

Crumbs – Good News for the Diaspora!

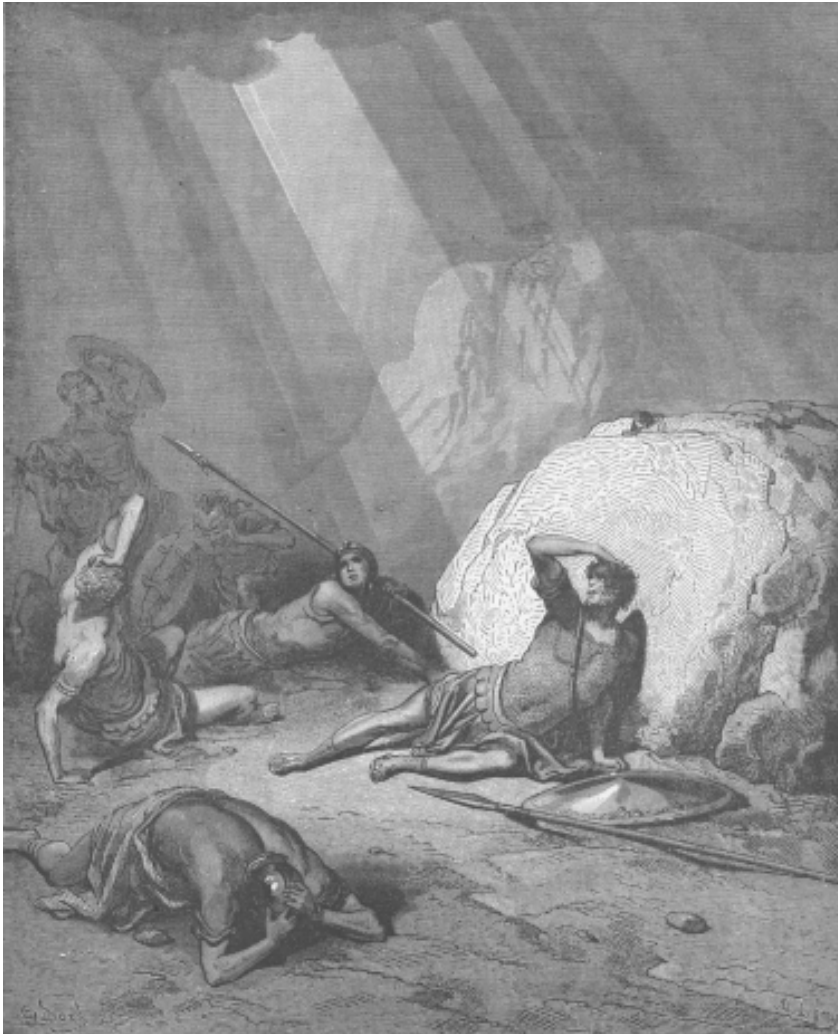


Illustration: Saul's (Paul's) Conversion

A Devotional for the Week of the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.

SUNDAY.

Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. – Acts 3:19.

We all are poor, miserable sinners. There is no doubt about that. But there are penitent and impenitent sinners. Penitent sinners are such as sincerely repent of their sins, believe in their Savior Jesus Christ, and are willing to amend. Impenitent sinners are such as do not repent of their sins, do not truly believe in the Savior, and are not willing to amend.

The Gospel is to be preached to all sinners, penitent as well as impenitent. But the application of the Gospel to the individual, the consolation of the Gospel applied to the individual, by which he is assured of the grace of God through Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and by which the absolution, or forgiveness of sins, is pronounced to him, – that is for penitent sinners only. For the sins of him who repents and is converted shall be blotted out. This is the divine rule which we know, and which our text teaches us. To the impenitent sinners the consolation of the Gospel is not to be given, nor that of Baptism, nor that of the Lord's Supper, nor that of absolution. To the impenitent sinners, when they become manifest as such, their sins are to be retained.

And the Office of the Keys, with the public administration of which, on the part of the congregation, the pastors have been commissioned, is the peculiar, the especial, and singular church-power which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of the penitent sinners to them, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent. May God graciously grant you, my dear Christian, at all times to be a penitent sinner, in order that you may be filled with the consolation of the Gospel, the consolation that your sins are blotted out.

PRAYER. – O Lord, gracious God, do not let me fall into a state of impenitence through the deceit of sin! Take me into Your gracious keeping, and for the sake of Jesus Christ bestow on me

Your Holy Ghost, that I may repent of my sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and willingly amend my sinful life. And thus lead me to the fount of grace which You cause to flow for me in Your Word and Sacrament, that there I may find abundant comfort. Amen.

Hymn 426, 7.

However great our sin may be,
The absolution sets us free,
Appointed by God's own dear Son
To bring the pardon He has won.

MONDAY.

If I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes I forgave it in the person of Christ. – 2 Corinthians 2:10.

My dear Christian, when considering and meditating upon what the Word of God says concerning the Office of the Keys, what, then, must be your faith, what, then, must be thy attitude with respect to the public administration of this office as performed by the pastor of your congregation? You must then say with all your heart: I believe that when the called minister of God deals with us by His divine command, this is as valid and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself.

If your pastor does anything without the command of Christ, then it is of no value. But when he does something by the command of Christ, then he does this in the person of Christ; and then this is as valid and certain, and is fully as valid in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, did it Himself. When the pastor preaches the Gospel in its truth and purity, this is just as valid and certain as if Christ Himself stood there and preached. Just so it is with Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And also with holy absolution. When your pastor pronounces absolution, or forgiveness of sins, to you, then this is

just as valid before God in heaven as if Christ, our Lord, Himself pronounced the absolution to you.

Remember, the pastor does this in the place of the congregation, in the person of Christ. If, in the due order prescribed by Christ, the pastor retains the sins of a manifest and impenitent sinner, and excludes him from the Christian congregation, then this, too, is as valid and certain before God in heaven as if Christ, our Lord, had done it visibly, in person. And just so it is when the pastor again absolves such an excommunicated person, and forgives his sins to him, and when the congregation again receives him into membership, that is, after he has repented of his sins and is willing to amend.

Will you consider all this carefully?

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, I thank You that for our - Your Christians' - benefit and consolation You have instituted within the congregations the holy ministry through which You are present in person, to distribute the treasures of Your grace. I pray You to preserve such ministry in truth and purity among us and among our children. And grant us, O Savior, Your Holy Ghost, that we make proper use of such ministry for the strengthening of our faith and for our eternal salvation. Amen.

Hymn 425, 1. 2.

O FAITHFUL God, we worship Thee!
Thou pardon'st our iniquity,
Thou grantest help in sin's distress,
And soul and body Thou dost bless.

Thou, through Thy servant, say'st to me:
"Thy sins are all forgiven thee,
Depart in peace; but sin no more,
And e'er my pardoning grace adore."

TUESDAY.

Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. – 1 Corinthians 5:13.

The retaining of sins, the excommunication from the Christian congregation, the *ban*, as it is called, should be executed upon those members of the congregation who are wicked, that is, who are manifest and impenitent sinners. Their sin must be *manifest*, that is, a sin which is recognized by every one in the congregation as an evident transgression of the Law of God. But even this is not enough for the execution of the ban. The impenitence of the sinner must also be evident to all in the congregation. But how is this possible? Who can look into the heart? you say. It is not necessary to look into any one's heart.

Our Lord and Savior has indicated a way in which it can be known whether a sinner is impenitent. It is given in Matthew 18:15-17. He that knows of the sin of a brother should go to him, and very lovingly, patiently, and forbearingly seek to convince him of his sin. If the sinner accepts the admonition, he has been gained, and all is well. If he refuses to accept it, then - I shall now address you - take with you one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established, and again admonish the sinner very patiently and forbearingly in the love of Christ. If he neglects to hear you, then, together with the witnesses, tell it to the church to which the sinning brother belongs. This congregation should then try to persuade him to repent. If he persistently refuses to hear the congregation, then he is certainly impenitent: for the Lord Jesus, the merciful Searcher of hearts, says that we should then consider such a person a heathen man and a publican. Then the pastor of that congregation should execute the verdict of the congregation: he should retain the sins unto the sinner, exclude him from the congregation, and publicly announce this.

But as soon as the sinner repents, he should be publicly absolved of the ban. For even excommunication is not intended for the perdition, but for the salvation of the soul.

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus Christ, I pray You to grant Your Holy Spirit to me and all true Christians, that we may deal with our sinning brother according to Your Word and will, lest want of discipline and worldly-mindedness spread in the churches, that, on the contrary, the sinners may be duly admonished and disciplined, to the end that God might bestow upon them His grace unto repentance and salvation. Amen.

Hymn 381, 5.

Watch against the world that frowns
Darkly to dismay thee;
Watch, when she thy wishes crowns,
Smiling to betray thee;
Watch and see Thou art free
From false friends that charm thee,
While they seek to harm thee.

WEDNESDAY.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

– 1 John 1:8-9.

Intimately allied with the Office of the Keys is that divine service which we call *Confession*. Confession embraces two parts. One is that we confess our sins. We are poor, miserable sinners, and remain such unto our dying hour. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." We should repent of our sins and confess them with heart and mouth. This is the first part of Confession. The term "Confession" clearly indicates this.

The other part is, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor, from the pastor, as from God Himself. You understand this from our devotion of the day before yesterday. We

should in no wise doubt, but firmly believe that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven. For if we penitently confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, as He has promised in His Word. And in Confession God does this through the confessor.

To be sure, if a hypocrite comes to Confession and with his mouth only confesses his sins, but at heart is impenitent, he does not receive forgiveness of sins; for, not having faith, he naturally does not accept the grace of God, though it is offered to him, too, in absolution.

– What a salutary act of worship Confession is! There children of God come to their heavenly Father and penitently confess their sins, and implore grace for Christ's sake: and the heavenly Father most mercifully and kindly forgives them all their sins. Do come to confession often, dear Christian! And there say the following confessional prayer, which is granted at once.

PRAYER. – O Almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess to You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your punishment in time and eternity. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You, of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter suffering and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being. Amen.

Hymn 415, 5.

Though great our sins and sore our woes,
His grace much more aboundeth;
His helping love no limit knows,
Our utmost need it soundeth,
Our Shepherd is the Lord, and He
At last shall set His Israel free
From all their sin and sorrow.

THURSDAY.

I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest me the iniquity of my sin. – Psalm 32:5.

What sins should we confess? Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not at the time realize and know, as we do in the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer and in General Confession. For there is not a single commandment of God which we do not transgress daily. And David prays: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

(Psalm 19:12.)

And when we have offended and grieved our neighbor, we should confess our sins to him and ask his pardon before we go to Confession. He who is not willing to do this, thereby clearly shows that before God also he does not truly repent of his sin. What does the Savior say? "Go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother!" (Matthew 5:24.)

But perchance we know and feel in our heart some particular sin which above others weighs upon our heart and burdens our conscience. Then it is very good, wholesome, and beneficial to go to Private Confession, that is, to go to our confessor alone, and privately to tell him our sins, get spiritual advice and consolation from him, and to receive absolution for just these particular sins. This greatly strengthens and comforts our faith.

It is to be regretted that Private Confession, where absolution is spoken to each person individually, has fallen into such disuse. For the sake of our infirmity it is better for every one of us to hear the word spoken to him: "Thy sins are forgiven thee" (Matthew 9:2 & Luke 7:48), though it is true that in the absolution spoken in the General Confession essentially the same is given.

PRAYER. – My God, help me by Your Holy Spirit that I may never deny a transgression of Your Holy Law, nor cover up or misrepresent it out of carnal pride and obstinacy, but that I may

freely, frankly, and penitently confess my sins. And then let me obtain mercy according to Your Word, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Hymn 414, 5.

I, a sinner, come to Thee,
And acknowledge my transgression;
Tender mercy show to me,
Grant me graciously remission;
Let these words my soul relieve:
"Jesus sinners doth receive!"

FRIDAY.

Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.
– *Lamentations 3:40.*

Observe a dear little child when it has done something wrong, how it comes to its father or to its mother and begs forgiveness. Or remember how the prodigal son came to himself and said: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," (Luke 15:18.) Thus should we go to Confession.

We must truly know and realize our sin. We must beware of going to Confession from mere force of habit, scarcely considering or knowing what or how we have sinned. We should first search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. We must search and try our ways in the light of God's Law. "For by the Law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20.) We should take up the commandments one by one, and in so doing search and try our ways. We shall then find enough wrong, transgression, and sin. We should also consider the station of life into which we have been placed by God, and in the light of God's commandments endeavor to discern where we have sinned with regard to it. And then we should arise and go to our

Father, and in sincere penitence confess our sins to Him in the confessional service. He will then assure us of His grace through absolution.

God grant you grace through His Spirit for Christ's sake that your confession may always be such.

PRAYER. – Heavenly Father, illumine me with Your Holy Spirit for Christ's sake that in the bright mirror of the Law I may rightly see my manifold, great and grievous sins, and truly realize how terrible is Your wrath because of sin, and how awfully You will punish all the impenitent for their transgressions. From the Gospel, however, let me also learn to know Your kind fatherly heart, which through Christ is opened to me, so that with a broken spirit and a contrite heart, but nevertheless not despairing, on the contrary, firmly trusting in Your grace, I may come to Confession, where You will surely deal with me according to Your fatherly goodness, and will forgive me all my sins. Amen.

Hymn 416, 1-3.

LORD, to Thee I make confession,
I have sinned and gone astray,
I have multiplied transgression,
Chosen for myself my way,
Led at last to see my errors,
Lord, I tremble at Thy terrors.

Yet, though conscience' voice appall me,
Father, I will seek Thy face;
Though Thy child I dare not call me,
Yet receive me to Thy grace;
Do not for my sins forsake me,
Let not yet Thy wrath o'ertake me.

For Thy Son hath suffered for me,
And the blood He shed for sin,

That can heal me and restore me,
Quench this burning fire within;
'Tis alone His cross can vanquish
These dark fears, and soothe this anguish.

SATURDAY.

The Lord's Supper. – 1 Corinthians 11:20.

Concerning the Lord's Supper the holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul the Apostle write thus: "*Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave it to His disciples, and said: Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup when He had supped (after the paschal supper), gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying: Take, drink ye all of it; this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me.*"

So this Sacrament of the Altar, as Dr. Luther calls it, is *the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ*, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself. And what is the benefit of such eating and drinking? "That is shown us by these words: 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins'; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation."

– How holy is this Sacrament, and how salutary!

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man, the Truthful and the Almighty, who is now exalted at the right hand of God, but nevertheless is truly present with us, in this Sacrament gives to every one who eats and drinks that very body and that very blood wherewith on the cross He procured for us the forgiveness of sins. And He does this to make us altogether sure of the forgiveness of our sins, of life, and eternal salvation. Sinner, Christian, come to the Lord's Supper!

PRAYER. – Gracious God, dear Heavenly Father, I thank You that for our benefit, through Your dear Son Jesus Christ, You have instituted the holy and venerable Sacrament of the Altar wherein under the consecrated bread and wine He truly gives us His body and His blood to the forgiveness of sins. Grant to me and to all Your children, Your Holy Spirit, that we may approach this Sacrament in true faith, make proper use of it, and be strengthened thereby unto life eternal. Amen.

Hymn 431, 1.

May God be praised henceforth and blest forever,
Who, Himself both gift and giver,
With His own flesh and blood our souls doth nourish;
May they grow thereby and flourish!

O Lord, have mercy!

By Thy holy body, the selfsame
Watch from Thine own mother Mary came.
By the drops Thou didst bleed,
Help us in the hour of need.

O Lord, have mercy!

These devotions are adapted from *Crumbs* by C. M. Zorn (1914).
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