

## His Spirit and His Sufferings

### IV - In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins ...

The Holy Spirit *calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Christ in the one true faith*, Lutheran Christians confess, because Holy Scripture teaches it, and because God Himself has made them to believe in Him, and, as such, also to believe what He teaches in Holy Scripture.

In His Word of His love and what His love has done for the salvation of sinners, God Himself has His love shine into the hearts of sinners and lighten up the darkness of disobedience and defiance and death in our hearts and minds, and makes us to come alive to His love. And this He does by His Holy Spirit, who is His own Spirit, the breath and life of God. *He calls Christians into the one true faith, and keeps us in the one true faith.*

For there is but one true faith, namely the faith God Himself teaches in Holy Scripture. In our day and age we call it the *Lutheran* faith, but it could just as well be called something else. It used to be called the *Catholic* faith, that is: the *common* faith, that without additions or distortion, common to the whole Christian Church and to all Christians. Our Lutheran Confessions call it the *Catholic* faith, also. But since the word *Catholic* has been claimed by one of the groups that does *not* hold to this Catholic faith, it is now problematic in common parlance to use the term *Catholic* of the Catholic faith; therefore, and for other historical reasons, we most often refer to the common Christian faith taught by Holy Scripture as the *Lutheran* faith.

At any rate, when the Word of God is spoken to us, the Holy Spirit makes us to believe it, and to understand it. By what we shall have before us tonight, though, of our Catechism, we are reminded that making Christians to believe what Holy Scripture teaches is not all that the Holy Spirit does; rather: *In this Christian Church He also daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.*

In other words, with the Word of God of His salvation, the Holy Spirit also actually *gives* to Christians the salvation He makes them to believe in.

We might ask ourselves, though: Is it not God who does that, or our Lord Jesus? It is. But the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, and of our Lord Jesus, one with the Father and the Son from eternity, and one God with the Father and the Son. So, what God the Father does, and the Son, that the Spirit does.

And what the Holy Spirit does, He does in the power of God, as He is Himself the power of God, and all His authority.

*Do you not know that I have authority to release you, Pilate said to our Lord Jesus, and authority to crucify you? Our Lord Jesus answered him: You would have no authority over me, had it not been given to you from above. Therefore, He who gave me over to you has the greater sin. All authority is His, who gave Himself over to suffer for the sin of sinners, for the salvation of sinners; and so is the greater sin. He who is God Himself from eternity had arranged for Pilate to have the authority to release Him or give Him over to be crucified, for such was His will, and the way of His salvation.*

He had had Himself baptised with sinners, and taken upon Himself the sin of sinners. And as such He had the greater sin, although there was no guilt in Himself. And therefore, according to the Law, He had to die, as the Jews said it: *We have a Law, and according to that Law he must die.* Not because he has made himself the *Son of God*, as the Jews said it, but because He is in fact the Son of God from eternity, who had had Himself made one with sinners, and taken all sin upon Himself, and because the Law is the Law of sin and death, which demands death and damnation upon all sin.

He was to be crucified, in accordance with what He Himself had had written of Himself in the Law: *Cursed is He who is hanged upon a tree.* And cursed He would be, not only by His enemies, but by God Himself, He who is Himself God, and the Holy One of God, and the Father's Beloved from eternity, for the sin of sinners, cursed into the just judgement of God and His goodness against all ungodliness, His holy hatred against all evil. He in whom even Pilate found no guilt, because there was none, He would bear the guilt of the guilty.

Pilate's authority enabled him to have Barabbas the murderer go free from death and judgement, rather than our Lord Jesus, or vice versa. Except that the outcome was given already at the outset, not only because of the hatred of the educated mob of the elite, the chief priests and the officers, but also because of the love of God, whose will it was that His Son would suffer and save us sinners.

And guided by God, even in his misguided exercise of authority, Pilate had our Lord Jesus suffer. He took Him and flogged Him. And his soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head and arrayed Him in a purple robe. And Pilate presented Him to the people, suffering and shamed: *Behold the man!*, hoping that this would be enough to solve his problem.

Pilate's solution was not sufficient to satisfy their hatred, though. Our Lord Jesus had to be crucified, and Barabbas the evildoer set free in His stead.

In the Word God has His Church proclaim, the Holy Spirit presents to us our Lord Jesus suffering and shamed, and not only that, but also the glory of His shame: that because the innocent has died for evildoers, evildoers are set free from suffering and shame, and glorified as righteous and right in Him, sons of God, and heirs to His heavenly Kingdom and His eternal life.

If and when our Lord Jesus is presented to us merely by means of the flesh, as merely a moral example, an appeal to our bad conscience or to our good instincts, we will reject Him; as did the Jews.

The flesh, that is: sinful nature in us sinners agrees to the ancient lie of the evil one, that *you will be like God to know good and evil*. I, rather than God, am the ultimate judge of good and evil; what is ultimately good is that which I like, and that which I want, and that with which I agree. I should have what I want and what makes me feel good.

And it feels good to believe that I am the *master*, also, of good and evil, that I am my own saviour, and perhaps even saviour of others, also, doing good and conquering evil. It makes me feel good to feel that I am good.

It might seem that many would prefer to have our Lord Jesus presented to them in a manner that would make them feel good about themselves and their goodness and godliness. And it seems that many seek churches and preachers who present Him as such, and worship that makes sinners feel good.

But nothing can be found in the flesh sufficient to save; no more than Pilate could absolve himself by washing his hands and declaring himself innocent of what he allowed to be done under his authority. History itself testifies to this by the irony that daily and richly, in churches and homes and hearts all over the world, exactly that is confessed, which Pilate would not acknowledge: that the Son of God *suffered under Pontius Pilate*.

But not only is nothing in the flesh *sufficient to save*; worse, when sinners embrace our Lord Jesus because He is presented to them in the flesh, in a manner that makes them feel good about themselves, it is not really *Him* they embrace, but rather Barabbas. A Gospel presented in a such manner as to make sinners feel good about themselves is not *the Gospel*, but rather that of which the Holy Spirit has had the Apostle write: *If even we or an angel from Heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed!*

To faith procured by preaching what is pleasant to the flesh, and produced by the flesh, what our Lord Jesus has said applies: *That which is born of the flesh is flesh.* What is born of sinful nature is sinful. Faith brought about by sinful nature, in sinful nature, through an appeal to sinful nature, is idolatry and ungodliness; as is all goodness and godliness brought about in sinful nature by sinful nature, through the appeal to sinful nature. It embraces not our Lord Jesus, but rather Barabbas.

The Gospel does not make us to feel good about ourselves and our own goodness, as we would prefer. It does not even *allow* us to feel good about ourselves and our own goodness. It presents to us the unappealing image of our Lord Jesus suffering and shamed: *This is Man! This is you! This is the cost and consequence of your sins and shortcomings, all born of your ungodliness, which actually is this evil! This is the judgement of God over you!*

The faithful Church of Christ presents this Word to the world, as He has entrusted her and given her the authority to do. In Lutheran parlance, we call this Word *the Law*. But she presents to the world also the other Word of God, with His own authority, that since this is His judgement over you and your sin, then you have already been judged before Him, and your sin.

He who suffered for the sin of the world *is you*. He was baptised into you, and made one with you. You are baptised into Him and made one with Him. And so you have been judged and died with Him, and you need no more die into eternal death and damnation.

And in His Church His Spirit brings Him to us and makes us one with Him. In His Word He gives Himself to us as our own spirit and makes us one spirit with Him.

He brings Him to us in His Baptism and makes Him one with us, and us with Him. And He brings Him to us, in the festive meal of salvation, with His body and blood, in bread and wine, for real, and makes Him one with us, and us with Him.

*His blood be upon us and upon our children!*, the Jews said to Pilate. Well, the Spirit and the power of God brings His blood upon us, and upon our children, for our salvation, and with His salvation, fully and for real.

As we confess it, with our Catechism, with regards to the Holy Spirit: *In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.* This is what it means that Christians believe in the holy Christian Church; or as the ancient Latin text has it, in the holy *Catholic* Church.

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. *Amen.*