

Week of Trinity 21

First recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the weekly section of the Small Catechism. Then read the Proper and assigned Scripture reading followed by the devotion. Conclude with singing the hymn of the week.



Weekly Catechism section: *Second Petition (Luther's Small Catechism)*
Hymn of the Week: *Lord, Keep Us Steadfast In Your Word (TLH #261)*

Monday - Introit (Apocryphal Esther 13:9-11; Psalm 119:1, 38-40) ***Read Esther 4.***

Our *Introit* comes from the apocryphal Esther. These were Greek supplements added to the Hebrew text of Esther in the second century before Christ. While they are not included in the canon, they still reflect how the people recorded in Esther would have trusted in God. We pray the prayer attributed to Mordecai: "The whole world is in Your power; O Lord, King Almighty, no one can gainsay You. For You have made heav'n and earth; you are Lord of all!" This catches the theme for this Sunday, as Jesus reveals himself to be the Lord over creation by healing a father's dying son.

Mordecai was a pious leader among the Jews who were still in exile in Babylon during the reign of the Persians. He adopted his little cousin, Esther, after her parents died, and she became the wife of the king. Now, one of the king's officers was angry at Mordecai for not bowing to him, and he got the king to allow him to put all the Jews to death. When Mordecai heard this, he rent his clothes, and fasted. He sent messengers to Esther the queen, asking her to speak to the king on their behalf. But this king, Ahasuerus, was so harsh that even if his own wife would come into his presence without being invited she would be put to death. But Esther didn't have a choice. She agreed to speak to the king, risking her own life. She only asked that her brethren would fast for her three days. Now fasting is shorthand for a solemn worship of God in which one not only abstains from food but also cries out to God for mercy. The prayer in our *Introit* is what that prayer of Mordecai may have sounded like when he was fasting. Later on in this prayer, he explains why he would not bow before the officer. It was not to disrespect him, since he would kiss his feet if that would save Israel. Instead, he did not want to exchange the glory of God for the glory of man. He therefore declares that the whole world is in God's power. It is to him alone we must pray.

Yet, our *Introit* goes on with the words from Psalm 119. The ones who are undefiled are the ones who rely on the Word of God. We pray to God not simply because he is all powerful. We pray to him, because he has given us his Word and promise to hear us. So we also pray, "Establish your Word to your servant." Just as the father in Cana relied on Jesus' Word, the fasting of Mordecai relied on God's promise, so do our prayers rely on God's Word of promise.

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Tuesday - Old Testament Lesson (Genesis 1:1-2:3)

Read Genesis 1.

Our Old Testament lesson comes from Genesis 1 and 2, the account of creation. God took six days to prepare for man and his wife the entire creation. He created them last only after he had provided for everything they needed. God is not only the Creator of all things. He is our Creator who made us in his own image. This shows us what God's original intention was before the fall into sin. He gave man life, intending him to live with him forever in innocence. Finally, on the seventh day God rested, showing that he desires to give us rest.

While this creation was corrupted because of sin, God remained our faithful Creator. He sent his Son into the flesh to die for our sins, restore all things, and give us rest. He remain the Lord of creation, with all things under his feet. And since he is risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father, the Son of God, as true man, has put all things under his feet. Man now stands in dominion over all. This was always God's intention, and he would not let it be taken away, even by sin. We can therefore continue to sing our Maker's praises and in him most joyful be, because in all things we see traces of his tender love for us.

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Wednesday - Gradual (Psalm 90:1-2)

Read Psalm 90.

Our dwelling is with God. God shows this by his great acts. This begins with his creation. His creation was and still is an act of grace. We confess in the Catechism under the first article that God has created me and all creatures, that he has given me all that I need to support this body of life,

purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in me. It is appropriate therefore that as we make our way

from the Old Testament lesson from Genesis 1 and 2, describing God's act of creation, to the Epistle lesson from Ephesians 6, describing our spiritual battle against the devil and his forces, we pause in our *Gradual* to meditate on Moses's words from Psalm 90: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations." This has always been the case. Before we get overwhelmed in our battle against our sin, the devil's temptations, and the world's scorn and deceit, it is fitting for us to remember that from the beginning God has been our refuge. He has been our Creator. He did not let the crown of his creation remain in sin, but he rescued us by the death of his eternal Son, and he sanctifies us by his Spirit and Word today as we must resist the forces of darkness. The God who provides us today with the armor and weapons of his own righteousness, Word, and Spirit is the same God who provided for everything Adam and Eve could ever need.

Moses describes God in a way that nothing else can be described. In fact, he echoes the way God first identified himself to him in the burning bush on Mount Horeb (Ex 3:14): "I AM that I AM . . . Say to them, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God is eternal. He is. So Moses says, "Before the mountains were brought forth, before you had ever formed earth and the world . . ." You would expect him to say something like, "You were there" or "You did something else." Instead, he says, "from everlasting to everlasting you are God." Or as Jesus says (John 8:58), "Before Abraham was, I AM." God is from everlasting to everlasting. He is eternal. As surely as he has created us, from before the foundations of the world, he is our God. We shall therefore not be moved. His Word is true and dependable from generation to generation.

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Thursday - Epistle (*Ephesians 6:10-17*)

Read Ephesians 6.

Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the authorities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this age. Our battle is against the devil and his angels in the heavenly places. We must always be reminded of this serious battle, even when we or our loved ones are sick with a disease. Sickness and death often consume us. But there is no use bearing your sickness and mourning unless you can see both the evil and the blessing within it. Suffering and death are not just unfortunate. They are God's verdict on sin. They are an evil, which God inflicts. Certainly, God is not the author of evil (James 1:13). After all, it is the devil who tempted man to sin, not God. But God uses evil for his good. He says

through the prophet Isaiah (45:7), "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things." God did not create sin, but he uses it to curb other sin. For example, he used the godless, pagan Babylonians to punish his people of Israel for their unbelief. So when we receive any chastisements, no matter how evil they are on the surface, we can know that God is using it to get us to recognize the real battle behind it. It is a spiritual battle between faith and unbelief, light and darkness, confidence and despair.

So what do we use in this battle? We use the whole armor of God, which helps us stand against the wicked foe whose only goal is to kill our faith. The whole armor of God includes the truth of Christ, which takes away the deceit of our own hearts. It includes the breastplate of righteousness, the salvation of Christ and the forgiveness of sins credited to us through faith, which is your shield against the fiery darts of the devil. And you will have peace in Christ's gospel as you let the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, penetrate your heart daily. This is the real battle. It is the battle over your conscience. So whether we are sick, persecuted, or experiencing wickedness all around us, Christ gives us the same life-giving Word he gave that poor father who was worried about his son's sickness. Your battle is not in vain when you reap the victory in Christ.

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Friday - Alleluia Verse (Psalm 125:1)

Read Psalm 125.

Our *Alleluia verse* is from Psalm 125:1, which says, "Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever." Just as our Creator has made all things, establishing the foundations of the earth so that it could not be moved, so does God establish his church, which is called Mount Zion. We learn from this verse how one is a member of the church. It is by faith in God's promise in Christ. By faith we are members of Mount Zion, the church of God, and our Lord promises that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

This verse prepares us for the Gospel lesson in which Jesus teaches a father to trust his Word. Jesus cares about his creation. He cares about the family. As he restored the creation of marriage, so does he establish every household that trusts in his promise of redemption. Teach your children to trust in God's Word, believing that it will accomplish what he promises. And you will not be moved. You and your children will abide forever under the protection of the Lord, who surrounds you like the mountains surrounded Jerusalem. This Word, which conquered death in

the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, is the same Word by which God created all things. And it is the Word by which he gives you faith to believe in Christ, your Rock, and not be put to shame.

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Saturday - Gospel (John 4:46-54)

Read John 4.

This was the second miracle Jesus performed in Galilee. In Cana, he turned water into wine. In Capernaum, he healed the son of a nobleman. These two signs are very much related. By turning water into wine at a wedding, Jesus blessed and sanctified marriage. Now, with this next sign, Jesus blesses and sanctifies children. He came to bless all families of the earth, just as God had promised Abraham (Gen 12:3). And so St. John records that the nobleman along with his whole household believed.

God cares very much about families. In creation God blessed man and woman with the fruitfulness of the womb. And of the Ten Commandments, the fourth, sixth, and tenth all have to do with family. Parents are given to teach their children with the sure promise of God's mercy (Prov 22:6). The law therefore affirms how much God cares about marriage, children, and protecting our neighbor's family. So Jesus comes to fulfill this law by saving a man's entire household. And while he saves this man and his family, he tests and purifies his faith. He says to the nobleman, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." With these words Jesus purges out any hypocritical desire for entertainment. If there was any carnal craving to be amused, it was stripped away. He then articulated very plainly his request. Come down before my child dies! The father's desire for his child's safety is clear, but it couldn't save him or his family. Instead, Jesus taught him to rely on his Word, just as Abraham did. Go your way; your son lives. It's like he is saying, "Believe what Abraham believed. Through me all families shall be blessed. Your son shall live because I, the Son of God, shall die. By taking away the sting of death, I am the defender of the widow, and I reveal the Father to the fatherless. So hold on to this promise. Your family shall be blessed." Then the nobleman's nobility was reduced to the stature of a beggar, with nothing but that little Word and promise of Christ. But with this Word, though despised by so many, he had more than all nobility could offer. And he was blessed to share this with his household.

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Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word 261

John 8: 31
 Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort
Martin Luther, 1541
Tr., Catherine Winkworth, 1863

L. M.

Erhalt uns, Herr
 "Geistliche Lieder"
Wittenberg, 1548

1 Lord, keep us stead-fast in Thy Word; Curb those who
 2 Lord Je - sus Christ, Thy pow'r make known, For Thou art
 3 O Com- fort - er of price - less worth, Send peace and

fain by craft and sword Would wrest the King-dom from Thy
 Lord of lords a - lone; De - fend Thy Chris - ten - dom that
 u - ni - ty on earth. Sup - port us in our fi - nal

Son And set at naught all He hath done.
 we May ev - er - more sing praise to Thee.
 strife And lead us out of death to life. A - men.