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Guidelines for Lutheran Worship Covering the Festival Half of the Church Year

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**GUIDELINES FOR LUTHERAN WORSHIP COVERING
THE FESTIVAL HALF OF THE CHURCH YEAR**

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June 1962

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FORWARD

The objective of this thesis has been to prepare a study of the origin and purpose of the various seasons of the Festival Half of the Church Year and to integrate the Propers for the Sundays, Festivals, and Ferial Days of the Festival Half of the Church Year for congregational use. This objective in itself has made it impossible to follow much of the procedure usually required in the writing of a thesis for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity. For example, the literary style of the thesis is simple and popular, and there is a lack of direct quotations, other than those of the Propers. The purpose of the thesis has also made it advisable not to set off in separate paragraphs the longer quotations of the Propers. On the other hand, it has made it advisable to note the source of such quotations in the body of the thesis. Also since much of the material in the thesis, especially the integration of the Propers, is the result of personal study, it has been possible for the most part to document only the historical data cited.

Throughout the thesis, the outline of the Church Year found in the Lutheran Liturgy and the Lutheran Lectionary has been followed, and the texts of the Propers have been quoted from these sources. This also accounts for the use of a system of capitalizing Scripture passages differing from the method used in the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

CHAPTER I

THE CHURCH YEAR AND ITS RELATION TO THE CHURCH'S LITURGY

The Arrangement and Purpose of the Church Year

Since the very beginning of the Christian Church, Christian people have regularly assembled in public worship to offer praise and thanksgiving to God, to lay their petitions before Him, to hear His Word, to be strengthened by the Holy Sacrament, and to enjoy the fellowship of believers. And in order to give her worship varied foundation and expression, the Church, down through the ages, has developed an annual, Christ-centered program of worship. For centuries this yearly program of worship has been called The Church Year or The Christian Year to distinguish it from the common or civil year. Just how the Church Year developed out of the life of the Church, we shall discuss in more detail as we consider the individual seasons of the Church Year. At present, however, we are primarily interested in discussing the arrangement and purpose of the Church Year as we know it today.

As it has come down to us through the ages, the Church Year is divided into two parts or two larger seasons. The first season, which extends from Advent Sunday to the Festival of the Holy Trinity, is often called the Festival Half of the Church Year, because it includes the celebration of all the great Christian Festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. During this season of the Church Year, the Church brings before

us the chief events of our Lord's earthly life in their historical order, reminding us of the great things God has done for us in His Son.

The second part of the Church Year is referred to as the Non-festival Half of the Church Year in contrast to the Festival Half, which contains all the great Festivals of the Church. This season is also called the Trinity Season because it begins with the first Sunday after the Festival of the Holy Trinity and concludes with the last Sunday after Trinity. During this season, the Church sets forth the Christian life and calls us to growth in Christian living. Contrary to its name, however, this season also includes the celebration of certain festivals; for, as during the Festival Half of the Church Year, the Church also commemorates some of the great events of her history during this season. For example, this season includes the commemoration of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist and the Festival of the Reformation.

When taken together, these two seasons of the Church Year combine to present a complete and well-balanced summary of Christian teaching during the course of a year. Because of this, the Church Year is well designed not only to give varied expression to our worship, but also to deepen our spiritual insights, strengthen our faith, and foster our growth in Christian living. The Church Year is truly a year of grace.

The Relation of the Church Year to the Church's Liturgy

Since the Church Year is intended to be the basis for our worship and meditation throughout the year, it is only natural that it finds expression in the Church's Liturgy - The Common Order of Service. Following the plan of the Church Year, the Liturgy for each Sunday and Festival of the year unfolds the events of our Lord's life and the various aspects of Christian teaching step by step, until the complete plan of the Church Year has been laid before us as the basis for our common meditation and devotion.

Certain parts of the Liturgy have been especially designed for this progressive unfolding of the Church's annual program of worship. They are those parts of the Liturgy which vary from Sunday to Sunday - the Introit, Collect, Epistle, Gradual, and Gospel. These variable parts of the Liturgy, known as the Propers, are always appointed according to the plan of the Church Year, and thus they are designed to present the specific message and determine the mood and spirit of each Day and Festival of the Church Year.

While discussing the Propers, it is also interesting to note that each of them has its own special part in presenting the specific theme and mood for each Day's commemoration. Since the Introit is the opening "anthem" of the service of worship, its purpose is to announce the Day's commemoration and to indicate the mood and spirit of the Day at the very beginning of the worship service. Later in the service, the

Gospel narrates the historic event being commemorated or presents the central teaching of the Day. The Epistle, in turn, usually expands the thought of the Gospel or applies its message in a practical way. Coming as it does between the Epistle and the Gospel, the Gradual serves as a transition from the Epistle to the Gospel or links the thoughts of the two together. And, finally, the Collect, which is a brief prayer, collects and presents to God the needs of the congregation which are reflected in the Day's Epistle or Gospel. Thus combined, the Propers for the Day adequately present the commemoration for the Day as appointed by the Church Year. And taken as a whole, the Propers for every Sunday and Festival of the year unfold the complete plan of the Church Year.

If, therefore, we would derive the greatest possible benefit from our use of the Church Year and receive with greatest blessings the message from God's Word which is addressed to us each Lord's Day and Festival, we must continually be aware of the plan and purpose of the Church Year and endeavor to understand the meaning and message of the Propers for each Day and their relationship to the entire Church Year. It is with this need in mind that the following pages have been written, which endeavor to outline the origin and purpose of each season of the Festival Half of the Church Year and to show in more detail how the Propers for each Day of this first half of the Church Year combine to carry out their appointed theme. Following this study throughout the coming Church Year, perhaps we shall be enabled to obtain a better understand and appreciation of the Church's program of worship and thus be enabled to receive greater benefits from our worship life.

CHAPTER II

ADVENT

The Season of Advent marks the beginning of the Church Year and is the period of preparation for the Festival of Christmas. As such, it introduces the first major cycle of the Church Year, which extends from Advent until the end of Epiphany. This season includes four Sundays, the four Sundays preceding Christmas, and the date of Advent Sunday is determined by St. Andrew's Day, November 30th; Advent Sunday being the Sunday nearest that Day.¹

This season, preparatory to Christmas, likely had its origin in France.² Its observance there can be traced back to as early as the first part of the fifth century.³ By the end of the fifth century, the time of Advent extended from the Feast of St. Martin, November 11th, to Christmas - a period of forty days.⁴ It was a penitential season, characterized by fasting and abstinence. However, this practice of a forty-day Advent fast was not everywhere uniformly held, and soon the length of the season was reduced to four weeks as we have it today.

¹ Paul Zeller Strodaeh, The Church Year (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, c.1924), p.23.

² Luther D. Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1947), p. 436.

³ Rodrigue Cardinal Villeneuve, An Introduction to the Liturgical Year, translated by J.A. Otto Eischlimer (New York: Frederick Pustet Co., 1946), p. 15.

⁴ Abbot Guéranger, "Advent," The Liturgical Year, translated by Dom Laurence Shepherd (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1922), p. 22.

The name "Advent" itself, which means "coming," points to the significance and purpose of this season. For, in preparation for the coming celebration of the Savior's birth, we think primarily during these weeks of Advent of the the three comings of our Lord - His coming in the flesh at Bethlehem to redeem the world from sin, His coming into the lives of men through the Word and the Sacraments, and, finally, His coming on the last day to judge the living and the dead.⁵ Such contemplation is well designed to prepare our hearts, so that our Lord will be born in us answ on the Day of His Birth and throughout the coming year.

As the season preparatory to Christmas, Advent is penitential in character. This is symbolized by the violet colored paraments which adorn the chancel furnishings throughout this season. In keeping with this penitential aspect of Advent, it is our purpose during these days to become more aware of our need for a Savior by acknowledging our sins and to prepare our hearts for our Lord's coming by confessing our transgressions unto God.

However, in spite of its penitential aspect, Advent is none the less a time of joy. It cannot be otherwise for soon we shall celebrate the Birthday of the King of Heaven and join the angelic choirs in chanting, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth

5

Villeneuve, op. cit., p. 17.

peace, good will toward men."⁶

The First Sunday in Advent

The keynote of this first Sunday of the Church Year is sounded in the Gospel, "...Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee,...." The King is coming! Just as these words once foretold the triumphal entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, so today they announce the approaching Festival of the Nativity and exhort us to prepare our hearts, so that our Lord might be born in us anew on that Festive Day. Realizing "...the threatening perils of our sins....," we cannot but respond to this announcement in the words of the Collect, "Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come,...."

At the beginning of this new Church Year these words of the Gospel also announce that, because our Lord was once born the Babe of Bethlehem and redeemed us to our God, He is coming to us once more throughout the coming Church Year in His Word and Sacrament, in order to strengthen our faith and fill us with His Spirit. How joyfully, therefore, we ought to exclaim in the words of the Introit and Gradual, "Show me Thy ways, O Lord: teach me Thy paths."

We are to make the most of this year of grace, for "...the day is at hand:...." (Epistle) We never know when our Lord might come. But we need not fear as long as we continue to pray throughout the year, as we do today, "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul: O my God, I trust in Thee." (Introit)

⁶
Luke 2:14.

The Second Sunday in Advent

Last Sunday the Lord's first coming was the object our meditation. Today we are reminded that He, Who was born in Bethlehem, shall come again at the end of time in power and glory to judge the living and the dead. This is our Lord's message in today's Gospel. "The powers of heaven shall be shaken: and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory," (Gradual and Gospel)

While His coming will be a day of destruction for those who have not accepted Him as Savior and as Lord, it will be a day of completed salvation and redemption for all of those into whose hearts the Lord Jesus has come during their lifetime. This is the assurance voiced in the Introit, "Daughter of Zion: behold, thy Salvation cometh. The Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard: and ye shall have gladness of heart." Added to this we have our Lord's words, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

This perfect redemption, which we will receive at the second coming of our Lord, is one of the many comforting promises written in the Scriptures to give us hope. (Epistle)

But it is not the purpose of today's Propers simply to announce the Lord's coming in judgment. St. Paul and our Lord also tell us what kind of lives we ought to live through the power of the Spirit until the great day comes, so that we might "...glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Epistle) and "...be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Gospel)

However, such lives of love and preparedness will be possible for us only if the Lord Jesus is continually reborn in our hearts. Fully aware of this, we pray in today's Collect, "Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Thine only-begotten Son, so that by His coming we may be enabled to serve Thee with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...."

The Third Sunday in Advent

During the past two Sundays we have considered our Lord's first coming and His second coming, which still lies in the future. Today we think of another coming of our Lord - His coming into our hearts through His Word with all His saving power. Mindful of His presence in us, how fitting are the words of St. Paul in the Introit, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." We rejoice especially that, as the children of God, we need not be overly concerned about the things of this life, "...but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving," we can let our "...requests be made known unto God." (Introit)

The Church, however, would have us think today particularly of the fact that it is through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments by the ministers of Christ that our Blessed Lord comes into our lives to save and sanctify us. Two such ministers of Christ are brought to our attention in the Gospel and Epistle - John the Baptist and St. Paul. John prepared the way of the Lord. He was more than a prophet. (Gospel) St. Paul was one of the foremost of the ambassadors for Christ. Since their time, throughout the ages, thousands of others have followed in their steps, proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. Through their preaching countless souls have been brought to the

Redeemer, even we ourselves. We ought, therefore, to love, respect, honor, and obey these servants of God, for they are "...the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." (Epistle)

As we enter this new year of grace and approach the coming Festival of Christmas, we ought also to be aware of the fact that it is through the Word spoken by these men of God that the Lord Jesus desires to enter our hearts with renewed power on the Day of His Birth and throughout the coming year.

In order that the Lord might so come into our hearts on the Festival of His Nativity and throughout this new year of grace, we pray, "Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth; stir up Thy strength and come.... Stir up Thy strength: and come and save us." (Gradual) "Lord, we beseech Thee, give ear to our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts by Thy gracious visitation;...." (Collect)

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

"Rejoice in the Lord always.... The Lord is at hand." (Epistle)

The joy of this last Sunday in Advent is greater than that of the previous; for in just a few more days we shall stand once more in spirit before the Manger Throne in David's Town, worshipping and adoring the new-born King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In eager expectation we cry out, "Drop down, ye heavens, from above: and let the skies pour down righteousness. Let the earth open: and bring forth salvation." (Introit)

But how shall we greet the Lord aright? How shall we prepare

our hearts for Him! We find the answers to these all-important questions in today's Epistle and Gospel. We are to greet our Lord in true humility and with a deep sense of our own need and unworthiness. Then the true joy and peace of Christmas will be ours. This lesson in humility we can well learn from John the Baptist, who said, "...He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." (Gospel) Furthermore, we are to go forth to meet our Lord with "...prayer and supplication with thanksgiving....," as the apostle Paul recommends in the Epistle.

Surely, the Lord Himself will assist us in preparing our hearts to receive Him, for "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him: to all that call upon Him in truth." (Gradual) Therefore, let us pray, "Stir up, O Lord, we beseech Thee, Thy power and come and with great might succor us that by the help of Thy grace whatsoever is hindered by our sins may be speedily accomplished through Thy mercy and satisfaction;...." (Collect)

CHAPTER III

CHRISTMASTIDE

For four weeks we have been preparing ourselves for the celebration and commemoration of our Lord's Nativity, and now the Festival has arrived. Christmas is the first great Festival of the Church Year. With its celebration of the birth of our Blessed Lord, we begin once more to relive, step by step, the events of His life.

The birth of our Lord was first celebrated in the East during the third century. At that time the date of its celebration was not December 25th, as it is today. Rather, the Nativity was celebrated on January 6th, together with the Feast of the Epiphany.¹ However, by the middle of the fourth century, the churches in Rome had begun to celebrate Christmas on December 25th.² And even though the Festival of the Epiphany continued to be the more popular among the people of the East, by the end of the fourth century, the custom of celebrating the Lord's birth on December 25th was accepted also in the Eastern Church.³ Since that time, Christmas has been universally celebrated on that date. Because its date is thus stationary, it is called an immovable feast.

¹ Dom Otto Haering, Living With the Church, translated by Dom Rembert Dulacik (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1930), p. 10.

² K.A.H. Kellner, Heortology: A History of the Christian Festivals from their Origin to the Present Day (London: Trubner, 1908), p. 142.

³ Paul Zeller Strodach, The Church Year (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, c.1924), p. 42.

In the ancient Church, as early as the end of the sixth century, three services of divine worship were held on Christmas to commemorate the Lord's birth.⁴ The first, at midnight, called the Mass of the Angels, celebrated our Lord's birth of the Blessed Virgin; the second, at daybreak, called the Mass of the Shepherds, commemorated the Savior's birth in the hearts of these men; and the third, the High Mass, celebrated the eternal birth of the Son from the Bosom of the Father.⁵

All three of these commemorations still find a place in our Liturgy in the Propers for Christmas Day and the Second Christmas Day. This ancient three-fold celebration also explains the fact that two Introits, two Epistles, and two Graduals are suggested for Christmas Day. However, in our study of the Propers for the Day, we shall consider only those those which are most generally used.

Needless to say, Christmas is a time of holy joy, for on this day the King of Kings came down from heaven to redeem us from our sin and bring us back to God. For that reason, our hearts should be filled with adoration, joy, gratitude and love on this most holy Day of His Nativity.

The celebration of Christmas proper continues for eight days, from Christmas Day until the Feast of the Circumcision and the Name of Jesus, on January 1st. The larger Christmas cycle, however,

¹
Haering, op. cit., p. 9.

²
Ibid., pp. 9-10; and Dom Prosper Guéranger, "Christmas," I, third edition, The Liturgical Year, translated by Dom Laurence Shepherd (Worcester: Stanbrook Abbey, 1918), p. 185.

includes the period from Advent until the end of Epiphany. This means that the birth of our Lord, and events related to and immediately following His birth, will be the object of our attention not only on Christmas Day, but for several weeks to come.

Christmas Day, the Feast of the Nativity
of our Lord

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord." This glorious announcement of the birth of our Blessed Redeemer, contained in the Gospel for the Day, is proclaimed at the very beginning of the service in the words of the Introit, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God: the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

He, Who is born, is "...the Mighty God: the Everlasting Father,...." He has come to redeem us from our sins and to empower us with His Spirit, so that "...denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;...." (Epistle) In Him, the Babe of Bethlehem, "...the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,...." (Epistle) "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God:....," for the "Lord hath made known His salvation: His righteousness hath He openly showed in the sight of the heathen." (Gradual)

Should we not pray God in the Collect that the birth of His "...only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free, who are held in the old bondage under the yoke of sin;...."? Should we not

rejoice on this Day of His Birth? "Oh, sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvelous things." (Introit) "...Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Gospel)

The Second Christmas Day

As on Christmas Day, the Introit once more fills our hearts with joy by proclaiming the Savior's birth in the words of the prophet Isaiah. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given:...."

Today's Gospel is a continuation of the Gospel for Christmas Day. It tells of the Shepherds who hastened to Bethlehem, worshipped the new-born Prince of Peace, "...made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child," and "...returned, glorifying and praising God...."

And so that we also might be filled with this same holy joy and devotion to the Lord Jesus during this Christmas Season and throughout the coming year, St. Paul, in the Epistle, once more reminds us of the great gifts which the Christ-Child has won for us. Our Dear Lord, Whom we now worship and adore, by His life on earth has made it possible for us to have the forgiveness of sins and become the heirs of eternal life. These gifts He has given us "...by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost;...." (Epistle) Surely, "This is the Lord's doing: it is marvelous in our eyes." (Gradual) And it is for the continuance of these gifts throughout our lives that we pray in the Collect.

Like the Shepherds of old, therefore, may we who have worshipped at the cradle of the Infant Redeemer also make known the glad tidings of Christmas and continually glorify and praise God.

The Sunday after Christmas

In today's Gospel we find the Christ-Child in the temple with His parents on the day of His presentation and of His mother's purification. We see two aged servants of the Lord, Simeon and Anna, adoring Him.

It was on this occasion that Simeon spoke those beautiful words of the *Nunc Dimittis*. But of particular interest to us today are the words of Simeon which prophecy the future suffering of this Blessed Child. "And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Simeon, however, was not the first to prophecy the Lord's future suffering. The prophets of old had predicted it. And in the Epistle St. Paul reveals the reason the Son of God must suffer. He must suffer to redeem men from the curse of the Law, that they might become sons of God. He writes, "...when the fulness of 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."

Indeed, our Lord has redeemed us from the Law, and we are the sons and heirs of God. Therefore, let us today join Anna and Simeon in worshipping and adoring Him, Who is "...fairer than the children of men:...." (Gradual) and Whose "...testimonies are very sure:...." (Introit) Let us also pray that, following the example of Simeon and Anna, "...we may be made to abound in good works;...." (Collect)

The Circumcision and the Name of Jesus

The Gospel for today is once again the basis for our commemoration. Our Blessed Lord is eight days old. It is the day for His circumcision and naming.

"And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the Child, His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb." (Gospel) His name is called Jesus, which means Savior. "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth:...." (Introit)

The Son of God has come to be our Savior. The very rite of circumcision, to which He submits Himself, is a significant part of His redemptive work. It signals the fact that His entire life is to be one of submission to the Law of God, so that He might fulfill it perfectly in the stead of all men. Thus men are to be released from the demands and curse of the Law and clothed in His perfect righteousness before God.

As Christians we have been clothed in Jesus' perfect righteousness. He has become our righteousness by faith. This is the comforting message which St. Paul addresses to us in today's Epistle. He writes, "Wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ."

Yes, in Christ, "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God:.... The Lord hath made known His salvation: His righteousness hath He openly showed in the sight of the heathen." (Gradual)

And what more appropriate words of petition could flow from our lips on this day than the words of the Collect, "O Lord God, who for our sakes hast made Thy blessed Son, our Savior, subject to the Law and caused Him to endure the circumcision of the flesh, grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit that our hearts may be pure from all sinful desires and lusts; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...."

The Sunday after New Year

The Gospel account of the Flight into Egypt and the Martyrdom of the Holy Innocents combines with the Epistle for today to instruct us concerning the blessedness of suffering for Christ's sake and to assure us that God protects and cares for His own.

The Holy Gospel informs us of King Herod's plot to kill the Infant Jesus. He ordered the death of all infants in Bethlehem and its surrounding countryside in the hope that Jesus would be among them. But the heavenly Father protected His Son. Long before Herod's orders were issued, He warned Joseph to flee into Egypt. There the Holy Family found refuge until God, after Herod's death, advised them to return.

So God protects all who are His; for "The Lord reigneth, He is clothed with majesty, the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith He hath girded Himself." (Introit)

Thus, we may suffer for Christ's sake, as did the children of Bethlehem, but we should "...speak the praise of the Lord:...."
(Gradual) amid such suffering, knowing that God is still caring for us and that such suffering is beneficial for our spiritual welfare.

We must never forget that the Lord is "...our Father and Redeemer:...."

(Gradual) This is the message addressed to us by St. Peter in today's Epistle. He writes, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." However, not only do we have this hope, but we can be confident also that God Himself will grant us the grace to perform this good work of patience in suffering, as well as all others which He would have us to do. (Collect)

CHAPTER IV

THE EPIPHANY SEASON

With the arrival of the Festival of the Epiphany, the Christmas Season closes. But as the name Epiphany, which means "manifestation," suggests, the Festival of the Epiphany and its succeeding Sundays serve to continue to unfold the events of the life of our Lord and to reveal new aspects of His coming. The season would present especially those events in the life of our Lord which manifest His Divinity and signal the appearance of His saving grace to the Gentiles. Both of these themes are found throughout the Propers for this Season.

As previously alluded to, the Festival of the Epiphany is of more ancient origin than the Festival of Christmas. It was first celebrated in the East during the third century, commemorating both our Lord's Birth and His Baptism.¹ Later, other commemorations were added to this day, such as our Lord's miracle at the wedding feast at Cana.

When, in the latter part of the fourth century, the Eastern Churches accepted December 25th as the day for the observance of our Lord's Birth, the Western Churches, in turn, adopted the Feast of the Epiphany.² There is some evidence that this Festival

¹ Paul Zeller Stredach, The Church Year (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, c.1924), pp. 60-1.

² Ibid., p. 42.

may have been kept earlier in certain parts of the West,³ but it was only in the latter part of the fourth century that its celebration became general throughout the Church.

In those early days, the Day of the Epiphany had three commemorations—the Visit of the Magi, the Baptism of Jesus, and the Miracle of the Wedding Feast at Cana.⁴ All were chosen with the purpose of declaring our Lord's glory and Divinity and of proclaiming His coming to the Gentiles.

Gradually, however, the Visit of the Kings from the East became the central commemoration of the Day, and the Baptism of our Lord and the Miracle of Cana came to be observed during the days after the Epiphany.

Following this change, we also commemorate the Visit of the Magi on the Feast of the Epiphany. The Miracle of Cana is the subject for our meditation on the Second Sunday after the Epiphany. Unfortunately, however, the commemoration of our Lord's Baptism is not provided for in our Liturgy.

Like Christmas, the Festival of the Epiphany is an immovable feast. It is always celebrated on the sixth day of January. The Sundays following this Feast, until the Time of Septuagesima, serve to amplify its teaching. Our Liturgy makes provision for as many as six Sundays after the Epiphany. But all six of these Sundays will not be celebrated every year. The number celebrated will depend on the

3

K.A.H. Keller, Heortology: A History of the Christian Festivals from their Origin to the Present Day (London: Trubner, 1908), p. 172.

4

Dom Prosper Guéranger, "Christmas," II, third edition, The Liturgical Year, translated by Dom Laurence Shepherd (Worcester: Stanbrook Abbey, 1918), pp. 122-5.

date of Easter, which is movable. When, however, it is not possible to celebrate all six of these Sundays, the Proper for the Transfiguration of our Lord are always used on the last Sunday after the Epiphany, unless there is only one Sunday following that Festival.⁵

The Epiphany of our Lord

"Behold, the Lord, the Ruler hath come: and the kingdom and the power and the glory are in His hand." The Introit for the Day announces in a clarion tone the arrival of our Blessed Lord, extolling His Divinity and Kingship. He, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, has come to reign over His people, as foretold by the Prophet Isaiah, "...the Lord shall arise up unto Thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee,...."

But He has not come to rule over His chosen people alone. He has come to reign over the Gentiles also, in fulfillment of the Prophet's words, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

And the Gentiles did come to His light and kings to the brightness of His rising. Today's Gospel declares the beginning of the fulfillment of these words. Here we see the Kings of the East, Gentiles from far away lands, worshipping the Infant King of Heaven and presenting Him gifts - the very gifts mentioned in the Prophecy of Isaiah.

On this Festive Day, shall we not also rise and shine and offer to our King the devotion of our hearts and the consecration of our lives? Yes, "...Arise, shine, O Jerusalem: for the glory of the

Lord is risen upon thee." (Gradual)

"O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...."

The First Sunday after the Epiphany

"I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne: high and lifted up. And I heard the voice of a great multitude, saying, Alleluia! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands: serve the Lord with gladness." These words of the Introit, in keeping with the message of Epiphany, again proclaim the Kingship of the Divine Christ and call us and all people of all nations to accept the saving rule of Him Who has come to reign over the Gentiles.

Today's Gospel also reveals Christ as the Divine Son of God. It is a continuation of the record of our Lord's life. He is now twelve years old, and we find Him in the temple at Jerusalem, "...sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions." And if, with His mother, we ask why He is there, He answers, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" He, the Son of God, is about His Father's business. Although His Divine majesty is hidden beneath His humanity, His mission is Divine. He has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Like our Savior, we, too, are to be about our Father's business. Our lives are to be dedicated and consecrated to the work of our God. Reminding us of this, St. Paul writes in today's Epistle, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." And remembering that God has redeemed us from sin and empowered us with His Spirit so to live unto Him, let us "...serve the Lord with gladness." (Introit)

"O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...."

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

The Introit and Gradual for today extol God for having made His saving grace manifest to all men through our Lord Jesus Christ and call us to worship our Lord and praise His goodness and His wonderful works. Oh, "...praise ye Him,...." (Gradual) and pray that His peace may abide with you all the days of your life. (Collect)

Truly, we ought to praise the Lord, for He is the Son of God. In today's Gospel, see Him miraculously changing water into wine by His Divine power at the marriage feast in Cana! See Him manifest His glory! The disciples did, and they believed on Him. So this manifestation of His Divine power should strengthen our faith and trust in Him, Who is our Savior and our God.

But behold Him once more! This time see His love for people and His willingness to help in time of need! There is no wine for the marriage feast, but the Son of God lovingly provides that which is lacking. He changes water into wine and presents it to the governor of the feast. How thoughtful! How loving!

So we, who are His, ought to follow His example. As God enables us, we are to "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality." (Epistle)

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

The Introit and Gradual for today, in keeping with the spirit of the Epiphany Season, proclaim the Kingship of the Divine Christ and call upon all in heaven and earth to worship and adore Him. "Worship Him, all ye His angels; Zion heard and was glad. The daughter of Judah rejoiced: because of Thy judgments, O Lord. The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice: let the multitude of isles be glad thereof." (Introit)

In the Gospel we find the two themes of the Epiphany Season interwoven in a unique way. It manifests both our Lord's Deity and His coming to the Gentiles. His Deity is unmistakably manifest in His healing of the leper and the Centurion's servant. The appearance of His saving grace to the Gentiles is signaled by the fact that the Centurion and his

servant, whom the Lord healed, were both Gentiles.

But more than this, in today's Gospel we see our Lord's readiness and willingness to help all of those who trust in Him. Like the leper and the Centurion of Capernaum, we are in need of His Divine help. We are burdened by sin and laden with many cares. We also need to pray, "Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...." (Collect) Truly, the Lord will hear our prayers and grant us His help.

Likewise, from our Lord's example in today's Gospel, we are to learn to be merciful toward our fellowmen. Christ is to have His Epiphany in our lives. Our kindness is to extend even to our enemies. St. Paul counsels, "Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

In today's Gospel we see once more our Blessed Lord's Divine

power and glory shining brightly through the cloak of His humanity. We see Him as the Lord of Nature. When He speaks, the winds and the sea obey His voice. "Worship Him, all ye His angels: Zion heard and was glad. The daughters of Judah rejoiced: because of Thy judgements, O Lord. The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice: let the multitude of isles be glad thereof." (Introit)

Notice also in today's Gospel for whom the Lord exercises His great power. It is for the protection of His own. A storm threatened the lives of the disciples as they sailed across the Sea of Galilee. They called upon the Lord, and He saved them by the power of His might. So we, who are "...set in the midst of many and great dangers...." (Collect) of both body and soul, should place our trust in our all-powerful Savior and pray that He would "...grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations;...." (Collect) Surely, He will defend and protect us, as He lovingly saved His disciples.

Yes, our Lord's life was one of love and He has given us that same power to love, so that our lives might be epiphanies of His love and power at work in us. Let us, therefore, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." (Epistle)

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

The Introit and Gradual for today are the same as for the past two Sundays. Their majestic words continue to sustain the mood of the season and call us to worship Him Whose glory has

been manifest among us.

In today's Gospel we no longer see our Lord's glory manifest in His Divine miracles as on previous Sundays. Rather, His Divine wisdom and power are revealed to us today in His teaching. Today we sit at His feet and hear Him speak a parable. He speaks of the Church, which is to be a continual manifestation of His power and glory on earth until the end of time.

Our Lord is the head of the Church - the communion of all those who trust Him as Savior and Lord. He has founded the Church and continues to preserve it. But He would remind us today that His Church in the world is surrounded by enemies which would destroy it. It is from these enemies that the Church must defend and protect herself with the Lord's help until the end of time, when the evil will finally be separated from Christ's holy people.

But how is the Church to do this? First of all, the members of Christ's Church are to give Satan and the world no opportunity to dissolve their unity with one another and with Christ. Rather, they are to heed the words of St. Paul in today's Epistle, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."

And so that such love and unity may continue among us, we, as

Christians, are to care for one another and foster and build up each other's life in Christ by "...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,...."

All of this, however, we can do only with the Lord's help and by the power which He gives us in the Word and the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood. For that reason, we must let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom. And we must continue to pray today and always, "O Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy Church and household continually in Thy true religion that they who do lean upon the hope of Thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by Thy mighty power through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...." (Collect)

The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
(The Transfiguration of Our Lord)

Our Lord's Transfiguration is the most wonderful of all of the manifestations of His glory and majesty recorded in Scripture. With its commemoration the Epiphany Season comes to a climactic conclusion. This commemoration, coming as it does on the last Sunday in Epiphany, also serves as an appropriate transition from the Epiphany Season to the Time of Septuagesima and Lent, for our Lord's Transfiguration took place just shortly before He went up to Jerusalem to suffer and to die.

At the very beginning of the service, the Introit, in sublime and thrilling words announces the splendor of our commemoration and expresses our desire to dwell with our Transfigured Lord.

"The lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts: my soul longeth,

even fainteth for the courts of the Lord." (Introit)

In the Gospel we behold our Transfigured Lord. We behold His glory and majesty shining forth in all its resplendent beauty. "...His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light." (Gospel) What a glorious manifestation of His Godhead! But more than that, we hear the voice of the Father declare, "...This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him." (Gospel) Oh, "Sing unto the Lord, bless His name; show forth His salvation from day to day: declare His glory among all people. Hallelujah!" (Gradual)

It was this remarkable scene of which St. Peter was an eyewitness. In the Epistle he gives us his account of the Transfiguration. He also reminds us that, even though we are not privileged as yet to see our Lord transfigured before our eyes, yet we have His word in which He still reveals His transforming glory and saving power. We will do well to take heed to this Word, so that we might become "...co-heirs with the King of His glory...." and enjoy the same. (Collect)

The danger during this season also seems to remind us that our spiritual enemies - Satan, the world, and our own flesh - are constantly working to destroy our faith. They endeavor the weakening of our spiritual fighting against these enemies of our soul. We certainly do need the collection of this danger, to which we are constantly exposed, should also be all the more willing to acknowledge and confess our sins during this season. It should

also: Selinger, "Theological," fourth edition, Theological Year, translated by the Lutheran Standard Society, 1911, p. 7.

CHAPTER V

SEPTUAGESIMA SEASON

Septuagesima introduces the second great cycle of the Church Year - the Easter Cycle. This period, known as Pre-Lent, is penitential in character and consists of the three Sundays prior to Ash Wednesday; it thus serves as a preparatory season to Lent¹, which is itself the longer and more deeply penitential season preparatory to the Festival of Easter.

In preparing us for a salutary observance of Lent, the Propers for this season direct us to think of our own sinfulness and the punishment which we justly deserve because of our sins, so that during the coming Lenten Season we will more gladly walk with our Savior the way of the cross and more fully understand and appreciate His love for us.

The Propers during this season also serve to remind us that our spiritual enemies - Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh - are constantly working to destroy our faith. They underscore the necessity of our continual fighting against these enemies of our soul. And certainly the realization of this danger, by which we are constantly surrounded, should make us all the more willing to acknowledge and confess our sins during this season. It should

¹
Abbot Guéranger, "Septuagesima," fourth edition, The Liturgical Year, translated by Dom Laurence Shepherd (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1923), p. 2.

also make us more willing to ponder and contemplate our Savior's Passion during the coming Season of Lent, for through such contemplation the Lord Himself will dwell in us more mightily with His saving and sanctifying power, enabling us to remain steadfast in the faith until the end.

The names for these Sundays prior to Lent are Latin: Septuagesima meaning seventy; Sexagesima, sixty; and Quinquagesima, fifty. The Sundays received these names because of their relationship to Easter.² Thus the names are designed to inform us each Sunday of the number of days remaining until the Festival of Easter. However, the numbers are not exact. For example, Septuagesima Sunday does not come exactly seventy days before Easter, but it is the Sunday within seventy days of Easter. Likewise, Sexagesima Sunday is the Sunday within sixty days of Easter. Quinquagesima Sunday, however, is exactly the fiftieth day before Easter.³

It is rather difficult to trace the origin of this pre-Lenten season. It was not known in the very early Church. But it seems that later, when the Church began to observe a season preparatory to Easter, certain groups within the Church, particularly those who lived in monasteries, began preparing for Easter as early as Septuagesima, while others began on Sexagesima and Quinquagesima. Then, Ash Wednesday became the more accepted date for the beginning

²
Luther D. Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1947), p. 450.

³
Paul Zeller Strodaoh, The Church Year (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, c.1924), p. 89.

of Lent, and these Sundays retained their penitential character and became a season of preparation for Lent.⁴

In keeping with the solemn and penitential character of this season, the Hallelujah has been dropped from the Graduals and replaced by a mournful and longer chant, called, in that account the Tract.⁵ This Tract continues to replace the Hallelujah throughout the season of Lent.

Septuagesima Sunday

The Introit for today calls us to an awareness of our sinfulness and the punishment which we justly deserve. Fully realizing our sinful condition, we cannot but cry out with the Psalmist, "The sorrows of death compassed me: the sorrows of hell compassed me about."

(Introit) But we are not to despair. Rather, we are to turn to our Lord with trusting hearts, for with the Lord there is forgiveness. (Gradual) The Psalmist says, "In my distress I called upon the Lord: and He heard my voice out of His temple."

(Introit) Yes, "The Lord will be a Refuge for the oppressed, a Refuge in times of trouble: and they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee; for Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee." (Gradual) Knowing, therefore, that our Lord desires to save us and forgive our sins, let us pray, "O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we,

4

Rodrigue Cardinal Villeneuve, An Introduction to the Liturgical Year, translated by J.A. Otto Eisensimmer (New York: Frederick Fustet Co., 1946), pp. 60-3.

5

Guéranger, op. cit., p. 10.

who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior,...." (Collect)

However, St. Paul, in today's Epistle would also remind us that even though our sins are forgiven, yet sin still dwells within us and Satan still surrounds us with the desire to destroy our faith. Comparing our Christian lives to a race, St. Paul therefore counsels us to subdue our flesh and bring our bodies into subjection, so that we might run well the race of Christian living and, holding fast to the faith, finally reach the goal and receive the crown of life.

In the Gospel our Lord compares our warfare with our spiritual foes to working in His vineyard. By faith we have entered into the Lord's vineyard, and, with His help, we are to do everything possible to continue in the faith, so that at the end of our life's day we might receive the reward of faith. Note well that the reward is not something which we have earned. It is a gift from our Lord because we have accepted Him as our Savior, entered His vineyard, and, with His help, have held fast to the faith unto the end.

Are you running well the race of faith? Are you working in the Lord's vineyard? Or are sin and Satan controlling your life and destroying your faith? Why stand ye here idle? Go ye also into the vineyard! Run the race! The Lord Himself will give you the strength to run and to labor faithfully until the end. Remember, many are called, but few chosen. (Gospel)

Sexagesima Sunday

Last Sunday we were called to battle against our spiritual enemies. So often, however, we are not aware of the enemies' attacks upon us. For that reason, today's Propers find it necessary to tell us how God Himself often warns us of danger and equips us for battle. He does this by sending us trials and suffering.

Who among us has not experienced such trials and tribulations? At times life becomes so burdensome that we almost feel God is not by our side. There are times when we would cry out with the Psalmist, "Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord?: Arise, cast us not off forever. Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face: and forgettest our affliction? Our soul is bowed down to the dust: arise for our help and redeem us."

(Introit)

But we need not think in such times of tribulation that God has forgotten us. Indeed, He has not! Such tribulations are a sign of His Fatherly love. He so often permits us to suffer, so that we will remember our sinfulness, helplessness, and the dangers that surround us and turn to Him for help and increased faith to fight against our spiritual foes. If we were not so reminded, the cares and pleasures of this life would divert our attention from Him and destroy our faith. (Gospel) But God would not have this happen. He would not have the devil take His Word from our hearts. Rather, in the words of Jesus, He would have us hear His Word, keep it, and bring forth much fruit with patience. (Gospel) Let us, therefore,

thank God amid suffering and recognize its meaning.

Yes, whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. St. Paul was fully aware of this. Read today's Epistle. See how much St. Paul suffered for the Gospel's sake. Yet, he says, "...I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities." Besides these sufferings, St. Paul also had a thorn in the flesh, which the Lord did not see fit to remove. But St. Paul rejoiced in that, too, saying, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." St. Paul fully realized that this infirmity was for his good. It was to keep him humble and dependent upon God, lest he should be "...exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations,...." and fall from the faith.

Like St. Paul, we, too, should realize that such tribulations are for our soul's welfare, for the strengthening of our faith and the salvation of our souls. Therefore, let us not fall away in the time of tribulation (Gospel) but turn to God for strength and guidance. His "...strength is made perfect in weakness." (Epistle) And, that no adversity will befall us that we shall be unable to bear, let us pray, "O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...."
(Collect)

Quinquagesima Sunday

During these weeks before Lent, it has been our purpose to become more aware of our need for a Savior, by examining our own sinful,

helpless condition. That awareness is uppermost in our minds today, as we prepare to enter the holy season of Lent during the coming week. It is this awareness which moves us to cry to God in the words of today's Introit, "Be Thou my strong Rock: for an house of defense to save me." But we have no doubts. Looking toward the cross of Calvary, we are confident of our salvation. We can say with confidence, "Thou art my Rock and my Fortress: therefore for Thy name's sake lead me and guide me. In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in Thy righteousness." (Introit)

Also, during these weeks, we have become more keenly conscious of the threatening activity of Satan, the world, and our flesh and of the necessity of fighting the good fight of faith. We are reminded of this again today as we read, in today's Epistle, St. Paul's great chapter on love. We are reminded that Satan and our flesh are continually trying to make us loveless in an attempt to turn us away from our Lord. For that reason, it is so important that we heed the words of the Apostle and use the power which our Lord has given to live lives of love. Surely, this power will be increased within us as we enter the Season of Lent and ponder our Lord's suffering and death.

The beginning of Lent is not far away. Next Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of that holy season. We are reminded of its nearness in today's Gospel. We hear our Lord's words, "...Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles

and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again." Yes, we are about to go up to Jerusalem. We are about to walk with our Lord the way of the cross for the strengthening of our faith and for the comfort of our souls.

But in today's Gospel we have related another event from our Lord's life. We see Him restoring the sight of the blind man at Jericho. "Thou art the God that doest wonders: Thou hast declared Thy strength among the peoples." (Gradual) What a powerful reminder that He Who is going up to Jerusalem is none other than the Son of God! And what a comforting reminder that our Blessed Lord is merciful and kind! Here we have the assurance that He will restore sight to us, who are spiritually blind, and heal us, who are spiritually diseased. For that purpose He is going up to Jerusalem. Let us go with Him and pray, "O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Our Lord,...."

(Collect)

CHAPTER VI

LENT

The Season of Lent, as previously mentioned, is the period preceding and preparatory to the Festival of Easter. It is a period of deep humiliation, penitence, and prayer, as symbolized by the liturgical color of the season, which is violet. In fact, the depth of its penitential mood is not equaled during any other season of the Church Year.

During this time the Church commemorates and contemplates the Passion of our Lord, and the Propers, throughout the season, call the faithful to repentance and sorrow for sin. And how can it be otherwise! As we see the suffering our sin caused our Blessed Lord and the great price He paid for our redemption, we cannot help but be filled with sorrow over our sins and turn away from them to serve our Redeemer. The Lenten Season, is, therefore, a time of confession and concentrated warfare against our spiritual enemies - a time of spiritual growth.

Since Lent, properly speaking, is a period of forty days, this season is often called the time of Quadragesima, which means "fortieth."¹ Our name "Lent," however, is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word for Spring, lenoten, and signifies the Spring-fast.²

¹
Rodrique Cardinal Villeneuve, An Introduction to the Liturgical Year, translated by J.A. Otto Eisensimmer (New York: Frederick Fustet Co., 1946), p. 70

²
Abbot Guéranger, "Lent," The Liturgical Year, translated by Dom Laurence Shepherd (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1923), p. 1.

The exact origin of this season, preparatory to Easter, is not known, but, since Easter was the first of the Christian festivals to be observed, its origin is likely quite ancient. Some Church Fathers trace its beginnings back to the Apostles.³ We do know, however, that, at first, this preparatory period lasted for only forty hours, commemorating the forty hours our Lord lay in the tomb. Later, the time was extended to include all of Holy Week and then the two weeks prior to Easter. Finally, the period was extended to forty days.⁴ These were forty days of fasting, deep humiliation, and abstinence from pleasures. Since, however, Sundays were not considered fast days in the Western Churches, the beginning of Lent had to be advanced four days to Ash Wednesday, so that the season would include forty fast days. This change probably took place at the end of the sixth century.⁵ Accordingly, even today, Sundays are not properly days of Lent but days in Lent.⁶ In other parts of the Church, however, other days besides Sundays were not considered as fast days, and, for that reason, Lent began as early as Septuagesima Sunday in some places.⁷ Today, however,

³ Paul Zeller Strodach, The Church Year (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, c.1924), p. 102.

⁴ Martin Carlson, "The Church Year," The Augustana Quarterly, XXI (April, 1942), p. 120.

⁵ Luther D. Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1947), p. 453.

⁶ Strodach, op. cit., p. 104.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 103-4.

Ash Wednesday is generally accepted as the beginning of Lent.

It should also be mentioned that in the early Church the time of Lent was the period of preparation and instruction for those to be baptized and confirmed on Easter.⁸ Also, during this time, those, who had been excommunicated from the Church and desired to be reconciled, were put under strict discipline, until they were received again into the Church on Maundy Thursday.⁹

As during the Time of Septuagesima, the Hallelujah continues to be omitted from the Gradual and replaced by the Tract. It is also customary to omit the "Gloria in Excelsis" from the Liturgy during this time.¹⁰

Ash Wednesday, the first Day of Lent

The name for this first day of Lent is derived from the custom in the ancient Church of sprinkling ashes upon the heads of the public penitents on this day.¹¹ Later all of the faithful were included in this ceremony as a symbol of their repentance.

Lent is, indeed, a time of repentance. The Lenten call to repentance is heard in today's Epistle. The Prophet Joel writes, "Therefore also now

⁸ Fernand Cabrol, The Year's Liturgy: The Sundays, Ferias and Feasts of the Liturgical Year (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1938), I. p. 117.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The Lutheran Liturgy, Authorized by the Synods constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 419.

¹¹ K.A.H. Kellner, Hecortology: A History of the Christian Festivals from Their Origin to the Present Day (London: Trubner, 1906), p. 102.

saith the Lord, turn ye even unto Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil."

We must all admit that we have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We must all confess that we have not always used the power which our Lord has given us to live according to His will. Let us, therefore, return to the Lord, trust in our Savior, and receive renewed strength, that we may turn away from evil and obey His will. Now is the time to turn from our sin and draw closer to our Lord. Now, as we see how much He loves us! Now, as we see so clearly His desire to forgive us, save us, and empower us to live under Him.

Shall we not make the words of today's Introit and Gradual our own? Shall we not say, "I will cry unto God most High; unto God that performeth all things for me. Yea, in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge: until these calamities be overpast. Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in Thee" (Introit) Surely, if we will so turn to the Lord in true faith, He will forgive us all our past sins and give us His Holy Spirit to live new lives for Him.

This turning to the Lord is also the subject of our Savior's words in today's Gospel. Like Joel, He emphasizes that our repentance is not to be purely outward, but a matter of the heart. The important thing is that we do not lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth but in heaven.

If we should desire to fast during these days to symbolize our heartfelt sorrow over our sin or to mortify the flesh, we may do so. But we must not make an outward show of it among men, as our Lord tells us. Such fasting will not please God. (Gospel) He desires that we rend our hearts and not our garments. It is important that we pray to the Lord with all our heart, "Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent, create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...." (Collect) God will hear such a prayer and grant us His peace.

Invocavit, the First Sunday in Lent

This Sunday, like all of the Sundays in Lent, receives its name from the first word of the Latin Introit. The first word of today's Introit is Invocavit, "He shall call," and so today is known as Invocavit Sunday.

On Ash Wednesday we heard and heeded the call to repentance. During these days we are turning once more to the Lord with renewed devotion. But this turning to God also means that we must turn away from evil. It means we must continually carry on spiritual warfare against our enemies, Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh. This is the aspect of our repentance that we would consider today. It is the design of today's Propers to remind us of the many hostile attacks with which our enemies would confront us and to show us how we might overcome them.

In today's Gospel we see our Blessed Lord Himself being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, after He had fasted for forty days and forty nights. These temptations were real. This was a trying time in our Lord's life. But He was victorious.

St. Paul also suffered many trials at the hand of Satan. Read his account in today's Epistle. But St. Paul was not overcome. Rather, he overcame.

Like our Lord and St. Paul, we shall also be tempted many times by Satan to turn from God. He would overthrow our faith. Yet, like our dear Lord and His Apostle, we, too, can overcome Satan and all the temptations with which he surrounds us.

How can we do this? Our Lord defeated Satan with the Word of God. We, too, have the Word of God. It not only gives us the answers with which to reply to Satan when he confronts us, but through the Word and the Blessed Sacrament our Lord would endow us with the dynamic power to be victorious in all times of temptation.

Indeed, our heavenly Father has promised us His assistance in such times of temptation. He has said, "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him: and show him My salvation." (Introit)¹⁵⁷

Yes, if you will only call upon God, you can be confident that in all times of temptation "...He shall give His angels charge over thee: to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands: lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High: shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." (Gradual)

If, however, we should ever happen to fall prey to Satan's temptations, we have this comfort, that our Lord overcame Satan for us and that, through faith in Him, His victory has become ours before God. For this let us thank Him.

But, knowing that our Lord has given us the power with which to overcome Satan in our own lives, let us use it. Let us not receive the grace of God in vain. (Epistle) And, that this power might be increased in us, let us diligently and faithfully read and hear His Word and go often to the Lord's Table. Let us also pray, "O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...." (Collect)

Reminiscere, The Second Sunday in Lent

The name for this Sunday is derived from the first word of the Latin Introit, Reminiscere, which means "Remember."

The subject of repentance occupies our attention once again. Our entire lives are to be lives of repentance. On Ash Wednesday we heard the call to repentance. We heard that repentance involves a return to God, trust in Him, obedience to His will, and turning aside from evil. Last Sunday we meditated on one particular aspect of our repentance - the turning away from evil. Today the Propers direct our attention to other aspects of our repentance. First of all, the Epistle would remind us that repentance includes the endeavor to lead holy lives through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Hear the words of St. Paul. He writes, "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and

exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.... For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." Yes, "Blessed are they that keep judgment: and he that doeth righteousness at all times."

From today's Propers we also learn that this turning aside from evil and obedience to God's will is not something we can accomplish ourselves. Today's Gospel makes this very clear. In the Gospel we read of our Lord healing the young girl who was "...grievously vexed with a devil." From this miracle we learn that it is He alone Who has the power to cast Satan out of our lives and make us holy. It is, therefore, to Him we must turn for faith and a new life during this Lenten Season. And, surely, as we hear His Word and receive His Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament, He will grant us true repentance.

Let us, therefore, not look to ourselves for help but to God. Let us turn to Him in the words of today's Introit and Gradual, ask His help, and place our trust in Him. "Remember, O Lord, Thy tender mercies and Thy loving-kindnesses: for they have been ever of old. Let not mine enemies triumph over me: God of Israel, deliver us out of all our troubles. Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul: O my God, I trust in Thee; let me not be ashamed."

(Introit)

And as you experience His help, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever." (Gradual)

Oculi, The Third Sunday in Lent

This Sunday receives its name from the first word of the Latin Introit, Oculi, which means, "Eyes."

Today is the third Sunday in Lent. Throughout the past Sundays we have heard the cry, "Repent ye!" Continuing this Lenten call to repentance, it is for purpose of today's Proper to make us aware of the absolute necessity for repentance, if we would be saved. In the Epistle St. Paul writes, "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye the light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth)."

Nor can our repentance be a partial repentance. Our Lord says in today's Gospel, "He that is not with me is against Me: and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth."

We must, therefore, turn to our Lord for true repentance. We must turn our eyes ever toward the Lord (Introit) and pray for the gift of His Holy Spirit, that we might continue to walk as children of light. If God's Spirit does not so dwell within us, the evil spirit will return once again and bring with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself. Then our last state will be worse than the first. (Gospel)

But we need not fear. God's Spirit will dwell within us as

long as we continue to pray with the Psalmist, "Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens: have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us." (Gradual)

"We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our Defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...." (Collect)

Lecture, The Fourth Sunday in Lent

This Sunday marks the middle of Lent. It receives its name from the first word of the Latin Introit, Lectate, which means "Rejoice."

Rejoice! The past weeks of Lent have been somewhat sober and sorrowful in mood. They have been weeks of repentance. However, today's Introit invites us to rejoice. "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem and be glad with her: all ye that love her. Rejoice for joy with her: all ye that mourn for her." (Introit)

What is our reason for rejoicing? Our prayers have been heard. God has blessed our repentance. Because we have turned to Him in faith, He assures us in the words of today's Epistle that we are free from the demands and curse of the Law. More than that, we are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem and children of the promise. Yes, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion: which cannot be removed, but abideth forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem: so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever." (Gradual)

Also, how very appropriate is today's Gospel! We see our

Lord feeding the five thousand, refreshing those who had followed Him. So today He refreshes us, who have been laden with sin and its sorrows, with the assurance of His forgiving grace. He gives us Himself, the Bread of Life.

"Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...."

(Collect)

CHAPTER VII

PASSIONTIDE

Judica Sunday begins a new period in the Lenten Season - a period which includes the two weeks preceding the Festival of Easter. These weeks have been set aside for the commemoration and contemplation of our Lord's Passion. Such has been their purpose since the third century or earlier.¹ For this reason, Judica Sunday is also called Passion Sunday and the week following, Passion Week.² The second of these weeks is called Holy Week because of the holiness of the events commemorated during these days.³ It is during this week especially that we shall walk with our Lord step by step the Way of the Cross.⁴

These weeks have been well appointed as the time for our meditation on our Lord's Passion. Throughout the past weeks of Lent we have been preparing for these days. We have become quite aware of the seriousness of our sin and have turned to God

¹ Rodrique Cardinal Villeneuve, An Introduction to the Liturgical Year, translated by J.A. Otto Eissensimer (New York: Frederick Pustet Co., 1946), p. 96.

² Abbot Guenger, "Passiontide and Holy Week," The Liturgical Year, translated by Dom Laurence Shepherd (Worcester: Stanbrook Abbey, 1911), p. 107.

³ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴ Fernand Gabriel, The Year's Liturgy: The Sundays, Ferias and Feasts of the Liturgical Year (London: Burns Oates and Washbourns, 1938), I, p. 184-5.

in repentance. Now we are eager to go up to Jerusalem with our Lord and contemplate His Passion, so that we might receive added assurance of His forgiveness and gain renewed strength to make our entire lives lives of repentance. Such meditation will prepare us also to experience the full joy and victory of Easter.

Judica, The Fifth Sunday in Lent
(Passion Sunday)

As mentioned before, this Sunday is often called Passion Sunday because today we begin to make the sufferings of our Savior the chief object of our meditation. This Sunday is also called Judica Sunday from the first word of the Latin Introit, Judica, which means "Judge."

At the very beginning of this Passiontide, today's Gospel introduces the events in our Lord's Passion. In the Gospel we see the hatred of the Jews toward our Lord growing more and more bitter. He affirms His divine Mission before them, but they take up stones to kill Him. Knowing, however, that His hour has not yet come, "...Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."

It is surrounded by this bitter hatred of His enemies that we hear our Lord cry out in the words of today's Introit, "Judge Me, O God; and plead my cause against an ungodly nation. Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man; for Thou art the God of my strength." But, as in Gethsemane, our Lord adds, "...teach me to do Thy will." (Gradual) He is willing to suffer, for He knows that, in spite of His suffering, He will be victorious in the end.

Looking toward that victory, He can say of His heavenly Father, "He delivereth me from mine enemies; yea, Thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me; Thou hast delivered me from the violent man."

(Gradual)

But why must our Lord suffer? Why is He so willing to suffer? We find the answer in today's Epistle. He has come to be our High Priest. He has come to sacrifice Himself upon the altar of the cross, as both Priest and Victim, so that He might obtain "...eternal redemption for us." He is willing and glad to suffer and to die "...that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called right receive the promise of eternal inheritance." And it is this, His sacrifice for our sins and the sins of the entire world, that will unfold before our very eyes during these coming weeks before Easter.

Yes, our Lord came to be despised and rejected of men, so that by His great goodness we "...may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul;...." (Collect)

Palmarum, The Sixth Sunday in Lent

Today is Palm Sunday. It is the day our Lord rode into Jerusalem surrounded by the multitudes, who spread their garments and palm branches before Him and proclaimed Him their King, saying, "...Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." (Gospel)

But see how He enters the city! He comes "...meek, sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." (Gospel) It is this

weakness of our Lord that we shall see portrayed throughout the coming week. St Paul writes, "...He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Epistle)

Indeed, as we today stand at the beginning of Holy Week, we cannot forget the suffering which lies ahead. In today's Introit and Gradual we hear the distant cries of our suffering and dying Lord. "Be not Thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength haste Thou to help me. Save me from the lion's mouth: and deliver me from the horns of the unicorns. My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?: Why art Thou so far from helping Me?" (Introit)

But not only do we see the suffering of the coming week. We also see the victory of Easter. We have a complete view of the events before us. St. Paul writes, "wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Epistle)

Yes, Christ is the suffering Servant, but He is also the victorious Lord. He is the King of our salvation. Let us, therefore, go forth to greet our King on this glad Palm Sunday, so that He might rule in our hearts with His saving grace. And, as we stand at the beginning of this Holy Week, let us pray, "Almighty and everlasting God, who hast sent Thy Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, to take upon Him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross that all mankind should follow

the example of His great humility, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of His patience and also be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...."

(Collect)

Monday of Holy Week

During this Holy Week it is our purpose to ponder our Savior's Passion as it is unfolded in the Propers for each day. Today's Gospel takes us back to the Saturday before Palm Sunday. We find our Lord visiting in Bethany in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and we see Mary anointing the Lord with precious ointment. This incident forms a fitting introduction to Holy Week, for we hear our Lord say, "...against the day of my burying hath she kept this."

The Gospel relates once more our Lord's entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and it concludes with the coming of the Greeks who "...would see Jesus" and our Lord's words, "...the hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified."

Yes, "...the hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified." But He is to be glorified through suffering. We are so clearly reminded of this in today's Introit and Gradual where, in the prophetic words of the Psalmist, we hear our Lord, surrounded by His enemies, imploring the Father's help. "Plead My cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler: and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear and stop the way against me: say unto my soul, I am Thy Salvation." (Introit)

But with His suffering our Lord is obedient to the will of His heavenly Father. He is determined to suffer and die for the sins of the world. He is confident of His Father's help and the final victory. Such is the picture of our suffering Lord which the prophet Isaiah presents in today's Epistle. He writes, "The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed."

Yes, our dear Lord willingly suffered for us. He suffered cruel treatment at the hands of evil men and the very wrath of God for sin, so that we "...who amid so many adversities do fall through our own iniquities may be restored through His Passion and intercession." (Collect) Let us, therefore, love and serve Him and continue to pray, "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name: and deliver us and purge away our sins for Thy name's sake." (Gradual)

Tuesday of Holy Week

The Gospel for today is a continuation of yesterday's Gospel. Our Lord speaks of the purpose of His Passion and once more invites the Jews to accept His salvation. His Divine Sonship is attested to by the voice of the Father Himself. However, St. John adds, "But though He has done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him...."

It was this unbelief on the part of the Jews which induced them to plot our Lord's death and crucify Him on the accursed tree. Already on this day of Holy Week the plot against our Lord's life was being conceived. Jeremiah had foretold it many years before. It is his words which we have in today's Epistle. He writes, "But I was like a lamb, or an ox, that is brought to slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered."

However, dear Christians, we are not to be unbelieving, but believing. We are not to be like the chief rulers mentioned in the Gospel who believed and did not confess because "...they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Rather, we are to glory "...in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," for "In Him is salvation, life, and resurrection from the dead: by Him we are redeemed and set at liberty." (Introit)

"Almighty and everlasting God, grant us grace so to pass through this holy time of our Lord's Passion that we may obtain the pardon of our sins; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...." (Collect)

Wednesday of Holy Week

The Gospel for today is the history of the Passion according to St. Luke. As we read the Gospel, we hear of Judas' conspiracy with the Jews to put our Lord to death; we see our Lord celebrating the Passover with His disciples and instituting the Lord's Supper; we follow to Gethsemane and there view our Lord's agony and capture; we witness

Peter's denial and our Lord's trial before the Jewish Court, King Herod, and Pontius Pilate; and, finally, we see our Lord condemned and crucified.

Our Lord is suffering and dying. His deep agony is reflected in the words of the Psalmist in today's Gradual, "Hide not Thy face from Thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily. Save me, O God: for the waters are come in unto My sou; I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing. Hear my prayer, O Lord: and let my cry come unto Thee."

But why does our Lord suffer? Why is He crucified? "...Say ye to the daughter of Zion, behold, thy salvation cometh; behold His reward is with Him, and His work before Him." (Epistle) As foretold by Isaiah so many years ago, the Lord has come to bring us salvation. It is to obtain this salvation for us that He is now suffering and dying. Soon the work will be completed and salvation will be won. After He has "...trodden the winepress alone;....," He will appear "...glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength." (Epistle)

Yes, at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow; of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth. For He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross....." (Introit)

"Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds are continually afflicted, may mercifully be relieved by the Passion of Thine only-begotten Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end." (Collect)

Maundy Thursday

The evening of the Thursday of Holy Week was the night in which our Lord instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion and it is this sacred institution which we are commemorating today. However, the Gospel for today also calls upon us to remember the example of loving service and humility which our Lord gave His disciples that same night when He, their Lord and Master, washed their feet.

Today, the Thursday of Holy Week is called "Maundy Thursday." This name is derived from the Latin name for this day, Dies Mandati, which means the "Day of the Commandment." The name thus refers to Jesus' words, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another,...." and to His words in the Gospel commanding His disciples to follow His example of service and humility. ⁵ The name also calls to mind the Lord's words at the institution of the Holy Supper, "...this do ye, in remembrance of Me." (Epistle)

It is indeed fitting that we should commemorate the institution of the Blessed Sacrament on this day when it was celebrated first by our Lord, but we are not to commemorate its institution on Maundy Thursday alone. We are to go often to the Lord's Table, for in the Blessed Sacrament our Lord gives us His Body and Blood, which were given and shed for us for the remission of our sins, in order to strengthen our faith in the

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Paul Zeller Strodach, *The Church Year* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, s.1924), p. 141.

forgiveness of sins and increase our love toward Him and toward one another.

However, as St. Paul warns us in the Epistle, we must receive the Lord's Body and Blood worthily, if we are to receive the blessings intended by our Lord. And, surely, we will be worthy communicants if, as the Introit exhorts, we glory only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, trust in Him for "...salvation, life, and resurrection from the dead:....," and firmly believe that in the Sacrament we are receiving His Body and Blood as a pledge of all these blessings.

Yes, the Lord "...hath made His wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He hath given meat unto them that fear Him: He will ever be mindful of His covenant."

(Gradual)

"O Lord God, who hast left unto us in a wonderful Sacrament a memorial of Thy Passion, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so use this Sacrament of Thy body and blood that the fruits of Thy redemption may continually be manifest in us; Thou who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end." (Collect)

Good Friday

Today we are commemorating the sacrificial death of our Lord on Calvary and His completed redemption. This day is appropriately called "Good Friday" because of the many good blessings which our Lord obtained for us by His death on the cross.

The Holy Gospel for today is the record of our Savior's Passion according to St. John. It unfolds the events of our Lord's

suffering from His capture in Gethsemane to His death on Calvary and burial in Joseph's Garden. Thus it is well appointed for our meditation and devotion today.

Since early times it has been the custom to adorn our churches in black today in remembrance of our Lord's death. But today is not primarily a day of mourning. It is also a day of solemn praise and joy. It is a day of deep and holy joy because on this day our Lord completed His redemptive work and made perfect atonement for our sins.

If, therefore, we would experience the joy of this Good Friday and receive all the blessings which flow from the Cross, we must go out to Calvary with the knowledge that there our Lord took upon Himself our sins, together with the sins of the entire world, and there suffered the punishment of our sin, that in Him we might have full and complete forgiveness. This is the comforting message which the Prophet Isaiah would address to us today. We have his words in the Introit, Gradual and Epistle. He writes, "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:.... But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." (Epistle)

Realising, therefore, that our redemption is complete, let us go penitently to Calvary, thank our Lord for His dying love, and in true faith accept the forgiveness of sins which He offers to each of us. And let us pray on this solemn day, "Almighty God, we beseech Thee graciously to behold this Thy family, for which our Lord Jesus

Christ was contented to be betrayed and given up into the hands of wicked men and to suffer death upon the cross; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end." (Collect)

Holy Saturday, Easter Eve

Since Holy Saturday is the day on which our Lord rested in the tomb, services were not held on this day in the early Church.⁶ In the Middle Ages, however, a service was introduced on the evening of Holy Saturday, which included the administration of Holy Baptism. This service, beginning after nightfall, lasted until after midnight, and thus it concluded with the Easter Mass, commemorating the Lord's resurrection.⁷ However, the liturgy for this service did not include an Introit, but the Introit was replaced by a litany.⁸

Later, about the eleventh century, this service, previously held on Saturday night, was moved back to Saturday morning, and the Lord's Resurrection came to be celebrated a day early.⁹ So, even today, the Lord's Resurrection is celebrated as early as the morning of Holy

⁶ Dom Otto Haering, Living with the Church, translated by Dom Rembert Sulzarik (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1930), p. 74.

⁷ Villeneuve, op. cit., p. 164.

⁸ Haering, op. cit., p. 83.

⁹ Villeneuve, op. cit., p. 164.

Saturday in some churches.

Our Liturgy for Holy Saturday does not follow this change. Instead it provides Propers which are more in keeping with the character of the Day. Since an Introit was not appointed for this Day by the ancient Church, an Introit is not included in our Propers.

The Gospel for the Day includes once more the account of our Lord's burial by Joseph of Arimathaea, as well as the request of the chief priests and Pharisees that a guard be placed at the Lord's tomb until after the third day. As the Gospel tells us, this request was granted, and "...they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch."

The Epistle serves as an appropriate transition from Holy Week to Easter. It speaks of Christ suffering for our sins, being put to death and being quickened by the Spirit; it relates our Lord's triumphant descent into hell, after His resurrection within the grave, as the victor over sin, death, and hell. The reference to Baptism in today's Epistle is also fitting, for it is through Baptism that we share in the victories of Christ's resurrection.

Like the Epistle, the Collect also makes mention of the resurrection. In fact, this commemoration is the basis for its petition. In it we pray, "O God, who didst enlighten this most holy night with the glory of the Lord's resurrection, preserve in all Thy people the spirit of adoption which Thou hast given, so that, renewed in body and soul, they may perform unto Thee a pure service; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...."

CHAPTER VIII

EASTERTIDE

Easter is the most important festival of the Church Year. With its commemoration of our Lord's triumphal resurrection from the grave, the Church Year reaches its climax,¹ for the resurrection of Christ marks the consummation of His work as Redeemer and is the very foundation for our Christian faith and hope.

Easter is also the oldest of all the Christian Festivals.² Its origin goes back to the very early Church when it was first observed every Sunday.³ From there it came to be celebrated annually and became the foundation for the entire Church Year.⁴

The commemoration of our Lord's resurrection is, of course, a time of greatest joy. Altars are adorned in white and the Hallelujah is once more sung in our services of worship. Joy and praise abound. And, as in the early Church, this time of rejoicing continues for fifty days,⁵ until the Festival of Pentecost. The Propers for the Sundays after Easter, which present the post-resurrection appearances of our Lord, serve to

¹ Paul Zeller Strodach, The Church Year (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, c.1924), p. 149.

² K.A.H. Kellner, Heortology: A History of the Christian Festivals from their Origin to the Present Day (London: Trubner, 1908), p. 37.

³ Strodach, op. cit., p. 149.

⁴ Kellner, op. cit., p. 37.

⁵ Luther D. Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1947), p. 463.

sustain this joyous mood, as well as to prepare us for the commemoration of our Lord's Ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

This day commemorating our Lord's resurrection has many names. The proper Liturgical name is "The Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord," but this Festival has also been styled "The Lord's Day of Resurrection," "The Paschal Day of the Resurrection," and "Easter." This last name, "Easter," is thought to be derived from the name of the pagan goddess Eostre, whose festival was originally celebrated at the same time of the year that Easter is.⁶ However, it has also been discovered that the name "Easter" might have been derived from the German „rstand, which means "to rise."⁷ This latter meaning would be the more appropriate.

The date of Easter is movable, and its date determines the date of many other Christian festivals and seasons, such as Septuagesima, Lent, and Pentecost. But while the date of Easter is movable, it is always celebrated on a Sunday - the first Sunday after the full moon of spring.⁸

In conclusion, it should be also mentioned again that Easter⁹ was the time for Baptisms and Confirmation in the ancient Church. Accordingly, many of the Propers appointed for the Season, notably

⁶ Strodach, op. cit., p. 149.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 149-50.

⁸ Kellner, op. cit., p. 51.

⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

those for the first and second Sundays after Easter, were chosen for the purpose of instructing the newly baptized and confirmed.¹⁰ This is of particular significance for us, for, in keeping with the custom of the ancient Church, we, too, perform the solemn rite of Confirmation during this season. Its Propers appropriately serve as our means of exhorting and instructing the newly confirmed and of encouraging them to remain steadfast in the faith. Let us, therefore, not forget our newly confirmed, but pray for them and use our worship services to foster and nourish their life in Christ.

Easter Day, the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord

Today we are celebrating the Feast of Feasts and the King of Days - the Festival of our Lord's triumphal resurrection from the grave as the Victor over sin, death, and hell. The Introit strikes the keynote of the Day with the glorious resurrection proclamation, "He is risen, Hallelujah! Why seek ye the living among the dead? Hallelujah! Remember how He spake unto you, Hallelujah! The Son of Man must be crucified and the third day rise again. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

Yes, Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! This is the thrilling message of today's Gospel. Together with the women who visited the Lord's tomb early on that first Easter Sunday morning, we hear the angel's words, "...Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen; He is not here: Behold

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Fernand Cabrol, The Year's Liturgy: The Sundays, Ferias, and Feasts of the Liturgical Year (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1938), I, p. 190-1.

the place where they laid Him."

Indeed, "This is the day which the Lord hath made: we will rejoice and be glad in it." There is much reason for joy today. Our Lord's resurrection assures us that God has accepted His Son's sacrifice for our sin; it assures us of the victory over sin, death, and hell in our own lives. Therefore, as St. Paul exhorts in today's Epistle, let us "...keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." In addition, let us also pray, "Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee, that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect, through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...." (Collect)

Easter Monday

In yesterday's Gospel we heard the angel's proclamation of our Lord's resurrection. In today's Gospel we see the Risen Lord Himself, walking with two of His disciples along the road to Emmaus. As we behold Him, we cannot but exclaim with these disciples, "...The Lord is risen indeed,...."

Today's Epistle also attests our Lord's resurrection. We have the witness of St Peter to the Roman Cornelius. He says, "And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the

people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead."

Yes, there is no room for doubt. The Lord has risen. The knowledge of this should fill our hearts with comfort and joy, for, through our Lord's resurrection, we have been freed from the slavery of sin, raised to the newness of life, and made members of Christ's holy Church. These are the blessings assured us in the words of today's Introit, "The Lord hath brought you into a land flowing with milk and honey, Hallelujah! that His Law might continually be in your mouth. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord: call upon His name: make known His deeds among the people." (Introit)

"O God, who in the Paschal Feast hast bestowed restoration upon the world, continue unto Thy people Thy heavenly gift that they may both attain unto perfect freedom and advance unto life eternal; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...." (Collect)

Easter Tuesday

Today's Propers continue the commemoration of our Lord's resurrection. The Gospel presents another appearance of the Risen Christ - His appearance to all of the disciples on Easter evening. On this occasion our Lord ate with His disciples and charged them to be witnesses of His resurrection. He said, "...ye are witnesses of these things."

Faithful to this charge, it was not long before the disciples went into all the world as witnesses to the Risen Christ. In yesterday's Epistle we heard St. Peter's witness to Christ's resurrection in the home of the Roman Cornelius. Today's Epistle contains St. Paul's

witness to the people in Antioch of Pisidia. We hear him say, "But God raised Him from the dead; and He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people." Like Peter and Paul, may we, who by faith have seen our Risen Lord, also "...show forth in our lives that which we profess with our lips;..." (Collect)

But it is not the purpose of today's Propers simply to make us more certain of our Lord's resurrection. They would also remind us of the blessings which we have received from His rising from the dead. Addressed to us, the Introit declares, "He gave them to drink of the water of wisdom, and they will be strengthened thereby, and they shall not be moved, Hallelujah! and it will exult them forever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" Indeed, because of His atonement for our sin, Christ, through the water of Baptism, has made us wise unto salvation, that we might obtain the eternal life, which He has opened to us through His resurrection. "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord; call upon His name: make known His deeds among the people." (Introit)

Quasimodogeniti, The First Sunday after Easter

The name for this Sunday is derived from the opening words of the Latin Introit, Quasimodogeniti, "as newborn babes." This Sunday is also called "Low Sunday" in order to emphasize the contrast between the great solemnity of Easter and this Sunday, the first Sunday after Easter.

"Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Christ, our Passover: is sacrificed for us. Hallelujah! The angel of the Lord descended from heaven; and came and rolled back the stone from the door and

set upon it. Hallelujah!" As these words of today's Gradual suggest, we are still celebrating and commemorating our Lord's resurrection. Today is the eighth day after Easter. Accordingly, today's Gospel presents not only the appearance of the Risen Lord to His disciples on Easter evening, but also His appearance to them eight days later.

As we read today's Gospel, we remember that Thomas was not among the disciples when the Lord first showed Himself alive to them on Easter evening. And having not seen the Risen Lord, Thomas doubted. He would not believe. However, his unbelief did not continue. When the Lord appeared to him a week later, he did believe and confessed, "...My Lord and my God." But we must not forget our Lord's words to Thomas on this occasion. "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."

"...blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Such is our faith. We have not seen our Risen Lord face to face, but we have seen Him in His word and experienced His saving grace in our lives, and we believe. And great are the blessings of such faith as ours. St. John writes in today's Epistle, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Yes, by faith in the Risen Christ, we have overcome the world, that is, the power of Satan ruling in the world. If, however, we would continue to triumph over the world, we must

continue to nourish and strengthen our faith by a faithful use of God's Word and the Blessed Sacrament. For that reason today's Introit exhorts, "As newborn babes: desire the sincere milk of the Word." And not only will such a diligent use of the Word and the Sacrament strengthen and increase our faith; but through these means God will also give us the help of His grace to bring forth the fruits of our Lord's resurrection in our lives and conversation. (Collect)

Misericordias Domini, the Second Sunday after Easter

The name for this second Sunday after Easter is derived from the phrase in the first verse of the Latin Introit, Misericordias Domini, "Goodness of the Lord." This Sunday is also known as "Good Shepherd Sunday" because both today's Epistle and Gospel present Christ as the Good Shepherd.

The note of Easter joy is once more sounded in today's Introit and Gradual. The Introit declares, "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord: by the word of the Lord were the heavens made. Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright."

Indeed, there is much reason for joy during these post-Easter days, but today we rejoice especially to hear our victorious Savior say in today's Gospel, "I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine." Yes, Christ is the Good Shepherd. He is our Good Shepherd. However, we were not always of His fold. Once we "...were as sheep going astray;...." (Epistle) but the Good Shepherd saw the danger by which we were surrounded and laid down His life for us that we might be rescued and returned to

His fold. It is, therefore, through the death and resurrection of our Good Shepherd that we "...are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of" our "...souls" (Epistle) and are assured of His living care.

Christ is the Good Shepherd, and we are His sheep. What a glorious relationship! It was with this relationship uppermost in his mind that St. Peter wrote the words of today's Epistle. He would not have us forget that Christ, our Good Shepherd, desires us to follow the example of love and patience which He has given us. For this reason He "...bare our sins in His own body on the tree,...." Heeding St. Peter's words, let us, therefore, learn of our gentle and Good Shepherd to be loving, kind, and patient as He is, until we become partakers of eternal joys.

(Collect)

Jubilate, the Third Sunday after Easter

Today's Latin Introit begins with the word Jubilate, "Rejoice," and so this Sunday is called Jubilate Sunday."

Looking back once more to the Festival of our Lord's Resurrection, and remembering the redemption the Lord hath sent to His people (Gradual), the Introit for today calls us and all people to praise God. It declares, "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: sing forth the honor of His name; make His praise glorious."

But, as mentioned in the introduction to the Season of Easter, it is not only the purpose of the Propers for these Sundays after Easter to present the post-resurrection appearances of our Lord and to sustain the joyous mood of Easter. They are also to prepare us for the commemoration of our Lord's Ascension and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Since, therefore, we are nearing

the Festival of our Lord's Ascension, the Propers for today begin to prepare us for that commemoration. In today's Gospel we hear our Lord say to His disciples, "A little while and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father."

No doubt the Lord's announcement, "A little while, and ye shall not see Me:...." filled His disciples' hearts with sorrow. But the Lord also gave them reason for joy. He added, "...again a little while, and ye shall see Me,...."

Yes, our Lord speaks to His disciples concerning both His Ascension and His return on the last day. They were to look forward to both of these events. So today we, too, are looking forward to both of these events. Following the plan of the Church Year, we are looking forward to the commemoration of our Lord's Ascension. At the same time, however, we are also awaiting our Lord's return at the end of time.

It was with this second coming of our Lord in mind that St. Peter wrote the words of today's Epistle. He tells us how we are to live "...as strangers and pilgrims,...." on earth. First of all, we are to "...abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;....," that we might be found blameless in the Day of Jesus Christ. Secondly, we are to live lives of obedience, love, and service. Heeding St. Peter's exhortation, let us, therefore, pray God that we who have been admitted "...into the fellowship of Christ's religion...may avoid those things that are contrary to" our "profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;...." (Collect)

Cantate, the Fourth Sunday after Easter

This Sunday receives its name from the first word of the Latin Introit, Cantate, "Sing."

Like the Introits and Graduals of the past Sundays after Easter, today's Introit and Gradual also remind us that we are still walking in the warm after-glow of Easter. Remembering the wonderful works of God and especially the resurrection of our Lord from the dead, the Introit for today invites all nations to come and sing unto the Lord a new song.

We will remember that last Sunday the Propers announced the approaching day of our Lord's Ascension and began to prepare us for that commemoration. We heard our Lord say, "A little while, and ye shall not see me:...." Likewise, in today's Gospel we hear our Lord speaking of His return to the Father. But He adds another thought - a thought which invites us to look ahead not only to the Day of His Ascension, but also the Festival of Pentecost. He says, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."

Yes, after His return to the Father, the Lord promises to send His Holy Spirit to His disciples in order to strengthen their faith and prepare them for their task of witnessing to Him, the Risen and Ascended Lord. The disciples are to look forward to the day of the Holy Spirit's coming. They are to look forward to the day of His outpouring with eager expectation.

From Scripture we know that our Lord kept this promise and poured

out His Holy Spirit upon His disciples ten days after His Ascension, on the Day of Pentecost. Soon we will be commemorating that glorious event. But as we hear our Lord's words of promise in today's Gospel, we cannot forget that He has also given us the gift of His Holy Spirit. He is one of those good and perfect gifts from above concerning which St. James speaks in today's Epistle. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit, Who, through the Word, has made us the children of God. St. James writes, "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." It is likewise through the Word that the Holy Spirit continues to come into our lives, helping us to love what God commands and to desire what He promises. (Collect) Therefore, "...lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls." (Epistle)

Rogate, the Fifth Sunday after Easter

The name for this fifth Sunday after Easter is "Rogate," which means "Pray." This name, unlike the names of the previous Sundays, is not derived from the opening words of the Latin Introit, but finds its origin in the words of our Lord in today's Gospel concerning prayer. The three days following this Sunday have also received their name from today's Gospel. Since early times they have been known as the Rogation Days, for, in keeping with our Lord's command in today's Gospel, the Christians in the ancient Church had the custom of walking in procession through

the fields of the countryside during these days, praying for the growth of the newly planted seed and for an abundant harvest.¹¹

The Liturgy for this Sunday still abounds with Easter joy. Inviting all the earth to celebrate our Lord's Easter victory, today's Introit declares, "With the voice of singing declare ye and tell this: utter it even to the end of the earth. Hallelujah! The Lord hath redeemed His servant Jacob: Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: sing forth the honor of His name: make His praise glorious."

Yes, behind us is the Festival of our Lord's Resurrection. But before us is the Day of His Ascension and the Festival of Pentecost. In fact, we shall celebrate our Lord's return to glory in just four more days. It is, therefore, with a note of immediacy that we hear our Lord say in today's Gospel, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." (Gradual and Gospel)

But while the Lord is about to withdraw His visible presence from His disciples, He reminds them that He will continue to be with them and care for them and invites them to make all their needs and requests known unto Him in prayer. He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." (Gospel)

However, these words of our Blessed Lord were not addressed to

¹¹

Strodach, op. cit., p. 166-7.

His first disciples alone. They are addressed also to us. With these words the Lord urges us to prayer. He promises, "...whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you."

What shall we ask the Father in Jesus' name? We have many needs and desires. We should take them all to the Lord in prayer. But above all, we should pray, as St. James suggests in today's Epistle, that God would grant us a special measure of His Holy Spirit, so that we might be "...doers of the Word, and not hearers only,...." How fitting, therefore, is today's Collect in which we pray, "O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,...."

CHAPTER IX

ASCENSIONTIDE

The commemoration of our Lord's Ascension comes forty days after the Festival of Easter and the entire period from Ascension Day until the Saturday before Pentecost is known as Ascensiontide. Since at least the fourth century, the Day of our Lord's Ascension has been celebrated by the Church as one of her great Festivals.¹ Like Christmas and Easter, it, too, is a Festival of greatest joy, for it commemorates the completion of our Lord's redemptive work and His enthronement in glory according to His human nature.

It should also be mentioned that with the celebration of the Feast of the Ascension the Church Year ends its commemoration of our Lord's earthly life. Soon, on Trinity Sunday, the Festival half of the Church Year will come to its close.

The Ascension of Our Lord

The Introit for today briefly but beautifully sounds the keynote of today's celebration. Solemnly announcing our Lord's Ascension, it declares, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? Hallelujah! This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Oh, clap

¹

Paul Soller Strodeach, The Church Year (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 6.1924), p. 169.

your hails, all ye people: shout unto God with the voice of triumph."

Both the Gospel and Epistle for today contain the record of our Lord's Ascension. Both also record His parting words to His disciples. After our Blessed Lord had appeared to His disciples for forty days after His resurrection, we are told that He charged them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Ghost should come upon them and commanded them that, after they had received power from the Holy Ghost, they should be witnesses of Him "...both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Epistle) "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." (Epistle)

Yes, "God is gone up with a shout: the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." (Gradual) And there is much comfort for us in the fact that our Lord "...was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." (Gospel). We are assured that, even today, our Blessed Lord still lives and reigns as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. We are assured that He personally rules and governs our lives and that He will come again and receive us unto Himself.

However, until our Lord does come again, we must not forget His words, "...Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Like the disciples, we, too, are to be witnesses of His saving grace throughout our entire lives. This we will be enabled to do if "...in heart and mind" we ascend to our Savior and "...with Him continually dwell;..." (Collect)

Exaudi, the Sunday after the Ascension

The Latin name for this Sunday is derived from the opening word of today's Introit, "Hear."

This is the Sunday between the Day of our Lord's Ascension and the Festival of Pentecost. As today's Gospel reminds us, before His Ascension our Lord had promised His disciples that He would send them His Holy Spirit in order to equip them for their task of witness. It was, therefore, during these days after our Lord's Ascension that the disciples waited in Jerusalem, eagerly expecting the outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

These are also days of waiting for us, too. Like the disciples, we, too, are praying that on the Festival of Pentecost the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon us anew. It is this mood of longing expectancy which is expressed in the words of today's Introit, "Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: Hallelujah! When Thou assist, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek: Hide not Thy face from me. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

However, during these days after our Lord's Ascension, we are not only looking forward to the Day of Pentecost. Like the early Christians, we are also longing and waiting for the fulfillment of our Lord's words in today's Gradual, "...I will come again to you,...." We are awaiting our Lord's return. But, as St. Peter reminds us in today's Epistle, these are not to be days of idle waiting. Rather, we are to be "...sober and watch unto prayer," and we are to live lives of love and service. Let us, therefore,

pray God that He would grant us a special measure of His Holy Spirit,
 so that we might always have "...a devout will towards" Him and serve
 Him "...with a pure heart;..." (Collect)

The Festival of Pentecost commemorates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the Christian Church. It is the third and last great festival of the Church Year. In the West "Pentecost," which means "Fifty days," signifies, this Festival occurs fifty days after the Feast of the Resurrection and occupies the fifty day period of rejoicing which follows each great festival.

Like Easter, the origin of this Festival is quite ancient. It was celebrated already in the very early Church, and there is some indication that its origin goes even back to apostolic times. Accordingly, Pentecost is the second oldest festival of the Christian Church.

The origin of the name of this Festival is also of special interest. Already in pre-Christian times "Pentecost" was the name of the Jewish Festival celebrated fifty days after the Passover. Since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place on this Jewish Festival, the early Christians adopted the name "Pentecost" for their own festival. This name is particularly appropriate

and other sources, The Church Year (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1907), p. 176.

Martin Luther, "The Church Year," The Lutheran Book Concern, 1884, p. 176.

Luther's Works, The Church Year (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publishing House, 1917), p. 176.

Swedenborg, 1703, p. 176.

CHAPTER I

WHITSUNTIDE

The Festival of Pentecost commemorates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the Christian Church. It is the third and last great Festival of the Church Year. As the name "Pentecost," which means "fifty days," implies, this Festival comes fifty days after the Feast of the Resurrection and concludes the fifty day period of rejoicing which follows that great Festival.

Like Easter, the origin of this Festival is quite ancient. It was celebrated already in the very early Church, and there is some indication that its origin even dates back to apostolic times.¹ Accordingly, Pentecost is the second oldest Festival of the Christian Church.²

The origin of the name of this Festival is also of special interest. Already in pre-Christian times "Pentecost" was the name of the Jewish Festival celebrated fifty days after the Passover.³ Since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place on this Jewish Festival, the early Christians adopted the name "Pentecost" for their commemoration.⁴ This name is particularly appropriate

¹ Paul Zeller Strodeach, The Church Year (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, c.1924), p. 178.

² Martin Carlson, "The Church Year," The Augustana Quarterly, XII April, 1942), p. 120.

³ Luther D. Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1947), p. 470.

⁴ Strodeach, op. cit., p. 174.

because the descent of the Holy Spirit came fifty days after our Lord's resurrection.

Another name by which this Festival is also well known is "Whitsunday." Since Pentecost, together with Easter, was the time for Baptisms in the early Church, this name may have reference to the white garments which the newly baptized wore on this day.⁵ It is also possible, however, that this name could refer to the gift of wisdom which the Holy Spirit conveyed to the apostles on Pentecost Day, for the old English word for wisdom is wit.⁶

It should also be noted in conclusion that in older times the Festival of Pentecost was a three day celebration.⁷ For that reason, our Liturgy also appoints Propers for Monday and Tuesday of Whitsun week. As we shall see, the Propers for these days serve to continue the commemoration begun on Whitsunday.

Whitsunday, the Festival of Pentecost

As mentioned in the introduction to Pentecost, the Festival of Pentecost commemorates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the Christian Church. It is this commemoration which is so majestically announced in today's Introit and Gradual. The

⁵ Ibid., p. 175-6.

⁶ Reed, op. cit., p. 470.

⁷ Dom Otto Haering, Living with the Church, translated by Dom Rembert Gulzarik (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1930), p. 105.

Introit proclaims, "The Spirit of the Lord filleth the world; Hallelujah! Let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

Before His Ascension into heaven, our Blessed Lord commissioned His disciples to be witnesses to Him unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Of themselves they would have been unable to carry out this tremendous task. They were unlearned, timid, and retiring men. But, as today's Gospel reminds us, our Lord had promised them His Holy Spirit in order to equip them for this tremendous task.

And the Holy Spirit did come. Ten days after our Lord's Ascension, He was poured out upon the disciples in abundant measure. It is the record of this miraculous event which we have in today's Epistle. "And when the Day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Wonderful and marvelous indeed was the descent of the Holy Spirit! A glorious transformation took place in the lives of the disciples. They became fearless, courageous confessors of Christ. They were enabled to speak in foreign languages so that all the strangers in Jerusalem could understand their witness. And as a result of their witness and the Spirit's activity, the Church was born.

But these early disciples were not the only ones upon whom the

Holy Spirit descended with great power. He has been poured out also upon us. Through the Word and the Sacraments He has brought us to faith in Christ, transformed our lives, and made us members of Christ's Church. On this Day of Pentecost, let us, therefore, thank God for the gift of His Holy Spirit and pray that He might continually dwell in us in more abundant measure, that we might have "...a right judgment in all things and evermore rejoice in His holy comfort;...." (Collect)

Monday of Whitsun Week

Yesterday we commemorated the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost and the establishment of the Christian Church. Today's Epistle continues that commemoration. It narrates another and subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit and shows us how the Holy Spirit continued to further the growth of the church.

Like the Epistle for the Monday after Easter, today's Epistle takes us to the home of the Roman Centurion Cornelius. There we find St. Peter proclaiming the glad tidings of the Gospel to the Gentiles. "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all which heard the word." Yes, the Holy Spirit descended also upon the Gentiles. They believed and were baptised. As the Introit declares in figurative language, "He fed them with the finest of the wheat, Hallelujah! and with honey out of the rock He satisfieth them. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

So God would create faith in the hearts of all men through the operation of His Holy Spirit, for God would have all men to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. As St. John writes

in today's Gospel, "...God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." If, therefore, we would obtain everlasting life, we must not reject the gracious activity of God's Holy Spirit, for He alone can create saving faith in our hearts. Remember, he who rejects shall perish. St. John writes, "He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God."

However, the Holy Spirit not only desires to create saving faith in our hearts. He would do even more. Through the Word and the Blessed Sacrament He would continue to dwell in us, strengthening our faith, transforming our lives, and granting us peace. (Collect) Knowing this, let us fervently pray, "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful: and kindle in them the fire of Thy love. Hallelujah!" (Gradual)

Tuesday of Whitsun Week

With the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the disciples began their great task of preaching the Gospel throughout the world. At first their witness was confined to Jerusalem, but it was not long before they began their missionary journeys. Yesterday we found the Apostle Peter preaching the Gospel in Caesarea in the name of Cornelius. Today we find him in Samaria with John. Here, as wherever the disciples preached the Gospel, the Holy Spirit was given to those who heard the Word, and many more added to the Church. (Epistle)

There is, of course, only one way of becoming a member of Christ's Church. It is the way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ - faith produced in the heart by the Spirit of God. Comparing His Church to a sheep-fold, our Lord says in today's Gospel, "...I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

Have you come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit? Are you a member of Christ's Church? If so, "Receive the joy of your glory, Hallelujah! giving thanks to God, Hallelujah! who has called you to His heavenly kingdom. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" (Introit) Pray also that the Holy Spirit would kindle in your heart the fire of love and give you "...right judgment in all things....," so that you might be an active member of Christ's Church and evermore rejoice in His holy comfort. (Gradual and Collect)

CHAPTER XI

TRINITY SUNDAY

Unlike the other festivals of the Christian Church, the Festival of the Holy Trinity is of rather recent origin. It was not introduced in the Church until the tenth century,¹ and it was not until the first part of the fourteenth century that its celebration became official.²

Although we worship and adore the Triune God throughout the Church Year, Trinity Sunday is the day when we think primarily of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and pay special honor to the Great Three-in-One. The appropriateness of this commemoration on this Sunday after Pentecost becomes even more apparent when we remember that Trinity Sunday marks the conclusion of the Festival Half of the Church Year and the beginning of the Non-Festival Half. After all, what could be more appropriate at the end of the first half of the Church Year than to remember once more with grateful hearts the wonderful things that each Person of the Holy Trinity has done for us and for our salvation and to praise the Triune God for His wondrous love and grace. And since it is our purpose during the second half of the Church Year to think primarily of Christian growth, the commemoration of Trinity Sunday is also well designed to equip us with the proper motivation for becoming

¹ Don Otto Haering, Living with the Church, translated by Don Roubert Bularsik (New York: Doubleday Brothers, 1950), p. 112.

² Martin Carlson, "The Church Year," The Augustana Quarterly, XXI, April, 1942), p. 122.

more zealous in living our Christianity during the days ahead.

The Feast of the Holy Trinity

Today we are commemorating the mystery of the Holy Trinity - the Three-In-One and the One-In-Three. Looking back over the past half of the Church Year, we desire to worship and adore our God Who is three Persons in One Divine Being and to ponder once more the greatness of His love toward us sinners. As today's Introit declares, "Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity: let us give glory to Him because He hath shown mercy to us."

Yes, "...He hath shown mercy to us." This is the message addressed to us in today's Gospel which tells us what the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost have done and are doing for our salvation. As we read of our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus, we remember that God, the Father, sent His Son to redeem us from sin; that God, the Son, carried out the Father's redemptive plan; and that it is God, the Holy Ghost, Who imparts to us the fruits of Christ's redemption through the water of Baptism, granting us a new birth into the Kingdom of God.

Marvelous and gracious indeed is our God, "...Who beholdest the deep; and who dwellest between the cherubim." (Gradual) As St. Paul exclaims, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen."

But let us not only worship and adore our great and loving God today. Let us also pray Almighty God that He "...who hast given us, ...grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity,...wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities;...." (Collect)

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