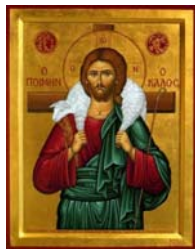


Week of Misericordias Domini (Good Shepherd)

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: *Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer (Luther's Small Catechism)*

Hymn of the Week: *Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense (741)*

Monday - Introit (Psalm 33:5-6, 1, 18-20)

Read Psalm 33.

Misericordias Domini means "the mercies of the Lord." Our Introit begins with these words from Psalm 33:5, "The earth is full of the mercies of the LORD." Yet when we look at the earth with an honest eye and listen with an honest ear, then we find that it is full of injustice. It is full of sin and unbelief. But when we speak with mouths of faith, then we confess that the earth is full of the mercies of the Lord. And how can this be? How can it be that we are able to confess this when what we see is far from pleasant and peaceful pastures?

We can confess this because Jesus is our Good Shepherd. But what does it mean to be the Good Shepherd? Jesus defines it for us: "The Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep." And so he has shown us mercy. Because Jesus gave up his life for us we enjoy the mercy and favor of God where ever we go. As his sheep we pass through this deceitful world and battle against the ugliness of our own sin. In this world of unbelief we find no goodness in our own best efforts and no mercy for our sins. But in Christ we find goodness. In Christ we find mercy. In Christ we find refuge from a guilty conscience and pleasant pastures of righteousness before God.

When the Son of God became a man, then all the earth was full of his glory (Isaiah 6:3), full of grace and truth (John 1:14). We confess this in the Sanctus: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth! Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory." This means that, as Christians, we have the glory and mercy of Christ, our Good Shepherd, even in the valley of the shadow of death. As our Good Shepherd, Jesus bore the filthiness of us, his wandering sheep. He fought off the wolves, and he has the scars to prove it. So despite the merciless ugliness of sin that we find all around us and even within our own wicked desires, we may boldly confess, "The

earth is full of the mercies of the Lord."

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Tuesday - Old Testament Lesson (Ezekiel 34:11-16)

Read Ezekiel 34.

Through the prophet, Ezekiel, God promises to be the Shepherd of his sheep. As David sang in the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Christ is the good Shepherd. He is the Lord. He is God. Now, God promises to feed his sheep on the high mountains of Israel. This shows that such feeding is not seen with our carnal eyes, but it is grasped only by faith. There were plenty of mountains much higher than mount Zion. The kings of Israel and Judah, who were supposed to be the shepherds of God's people, as David was, made pagan shrines on some of them and everywhere else they could think of, whether it was on hills or under trees (2 Kings 16:4). They were not satisfied with God's promise to bless them from Zion. So they followed after other gods and led the people astray.

So it is today. False shepherds, preaching only for hire and earthly glory, lead people away from God's pure words of eternal life. They direct them to rely on their own spiritual feelings, or on their own understanding about God. Just like mount Zion was not impressive enough for them, the water Jesus provides, the bread he gives, and the wine he pours, are not certain enough. But our Good Shepherd gave us the washing away of our sins in the washing of our baptism. He gives us nurture for our faith in his body and blood hidden under the bread and the wine. He leads us beside the still waters and feeds us on the highest mountain, higher than any lofty place here on earth. This is the mountain of his church where his pure Word feeds us and his Sacraments keep us in his care. This is the mountain of the forgiveness of sins, flowing from his death on mount calvary. This is the mountain of the resurrection from the dead. Our eyes cannot see these things right now, just like the children of Israel could not see the mountain promised by God when they were trapped as captives by the Babylonians. But by faith we grasp what God's Word fulfills. Though many false shepherds rise up and deceive even the elect, Christ remains our good Shepherd through his Word. He who gave his life up for us does not speak in vain. And by his grace, we hear his voice.

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Wednesday - Gradual

Read John 10.

John 10 records Jesus explaining that he is the good Shepherd. He sets himself up against the chief priests, whom he calls thieves who only know how to kill and destroy. The word he uses for "kill" is the word to "sacrifice." They honor God with their sacrifices, but their hearts are far from him. All their sacrifices of bulls and goats are nothing but abominations before God. But Jesus sets himself up as the true sacrifice to take away sin. He sets his life up on the altar of the cross. And he takes it back again.

This is all based upon the love he has shared with the Father from eternity. The Son loves the Father. The Father loves his only begotten Son. He brings us, his sheep, into this eternal love. Those who are only interested in outward show are hired hands. They take your money and tell you that you're blessed. But they won't tell you about your sin. They will marry you when you are fornicating. They will bury you when you have cursed God by ungodly living. They will take your money and your praises. But Jesus took the curses of those deemed respectable. Indeed, he took the curse of God himself against our sins, all for the sake of bearing witness to the truth. He laid down his own soul, which was sorrowful even unto death. And he took it up again. This is our good Shepherd.

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Thursday - Epistle (1 Peter 2:21-25)

Read 1 Peter 2.

St. Peter calls Jesus the Shepherd and Bishop our souls. These two words, shepherd and bishop, have a lot to teach us. First, Jesus is our Shepherd. He is the Shepherd of our souls. Our soul includes our entire being. It includes our reason and all our senses, our mind and our will. He is the Shepherd of our souls. And how is he our Shepherd? He says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep." Again he says, "I lay down My life for the sheep." This word for "life" is the same word St. Peter uses for "soul." Jesus gives his entire self for his sheep. He lays it down into death. His reason and all his senses, his mind and his will suffered the death that our souls deserved.

Jesus is also the Bishop of our souls. This word, bishop, is often translated as "overseer." Jesus watches over our souls. And this overseeing is very intimate. The verb form of this word means to look upon or to visit. So Jesus doesn't oversee from an executive desk way up

in some celestial office. No, he visits his sheep. Just as he bore their sins in his own body he gives his body for them to eat. In fact, he gives himself entirely for them so that they may feast upon him through faith in his Word. And this is why Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me." His sheep gather around his Word as he visits them with his mercy. It's just as Zechariah sang (Luke 1:68), "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited his people and redeemed them." A bishop visits the sheep and feeds them with the bread of life. As St. James says, this is true worship, to visit orphans and widows in their tribulation and to keep oneself unstained from the world (James 1:27). So the shepherds and bishops, whom Jesus sends in his name, preach his Word and administer his Sacraments to his sheep. And they do so in order to comfort those who are in distress. They visit the sick, needy, and those who are deceived in order to instruct them in the pure doctrine of Christ, which alone keeps us unstained from the world. And through this ministry of his Word Christ remains our good shepherd and trusted bishop who leads us into the green pastures and paths of his righteousness.

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Friday - Alleluia Verse (Luke 25:35; John 10:14)

Read Luke 25.

Our *Alleluia verse* is taken from Luke 24, in which Jesus is described as making himself known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread, as well as from John 10, in which Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and is known by his sheep. This is very appropriate, because when we turn to Luke 24, we find how Jesus made himself known. What was he doing with these two disciples? They were on their way to Emmaus, and he walked with them, explaining the Scriptures to them. He was hidden from them; they didn't recognize them. But he first made himself known through the Scriptures, showing them from Moses, the Psalms, and the prophets that it was necessary for the Christ to die and rise again. So this is how Christ, our Good Shepherd, knows us. He knows us through his Word, the very Word he fulfilled by making atonement for our sins by his obedience unto death, even as he rose from the dead with all things accomplished. And it is this Word of the Scriptures, which delivers to us the power of his resurrection. This Word declares us righteous for the sake of our Shepherd who laid his life down for the sheep.

Christ knows us in the Scriptures. This is an important point to make.

Our natural minds look at the Scriptures as some book for us to scrutinize and judge. So called higher interpretations of the Bible call on us to determine the truth of Scripture by means of our own historical conclusions. But it is crucial for us to keep in mind that when we hear the Scriptures, this isn't some dead deity waiting for us to know him. This is the living Lord Jesus knowing us, calling us to repentance and a living faith in him. And it is only when he knows us through his Spirit and Word when we know him. So search the Scriptures. But know that when you do, you are not judging the Scriptures. The Scriptures are judging you. But this is so that the Scriptures, as the very voice of God, might make known to us the one who has known us from before the foundations of the world. And as we grow in this knowledge, we get to know him more and more even as we are presently fully known by him. Amen.

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Saturday - Gospel (John 10:11-16)

Read John 10 again.

There are many folds but one flock. Jesus says that he has other sheep who are not of this fold. By "fold," he is referring to the people who were presently hearing his voice in that particular place. That was his local congregation. But he teaches us that his flock is not limited to the local congregation. We don't define the church by where it is located. This has been the error of the Roman Catholic Church, who define the church according to its place, that is, according to how it is united to the visible Roman bishop and the other bishops under him. We can make this same mistake by identifying the church according to the outward structure of a synod or even according to the constitutional structure of a local congregation. The church is not identified by where it happens to be. We might determine other things based on where the church is. Since we are located in the United States of America where there is no official, state church, our churches must govern the outward affairs accordingly. We have voters' assemblies and a synodical structure so that we can work with other congregations in an orderly manner. But the church is not identified by these things. She is not identified by a clergy roster or membership statistics. She is identified rather by what God commands pastors to give to his sheep. She is identified by the pure preaching of his Word and the right administration of his sacraments. Or as Martin Luther says in his Smalcald Articles (SA, III, 12:2): "Thank God, today a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd."

Jesus says that his sheep hear his voice. This is what identifies them as his church. His sheep do not hear the voice of a hired hand. They don't hear the voice of him who only wants to meet his quota, do a wedding here, a funeral there, and make people feel good about themselves. They hear the voice of Christ, who is their Shepherd and Bishop, because Christ has borne the attack of the wolf in their place, dying for their sins. He therefore knows them, and they know him. And there is one flock just as there is one Shepherd.

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Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense

1 Cor. 15: 35ff.

7. 8. 7. 8. 7. 7.


Jesus, meine Zuversicht

Author unknown, 1653


Tr., based on Catherine Winkworth, 1863

Jesus, meine Zuversicht


Johann Crüger, 1



1 Je - sus Christ, my sure De-fense And my Sav-ior, ev - er liv - eth;
2 Je - sus, my Re-deem-er, lives; I, too, un-to life shall wak-en.



Know-ing this, my con - fi-dence Rests up - on the hope it giv - eth
End - less joy my Sav-ior gives; Shall my cour-age, then, be shak-en?



Though the night of death be fraught Still with man-y an anx-i-ous tho't.
Shall I fear, or could the Head Rise and leave His members dead? A-men

3 Nay, too closely am I bound
Unto Him by hope forever;
Faith's strong hand the Rock hath found,
Grasped it, and will leave it never;
Even death now cannot part
From its Lord the trusting heart.

4 I am flesh and must return
Unto dust, whence I am taken;
But by faith I now discern
That from death I shall awaken
With my Savior to abide
In His glory, at His side.

- 5 Glorified, I shall anew
With this flesh then be enshrouded;
In this body I shall view
God, my Lord, with eyes unclouded;
In this flesh I then shall see
Jesus Christ eternally.
- 6 Then these eyes my Lord shall know,
My Redeemer and my Brother;
In His love my soul shall glow —
I myself, and not another!
Then the weakness I feel here
Shall forever disappear.
- 7 They who sorrow here and moan
There in gladness shall be reigning;
Earthly here the seed is sown,
There immortal life attaining.
Here our sinful bodies die,
Glorified to dwell on high.
- 8 Then take comfort and rejoice,
For His members Christ will cherish.
Fear not, they will hear His voice;
Dying, they shall never perish;
For the very grave is stirred
When the trumpet's blast is heard.
- 9 Laugh to scorn the gloomy grave
And at death no longer tremble;
He, the Lord, who came to save
Will at last His own assemble.
They will go their Lord to meet,
Treading death beneath their feet.
- 10 Oh, then, draw away your hearts
Now from pleasures base and hollow.
There to share what He imparts,
Here His footsteps ye must follow.
Fix your hearts beyond the skies,
Whither ye yourselves would rise.