**Lent Vespers 4,**

3 April 2022,

 *Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

Terrebonne, Oregon.

**“Christ’s Prayer on the Eve of His Passion Seals and Secures the Preaching of the Gospel and Saving Faith.”**

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word ... .

**St. John 17:20.**

**Introduction**.

 We know our faith is secure because Jesus prayed for us and our faith on the Eve of His Passion in His High Priestly Prayer, sealing and securing it. Naturally, at the same time Jesus prayed for the Preaching of the Apostolic Gospel. Consequently, our faith and Salvation is sure.

 Christ died on the Cross in order to Atone for our sins. That Blessed Atonement He communicates to men through the Preaching of the Word of the Apostles, namely, the Gospel. But how do we know we have the True Gospel, especially in this era when we are overrun with feckless and faithless pastors? Christ is careful to protect and prosper the Apostolic Preaching in order to secure saving faith by praying for its success amongst us who hear the Preaching of the Gospel.

 On the Eve of the of His Passion Christ thinks not of Himself but He and the Entire Holy Trinity is absorbed with effecting the success of our salvation by the Cross of Christ through the Preaching of the Gospel.

**I. God the Holy Trinity Saves by the Passion of Christ.**

**A. God the Holy Trinity is absorbed in effecting the salvation of men through the Cross of Christ.**

 Notice on the Eve of His Passion, Jesus concerns Himself not with Himself but with us for whom He is about to suffer the ultimate penalty, the infinite and everlasting wrath of God because of our sins; or, as the Apostle St. Paul writes, He “pleased not himself ... .”[[1]](#footnote-1)1 Luther writes:

Among all the works of our Lord Christ, we should especially desire to know how He conducted Himself when He prayed and spoke with His dear Father. ... And, truly, it is an extraordinarily fervent and heartfelt prayer, in which He opens and pours forth all the depths of His heart to us and to His Father. ... If we could but see and ponder the man who is praying and the One who is being prayed to, and how great the matter is for which He prays, we would not esteem it as so worthless and insignificant, but mark and feel the super-abundance of power and comfort ... contained and conveyed in these simple words.[[2]](#footnote-2)2

 Moreover, we see that the Entire Holy Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is engrossed in securing the success of our salvation through the Cross of Christ. We are unworthy because of sin, but look at how God the Holy Trinity deliberates, counsels, prays, and sighs over us in order that we might gain salvation from sin and life everlasting. John Gerhard writes:

The reason why this Child, this Son, is also called **Counselor** is that He, in counsel with [the other Persons of] the Holy Trinity, helped reach the conclusion of how fallen mankind could be helped again. The unending righteousness of God was offended by the Fall of Adam. Now then, there was only an unending payment required, which neither angel nor man could provide. Therefore there was no counsel either in heaven or upon earth. Thus, the Son of God, the eternal Wisdom, came up with the counsel that He would volunteer Himself s Mediator and Redeemer, that He especially in the fullness of time wanted to take into Himself human nature and within it make payment of us men.[[3]](#footnote-3)3

 God the Holy Trinity is thoroughly engrossed with and laboring to effect your salvation and the salvation of all men. Our salvation is consuming the attention of the Almighty in the midst of the Heights of Heaven. Christ’s Prayer on the Eve of His Passion reveals to us God’s Great Mercy, Deep Love, and Care for us and for all men and His Almighty effort to effect it.

**B. God the Holy Trinity saves men by the Passion of Christ**.

 God the Holy Trinity saves men by the Passion of Christ. The Apostle St. John writes:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whomsoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.[[4]](#footnote-4)4

Luther writes:

But now bestir yourself to the end: first, not to behold Christ's sufferings any longer; for they have already done their work and terrified you; but press through all difficulties and behold his friendly heart, how full of love it is toward you, which love constrained him to bear the heavy load of your conscience and your sin. Thus will your heart be loving and sweet toward him, and the assurance of your faith be strengthened. Then ascend higher through the heart of Christ to the heart of God, and see that Christ would not have been able to love you if God had not willed it in eternal love, to which Christ is obedient in his love toward you; there you will find the divine, good father heart, and, as Christ says, be thus drawn to the Father through Christ. Then will you understand the saying of Christ in Jn 3, 16: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” etc. That means to know God aright, if we apprehend him not by his power and wisdom, which terrify us, but by his goodness and love, there our faith and confidence can then stand unmovable and man is truly thus born anew in God.[[5]](#footnote-5)5

**II. God the Holy Trinity Seals and Secures the Success of the Preaching of the Gospel and our Salvation through Faith.**

**A. God the Holy Trinity Seals and Secures the Preaching of the Holy Gospel**.

 On the Eve of His Passion Christ is careful to seal and secure the Preaching of the Gospel. Christ does so because the Blessings of His Passion flow to men and become theirs by faith through the Preaching of the Gospel, the Apostolic Word. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall the preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

How can we know that we will get the Apostolic Preaching of the Word, especially in our age when we are overrun with so many feckless and faithless pastors? We know we will get the faithful Apostolic Preaching of the Word because **A**. God sends them, and **B**. Jesus prayed for the Preaching of the Gospel on the Eve of His Passion. Jesus prayed:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word ... .[[7]](#footnote-7)7

 Just as last Advent we learned that Jesus guaranteed that we would have the Pure Gospel come down to us because, as a part of His First Advent, He purified the sons of Levi, i.e., He purified the Public Ministry of the Gospel, so we know we have the Pure Preaching of the Gospel come down to us because Jesus has sealed and secured it with His High Priestly Prayer on the Eve of His Passion. Regarding the Pure Public Ministry of the Gospel the Prophet Malachi prophesied of Christ:

But who may abide the day of his [Christ’s] coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiners’ fire, and like a fullers’ soap: And he shall sit *as* a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.[[8]](#footnote-8)8

Martin Chemnitz[[9]](#footnote-9)9 writes Christ’s Work to purify the Public Ministry of the Gospel:

We are sure, after all, that He wanted to reveal in the debate of His twelfth year the initial service of His coming office about cleansing the sons of Lev, Mal. 3:3. This, then, was undoubtedly a token of the doctrine which He was going to teach later by explaining true statements and refuting corrupt ones as, for instance, about the person and office of the Messiah; the difference between Law and Gospel; the true worship of God in the New Testament; the abrogation of Levitical ceremonies; Pharisaic traditions, etc. There is no doubt but that, when the Child Jesus heard their usual rubbish decorated with this title: “It was said of old time,” Mat. 5, He showed by asking discretely that such things did not agree with the words and timeless meaning of Scripture. Because He was doing this with such great proof that the doctors were unable to contradict Him, He was given the opportunity to illustrate with His responses the meaning of prophetic doctrine. At the same time, His wisdom and grace were joined together so that everyone was amazed. Moreover, we can conclude that those who were “doctors” were of those groups whom we noted earlier: scribes, Pharisees, men skilled in the Law, and doctors of the Law. Therefore the Child Jesus is showing with this initial service that it would come to pass that, after He had refuted the corruptions of Pharisaic doctrine, abrogated Levitical worship and rejected the traditions of people, the sound doctrine and true worship of the New Testament was beginning with His ministry. ... Thus the Child Jesus showed the doctors in the temple rays of His divinity somewhat more clearly than before. The reputation of this Child was undoubtedly widespread at that time. However, because He published no further such token later but lived not among the doctors but at a carpenter’s house in the city of Nazareth, He vanished, as it were, from people’s memory.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

 We also know that we have the Pure Preaching of the Gospel in spite of all that the world, the flesh, and the devil, throw in the way, because God the Holy Trinity sealed and secured the Preaching of the Gospel, the Apostolic Word, by Christ’s Prayer.

**B. God the Holy Trinity Seals and Secures Saving Faith which comes through the Preaching of the Holy Gospel**.

 Just as the Preaching of the Gospel is sealed and secured by God the Holy Trinity through Christ’s Prayer on the Eve of His Passion, so we know we will remain preserved by God in Saving Faith because of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer for us on the Eve of His Passion:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word ... .1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

**Conclusion.**

 The Preaching of the Gospel and saving faith is secure because Jesus prayed for us and our faith on the Eve of His Passion in His High Priestly Prayer, sealing and securing it.

 Because God the Holy Trinity has sealed and secured saving faith by the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus on the Eve of His Passion, we know that, no matter what the world, the flesh, and the devil, throw our way, we are secure in salvation and life everlasting,

  **Amen.**

1. 1**Romans 15:3**. “For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached the fell on me [from the Messianic Psalm **Psalm 69:9**]”, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 14, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons (1613)*, tr. the Rev. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Decatur: The Johann Gerhard Institute, first edition, November 1996, pp. 75, 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4**St. John 3:16**. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5*The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 1.2, p. 190, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6**Romans 10:13-17**. “For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves.” *The Large Catechism*, **Part Second, Of The Creed, Article III**.38-39, *Triglotta*, 689. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7**St. John 17:20.** [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8**Malachi 3:2-4**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9“Chemnitz, Martin, Lutheran theologian. B. 1522 ... He took the leading part in getting out the Formula of Concord, and the Catalog of Testimonies, which is appended to the Symbolical Books, is essentially his work.... Together with Selnecker and Kirchner, Chemnitz, in 1582, published an Apology of the Book of Concord. ... The most learned theologian of his time was mourned by the whole Lutheran Church; his importance is seen in the Catholic saying that if Chemnitz had not come, Luther had not stood.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, pp. 127, 128, **s.v. Chemnitz, Martin**. “‘If the Second Martin had not come, the first would not have prevailed. – 17th Century Adage.’” *The Second Martin: The Life and Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, The Rev. Dr. J. A. O. Preus, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, back cover. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10Martin Chemnitz, *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists*, Vol. I, Book I, tr. Richard J. dinda, Malone, TX: The Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 2009, pp. 250, 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11**St. John 17:20.** Just as the Apostle St. Peter’s faith was sealed, secured, and preserved in saving faith by Jesus’ prayer, so Christ’s prayer on the Eve of His Passion seals, secures, and preserves the faith of all believers. “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” **St. Luke 22:31-32**. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)