**The Festival of Ash Wednesday (Observed),**

1 March 2020.

*Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

Terrebonne, Oregon.

**“The Gospel Restores Men to Participation in God by Restoring in Men the Image of God**.**”**

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

**II Peter 1:4**.

**Introduction**.

Are not men already partaking in the Divine nature because in God all men live, move, and have their being?[[1]](#footnote-1)1 Yes, men do. Why, then, do men perish, all of them, all of us? Men perish because they are bereft of the Image of God. The Image of God is what is mean by partaking of the Divine nature, not the mere physical sustenance.

Men lost the Image of God through sin. Unlike all other earthly creatures men were created in the Image of God. Men were created to *know* who God is and to have a *blessed* personal relationship with God. No other creature *knows* God. While all other earthly creatures obey God everywhere all the time, none *know* Him. Man is the only earthly creature who *knows* who God is. This Blessed Knowledge of God was lost through sin and with the loss of the Image of God also life. The loss of the Image of God through sin reduced men to the dust and ashes of everlasting ruin.

Christ undertook to raise up men from the dust and ashes of sin by His Passion. Through the Cross Christ made propitiation for all sin and reconciled God to all men.

By the Gospel God reveals to men His Reconciliation in the Cross of Christ. This revelation creates saving faith in the hearts of men and restores them to God and to life everlasting, raising them up from the dust and ashes of sin.

The Gospel restores men’s partaking of the Divine nature unto life everlasting because the Gospel restores the Image of God and, thereby, raises from the dust and ashes of sin and death unto life everlasting.

**I. The Passion of Christ Raises Men from the Dust and Ashes of Sin to once again Partake of the Divine Nature.**

**A.** **Sin reduces men to dust and ashes because it uncouples man from partaking in the Divine nature.**

This Wednesday past (**26 February 2020**) was the Festival of Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the season of Lent, a penitential season, i.e, a season of repentance.

The application of ashes on the Festival of Ash Wednesday reminds us we are mortal because of sin. Sin ultimately reduces man to permanent destitution, darkness, poverty, and death, because sin reduces men to ashes and dust.[[2]](#footnote-2)2 Sin introduced death to mankind and reduced man to dust and ashes.[[3]](#footnote-3)3

Man perished when he lost the Image of God. Unlike all other earthly creatures, man was created to *know* God and to have a *blessed* relationship with Him.[[4]](#footnote-4)4 The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

In fact, [man] was created in the image of God so that he might understand the purpose of his creation, know his Creator from His works, and offer Him due obedience. ... Before the fall, in the mind of man created after the image of God, a bright light of the knowledge of God used to glow. As a result of and following the fall, however, terrible darkness was introduced into man’s mind -- for which no remedy can be provided except from the light of the Word. Therefore it is exceedingly necessary that we teach the doctrine of God from the revealed Word and that in this way, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the light of the salutary knowledge[[5]](#footnote-5)5 of God be rekindled in man’s mind. ... That person is not worthy of the name “human” who either does not know or does not rightly know his Creator or He reveals Himself in His Word. God is the greatest good for man. Whoever has and possesses that good and enjoys what he has is blessed. Whoever does not know, does not love, does not possess that greatest good, therefore, is most wretched and unfortunate. Hilary[[6]](#footnote-6)6 ... “Whoever does not know God does not know how to know.” Jerome[[7]](#footnote-7)7 ... “Every man who lacks a knowledge of his Creator is a beast.”[[8]](#footnote-8)8 St. Augustine[[9]](#footnote-9)9 ... It is an unfortunate man who knows all those things but does not know You [God]. But he is a blessed man who knows You, though he does not know those things. Whoever knows both You and those things is not more blessed because of those things but is blessed because of You alone if, as he understands You, he glorifies and thanks You as God and does not go off into his own thoughts.”1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

Unlike all other earthly creatures, God took counsel within Himself when He created man. Moses writes:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... . So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes of God taking counsel when He created man:

A special divine decision preceded the creation of man. God spoke to Himself and counseled with Himself, when it is stated, “Let us make man.” In God there are a number of persons. In truth we human beings owe our existence not to blind chance, but to God’s well-planned counsel. It was a counsel prompted by the love and goodness of God. God desired to have man share in His joy and salvation. Therefore, humanly speaking, He took special care and pains in the creation of man. ... The greatest adornment of man, however, was that God created man in His own image, which consisted in that man was created in righteousness and true holiness. Eph. 4, 24. Man was like God, good, pure, and holy. He feared and loved God with his whole heart.1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

This Blessed Word and Counsel of God Adam kicked to the side when he rejected God’s Word and followed the devil’s doctrine. Now this Blessed Counsel of God was no longer engaged and spoken regarding Adam nor any of his descendants. After the fall into sin, men lost the Image of God and were begotten in the sinful image of Adam. Moses writes:

And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat *a son* in his own image and his own likeness, after his image ... .1[[13]](#footnote-13)3

The image of Adam did not produce life for his children but rather death. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned ... .1[[14]](#footnote-14)4

**B. The Passion of Christ restores man’s partaking of the Divine nature, namely, the Image of God and saves.**

God, however, in His Great Mercy toward fallen man, took counsel to restore to man the Image of God in the Passion of Christ. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

The reason why this Child {Jesus}, 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 counsel1[[15]](#footnote-15)5 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.1[[16]](#footnote-16)6

Now in the Cross of Christ God once again takes counsel regarding man as He did in the beginning but this time to re-create man in His Image by the Passion of Christ. Through this restoration of the Image of God by the Passion of Christ men are saved and gain life everlasting. The Apostle St. John records Jesus’ words in His High Priestly Prayer on the Eve of His Passion:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.1[[17]](#footnote-17)7

**II. The Gospel Restores Men’s Participation in the Divine Nature by Restoring in Men the Image of God**.

**A. God takes counsel in the Gospel in order to forgive sins and save.**

But where today do we see God taking counsel to re-create man? We see God taking counsel in the Gospel to re-create man. The Apostle St. Matthew writes:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.1[[18]](#footnote-18)8

In the Blessed Waters of Holy Baptism God is once again taking counsel to create man anew, restoring in Him the Image of God. The Evangelist St. Luke writes:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.1[[19]](#footnote-19)9

In Holy Baptism we see that God the Holy Spirit is active to forgive sin and, thereby, restore in man the Image of God. For God the Holy Spirit is the True God and He certainly dwells with us Blessedly because He dwells with us Graciously, forgiving any and all sins and, thereby, saving.

**B. Through God’s Counsel of the Gospel, men gain life everlasting.**

Through the Gospel God Himself deals directly with us individually in order to re-create us unto life everlasting in His Image according to His Divine Counsel. Luther writes that in God’s Promises God Himself is dealing with us individually:

When God makes a promise, there He Himself is dealing with us and is giving and offering us something.2[[20]](#footnote-20)0

This re-creation of fallen man through God’s Counsel of the Gospel is as great a work as God creating man in the beginning. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Faith is not the product of human deliberation, self-decision, or concurrence, etc., but as much a creative work of God as the calling forth of light out of darkness at Creation (2 Cor. 4:6).2[[21]](#footnote-21)1

Through the Gospel men gain life everlasting because they are now again participating in the Divine Nature According to the Image of God. Jesus prayed in His High Priestly Prayer on the Eve of His Passion:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.2[[22]](#footnote-22)2

Luther writes of this Saving Knowledge of God:

In these words [**St. John 17:3**] He expresses the form and formation of eternal life. ... For since He has said that He has the power to grant eternal life, someone now might ask, ‘In what does eternal life consist, or how does it happen that we receive it?’ he answers that by saying, “It happens in this way, and by this means or in this manner they shall receive it: that ye know You, who alone are the true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” ... Concerning this knowledge and its power the prophets have spoken gloriously and clearly prophesied, as in Isaiah 53[:11]: “By knowledge of Him shall He (My Servant, the Righteous One) make many just or righteous.” This means: “He will redeem them from sins and snatch them from the devil’s jaws solely through this; that they know Him and who He is.” ... Likewise, Jeremiah 9[:23-24] says: “Let no one boast of his wisdom nor of his might nor of his riches” – in short, let no one boast at all – “but if anyone wants to boast, let him boast in this, that he knows Me and knows who I am: the Lord, who does good and establishes righteousness and justice on earth.”2[[23]](#footnote-23)3

By God taking Counsel in the Gospel men once again become partakers of the Divine Nature, namely, the Image of God, and escape the evils of this fallen world and enter life everlasting in God’s Eternal Kingdom. The Apostle St. Peter writes:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.2[[24]](#footnote-24)4

**Conclusions.**

Men lost participation in the Divine Nature when they lost the Image of God through sin. Short of this participation, men cannot gain life everlasting but only perish forever.

Christ, however, undertook to restore life everlasting unto men by restoring in men the Image of God by His Passion. By His Passion, Christ fulfilled all righteousness and Atoned for all sin, thereby, bridging the gap that left men bereft of the Image of God, perishing in death, thereby, and bestowing upon them life everlasting.

By the Gospel the Lord takes Counsel again to re-create men fallen in sin to life everlasting and the resurrection of the body when Christ returns again glory on the last day.

***Amen.***

1. 1**Acts 17:28**. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2“The ancient act [of the imposition of ashes] is a gesture of repentance and a powerful reminder about the meaning of the day. Ashes can symbolize dust-to-dustness ... .” The Rev. James L. Brauer, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, editor, the Rev. Dr. Fred L. Precht, Authorized by The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 166.

   “And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which *am but* dust and ashes ... .” **Genesis 18:27**. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.” **Genesis 3:19**. Hence, we read in **The Order for the Burial of the Dead**, “FORASMUCH as it hath pleased Almighty God, in His wise providence, to take out of this world the soul of our departed *brother*, we therefore commit his body to the ground (to God’s acre); earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.” *The Lutheran Agenda*, p. 95, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned ... .” **Romans 5:12**. “... till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.” **Genesis 3:19**. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4“**113. What was the image of God?** The image of God consisted in this – A. That man *knew God* and was *perfectly happy* in such knowledge. 263 [Ye] have put on the new man, which is renewed in *knowledge* after the *image of Him that created him*. *Col. 3:10*B. That man was *perfectly holy* and blessed. 264 Put on the new man, which *after God* is created in *righteousness and true holiness*. *Eph. 4:24****.*** ... **114. Does man still bear the image of God?** Man *lost* the image of God when he *fell into sin*. In *believers*, a *beginning* of its renewal is made. Only in *heaven*, however, will this image be *fully* restored. 265 [Adam] begat a son *in his own likeness*, after his image. *Gen. 5:3****.*** ... 266 I will *behold Thy face in righteousness*; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, *with Thy likeness*. Ps. 17:15.” *The Small Catechism*, pp. 96, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5Compare **St. John 17:3**. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” “In these words [**St. John 17:3**] He expresses the form and formation of eternal life. ... For since He has said that He has the power to grant eternal life, someone now might ask, ‘In what does eternal life consist, or how does it happen that we receive it?’ he answers that by saying, “It happens in this way, and by this means or in this manner they shall receive it: that ye know You, who alone are the true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” ... Concerning this knowledge and its power the prophets have spoken gloriously and clearly prophesied, as in Isaiah 53[:11]: ‘By knowledge of Him shall He (My Servant, the Righteous One) make many just or righteous.’ This means: ‘He will redeem them from sins and snatch them from the devil’s jaws solely through this; that they know Him and who He is.’ ... Likewise, Jeremiah 9[:23-24] says: ‘Let no one boast of his wisdom nor of his might nor of his riches’ – in short, let no one boast at all – ‘but if anyone wants to boast, let him boast in this, that he knows Me and knows who I am: the Lord, who does good and establishes righteousness and justice on earth.’” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 29, 35, 36, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6“**Hilary of Poitiers**, ‘the Athanasius of the West’; of pagan parentage; bishop, though married, ca. 350; devoted himself to checking the spread of Arianism; banished, he withstood the Arians and their emperor in the East; returning, he purged Gaul, though not Italy, of the heresy; his chief work: *De Trinitate*; the first exegete among the Latin writers ; composed hymns of great beauty and power; d. 366.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, eds., Ludwig Fuerbringer, Theodore Engelder, P. E. Kretzmann, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1927, p. 328, s. v. “**Hilary of Poitiers**”. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7“**Jerome**. One of the Fathers of the Church; b. 331 at Stridon, on the frontiers of Dacia; d. near Bethlehem, in 420 ; of Christian parentage, but was not baptized till 360, when he studied

   rhetoric and philosophy at Rome; lived in Gaul, then at Aquileia, on the Adriatic, till 373. ... To the last thirty-four years of his life belong the most important works of his career: his version of the Old Testament in Latin on the basis of the original text, the best of his Scriptural commentaries, his catalog of Christian authors, and the dialog against the Pelagians ... . To this period belong also his passionate polemical writings, which distinguished him among the early

   Fathers. Jerome was buried at Bethlehem, but his remains were later removed, the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome claiming the greater part of his relics. Among Jerome's works,

   besides the Bible translation noted above, now known as the Vulgate (‘the common,’

   since it was intended for the use of all men), are to be mentioned a book describing the chief places of interest in the Holy Land, several original commentaries on the Old Testament (chiefly

   Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel), and some New Testament commentaries. He also published some educational treatises. His theological position was not strong, since a clear exposition of doctrine

   caused him great difficulty, but his writings show much poetical skill. His great importance is due to the incalculable influence exerted through his Latin version of the Bible upon all subsequent theological development.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, eds., Ludwig Fuerbringer, Theodore Engelder, P. E. Kretzmann, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1927, p. 387, s.v. “**Jerome**”. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8While Jerome’s assessment may seem harsh, he is simply reproducing God’s own judgment on the matter. “Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.” **Jeremiah 8:7**.

   Beast refers to man bereft of the Image of God. In this case, the beast, namely, the Papacy, is bereft of the Image of God because he rejects and persecutes the Gospel, which Gospel restores in fallen men (beasts) the Image of God.

   **Beast**: The Greek word used for beast is therion. Therion means a “*(wild) animal, beast* ... fig., persons w. a ‘bestial nature’ ... .” This expressions is used to described man according to the fallen human nature. Man according to the fallen human nature is indeed unruly and rebellious against God’s Word. St. Peter writes: “But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.” (II Peter 2:12) Jude writes: “But these speak evil of those things which they know not; but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.” (Jude 10) The Greek words Sts. Peter and Jude are “alogia zoa”. Alogia means without the word. And zoa means living creature. So man without the Word of God and thereby lacking the image of God is called a wild beast by Scripture. St. Augustine writes: “... the slippery motion of falling away [from what is good] takes possession of the negligent only gradually, and beginning from perverse desire for the likeness of God, arrives in the end at the likeness of beasts. ... The true honor of man is the image and likeness of God, which is not preserved except it be in relation to Him by whom it is impressed. The less therefore that one loves what is one’s own, the more one cleaves to God. But through the desire of making trial of his own power, man by his own bidding falls down to himself as to a sort of intermediate grade. And so, while he wishes to be as God is, that is, under no one, he is thrust on, even from his own middle grade, by way of punishment, to that which is lowest, that is, to those things in which beasts delight: and thus, while his honor is the likeness of God, but his dishonor is the likeness of the beast ... .” The Lord says in the prophet Jeremiah: “Yea, the stork in heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.” **Jeremiah 8:7**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9“**Augustine**. One of the greatest of the Latin Church Fathers and one of the outstanding figures of all ages ; b. Tagaste, 354; d. at Hippo Regius, 430,. both in Africa. ... For more than thirty years Augustine was the leading theologian and leader of the Church in Africa, his influence at the various synods and councils being decisive. As a defender of the orthodox faith he stands head and shoulders above his contemporaries, although in some points he did not reach the clearness in the doctrine of sin and grace which is found in the later writings of Luther. But he fought the Pelagian heresy ... consistently, chiefly in the interest of letting the grace of God stand forth in the fulness of its beauty over against man. Among his chief writings are: *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* (Of Grace and of Free Will), *De Catechizandis Rudibius* (a treatise on the art of catechizing), *De Doctrina Christiana* (Of the Christian Doctrine), *De Civitate Dei* (Of the City of God), and his *Confessions*.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, pp. 49, 50, s.v. “**Augustine”**. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces* ... *On the Nature of God and On the Most Holy Mystery of the Trinity*, tr. Richard J. Dinda, edited with annotations by Benjamin T. G. Mayes, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, no date, pp.3, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11**Genesis 1:26**, **27**. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Wisdom for Today*, Vol. I, tr. the Rev. Arthur E. Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, no date, pp. 2, e. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13**Genesis 5:3**, underscore added. “Since Adam had lost the perfect image of God in the Fall, it was no longer possible for him to transmit the image of God to his offspring. Seth was born in the image of Adam, and therefore subject to sin and death. Since the Fall of all men are conceived and born in sin, and all of them are subject to death and damnation, Rom. 5, 12. Only through the merits of the one Man, who was in Himself sinless, though burdened with guilt of all men, are we delivered from the inevitable doom of damnation.” The Rev. Dr. P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, Vol. I, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1923, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14**Romans 5:12**. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15This expression is consistent with the language of Scripture and the form of the creeds, which are formed by Scripture. While the Work of Redemption is common to all Three Person of the Godhead because Redemption is God’s Work, Scripture also especially ascribes Redemption to the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, namely, the Son of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 16The 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, amplification in braces added. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 17**St. John 17:3**. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. 18**St. Matthew 28:18-20**. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 19**Acts 2:38-39**. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 20Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 3, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. 21*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 514. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. 22**St. John 17:3** [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. 23Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 29, 35, 36, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. 24**II Peter 1:4**. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)