

Trinity XIX

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[0 : 00] When I was a Lutheran pastor for about 10 years, the liturgy would always begin with the confession of sin, followed by the pastor absolving the sins of those who were truly repentant.

So I was bound to the liturgy, where I was to say each and every Sunday, or whenever we had Mass, the following words. In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Now those words would sometimes shock visitors. How can a man forgive sins? It's a good question. And that was the same question that we heard from the scribes here in our gospel reading from Matthew chapter 9 this morning.

We heard about a man who was brought to Jesus who was a paralytic. This bedridden man was brought to Jesus and the people waited in expectation to see a great miracle.

But Jesus shocked the crowd by saying, Son, be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven. Some of the scribes then said, This man blasphemes.

[1 : 34] I suppose that same response could be said by some today. How can a priest, how can a bishop, forgive anyone their sins?

How dare Bishop Chad, Father Paul, or Father Miller think that they can forgive sins? Only God can forgive sins.

And Bishop Chad, Father Paul, and I would agree with this statement. But our good and gracious God is not some distant, remote deity or power that is far from us.

He is not merely some unmoved mover that watches from afar. We believe that God uses fallible means or vessels or vehicles to bestow his grace.

And he does so with his full authority and stamp of approval. You see, our Lord uses water connected to his word to bring people through the sacrament of holy baptism, to bring people into his kingdom, a part of his family.

[2 : 52] He uses bread and wine that mysteriously becomes the body and blood of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit in order to bestow life and grace so that we truly participate in that divine love of our triune God.

And he uses apostles, those who possess apostolic authority that comes from Christ himself to bind the sins of the stubborn and the prideful, that is, the unrepentant, but to remit or forgive the sins of those who repent.

And to demonstrate to these skeptical scribes who doubted his authority, Jesus then heals this man, this paralytic, this man who was bedridden.

And this man rises from his bed and he begins to walk. This miracle demonstrates the very heart of what God has done by becoming man in the person of Jesus the Christ.

God has broken the chains of death. God has released the captives from their sin. And God has freed creation from the despair and decay that leads to death.

[4 : 25] Jesus has brought liberty to the captives of sin, death, and the devil. The healing of this paralytic is the healing that we all receive as our souls are cleansed from sin by God.

And this healing is ours in Jesus Christ. Although we have been crippled by sin, we are like paralytics. God has brought healing to us so that now we can rise with great joy and walk in newness of life.

And this new life will be fully realized at the great and final day of the resurrection of the dead. God has brought us to the great and final day of the dead. Where all the faithful who have put their trust in Christ Jesus will no longer be plagued by disease, hurt, pain, or the finality of death and hell.

But there's one more very important point from our text that we cannot miss this morning.

This, if you've been sleeping so far, wake up and hear this. We heard at the very end of our gospel text how the people marveled.

[5 : 49] Why were the people so astonished? Well, we read in Matthew 9, verse 8, the very last verse we heard from our gospel text. Now, when the multitude saw it, that is this great miracle, they marveled and they glorified God who had given such power to men.

Let me say that again. Who had given such power to men. Notice the plural form. It's from the Greek word anthropos, but it's actually anthropois.

It means men, plural. And this was not a mistake. St. Matthew did not make a mistake here. You see, God continues to forgive sins.

And he does so by using men, fallible men, sinful men. But those men who have been given full authority by Jesus himself.

Now, you might say, yeah, but all the apostles are dead. They're all gone. This authority has ceased. Well, the apostolic authority that Christ gave continues.

[7 : 10] It extends to bishops like Timothy, like Titus. It continues to bishops who then ordain priests so that this sacrament of life and forgiveness continues in the ministry of the church established by our Lord.

Beloved, the church has an authority that does not come from vestries or voters. It comes from God through the laying on of hands, through the apostolic ministry for the preservation of the one holy Catholic and apostolic church.

And this ministry is one of reconciliation. Reconciliation to God and to one another. The Holy Spirit comes connecting us to the one who has power over heaven and earth.

Jesus is releasing people from the debilitating disease of sin by acting in and through his holy church, demolishing the evil that wages war against his kingdom.

Christ has destroyed. He is destroying death once and for all. Now, this should create in us a deep sense of thanksgiving and thankfulness to our God because he does not leave us.

[8 : 45] He is not some distant dictator. No. It should make us thankful because he does not merely make divine decrees from afar, from the heavens.

He comes to us through the ministry that he has established in order to be near, to speak gentle and kind words of life, forgiveness, mercy to all.

There will always be those naysayers, those certain cynical scribes who prefer the invisible and the unknown God or the God that they can locate in their mind, their intellect, or in their gut over and against the physical incarnate Lord who has come to this earth, who has come down and got his hands dirty.

But you see, God has heard the cries of his children enslaved to sin, death, and the devil. He has come to deliver you so that you might now hear his voice, receive his body and blood as his children who have been washed and given that most precious and holy name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And his words to you are forgiven. You are forgiven. And friends, then he calls for you to rise up to walk, to walk and to proclaim his goodness to a world that is bedridden, a world enslaved to sin.

[10 : 45] He calls you to speak and to practice righteousness in a world void of all hope. And he calls you, his forgiven sons and daughters, to then be healers, to be instruments of life which you have received, to be instruments of grace which you receive.

And as you confess your sins and that forgiveness you receive, to go out and to proclaim that forgiveness. Thus becoming his sacraments, his vessels, his means of grace to a hurting world. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.