

## The Third Sunday of Advent

### 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

*This is how one should regard us, writes the Apostle: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. This he writes not of himself and the other Apostles, but rather of himself and his apprentices who serve alongside him in the ministry, and, by obvious extension, therefore, also of those who would succeed him in the ministry; which means that this is how Christians today should regard their Pastors: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. They are those whom Christ has given to the congregation to manage the mysteries of God, that is: to proclaim His salvation and administer the Sacraments to the faithful, and to teach the truth of God, to admonish those who are on the way away from the faith and demonstrate defiance and disobedience against the Word and will of God in the way they live, and withhold the Sacrament from them, for the sake of their salvation, until they repent. This is how you should regard your Pastor; for this is what God has made him to be, an overseer of the flock, as the Apostle is recorded as having said it, in the Book of Acts, that is: of the congregation in which he serves, to care for the Church of God, which He obtained with His own blood.*

Now, an overseer of a flock is called a *shepherd*, by the way, which in Latin is *pastor*. Literally, in Latin, the word *pastor* means *feeder*, though, *one who feeds*; for a shepherd leads his heard to *pasture*, that is: to the feeding grounds. And a Pastor feeds the sheep of Christ with the Word of Christ, in which Christ is Himself, and His life. Feeding is not all that a shepherd does, though: he also leads the flock where it should go, and calls those sheep back who are going astray, and protects the sheep from predators; as a Pastor has been given to the Christians in his congregation to lead them in their life with God, and to warn them against false teachers who would lead them astray, lead them away from the faith and into false faith instead, by making them to seek other things than the Word of Christ, and His salvation.

This is what your Pastor has been set to do, and this is what you should expect of him. *What is required of stewards is that they be found faithful*, as we also hear it today that the Apostle writes it; not that they be exciting or entertaining, charming or otherwise talented, funny or fresh, but that they be *faithful* to their duties, and to the Word of God.

For the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, as the Apostle writes it elsewhere, the Word of God of His love and what His love has done for the salvation of sinners.

And as such, the only criteria by which you should judge your Pastor is whether or not he is *faithful*. As the Apostle also writes it, as we hear it, and as any Pastor should think of himself and his ministry: *With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. It is the Lord who judges me.*

What we hear today, though, is not only about how a Christian should regard and relate to his or her Pastor; the Church of Christ has very deliberately made us to hear what we hear today today, of all Sundays, on a Sunday in Advent, while we prepare for Christmas by meditating on the coming of the Christ, that He who was to come, according to the promises of God, that He has come, with salvation from God, and that He shall come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead.

*Therefore, as the Apostle writes it, do not judge prematurely, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each will receive his commendation from God. Not only should you not judge your Pastor pettily, by your own personal preferences and subjective standards; you should not judge anybody else, either. Who are you to pass judgement over the servant of another?, as the Apostle writes it elsewhere; It is before his own master that he stands or falls.*

In fact, you should you not even judge yourself by your own petty personal preferences and subjective standards.

*I am not aware of anything against myself, writes the Apostle, but thereby am I not acquitted: it is the Lord who judges me.* And you should know, also, that even if you think you are doing relatively well in leading a good and decent life, and perhaps even a godly one, you are not thereby acquitted and in the clear. It is the Lord who judges. And He will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and disclose the purposes of the heart, and then each will receive his commendation from God - or his condemnation!

It is the Lord who judges. It is before His judgement we shall stand, ultimately. And ultimately, nothing else matters. And on that day, when He comes in glory to judge both the living and the dead, it will do you no good to argue before Him that you were right and He wrong, and that your judgement should stand, rather than His. He is God, and you are not. It is as simple as that.

It is the ancient lie of the evil one in your heart that you are like God in knowing and judging good and evil; and a lie it is.

Even if you are not aware of anything against yourself, the Lord *will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness*, as the Apostle writes it, *and disclose the purposes of the heart*. He is God, and you are not. He knows all evil and impurity and ungodliness in your heart and mind as well as that in your life, even that of which you are not aware yourself. And it is He that judges. All there is for you to do is to submit to His judgement, as His judgement is pronounced upon you in His Word, in Holy Scripture, and in true and faithful preaching and teaching of His Truth, in accordance with Holy Scripture.

This is, in fact, what it means to *confess* your sins; the Latin word *confess* means to *state something together*; and the Biblical word we translate as *confess* means to *say the same*. To *confess* your sins is to submit to the judgement of God and say the same about your sins as He does, namely that they are sinful, that by them you have greatly offended Him and justly deserved His temporal and eternal punishment; not because you *feel* it, necessarily, but because you acknowledge that God is God, and you are not.

And *if we confess our sins*, writes the holy Apostle John, *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. And: *If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have communion with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin*.

In the communion Christians have with each other, that is: in our worship, the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, cleanses us from all sin. He who is Himself God from eternity came to us to suffer and die for us and bear for us His own judgement against all evil and impurity and ungodliness in our lives, and in our hearts and minds. And with that He paid the price and penalty for all our sins and shortcomings. And in His Word He declares us to be free from all sin and guilt and debt before His judgement. He has Himself borne all judgement for us, and He is Himself the one who shall come in glory to judge both the living and the dead; and this means that the judgement *He* pronounces, well. that is what goes. The Gospel His faithful Church proclaims is His own promise that we shall not perish and die forever in His judgement on account of our sin, rather, on account of what He Himself has done for us we shall live and be with Him forever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory.

And with His promise, all that He promises is given to us, when we hear His promise, and take it to heart and surrender to His love, and submit to His judgement.

And as we celebrate His festive meal of salvation, He gives Himself to us, with His body and blood, and makes Himself one with us, so that we have *communion*, not only with each other, but also with *Him*, that is: we are made to be one with Him in all that He is and all that is His, in His own righteousness, that is: His goodness and innocence before God, and in His heavenly Kingdom and His eternal life.

*If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And: If we walk in the Light, as He is in the Light, we have communion with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin; whereas, as the Apostle also writes it, God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; and if we say we have Communion with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not do the Truth.*

With what we hear today, God calls you to submit to His judgement rather than insist on your own, that He is wrong and you right, that your sin is not sin, that your darkness is the true light, and you are right to remain in it.

He calls you to take His Word to heart, as He has had it written down in Holy Scripture, and as He has your Pastor speak it in order for you to hear His Word from *him*, and take it to heart.

So do take His Word to heart, as it is spoken to you. It is He that speaks it. Take His Word to heart, and submit and obey, when He judges your sin to be sinful, and commands you to repent of your sin and seek His forgiveness for your sin, and the help of His Holy Spirit in abandoning your sin and in sinning no more. And take His Word to heart when He declares you to be free from all sin and guilt, all out of His goodness and mercy and for no other reason whatsoever, and righteous and right before His judgement. Remember and rejoice that you have been baptised into Him and made one with Him in all that He is and all that is His, that your sin is dead and buried with Him, and you have been raised to new life to be with Him in glory. And rejoice to receive His His body and blood, as it is given to you in His festive meal of salvation, with which He gives Himself to you, and all that is His, and His own assurance that when He comes to judge, you shall receive *commendation* from God rather than *condemnation*, His commendation for what He Himself has done.

Blessed is He that comes, in the name of the Lord. *Amen.*