

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dearly beloved,

Remember last week how Pentecost was called Whitsunday because it was often chosen as the day when many of the catechumens were baptized, and so they wore the white baptismal garments? Well, the Church doesn't forget such important events, and so, on this Feast Day of the Holy Trinity, the week after so many would have been baptized, we learn about the new birth, our rebirth into the Triune God's family. And for the rest of the Trinity season, we will consider the life of Christ in the life of the Christian.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

...“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” ...

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ... as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.”(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

For those who desire to become members of PLC, after taking the Christianity 101 class, they also complete an oral examination.

Here are a few of the questions from the very end of the oral examination.

I would encourage you to consider how you would answer if you were asked these questions.

As a hint, recognize that we are looking for a correct understanding between Law and Gospel.

1. *Did God in Christ take everyone's sins away on the cross?*

Answer: “Yes, Jesus paid for every single sin of every single person.”

2. *Does God still demand perfection?*

The answer is: “Yes. But that perfection is given to me by Christ and He has paid for my sins fully.”

3. *What does it mean for a Christian to live in faith?*

Now be careful: the question itself informs our answer: *What is it to live in faith?*

To live in faith means that every day you repent of your sin and trust that Jesus has saved you from all your sins.

4. *Does God want us to keep His Ten Commandments in order to get into heaven?*

Answer: “No. St. Paul clearly says in Ephesians 2:8,9:

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”

5. *Are we to strive to keep the Ten Commandments?*

Answer: “Yes, for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

And here is the one that most easily gets us if we're not careful.

6. *How does God want us to live?*

We just answered that God created us for good works and so now...

how does He want us to live?

Our thoughts turn to what we are to do by way of good works, don't they?

But the truth is that this question is not one of good works, but one of faith.

Actually, in truth, it is one of faith that leads to certain works or actions.

So... *How does God want us to live?*

He wants us to live in faith, that is, trusting in Jesus as your Savior

AND using His means of grace to feed and nourish that faith.

God desires you to live in faith. Of course, this is the first commandment, isn't it?

That we *should fear, love, and TRUST in God above all things.*

This means that we put no trust in our own accomplishments but in what Christ has done.

This means that you put no trust in your own reason or strength,

but rejoice that *the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His gifts,*

and keeps you in the one true faith. Small Catechism, Explanation to the 3rd Article

This means that you trust the Father's Word when He reveals to you

that He sends His Holy Spirit to you through that Word and Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

And this was the topic of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus that evening.

Nicodemus wanted to know about Jesus, what did Jesus say about Himself.

But Jesus doesn't want Nicodemus just to know Him intellectually,

He wants Nicodemus to believe in Him.

And so He speaks about how the Father has chosen to give one faith to believe

that Jesus is the Savior and Son of God, and not just **a teacher come from God.**

Nicodemus, like the other Jewish leaders, had not submitted to Baptism as John was baptizing. Luke 7:3

They were relying on their own thoughts about how heaven is attained.

They had heard John's preaching of repentance,

but they didn't imagine they needed any part of his ministry:

not the repentance, not the forgiveness, not the baptism.

From Jesus' conversation, it sounded like they were relying on their own wisdom,

their own reason and strength and thinking that they could come to God on their own,

and offer to Him their own good works.

But Jesus was showing Nicodemus that faith is not our work, but God's work upon us.

The imagery of birth is a perfect picture of this.

Birth is not something that we do.

We did not decide to be conceived, nor even when to be born. These are works of God.

So it is with faith. We do not decide to believe that Jesus was **lifted up** (on the cross) for our sins.

The Holy Spirit teaches us this and gives us faith to believe it and therefore gifts us eternal life.

And how does the Holy Spirit do this?

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit,

he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Our corrupted flesh gives birth to more corrupted flesh, it can't do otherwise.

We are not born believers, even if born into a Christian family.

The new birth of spiritual life is guaranteed to us in Baptism, by the **water and the Spirit** together.

And just like natural birth is a watery, bloody mess, so is Baptism.

For in Baptism the water is made dirty with your sins as they are washed from you,^{Acts22:16}

and yet, it is **the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son which cleanses you from all your sins.**^{1John1:7}

Our flesh responds like Nicodemus', "**How can these things be?**"

Even as Christians, our corrupted flesh still asks this question.

This is why it is so dangerous to neglect (or to use the catechism's terminology), *to despise, preaching and His Word.*

This is why, upon receiving the gift of faith, whether by Baptism or through the Word, we also need to continually be using the means of grace to feed and nourish our faith.

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but its origin and destination are a mystery.

So it is with the Holy Spirit: He works where and when He pleases,

but you know He is present where you hear the sound of God's Word blowing in your ear.

When you hear in the absolution that your sins are forgiven in Christ's name,

when you hear the **name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit** spoken in Baptism,

when you hear Jesus say, "**This is My body...this cup is the new testament in My blood, given for you for the remission of your sins...**"

when you hear Jesus was lifted up on the tree to pay for your sins,

you know the Father has sent His Holy Spirit to you to give you the gift of faith in His Son, Jesus.

How this all works is a mystery, as is the wind, but just as surely as we know the wind works,

so you can be sure that the Holy Spirit is working through God's Word and Sacraments.

God desires that you live in this faith, not because He wants a strangle hold on you,

but because this is the only way that you truly live, spiritually and eternally.

To fall into the beliefs of your corrupted flesh, is to fall back into spiritual and eternal death.

And so He desires that you regularly and often, understand this to be daily and weekly,

use His means of grace, that is His Word, Baptism and the Lord's Supper,

to feed and nourish your faith in Jesus' work of salvation.

These are the way, the means by which the Holy Spirit *keeps you in the one true faith,*

that is, the way He keeps you in Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and your Life.

And so we start off this Trinity Season, as we do every year,

recognizing that the life of the Christian is the life of Christ abiding in us.

In Jesus name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria