

Blessed Lord, since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that as we hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that we may find and crave only the food of Your salvation and recognize the poisonous lies and distortions of Satan, and be repulsed by them. Amen.

When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

In Christ Jesus, our true Bread of everlasting life, dear fellow redeemed:

I know a nurse who has a very simple diet plan. **Part One:** look upon all junk food - from salty snacks to sweet pastries and candies - as toxins. Develop a revulsion for all such toxins and push them away before consuming. **Part Two:** Eat less, move more. Now I am about halfway there. I can push away sweets and with my fit-bit, I do move more. But ...

Now following such a diet plan is a good thing for our health and general well-being; however there is another kind of diet that is extremely more important. Disregarding this diet can result in a more serious place than a hospital or cemetery; it can result in complete godlessness and eternal fire. Jesus points this out to His disciples in our text and we do well to take heed as well. **Make Spiritual Toxicity a Greater Concern than Physical Nutrition.**

I

When you are moved to pray and are not using a memorized prayer like the Lord's Prayer, for what do you find yourself petitioning the Lord most often - physical concerns or spiritual concerns? If you are like the rest of us, your fellow sinners, it is for physical concerns. We regularly do this even though we learn in the prayer our Lord has taught us that six of the

seven petitions concern spiritual matters, whereas only one pertains to our physical needs.

Now do not misunderstand we should still call upon the name of the Lord in the day of trouble where our physical needs can often overwhelm us. But by having such priorities misplaced we have a tendency to overlook the serious nature of the spiritual warfare we are engaged with the devil, the unbelieving world and own sinful flesh.

So it was with the disciples in our text. Their immediate concern was that they had brought no bread with them on their trip across the sea of Galilee. Now in itself that can truly be a concern. Remember Jesus was concerned about the lack of food for the 4,000 who had followed Him into the wilderness to hear His Word. But strangely it was just the day before that Jesus miraculously provided the 4,000 with enough food to be well satisfied. And ... it was not all that much before that Jesus had done the same with the crowd of 5,000.

But when Jesus said to them: "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.", their consciences were so troubled that they thought Jesus was reprimanding them for neglecting to bring food. In truth, Jesus was issuing a warning about spiritual toxicity. He was taking the occasion of their reference to bread for physical nourishment and applying it to their spiritual nourishment. Jesus' comment about the Pharisees and Sadducees was not a disconnect. These false teachers had just approached Jesus asking for a sign from heaven. Their toxicity was on full display.

The Pharisees were known for their elaborate system of work-righteousness, whereby they thought they made themselves righteous enough to be found acceptable by God. The Sadducees on the other hand were known more for denying certain simple and plain truths taught in Scripture like the resurrection from the dead. The leaven of both as Jesus said was the false teachings they put forth as the truths of God. They were among the false prophets Jesus spoke of in our Gospel lesson, who appeared as sheep but inwardly were the disguised wolves Satan was using among God's people to devour faith in Christ as Savior.

II

Satan desires to destroy faith with his lies, which either lead to despair, losing all hope in God's love for us **OR** apathy, an "*I really do not care*" what happens to me spiritually. Either way the lies are toxic to us

spiritually leading us away from the truth that God loves us and has saved us in His Son. But just as physical toxins can take a long time to noticeably harm us and finally kill us, so spiritual toxins can take a long time to destroy faith.

When we think of theological errors found in other Christian churches, they can seem rather harmless at first. Take for example the error, which denies babies baptism. Those who deny their babies baptism are often very sincere believers in Christ, who plan on teaching their children from early on about the Lord. Faith can come by hearing of the Word, we may tell ourselves to excuse them.

But look at some of the things that result from not baptizing babies. The idea that the Christian is to be drawn to his or her own work of making a decision for Christ becomes so all important. And regardless of how Scripture speaks of baptism as the work of God alone and that through it the sinner receives forgiveness of sins and salvation, this brand of theology makes it into their own work. Therefore every time they fall into “*serious*” sin again, or *backslide* as they say, they have to do the work of baptism all over again. The monster of uncertainty frightens them and can ultimately throw them into despair. God wants us to be certain of salvation. His truth alone sets the sinner free.

Our Lord warns us about the lies of Satan and desires us to take spiritual toxicity seriously. But the lies that are pedaled today are not just under the guise of Christianity. In our secular culture we find it reported that spirituality is on the increase among the *millennials*, but with it we see a rise in accepting immoral behavior. In truth what is immoral in God’s eyes is now so often declared moral, and what God calls moral is declared immoral. We are inundated with multiple daily sensory presentations which captivate the unsuspecting with the twisted, *topsey turvey* set of virtues “of the media, politics, celebrity and the cyber-universe. The culture’s creed is toxic, and it may well discourage” our youth “from embracing God’s truths and a life of faith. The culture has no knowledge of the need for confession and redemption. It surely has no concept of our total reliance on the mercy of God the Father in the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, for the sins of the whole world.” (The Lutheran Witness, Sept. 2014, p. 7)

The prophet Isaiah dealt with the same twisted values of those around him, when he warned: “Woe to those who call evil good and good

evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” And the Apostle Paul observed the same in his day: “since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, ... Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

So it is nothing new. You and I are surrounded by all these same toxins of Satan’s lies today. Sadly we have to admit that we have flirted with some of the ways of erring Christian churches and the philosophies of the unbelieving world and even succumbed to them at times. Satan does not rest, his agents we are told will increase as the end draws near.

But our Lord in His grace is patient with us, just as He was with His disciples in our text. He continues to declare the truth of His love for us, forgiving us all our sins, even the sins of dabbling in the lies of Satan. In addition to His warning to us about these spiritual toxins, He fills us with all good things by liberally declaring us to be righteous before the Father for the sake of His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. All uncertainty about our salvation vanishes as the Word of Christ dwells in us richly. We are truly among the blessed who hunger and thirst after righteousness, because we are filled through Word and Sacrament. Eat well my fellow believers and be confident in the Bread of life Himself. In Him alone you will never die! Amen.