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# Do We Need “Another Synod”?

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“Another new synod? Don’t we have enough of them already? Won’t this just divide the Church even further?” These are questions which can be legitimately asked, and they deserve an honest answer.

There are plenty of people who believe that “more than one” is “too many” when it comes to the number of synods/fellowships/associations of Lutherans in this country. Such people yearn for the ‘One Big Synod’ (OBS) where all doctrinal differences are considered to be “not divisive of fellowship.” The OBS has been the recurring dream of many ‘Lutherans’ in America; it was the goal of the General Synod in the early nineteenth century and it certainly seems to be the intention of the ELCA and its ‘wannabes’ in the LC—MS and WELS.

Appeals for the OBS are usually expressed in terms of a theology of glory: its proponents talk about all the glorious things which could be accomplished if only Lutherans would stop talking about, and dividing over, doctrine.

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\* This essay appeared in the first issue of *The Lutheran Herald* to be published after the organization of the ELDoNA in June 2006. Bishop Heiser wrote it as a clear statement of the distinction between the diocese and a wide variety of synods in existence at that time. In this essay, the diocese set forth in clear language that it was not to be understood as a continuation of any of the various Synodical Conference church bodies, and that the diocese would not define itself according to the various controversies which filled the history of those church bodies. As particular churches, the controversies of such bodies may be of historical interest; however, the diocese is bound only to the Confessions of the universal church—those contained in the Book of Concord (1580). Over the years, the diocese has produced theses on various topics of concern (e.g., the Niles and Malone Theses) but these are understood to not rise to the level of confessional documents, and are also understood as documents of our particular fellowship.

Tabitha, called Dorcas, had lived a life of faith towards God that manifested itself in love for neighbor. St. Luke records, “This woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (KJV). This woman personified the life of faith, which lives for neighbor. She is remembered for being zealous for good works and “almsdeeds,” which means charitable giving to those in need. This is the kind of life which Tobit extols in Tobit 4:16, “Give of thy bread to the hungry, and of thy garments to them that are naked; and according to thine abundance give alms.” The good works of Tobit, Tabitha, and of all the faithful spring forth from faith in the Lord’s promises. Gratitude and true faith in Christ will naturally blossom into good works. Good works and almsdeeds do not earn anyone salvation, merit, or favor before God. In spite of not being necessary for salvation, good works are necessary for the Christian to do because they are God’s will for us.

Almsdeeds and good works are the fruits of faith for the benefit of our neighbor. The Lord does not need your charity and good works. But your neighbor does. As Christians we are called to care for our neighbor, to love neighbor as we love ourselves, and to give to them as opportunity arises, first and foremost to the saints who are in need. May the Lord fill you with zeal for good works out of gratitude for the gift of Christ Jesus, so that your neighbor might be served and God glorified when you are seen as being “full of good works and almsdeeds.”

However, there are others who do not desire to be the OBS, but whose self-identification is inextricably connected to it: these are the Micro Synods (MS). The MS bodies define their existence over against the various candidates for, and advocates of, the OBS. The MS fellowships usually define themselves around documents such as the “Brief Statement” (1897 or 1932), or theologians of the 1930s and ’40s as “the” expression of faithful Lutheranism in America (or, perhaps, the world, since they have great reservations about European Lutheranism, ‘hyper’ or otherwise). The MS leaders define their ‘orthodoxy’ over against the OBS crowd by demonstrating *ad nauseum* that the OBS bodies don’t teach what people were teaching in the 1930s. Such displays are usually amusing to everyone (since they are usually elaborate proofs of something which no one denies)—with the exception of the MS leaders, who use it as ‘proof’ that they are the legitimate heirs of the chair of Walther, Pieper (either Francis or August), Schaller, *et cetera*. From the perspective of the MS, there will *never* be enough such fellowships, because there will always be further division based on appeals to the latest *midrash* of a letter or sermon by Walther or Pieper.

The MS bodies give the appearance of being the Synodical Conference in amber; there is the appearance of still being alive, but they are in fact simply preserving something which is long gone.

The MS bodies need the OBS groups because the MS groups define themselves over against the OBS. If the OBS bodies vanished tomorrow, the MS would be thrown into an identity crisis. The MS groups are like a bunch of ‘Protestants’ who define themselves as “not Roman Catholic”—it gets very hard for them to tell you who they *are* and what they *teach* in the absence of the enemy over against which they define themselves.

For the OBS crowd, more than one synod will always be too many; for the MS, there will never be enough.

This has been the cycle for Lutherans in America for many decades. I believe that the error of both the OBS and MS is that they lack true catholicity—catholicity in the sense in which that term is used in the Athanasian Creed and the rest of our Lutheran Confessions: neither the OBS nor the MS are truly interested in the unbrot-

ken unity of doctrine and practice in the one true Church.

The OBS teachers essentially maintain that there is no true doctrine; doctrinal differences are irrelevant. It appears that the OBS are largely beholden to the higher critical mentality, and having dispensed with belief in an inerrant and inspired Holy Scripture, and yet still desiring to ‘be Church,’ they seek to gain such assurance not by adherence to the one, holy catholic and apostolic faith, but through unionism. I believe that their practice maintains the notion that if only they can merge the Church to be ‘one,’ then they will know that they are in ‘the Church.’ This explains the drive to establish the OBS, and it explains the frantic ecumenical activities within the OBS toward Rome, which bore its most humiliating fruit to date in the tragic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

However, the plight of the MS is just as tragic. Although maintaining that they adhere to the one true faith, in fact they seem more concerned with maintaining the peculiarities of the private teachers and writings of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Lutherans. They pine for a past that probably never was, and which we may be quite sure will not come again.

History does not stop: for good or for ill, it will never be pre-World War II America ever again. I believe that the way of the MS groups is the path which leads to despair because they labor for something which can never be. Their adoration of theologians who were and are, frankly, obscure simply heightens the tragedy of the situation.

In every generation from the resurrection until the return of the Christ in glory, the Lord God’s people are a pilgrim people who lack an enduring city until the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven. The faithful in each generation seek to stand with the one true Church divided among the generations and nations of men. There is a tendency toward obscurantism among MS leaders which ignores 1,900 years of Christian teachers unless they happen to say (or can be ‘interpreted’ to say) what MS folks want them to say. Needless to say, such a mentality is not catholic.

We need to truly listen to the Church of past ages. We should begin by cultivating an openness to the listen once again to 500

**FRIDAY, JUNE 28: ACTS 9:1-22**

**TRINITY 4**

The Lord Jesus gives His faithful so many great and precious promises. He promises us the forgiveness of all of our sins. He promises us the Holy Spirit so that we fight sin in our flesh. He promises to raise us from the dead on the Last Day. And He promises that we will suffer much in this life for the sake of the Gospel. Faith clings to all of these promises and receives them with a hearty and confident, “Amen,” even the promise of suffering. Our flesh wants to run from suffering, cross, and trial of any kind. Yet the Lord lays His holy cross upon His baptized children. This is why the Lord tells Ananias, “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

That is what makes suffering endurable. The Lord told us it would come. The Lord also has told us that it will not last forever, but that it has a limit. For the disciples, their sorrow would last “a little while.” Their “little while” was only three days. Though it seemed like ages while in the midst it. Our suffering only lasts “a little while” as well. Like the apostles, we are not told how long it will last. But we hear comfort from the same St. Paul whom Christ afflicted with suffering when he writes, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:16-17).

Years ago my grandfather asked me what I would be preaching about the next Sunday. I had not given my sermon much thought at that time of the week. I responded with “I don’t know.” My grandfather sharply replied, “How about Jesus?”

In today’s reading Philip is given opportunity by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel based on Isaiah 53. St. Luke records, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.” Philip understood my grandfather’s point. Preaching ought to always be about Jesus since all the Scriptures are about Jesus. The pastor’s sermon, and the content of all his preaching, ought to be about Jesus. Philip (and my grandfather) understood that preachers have nothing much to say if they are not talking about Jesus: His perfect life lived on our behalf, His innocent, bitter sufferings for our sin, and His death to atone for the sins of the world.

Philip’s preaching of Jesus leads to the conversion of the Ethiopian so that he desires to be baptized. Baptism incorporates the sinner into Christ’s death and resurrection. Baptism clothes the sinner with Christ and His righteousness. Baptism applies Jesus’ atoning sacrifice to the believing one in baptism. The Ethiopian hears of Jesus, and in faith desires the gifts Jesus had won for him. May the Lord inspire such faith in our hearts so that we desire always to hear only of Jesus crucified and resurrected for us. May the Lord plant His word in our hearts so that we, like Philip, may open our mouths when the Holy Spirit gives us opportunities and proclaim Jesus.

years of Lutheran teachers. There is a great deal which we can learn from these theologians—and one of the things which we could learn is their eagerness to listen to the faithful teachers of even earlier generations. Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Martin Chemnitz and other orthodox theologians saw themselves as the students—not the masters—of the earlier fathers. We need to learn such a spirit again.

We began with two questions: “Don’t we have enough fellowships/synods/etc. already?” and, “Won’t this just divide the Church even further?” Actually, these were the questions of the Reformation. Certainly, both the Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox maintained that the Lutherans (and others) were simply dividing the Church. The Reformation is only defensible if one maintains (as Scripture does) that it is necessary to separate from false teachers, and we observe that the teachings of neither the OBS nor the MS conform to that of the Holy Scriptures nor the Lutheran Confessions. **In fact, both groups tend to look upon Scripture and the Confessions with a suspicious eye, and a need to ‘adjust’ the interpretation of them to fit the doctrinal particularities of their specific visions of the pined-after Synodical Conference.**

**We have no desire to participate in the OBS/ MS dichotomy; they are too much like binary stars, destined to orbit round and round each other forever and ever.** We desire to hear the voice of our fathers in Christ’s holy catholic and apostolic Church; but above all we desire to hear the voice of our Good Shepherd.

In short, we believe that it is not a question of whether there are ‘too many’ or ‘too few’ Lutheran synods. It is a matter of whether those who are truly in agreement with Holy Scripture and the Book of Concord (1580) will acknowledge the unity which is established by the Holy Spirit, and work together in that fellowship.

Some of the pastors of our diocese have waited for years before taking this step. Far from being “too hasty,” we have waited for others to take this step and lead, so that we might have followed. The decision to begin a new diocese was not an easy one, but we believe it is necessary, and that to continue to wait would not best serve the congregations entrusted to the care of the pastors of the diocese. **We are not interested in the political squabbles of the**

**OBS/MS groups and we do not, and will not, define ourselves over according to their controversies.**

We have organized ourselves as a ‘diocese’ because this is the traditional structure of the church throughout most of her history. A ‘diocese’ is an administrative area which is overseen by a bishop. As we observe on our website ([www.eldona.org](http://www.eldona.org)):

We recognize that the term “diocese” has not often been used among Lutherans in North America; but we found that the other terms which are being used are inadequate or misleading. A “synod” is a meeting of bishops—not an organization. Terms such as ‘fellowship’ or ‘association’ seem too vague, or have too often been misused. And for a man-made organization to usurp the name ‘Church’ to itself seems presumptuous, at best. We are a diocese: our bishop serves his fellow pastors, even as he serves the congregation which the Lord of the Church has placed into his care.

The congregations are not members of the diocese— each congregation is overseen by her pastor; it is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop to oversee the pastors of the diocese. As we seek to go about the work to which the Lord of the Church has called us, it is my prayer that we would keep one another in prayer, and be built up through the Word.

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26: ACTS 8:1-25**

**TRINITY 4**

The gift of the Holy Spirit, given in Holy Baptism, is a gift. Simon the former sorcerer did not understand this. He still thought the gift of the Holy Spirit was something that could be earned, merited, or purchased. St. Peter chides this attitude of works-righteousness in Simon. He is told to repent so that the Lord might forgive his sin and release him from the false doctrine under which he lives.

We may not be tempted to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit with money as Simon was, but we are always tempted by our flesh to give something to God. Some want to give their hearts to the Lord, as if that was something worth giving. Jeremiah says the heart is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (17:9). Others want to do the Lord’s work, but think that work ought to be more flashy than their vocations of parent, children, employees, employer, churchman, etc., as the work the Lord has given them to do. The bad theology of Simon the Sorcerer lives on in each of our hearts.

Thanks be to God, the gift of the Holy Spirit cannot be earned, merited, or purchased. Who would have enough work, merit, or money to offer the Lord for such a gift? Rather, the Holy Spirit is given to us at baptism. God the Holy Spirit dwells in you by faith, making you the temple of the Lord. The Holy Spirit is given to you to urge you to strive against temptations in the flesh. He is a gift to you so that you may believe the Gospel and remain steadfast in that confession until the end.

Peter inquires, “But Lord, what about this man?” as he looks at the beloved disciple. But the Lord does not tell Peter about the fate of another, only his own. Peter’s plight is one that we often find in ourselves. We want to probe the mind of God to search out things that He has hidden from us. We are tempted to ask, “Will my children remain steadfast in the true faith?” “Will our congregation survive to minister to the next generation?” “Will our diocese remain firm in the pure confession of the Christian faith for generations to come?” To these questions and all others that our troubled hearts want to ask our Father in heaven, the Lord Jesus has a sobering, yet helpful reply. “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow me.”

Jesus pulls us back from our thoughts of the future to the present day. We are not to borrow trouble from tomorrow, as tempting as it may be. That sort of thinking is unhelpful because it draws us away from following Jesus today in true faith. If the Lord were to give us the answers that are His alone by Divine foreknowledge, we would most certainly put our trust in those future events rather than in the sacred promises of Christ Jesus. We are not given the future. We are given today. And today is the day that the Lord has made. We are to trust Him today. If the Lord grants us a tomorrow, then we pray that we will trust Him tomorrow as well, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

**THE HOLY GOSPEL****ST. LUKE 16:19-31 (NKJV)**

There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”

But Abraham said, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.”

Then he said, “I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.”

Abraham said to him, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.”

And he said, “No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”

But he said to him, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”

**THE COLLECT**

O God, the Strength of all them that put their trust in Thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without Thee, grant us the help of Thy grace that in keeping Thy commandments we may please Thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The Jews said to Jesus, “How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” But their words were a deception. They have no doubt: they have already rejected Him. Caiaphas would later place Jesus under oath, and asked Him the same question: “I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!” (Mat. 26:63) And his reaction to Jesus’ answer was the same as that given by the mob in John 10: “Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, “He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?” (Mat. 26:65–66)

Jesus had already answered their question before, for He said to them in John 8: “ “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” (v. 58) The Jews did not lack an answer to their question—they lacked faith in the Word of God. In John 8, they responded to the Word with the intention to murder Jesus, and the same reaction to the Word was manifest in John 10. Men are shocked by this reaction, but it was certainly no surprise to the Lord: “But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.” Their reaction to the Word reveals what is in their hearts.

For those who hear the Word, and in whose hearts the Holy Spirit creates faith, there is comfort and peace in Christ’s words: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” We have this life and peace in Christ, and the Caiaphas and angry mobs of unbelievers cannot take that consolation from us.

“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” The resurrected Christ appears to His disciples to give them peace. Surely their consciences have greatly troubled them since the passion and death of their Lord Jesus. They had abandoned their Lord. For this their consciences would have given them no peace. There would have been only anxiety, guilt, and shame over their sin.

The world cannot give the peace which heals the darkened conscience. So Christ appears to the disciples to speak peace to them. Having restored them by His absolving word, He then sends them out to speak that same peace to the rest of the human race. In today’s text the Lord Jesus gives to His Church the Office of the Holy Ministry so that sins may be forgiven by pastors, as if from God Himself. The peace of sins forgiven, spoken by the apostles to penitent sinners, was not their own word of worldly peace. It was the word of Christ Himself who is present in the Office of the Ministry.

Later, when unbelieving Thomas is present, the Lord appears again to the disciples and shows them the price for obtaining their peace with God through the forgiveness of their sins. He shows them His holy wounds as the cause of their reconciliation with God, which is to be received by faith alone. When your pastor absolves you of your sins in the Divine Service and in the confessional, it is not his word, but Christ’s word spoken to you. In the absolution Christ shows you His wounds to proclaim that your sins are forgiven and your guilt removed forever.

**THE HOLY GOSPEL****ST. LUKE 6:36-42 (NKJV)**

Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

And He spoke a parable to them: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother’s eye.”

**THE COLLECT**

Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The disciples understand that the Jews of Jerusalem have rejected the Christ. After the confrontation in John 10, we read yesterday: “And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. Then many came to Him and said, ‘John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.’ And many believed in Him there.” (v. 40–42) The Jews of Jerusalem believed neither the Word nor the sign, but beyond the Jordan the Word and the sign were received in faith.

But now, with the illness and death of Lazarus, the disciples feared the wrath of the Jews if Jesus returned to Judea. They were probably relieved when Jesus seemed to hesitate when He heard of Lazarus’ illness, but when He resolved to return, their response was one of fear: “‘Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?’” And we hear the brave words of St. Thomas: “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

Thomas seemed bold, but like the rest of the disciples, he scattered with the other sheep when the Shepherd was struck. Salvation was not to be found in the boldness of the disciples, but in the Christ and His perfect sacrifice for sin. Jesus spoke the truth of Lazarus’ illness to the disciples: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” And again: “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” There is One who conquers death with a Word, and who is glorified in the fulfillment of His promise, and it is He who will call us forth from our tombs on the last day.

The question asked by some of those who saw Jesus wept is the same question which is often heard today: “Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?” In essence, they asked: “Why did the Lord let this happen?”

When that which we do not desire to happen transpires anyway, and a devastating loss takes away our homes, livelihood or loved ones, the cry of Job, and the utterance of the friends of Lazarus, is heard in our own thoughts and words, as well. But Jesus, from the moment that He heard of Lazarus’ illness, declared: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” And the Lord said to Job: “Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?” (40:8)

Martha and Mary trusted in the Word of the Lord, and both of them said to Jesus: “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” But it is Martha who gives the clearest confession on this occasion: “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day,” and, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” In the midst of her sorrows, she made the good confession which the Jews of Jerusalem rejected. In our own sorrows, we cling to Christ, for He had delivered us from the fear of death, and He gives us the hope of eternal life because He has given us pardon and peace through the forgiveness of our sins.

Crucifixion was common. Among the many examples that could be cited, we have the example in Italy about 75 years before the birth of Christ. There was a slave revolt in Italy led by a slave named Spartacus. The number of these rebelling slaves may have amounted to as many as 70,000. The fight to defeat these slaves was known as the Third Servile War. After these slaves were defeated, Roman general Crassus crucified 6,000 of Spartacus’ men along the Appian Way from Capua to Rome. The Romans had plenty of experience at this sort of thing, and many people had suffered this type of execution over the centuries. Jesus’ type of death was not physically unique, nor was it uniquely physically painful. It was, of course, terribly painful, but no different than other crucifixion victims.

There is more to the crucifixion than just horrible suffering and self-sacrificing love. He is our substitute on the cross. The substitutionary atonement of Christ for us is the heart of our faith. Without that the passion and crucifixion are just inspiring stories. This substitutionary sacrifice of Christ means even more to we who are faithful than to anyone else, because we know what this means. This crucifixion is not just an example of righteousness. Christ’s life is not just a good example for us to emulate. His Passion is not just inspiring. This life, passion, and death are substitutionary events for us. Because Jesus hung on that cross, through faith I am alive to God. Because Jesus died, I live, and so do you.

It is hard to look at a crucifix and not think of what Christ did for us. As a student in Kraków, Poland, I went to that city's Lutheran Church on Sundays. I remember being transfixed by the giant black crucifix hanging high above the altar. As I drifted in and out of following the liturgy (my Polish was not that good), I meditated on the crucifixion. Some Sundays I spent most of the hour meditating like that.

I do not mean to suggest a bare cross is evil. In fact, we should venerate the cross. But the cross gets its meaning from what happened upon it, and from Christ who died upon it. We worship the Christ who hung on the cross. The crucifix is very visual and concrete. A bare cross is more abstract; it does not as immediately communicate a story. This is why crucifixes, statues, and stained-glass windows have been used for thousands of years. These are aids to worship for the young, the illiterate, and everyone in general.

The crucifixion is the center of our piety. We venerate the Holy Cross as the altar on which our Lord was sacrificed. We worship Christ, and specifically, we worship Christ crucified. We worship the God who became the sacrifice for His people. There is no other God for us to worship. There is no abstract, generic God. The God that exists is precisely the God who died on the cross. All of life, all of Christianity, springs forth from that cross.

It was the "Feast of Dedication" (Hanukkah) when Jesus last confronted the Jews in the temple (John 10:22), but the scheming which followed in the aftermath of the resurrection of Lazarus proves that the disciples' fears were not unfounded. For months, Jesus and His disciples had been away from Judea, but their absence had done nothing to diminish the fury of the enemies of the Christ.

Even from the lips of the enemies of Christ, the significance of the coming of death of Christ was prophesied: "And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.' Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad." (v. 49–52)

The death and resurrection of Lazarus filled the Jews with fury, for in this, as Jesus declared, the people beheld the glory of God. (v. 40) In the death and resurrection of Christ, there would be an atonement for the sins of the whole world, so that all those who believe in Him would receive the forgiveness of their sins. In the death and resurrection of the Shepherd, the scattered flock of the children of God would be gathered, for the sheep know the voice of their Shepherd.

Neither the thief nor the murderer comprehend the piety of the saints of God. St. Mary's offering to the Christ is met by Judas' attempt at pious-sounding noises: "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" Considering that St. Philip declared at the feeding of the 5,000 that 200 denarii would not have been enough to provide even a little bit to eat to each person among that multitude, the cost of daily bread was not far from the minds of the disciples. Far from rebuking Mary, Jesus honored her offering: "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." Judas' outburst *sounded* pious, but it sprang forth from his greed.

So, too, the chief priests and Pharisees greeted Jesus' gift of life to Lazarus with murderous intentions. In the midst of the sorrows of Holy Week, it is worth remembering that Lazarus was also targeted for death: "But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus."

Those things which are given as an offering to the Lord may no longer be fragrant oils, or clothing laid on the road before the Lord, but they are still that which has been sacrificed to Him. Whether given for the care of the poor or for the needs of Christ's servants in the ministry of Word and Sacrament, and the support of Christ's Church, that which is given in offering to the Lord is not to be despised.

"The Stations of the Cross" refers to the depiction of the final hours (or Passion) of Jesus Christ and the devotion commemorating His Passion. Some type of "Stations of the Cross" have been observed by Christians as far back as the fourth century. At the time of the Crusades this practice became very popular among Christians.

In the Stations of the Cross the events of the Passion are recounted for us in visual fashion. Peter's betrayal, Pilate's sinful abdication of his office, etc., are brought before us in artistic ways. Think of the heavy, almost unbearable guilt and shame the disciples must have felt for having abandoned Jesus. Peter, even worse, had denied Jesus three times. We should consider the times we deny our Lord through our words and actions. With regard to Pilate, Saint Mark's gospel says, "So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified" (15:15). We should meditate upon our need to stand with Christ in the face of authority, and be mindful of the evil use of authority in the world. The Stations of the Cross is a useful tool for meditation upon the details in the story of our Lord's work of faithfulness and sacrifice for our redemption.

The world has fallen under the wrath of God for its willfulness and rebellion. And bloody death is the only sentence in the divine courtroom. This is the message of the sacrifices of the Old Testament. The priests themselves were inadequate to atone for the sins of even one man because they sacrificed by unclean hands. They were imperfect mediators between God and His people. But Jesus is the true high priest.

Jesus is the true and only high priest who can bring the perfect and complete sacrifice to God the Father. Jesus, as that high priest, was the one who was truly bringing peace and reconciliation, whereas Caiaphas and the other chief priests were participating in something that was inadequate and worthless now that Jesus had come. Caiaphas was sort of the “anti-high priest”. Caiaphas should have pointed the way to the true high priest. He should have pointed the people to the real forgiveness of sins.

The old sacrificial system that Caiaphas was a part of was only a shadow and a prefiguring of the true thing, Jesus. But Caiaphas, inspired by the Devil, drew people away from the Messiah and cursed the true high priest. Jesus was not only the true high priest that the Old Testament high priests foreshadowed, but he was also the sacrifice that was to be killed. This is why we call Him “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” It is the blood of this Lamb that is the perfect payment for all the worlds sins.

For a third time, the voice of the Father is heard from heaven. When Jesus said, “Father, glorify Your name.” “Then a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.’” At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry at His Baptism by John, and again on the Mount of Transfiguration, and now, only days before His crucifixion and death, the voice of the Father is heard. But those who would not receive the voice of the Son, do not receive the voice of the Father: “Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to Him.’”

But for the disciples, and for those Greeks who spoke to St. Philip, the word of the Christ is light and life. The Greeks come to Philip with their request, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” and it is then—at last—that the Lord declares: “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” Time and again, Jesus had spoken of it not yet being ‘His hour.’ (Think, for example, of Jesus’ words to when St. Mary spoke to Him at the wedding in Cana: “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.”) Now His hour had come, and the appointed hour had arrive for the Son of Man to be lifted up.

The people acknowledged, “We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever...”—and so He does, but not after the imagination of men. The Lord abides with His people forever, forgiving and sustaining them through His Word and Sacrament, and He will come again in glory at the end of the age.

**THE HOLY GOSPEL      ST. LUKE 14:16-24 (NKJV)**

Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’”

So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.”

And the servant said, “Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.”

Then the master said to the servant, “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.”

**THE COLLECT**

O Lord, who never fails to help and govern those whom Thou does bring up in Thy steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Thy holy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

This world is indeed a frightful, dangerous place. We need a “Holy Father” in this unholy world. Jesus prays to the Father that He would protect us by the power of His name. But what sort of protection are we talking about here? Christians were still being hunted down by the Jews even after this prayer. Christians were still fed to the lions after this prayer. It does not seem like much protection.

Jesus does not pray that we be kept from harm or temporal death. He prays that we be kept from eternal death. He prays that we would keep the faith to the end, that we would be preserved as His sheep until He returns. This is really the hope that we have. The world will not get better. We will not win in this world. We will not win, but we will be preserved.

We will be protected by the power of His name, the Name that each one of us received at our baptism. That name is Father, Son and, Holy Spirit. We will be protected by that name because it is not just some label. There is powerful content in that name. God, our loving Heavenly Father, has revealed Himself to us through His Son. He has revealed His very nature to us. He has revealed that He loves us to the point of dying for us and preparing the way for us to be with Him forever. Eternal life is in knowing and trusting in the true God and in Jesus Christ. Our salvation is safe and secure in Him.

To be in Christ is to overcome the world. In Jesus is all life and power, all vitality and courage. When the Holy Spirit finally came He would impart those blessing to the disciples and to the whole church. As a matter of fact, that is what Jesus is telling His disciples at the beginning of this passage. When Jesus tells them “the time is coming” He is speaking about the time after His resurrection and the time when the Holy Spirit would come. He tells them to prepare for the new reality after the resurrection.

The disciples, when they had prayed, prayed to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, like any good Jew. They prayed to the God of Mount Sinai. And they prayed their prayers with typical Jewish construction, in a typical Jewish fashion and formula. But Jesus now lets them know that all prayer will be through Him from now on. Jesus is the focal point of all reality. He is the center of God’s revelation to man.

Jesus was not chastising these disciples for not having enough faith, He is simply telling them that a new age has come and all contact with the Father is through Him, and through no other. This is important to remember. When we are commanded to pray in Jesus’ name, we are commanded to pray *only* in His name. “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Jesus teaches Peter, the disciples, and us about His work of the Cross through this example of foot washing. Christ was stripped of His garments as He served them, and they would again see Him stripped as He hung crucified. He did the work of serving and blessing the disciples, as He would all mankind by His sinless death in public execution. And He sends the disciples, and His Church after them, to show forth this grace in His holy Name so that those who believe in Him would have everlasting life!

It is a dangerous trap for Christians to act like Peter did in that moment and lose sight of Christ’s work for us. We cannot focus on our efforts to “give God the glory” at the expense of ignoring the primary importance of Him coming to us first, in order to redeem us and make us part of His life! This is the danger with many current worship forms. Does the Sunday morning content teach the whole Word and connect us with the holy Church throughout history, or does it ape the entertainment of the world and focus on “me” and “us” and our attempts at piety?

Peter may have had good intentions when He told the Lord, “You shall never wash my feet!” However, good intentions can have dangerous results, as the old saying about the “road to hell” warns. That is why we must always let our Lord teach us, and serve us with His holy gifts, so we may be made truly clean unto everlasting life.

Judas had just gone out to begin the final events that would lead to Jesus being arrested, beaten, and crucified for our rebellion against God. Christ would be lifted up on the Cross, and there He would draw all nations to Himself in the Gospel of forgiveness and everlasting life. This is how God would be glorified in His Only-Begotten Son.

Only Christ could do this. The work of the disciples was not to die with Jesus, because their deaths would not help the world at that point. Only the Son of God—and Son of Man—could atone for the world. The disciples would die later, but first they would serve God more importantly through the preaching of Christ crucified. That preaching is the great love He commanded them to show one another and the whole world.

Love must always be understood in this way: we could lay down our own lives out of kindness and zeal for another, but if it is not for the sake of Christ and His truth, then we only glorify ourselves, which is an empty and wicked thing. Satan would have the Church sell out Christ for the sake of hollow prosperity, like Judas did; or the enemy would have us deny the truth about our Lord, out of cowardice and self-preservation, like Peter did. But foolish crusades in the cause of misguided love are just as diabolic.

Proper love desires the salvation of one another's souls, so our acts of love show forth the mercy of the Gospel, teach the righteousness of Christ's commands, and encourage others to abide in His holy Word!

**THE HOLY GOSPEL****ST. LUKE 15:1-10 (NKJV)**

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." So He spoke this parable to them, saying:

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

**THE COLLECT**

O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

It is a humbling thing to be called a friend of God! But God loved the world and gave His life for us all in Jesus Christ so that we might be considered His friends, His brothers and sisters, and part of His Body, the Church. The Father and His will are made known to us through Jesus, and we are made part of His work. However, part of that work is to speak the truth in the world, and be hated on account of it. As friends of God we are made to share in that as well.

All of us started out as enemies of God, but now that we are made His friends through Christ, we have become enemies of the world. Like being a branch of the True Vine, being a friend of God and enemy of the world is not a role to be taken lightly. We are called by our Lord to keep His Word and bear witness to the truth in the hopes that other enemies of God will also be turned into His friends by the Holy Spirit.

This is a serious task, and we can easily find ourselves hated for it. In other times and places the friends of Christ have endured violence and persecution that are beyond anything we have experienced, but that could change for us at any time. May our Lord keep us always mindful of the great joy that we have as His beloved friends and keep us always steadfast in His holy Word, which is the true source of peace and salvation for us and all the world. Amen.

Do not be deceived, the Father is not known by Judaism or Islam. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Chapter 1 of John’s gospel emphasizes that the Only-Begotten Son of God was there in the beginning with the Father. Jesus is not merely a teacher or a prophet, He is the only way to reconciliation with God and everlasting life.

Religions that despise Jesus Christ or esteem some corrupt man above Him have no real knowledge of the Father. They are not sons of Abraham because they deny the faith that made Abraham important in the Church. They listen to the serpent rather than look to the Seed, the Son of Man, Who alone saves us from death and the devil.

The glory of God is not found in temples, nor nation-states, nor false prophets. It is seen in the Cross, which proclaims God’s mercy, His forgiveness, and His promises of life through His Spirit. The Father allowed violence against His Son, but teaches us to be peaceful. He sent His faithful people to manifest kindness and wisdom throughout all nations, not to conquer or terrorize. And He gives us a kingdom that is perfect and otherworldly, while He comforts us with the Cross and the Blood of the Lamb in this world.

Heavenly Father, make us to be truly peaceful and loving according to Your Word and Spirit, and let those who say they know You be brought to true faith, which is found only in Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Peace comes from the Word of God. The Word also fills and gives meaning to things. Without the Word we would not know that Jesus' death was the atoning sacrifice by which He restores us to the Father. We could guess at what it meant, but without that sure Word from our Lord we could not really *know*. His resurrection would show that He overcame death, but His Word assures us that we shall also overcome death in Him. And the good works that He would have us do might seem similar to some of the works that even an atheist or Mohammedan might do, if not for the Word of Christ's command and His Spirit to give them meaning in relation to the Cross of our salvation!

This is why it is important for the Church to cling to His Words and keep His commandments. He manifests Himself according to His Words and blesses us with His comforting presence. Satan is quite effective at causing confusion, fear, and destruction by spreading false words and vain actions. His diabolical goal since the garden of Eden has been to separate us from the Father and make us into orphans. But God is with us in Christ Jesus. His promises assure us of that, and His teachings strengthen us in His blessings. May His Spirit always work mightily in us to spread that peace in His Word to others as well. Amen.

Jesus said, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." Our very purpose is to be connected to our Lord and bear the fruit of faithful works so that the seeds of the Gospel may be spread. This purpose is not secondary, or incidental. The life of a branch is not part-time.

It becomes far too easy for us to forget this. Existing as a branch of Christ can often become something we think about only on Sundays, or only when it suits our own purposes and the rest of the time we think our life is ours to do with as we please.

We are truly blessed to be part of Christ, the True Vine, rather than be dead branches for kindling. Likewise are we blessed to be pruned and guided by the Father's hand, and be made to bear the weight of the fruit that the Vine produces through us. Christ would have us find joy in that identity. He calls us to simply abide in the work that He accomplishes in us by His Word. But we know from experience that if our energies become directed toward unfruitful things, we often can see the weakness and brittleness of faith that can result, so we are called to be mindful of these realities.

Lord, made us truly joyful as we are made to abide in the life of Christ Jesus and to do the blessed works He would accomplish through us! Amen.