Lent Vespers 1
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Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

"God's Glory is the Cross of Christ because the Cross is His Mercy toward Fallen Men to Give Life Eternal."

"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee...."

St. John 17:1

Introduction

Of what glory speaks Christ here? Is it the glory of His omnipotence, omniscience, or omnipresence? No. It is the glory of His Mercy toward fallen men. God's renown or glory is His Mercy toward fallen men in the Cross of Christ.

Christ was on the Eve of this Glory when He prayed these Words here with deep and profound heartfelt earnestness. Christ was about to ascend the Cross of Calvary to bear the wrath of God and atone for the sins of all men. Pure and unmerited Sacrifice and Mercy for fallen and impure men is God's Glory, God Himself bearing the awful burden.

This Glory manifests itself to us today in God's Word and Sacraments.[1] From God's Word and Sacraments emerge God's Glory of the Cross and the Fruit of the Cross: the Forgiveness of sins.

And where this Blessed Glory of God is found, there men have life eternal.

I. God's Glory is His Mercy Toward Fallen Men in the Cross of Christ.

A. Christ is our High Priest and Sacrifice.[2]

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[1]"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." **I Corinthians 11:26**. "Jesus answered and said, ... Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me." **St. John 12:30, 31-32**.

[2]"b. Priest. By His spotless, all-perfect obedience, obedience unto death, He propitiated, in the place of all mankind, the offended majesty of God. 'Himself the Victim and Himself the

St. John 17 is Christ's High Priestly prayer[3] on the Eve of His Sacrifice to Atone for the sins of the world on the Cross. In this prayer He pours out His Heart to our Heavenly Father as He embarks on His Great Intercessory Work to atone for the sins of men on the Cross.

A priest is someone appointed to office to make intercession for men before God by bringing the satisfaction for their sins. In catechism we learned:

> As my *Priest*, Christ *fulfilled the Law* in my stead perfectly (active obedience), *sacrificed Himself* for me (passive obedience), and still *intercedes* (pleads) for me with His heavenly Father.[4]

Here we see a striking difference between Christ and all other priests. All other priests need an intercessor before God because they, too, are fallen and sinful men. Christ, however, needs no intercessor for Himself because He is God and in the Bosom of the Father already.[5] The Apostle St. John writes:

Priest,' He has by His vicarious life and suffering fulfilled all righteousness and atoned for all sin." *Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 135 s. v. "**Christ Jesus, His Person, States, and Office**", underscore added.

[3]"And now He lifts up His eyes to His heavenly Father and pours forth His soul in a most wonderful and inspiring prayer of intercession. It has fitly been called the great sacerdotal [priestly] prayer, for here Jesus appears in His work as Mediator, beseeching His heavenly Father first for Himself, then for His little band of disciples, and finally for all those that would be gathered by the proclamation of the Gospel. There is so much beauty, comfort, and power in this simple prayer that its main thoughts at least, if not the entire text, should be memorized." The Rev. Dr. P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, The New Testament, Volume I, ...* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921, p. 502, amplification in brackets added.

[4]*The Small Catechism*, p. 108.

[5]"Therefore, you must not understand this word ('I sanctify Myself') as though He had not been holy before and needed still to become holy. For He was holy in His mother's womb, as the angel says in Luke [1:35]: ... 'What is born in you will be called holy.' But by 'sanctify' He means here exercising and carrying out a priestly office or work. It is as if He were saying, 'I, too, will celebrate Mass once ... or make a holy offering and step forward in a priestly work.' What work will this be? 'I will sanctify Myself, that is, I Myself will be the offering and the gift; indeed, I will be the Priest as well.' So in our German the words simply mean: 'I am offering Myself as a holy sacrifice, a sacrifice,' He says, 'for them.' For He needs nothing at all for Himself, for He is already holy and is a priest only so that He may make us holy." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 69, p. 98, underscore added.

> No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.[6]

All other priests need Christ for an intercessor and priest. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

> For such a high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled[7], separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.[8]

The priests of the Old Testament themselves relied for their own good standing before God on the Old Testament Sacraments, namely, the Old Testament Sacrifices. The Old Testament Sacrifices were actually the Old Testament Sacraments through which the Blessings of the Sacrifice of Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, were communicated to the people of Israel. The Rev. Dr. Edward W. A. Koehler writes in the catechism:

> In appearance they were sacrifices, but in reality they were Sacraments, through which grace and forgiveness was offered to the people.[9]

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[6]**St. John 1:18**. The Jehovah's Witnesses at times have undertaken to use this passage to prove that Christ is not God because "No man hath seen God at any time ... ." Presumably, their argument goes: This passage proves that Christ is not God because men have seen Christ and Christ says, "No man hath seen God at any time ... ." They, presumably, therefore, conclude that Christ is not God. Yet Christ is Man and is in the Bosom of the Father. So Christ is a Man who has seen and sees God continually. The Jehovah's Witness point, therefore, fails and is demonstrated to be either a red-herring to distract or a desperate argument that readily fails. No man except God Incarnate has seen God at any time Christ says. And Christ alone, because He is in the Bosom of the Father and God's Son, can reveal God to men.

[7]Hence, David writes in **Psalm 24** David writes of Christ's Priestly Purity: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."

[8]**Hebrews 7:26-27**.

[9]*A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism Edited by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States with Additional Notes for Students, Teachers, and Pastors by* the Rev. Dr. Edward W. A. Koehler, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1981, p. 148.

"On this account Luther says: 'It is not true that the Sacraments of the New Testament differ from the Sacraments of the Old Testament as to their signification' [namely, as God-appointed signs of the *grace* of God] ... 'Both our and the fathers' signs or Sacraments have a word of promise attached which calls for faith and can be fulfilled by no other work. Therefore

Christ Himself needed no intercessor and, indeed, the priests of the Old Testament could only function because Christ had already interceded for them. And Christ has already interceded for all men by Offering His Life a Sacrifice for the sins of all men. In the first place, as the catechism has already noted, Christ obeyed God perfectly in all matters in order that this perfect obedience become ours and we gain good standing before God. The Apostle St. Paul writes of Christ's *Active Obedience*:

> But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.[10]

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes of Christ's *Active Obedience*:

> This teaching of Scripture is of great practical importance. In his life of faith the Christian continually resorts to Christ's vicarious fulfillment of the Law. Luther: "He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me. Thus the Law is silenced."[11]

I recall hearing a beautiful sermon the First Sunday after Christmas many years ago while visiting a neighboring sister congregation. A retired pastor was filling in for the regular pastor and his sermon was on the Gospel for the day, **St. Luke 2:41-52, specifically**, **v. 49**, the Twelve-Year Old Christ teaching in the Temple. The sermon was titled, *About His Father's Business*. Upon reading the sermon title my cynicism, I regret to say, got the better part of me and I was expecting another moralizing homily along the lines of, "See, the Lord is in the Temple; why aren't you? See how the Lord sets the example for us?" But much to my surprise the sermon wasn't about that at all but was on Christ's *Active Obedience* and went along these lines, "*Here Christ is in the Temple fulfilling the First Commandment and, therefore, all the Commandments, for us and for all men, because we have failed to be in the Temple to worship the Lord because of our sin. So Christ was in the Temple for us fulfilling for us what we should have done.*" Here was a most delightful sermon because it preached Christ's fulfilling of the Commandments for

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they are signs or Sacraments of justification.' ... Both through the Word about the coming Messiah and through circumcision and the Passover, the Sacraments of the Old Testament, the remission of sins was given and, by the believers, appropriated." The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 215.

[10]**Galatians 4:4-5**.

[11]The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375.

us, buoying our souls and faith with His Work for us, Christ dedicating His Entire Life to make intercession for us with His Own Life the contribution, waking and sleeping. Jesus says:

> Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.[12]

And Christ was also obedient unto the death of the Cross in order to Atone for the sins of the world. This Blessed Work of Obedience unto the Suffering and Death of the Cross is called Christ's *Passive Obedience*. The Apostle St. Paul writes of Christ's *Passive Obedience*:

> And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.[13]

The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard brings out the Profound Work of Christ's *Passive Obedience* when he writes of Christ's *Active Obedience*:

> "Although in many passages of Scripture the work of redemption is ascribed to Christ's death and the shedding of His blood, yet this must by no means be understood *exclusive*, as if by it the holy life of Christ were excluded from the work of redemption. But it is done for the reason that nowhere does the fact that the Lord has loved and redeemed us shine forth more clearly than in His Passion, death, and wounds, as the devout old teachers says; the death of Christ is, as it were, the last line and completion, ... the end and perfection, of the entire obedience, as the Apostle says in Phil 2:8. In this merit it is altogether impossible to separate the active from the passive obedience."[14]

Christ is our High Priest, Our Intercessor, and also the Sacrifice on which His Intercession is based and made before God. So we sing the communion hymn:

> Offered was He for greatest and for least/
> Himself the Victim and Himself the Priest.[15]

B. Christ's High Priestly Work glorifies God because God delights in showing mercy to fallen men.

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[12]**St. Matthew 20:28**.

[13]**Philippians 2:8**.

[14]Quoted in the Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 376, footnote 81.

[15]*The Lutheran Hymnal,* #307, Draw Night and Take the Body of the Lord.

This High Priestly Work glorifies God because God delights in showing mercy toward fallen men. The prophet Micah writes:

> Who *is* God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth *in* mercy.[16]

God delights in mercy. Mercy so aptly fits God's nature to give and to give abundantly[17], and especially here because His giving here is absolutely unmerited because He is giving to sinners what they don't deserve and haven't earned but quite the opposite of what they have earned. Men earned eternal wrath and death, but God responded with goodness, mercy, kindness, and forgiveness.[18] And so Christ prays with the greatest earnestness and passion in His High Priestly prayer for this Work so dear to Him and, indeed, the entire Holy Trinity:

> These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee ... .[19]

Likewise, the Apostle St. Paul writes of Christ's Passion for His Work of mercy toward fallen men:

> Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.[20]

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[16]**Micah 7:18**.

[17]"Therefore the Spirit of Christ must not only comfort, but also through the office of the Law *reprove the world of sin*, John 16, 8, and thus must do in the New Testament, as the prophet says, Is. 28, 21, *opus alienum*, *ut faciat opus proprium*, that is, He must do *the work of another* (reprove), in order that He may [afterwards] do His own work, which is to comfort and preach of grace. For to this end He was earned [from the Father] and sent to us by Christ, and for this reason, too, He is called the Comforter ... ." The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, **Article V. Of the Law and the Gospel**.11, *Triglotta*, p. 955.

[18]"K. *Gracious* (showing undeserved kindness, forgiving). [44] The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and *gracious*, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, *forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*. *Ex. 34:6, 7*." *The Small Catechism*, question 25 K, p. 45.

"A Christian's revenge is to return good for evil." The Rev. Dr. Edward W. A. Koehler, *Luther's Small Catechism, Annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler*, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 77.

[19]**St. John 17:1**.

Luther writes:

> "Here Paul [**Phil. 2:5ff**] with one word opens heave to us and permits us to gaze into the unfathomable abyss of the Divine Majesty and behold the ineffably gracious will and love of the fatherly heart toward us, that we may feel that it pleased God from eternity what Christ, that glorious Person, should do, and now has done for us. Whose heart will not melt here for joy? Who can refrain from loving, praising, and giving thanks and from becoming on his part, too, not only a servant of all the world, but gladly becoming meaner and lowlier than anything, when he sees that God Himself regarded him so dearly and so richly pours out and exhibits His fatherly will in His Son's obedience?"[21]

C. The Risen Christ intercedes for men at the Right Hand of God.

And Christ's High Priestly Work doesn't end with the Cross, but continues in glory at the Right Hand of God because Christ rose from the dead on the third day. David writes of Our High Priest's Session at the Right Hand of God after His Resurrection from the dead:

> The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. ... The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.[22]

And Our High Priest is our Intercessor at the Right Hand of God pleading our cause for the sake of His Sacrifice for us. The Apostle St. John writes:

> My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.[23]

Our High Priest seated at the Right Hand of the Almighty provides comfort for Christians in all circumstances and every time in this life. Luther writes:

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[20]**Hebrews 12:2**.

[21]Quoted in the Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pp. 291, 292.

[22]**Psalm 110:1, 4**.

[23]**I John 2:1-2**.

> This is the kind of joy and comfort St. Bernard[24] had in his heart, so that he could say, on the basis of this article: "How can I ever become sad and mournful or discouraged? After all, my flesh and blood sits in heaven above. I expect He will not be my enemy."[25]

II. God's Glory in Christ Our High Priest Manifested and Saves in God's Word and Sacraments, the Gospel.

A. Christ's Glory appears to men today in God's Word and Sacraments.

And Christ's Glory appears to men today in God's Word and Sacraments. The Apostle St. Paul writes of the Holy Communion:

> For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.[26]

The Apostle St. John writes:

> Jesus answered and said, ... Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said signifying what death he should die.[27]

Wherever we have the Cross of Christ, there we have God's Glory of Mercy toward fallen men. Hence, in the Church, where the Cross of Christ is lifted up in God's Word and Sacraments, we find nothing but God's Mercy and Forgiveness. Luther writes:

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[24]"**Bernard of Clairvaux, St.**, 1091 to 1153. The most influential man of his day; an upright monk (Cistercian),spending himself in ascetic practises. His wise rule as first and lifelong abbot of the newly founded cloister at Clairvaux, France (1115), served to extend the order (now also called Bernardinos) throughout Europe, and the influence of his eloquence and personality gave a new impetus to monasticism.... he was a sincerely pious, a truly humble Christian, and he was that because he loved the Bible and because he believed in justification by faith, deploring on his deathbed, as throughout his life, the sinfulness of his life (Perdite vixi), and imploring the mercy of God for the sake of the righteousness gained by Christ ... Luther says: "When Bernard is speaking of Christ, it is a pleasure indeed to listen to him; but when he leaves that subject and discourses on rules and works, it is no longer St. Bernard." *Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 72, **s.v. "Bernard of Clairvaux.**

[25]*Luther's Works*, Vol. 13, p. 245.

[26]**I Corinthians 11:26**.

[27]**St. John 12:30, 31-33.**

> This holiness [of Christ's] is so mighty and powerful that it covers and wipes away all the sins and iniquities that remain in human flesh and blood. As I have often said: Christ's kingdom is nothing but sheer forgiveness, a kingdom that deals solely with sin and constantly blots it out, covers, cleanses, and makes pure as long as we live on earth.[28]

B. God's Glory in His Word and Sacraments give life eternal.

> And where sin is forgiven, there we gain life eternal. Jesus says:
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> Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life.[29]

In catechism we learned this Blessed Truth:

> 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 sins, there is also life and salvation.[30]

Conclusion

God's Glory is His abundant Mercy toward fallen, sinful men.

And so important and serious is this Glory of God that He gave His Only-Begotten Son to be Our Sacrifice and Our High Priest. Christ is Our Sacrifice for our sins because He gave His Entire Blessed Life to atone for our sins and give us the righteousness that avails God. And He is Our Priest because He uses His Sacrifice for us to Intercede with God to reconcile God to us. And He continues to intercede for us with the Father at the Right Hand of All Power.

And Christ intercedes to keep us safe in His Word and Sacraments through which comes to us the fruits of Christ's Sacrifice and Intercession, the forgiveness of sins, saving faith, life everlasting, and the resurrection of the body.

Amen.

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[28] *Luther's Works*, Vol. 69, p. 101, underscore added.

[29] **St. John 5:24**.

[30] *The Small Catechism*, p. 21, underscore added.