

Sermon for Easter Sunday;

MARK 16:1-8.

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Contents: The resurrection of Christ.

MARK 16:1-8

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

I. THE STORY OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION

1. This Gospel lesson is part of the general account and the first announcement of the resurrection of Christ, which was made by the angel to the women who went early to the tomb to anoint the dead body of the Lord, before Christ showed himself to them and talked with them; inasmuch as he wanted to reveal his resurrection through the Word, even before they should see him and experience the power of his resurrection.

2. And as we said there are two ways of considering Christ’s passion and death and the other doctrines of Christ, so there are also two things concerning the Lord’s resurrection that we ought to know and understand. First, the history which relates the events as they occurred, together with the different circumstances and how he revealed himself alive in various manifestations; so that we might have a sure record and testimony of everything

as a foundation and support of our faith, inasmuch as this article of faith on the resurrection is the chief one upon which our salvation is finally based, and without which all others would be useless and altogether fruitless. Now, what a person ought to know about the historical events, namely in what order these two events, the appearance of the angel — which is reported in part in this Gospel — and the manifestation of the Lord occurred, that should be discussed in connection with the full account, compiled and arranged in order from all the Evangelists; therefore, we will treat the part mentioned in this Gospel in connection with that account.

II. THE BENEFIT AND COMFORT OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

3. The second point, that is more important and necessary, and on account of which the narrative has been recorded and is preached, is the power, benefit and comfort of the joyous resurrection of the Lord; and the use we are to make of the same faith. Concerning this Paul and all the apostles and the entire Scriptures teach and preach gloriously and richly; but most gloriously of all did Christ the Lord himself preach, when he manifested himself first of all to the women. Therefore, in order that we too may hear and gather something useful from it, let us consider the words Christ spoke unto Mary Magdalene, as recorded in the Gospel according to John 20:17: *“Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father; but go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.”*

4. This is the first sermon our Lord delivered after his resurrection and, without doubt, also the most comforting; although in words very brief, but exceedingly kind and tender, and spoken first of all to his beloved Mary Magdalene, and through her also to his disciples after their deep woe, grief and sorrow, caused by his departure and death, that he might comfort and gladden them by his resurrection. And since this Mary is far more deeply and tenderly concerned about the Lord than the others, and is first at the grave to anoint the body of Christ with costly spices; and especially because, when she fails to find him, she is frightened and bewildered, deeply troubled and in tears, supposing him to have been taken away; therefore, he permits her to enjoy this evidence of his love, in that he appears first of all to her, comforting her in her fears, and preaching this beautiful sermon, which we will now consider.

5. In the first place, when Jesus manifests himself to her not far from the tomb, before he speaks to her, she mistakes him for the gardener; but when he calls her by name and says “Mary,” she immediately recognizes the voice, and at once turns with that name upon her lips by which she as well as the other disciples had been accustomed to address him in their language, namely “Rabboni,” that is: O dear Master, or dear Lord, for they would say Master, whereas we generally say, My Lord, and immediately, as she was accustomed to do, she falls at his feet to touch him. But he restrains her and says: “Touch me not,” as though he meant to say: I know indeed that thou lovest me, but thou canst not yet rightly look upon nor touch me, as thou shouldst look upon and touch me. For her joy is no higher or greater than the mere bodily, fleshly pleasure of having her Lord alive

again as she had him before; clinging thus only to the fact of his return, and thinking that he will again be with them as he had been before, to eat and drink with them, to preach and do miracles; intending therefore, by her service and by touching his feet, to show him that love she had shown him before, when she anointed him both in life and in death.

6. He does not permit himself to be touched in this manner now, however, because he wants her to stand still and listen, and learn what as yet she knows not; namely, that he refuses to be touched and anointed or to be served and waited upon, as she had done heretofore; but he says ‘ I will tell thee something different and new’ I am not risen in order to walk and remain with you bodily and temporally, but that I may ascend to my Father; hence I do not need or desire such service and attention, nor will it do to look upon me as you look upon Lazarus and others, still living in the body. For it is not here that I intend to dwell and abide; but I would have you believe that I go to the Father, where I will rule and reign with him eternally, and whither I will also bring you out of your death and sorrow. There you shall have me visibly and tangibly with you indeed, and you shall rejoice forever in eternal communion with me and the Father. Therefore, he wishes to say: Refrain henceforth from all such bodily service and reverence, and go rather and become a messenger, and proclaim what I tell thee unto my dear brethren, that I will no more be and abide here in bodily form, but that I have left this mortal state to enter upon a different existence, where ye may no more handle and touch me, but shall know and possess me only in faith.

7. Here he uses language entirely new, when he says: “Go and tell my brethren,” taken from Psalm 22:22, which treats entirely of Christ, and in which he speaks both of his passion and resurrection, saying: “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, etc.” Never had he spoken in this manner to his apostles before. For at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, he indeed calls them his “dear children” and his “friends,” John 13:33; John 15:14; but now he employs the most affectionate and glorious name possible and calls them his “brethren.” And it is of great importance to him; for he does not delay, but as soon as he is risen, his first concern is to have them told what he intends to do and why he is risen from the dead.

8. And, indeed, this is said in a manner that is lovely and sweet beyond all measure, so that whoever desires to believe, has reason enough to believe, all his life and as long as the world endures, that these things are true indeed; even as the dear apostles themselves had found in them encouragement enough, and more than enough, to believe. For the comfort is too great and the joy too glorious, and the heart of man too small and narrow to have attained it.

9. The Apostles crouched behind barred doors, not only discouraged and cowed, as sheep that are scattered without a shepherd, but also troubled in conscience. Peter had denied and renounced his Lord with an oath, and cursed himself; and the others had all fled and proved themselves to be disloyal. That was indeed a fall so deep and terrible that they

might well think they would never be forgiven for denying the Son of God, and so shamefully forsaking their dear Lord and faithful Savior. How could it have ever entered their hearts that Christ would send such an affectionate greeting and such a kind good-morning to them who had been so disloyal and denied him, and would not only forgive everything, but also call them his dear brethren? Or who can believe and grasp it today? I myself would like to believe it at times, but I cannot get it into my heart so completely that I dare rely upon it wholly, and dare count it to be really true. Yea, if we only could, we would be in heavenly bliss already in this life, and would fear neither death, nor the devil, nor the world, but our hearts would constantly bound for joy, and sing to God an eternal *Te Deum Laudamus*, i.e. We praise thee, O God.

10. But alas, this is not the case upon earth; our miserable beggar's bag, this old hide of ours, is too cramped. Therefore, the Holy Spirit must come to our rescue, not only to preach the Word to us, but also to enlarge and impel us from within, yea, even to employ the devil, the world and all kinds of afflictions and persecutions to this end. Just as a pig's bladder must be rubbed with salt and thoroughly worked to distend it, so this old hide of ours must be well salted and plagued until we call for help and cry aloud, and so stretch and expand ourselves, both through internal and through external suffering, that we may finally succeed and attain this heart and cheer, joy and consolation, from Christ's resurrection.

11. For, let us consider for a moment what manner of words these are, which Christ here uses; and let us not pass lightly over them, as has been done heretofore, and is still done in all popedom, where we have read, heard and sung them until we are weary; and nevertheless we have passed over them, as a cow walks by a sanctuary; so that it is a sin and a shame to have heard and known such words, and still to let them lie, cold and dead, outside of the heart, as if they were spoken and written altogether for naught; and that even Christians themselves, though they do not despise them as others do but use them daily, neither appreciate them as highly nor believe them as firmly as they would like to do.

12. For consider, I say, what these words contain and offer: Go my dear sister, for thus he would undoubtedly address these women, since he appeared unto them first, and tell the denying and disloyal disciples that they are called, and shall be, my dear brethren. Isaiah not this, in a word, including and placing us with Christ into the complete tenure and inheritance of heaven and of everything Christ has? Rich and blessed indeed must be the brethren and sisters who can boast of this Brother, not hanging now upon the cross, nor lying in the grave under the power of death, but a mighty Lord over sin, death, hell and the devil.

13. But how have these poor, frightened and discouraged disciples come to such honor and grace, and wherein have they deserved such brotherhood? Was it by Peter's shameful denial of Christ, and by the disloyalty of all the others to him? And how have I and others

deserved it to apply this also to ourselves? I, who have read the idolatrous mass for fifteen years blaspheming God and helping daily to crucify Christ afresh? Fine merit this, forsooth, riding to hell in the devil's service and looking to other brotherhoods, — those of the devil and his clique, bearing the names of dead saints, St. Anthony, St. Francis, St. Sebastian, St. Christopher, St. George, St. Ann, St. Barbara, concerning some of whom it is not known whether they were saintly, yea, whether they ever lived at all. Fie! what a sin and shame for us, who are called Christians, to have had this brotherhood of Christ the Lord, so graciously offered us, and then to despise and reject it, and fall into such deep blindness as to have ourselves inscribed in the rascally brotherhood of the shameful monks and of the whole herd of the pope, and to preach about and praise this as though it were a precious thing indeed! But that is what the world deserves. Why did we not appreciate the Word of God that was written, painted, played, sung and rung before our eyes and ears? And even now, that the Word of God itself points this out, and rebukes us, we cease not to blaspheme and to persecute; whereas we ought to thank and praise God for having so graciously delivered us, without, and contrary to, any merit of our own from such blindness and blasphemy, and for having vouchsafed unto us grace to recognize it.

14. Now let him who can believe it. For whether we believe it or not, it is the truth none the less. This brotherhood is founded among us, and is not such a brotherhood as our loose Kaland, and the brotherhood of the monks, but it is that of Christ, wherein God is our Father and his own Son our brother, and where such inheritance is bestowed upon us as assures not merely a hundred thousand dollars, one or more kingdoms, but in which we are redeemed from the fellowship of the devil, from sin and death, and obtain the inheritance and possession of eternal life and eternal righteousness; and though we were once in sin, worthy of death and eternal damnation, and are so even now, we should know that this brotherhood is greater, mightier, stronger and superior to the devil, sin and all things. We are not fallen so deeply', and things are not so bad and ruined that this brotherhood cannot arrange and fully restore everything again, inasmuch as it is eternal, infinite and inexhaustible.

15. For who is he that has instituted this brotherhood? The only Son of God and almighty Lord of all creatures, so that on his own account he did not need to endure suffering or death. But I have done all this, he tells us, for your sake, as your dear Brother, who could not bear to see, that you, eternally separated from God by the devil, sin and death, should so miserably perish; hence I stepped into your place and took your misery upon myself, gave my body and life for you that you might be delivered; and I have risen again to proclaim and impart this deliverance and victory to you, and receive you into my brotherhood, that you might possess and enjoy with me all that I have and hold.

16. Thus you see, it is not enough for Christ that the historical fact has occurred, and that as far as he is concerned everything is accomplished; he infuses it into us and creates a brotherhood from it, so that it may become the common possession and inheritance of us

all; he does not place it in praedicamento absoluto, but relationis, namely, he has done this, not for himself personally nor for his own sake, but as our Brother and alone for our good. And he does not want to be considered and known otherwise than as being ours with all these blessings, and that we, on the other hand, are his; and that we are therefore so closely united that we could not be more intimately related, having a common Father, enjoying an equal, common and undivided estate, and authorized to use all his power, honor and estate, to boast of it, and to comfort ourselves with it, as though it were our own.

17. Who can fully, comprehend this? and what heart can sufficiently believe that the Lord is so completely ours? For, indeed, it is a thing too great and unspeakable, that we poor, miserable children of Adam, born and grown old in sin, are to be the real brethren of supreme Majesty, joint-heirs and joint-rulers in eternal life; as St. Paul so gloriously declares, Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7: “And if children then heirs, heirs of God, and jointheirs with Christ, etc.” For all this follows in order: if we are called the children of God, then we must truly be also his heirs, and brethren and joint-heirs of Christ the Lord, who is the only essential Son of God.

18. Hence, let him who can learn rightly to begin to pray the Lord’s Prayer; and to know what it signifies for me to call God my Father, and for me most truly and fully to regard and consider myself his dear child and the brother of Christ the Lord, who has shared with me everything that he has and placed me in possession of his eternal treasures. Here examine and ask your own heart, whether without doubt and wavering you can thus say from the bottom of your heart: “Our Father;” whether you are firmly grounded upon and can be assured before God: I consider myself thy dear child, and thee my dear Father, not because I have merited it, or could ever merit it, but because my dear Lord wants to be my Brother, and of his own accord has proclaimed it and invited me to regard him as my Brother, and has said that he would also regard me as such. Only begin this, I say, and see how you will succeed in the task; and you will soon discover what an unbelieving knave is hidden in your bosom, and that your heart is too dull to believe it. O, I am such a poor sinner, nature exclaims, how dare I exalt myself so highly, seat myself in heaven and boast that Christ is mine, and I am his brother! For this greatness and glory is so exceedingly high, beyond all human sense, heart and thought, that we cannot comprehend it; even as Paul himself also confesses in Philippians 3:12, that he is pressing on to lay hold of it, but has not yet attained it. Yea, man is astounded and terrified at himself for presuming to receive and boast of such honor and glory.

19. But, what shall we do? We must indeed say, and it is true, that we are poor sinners, and with St. Peter, we have denied our Lord (I especially above others). But what shall we do about it? It is enough and more than enough that which I did against him in falling away from him and making myself a knave. Should I, in addition, make him a liar and a knave, and deny this comforting proclamation, and blaspheme? God forbid!

20. Yea, says the devil, through my flesh thou art not worthy of this. Alas, it is true; but if I would not believe and accept it, I would have to, make my Lord a liar, and declare that it is not true when he tells me that he is my Brother. God forbid that I should do this, for that would be rejecting my God and all my salvation and eternal blessedness, and to trample it under foot.

21. This, therefore, will I say: I know very well that I am an unworthy being, worthy to be the brother of the devil, not of Christ and his saints; but now Christ has said that I, for whom he died and rose again, as well as for St. Peter, who like myself was a sinner, am his brother; and he earnestly would have me to believe him, without doubt and wavering, and would not have me consider that I am unworthy and full of sin, because he himself will not so consider nor remember it, as indeed he well might do, having abundant cause to repay his followers and visit upon them what they committed against him. But it is all forgotten and blotted out of his heart; yea, he has slain, covered and buried it; and he knows nothing to say of them now but that which is kind and good, and he greets them and addresses them affectionately as his faithful, dearest friends and pious children, as though they had not done any wrong, nor grieved him, but had done only good to him; so that their hearts may not be uneasy or worried with the thought that he would remember it and charge it against or visit it upon them. Since then he does not want it remembered, but wants it slain and buried, why should not I leave it at that, and thank, praise and love my dear Lord with my whole heart, for being so gracious and merciful? Even though I am laden with sin, why should I go on and brand as a falsehood this gracious Word, which I hear himself speak; and willfully reject the proffered brotherhood? If I do not believe it, I will not receive its benefits; but that neither renders it false nor proves that anything is lacking in Christ.

22. If anyone now desires to load himself down with new sins, and does not want forgotten what he has forgotten, let him then so sin that it never will be forgotten, and he never can be helped; as we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 4:4-6, and Hebrews 10:26, concerning those who have sinned by falling away from God's Word and rebuking it as a lie. This is the sin against the Holy Ghost and is described as crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting the Spirit of grace to an open shame. From this may God protect all who desire to be Christians! Alas, there is too much of the old blindness and folly, in which we have been enveloped hitherto. This ought to perish and be forgotten, now that we have become his brethren, if we only accept it. If we cannot believe as firmly as we ought, let us begin, like young children, to drink at least a little spoonful of this milk, until we become stronger, and not thrust it from us altogether.

23. Therefore, though your own unworthiness rebukes you, when you engage in prayer, and though you think: Alas, my sins are too many, and I am afraid that I cannot be Christ's brother, strike out about you and defend yourself as best you can, that such thoughts may find no room in your mind. For here you are in great danger of committing the sin against the Holy Ghost. With all confidence and boldness reply to such thoughts

of the devil: I know very well what I am, and you need not tell nor teach me, for it is not your business to judge this case; therefore, away, thou lying spirit! I will not and must not listen to thee. Here is my Lord Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who died for me and rose again from the dead; he tells me that all my sins are forgotten, and that he will be my Brother, and that I likewise am to be his brother; and it is his will that I should believe this from my heart without wavering.

24. A knave and a villain, yea, a brother of the wretched devil himself must he be who would not accept this. Though I be not worthy of it, yet am I in great need of it; and even if that were not so, God at least is worthy that I should honor him and judge him to be the true God. But should I not believe, I would, in addition to all other sins, in this worst possible way heap dishonor upon him in violation of the first commandment, in making him a liar and a vain God. What greater wickedness and blasphemy has any man ever heard or proclaimed? Much rather do thus: When you feel that it is too hard for you to believe, fall down upon your knees and complain to God of your inability; and say with the apostles: "O, Lord, increase our faith." Luke 17:57. I would at heart gladly count thee my dearest Father, and Christ my Brother, but my flesh, alas, will not submit; therefore help my unbelief that I may honor thy name and hold thy Word to be true.

25. See, in this way you will yourself experience what a great conflict it requires to believe God's Word and to pray the Lord's Prayer aright; not as though this Word in itself were not sure, steadfast and strong enough, but that we are so weak, yea, so much like wretched, unstable mercury that we cannot hold fast that which is well worthy of being held with hands and hearts of steel and adamant.

26. Formerly, when we were led astray and cheated with lies and false worship, we could hold fast and comfort ourselves with firm, though false, faith in all the saints and the brotherhoods of the monks; and joyfully said: Help, dear lord St. George, or St. Anthony, and St. Francis, and let me enjoy the benefit of thy intercessions! There was no doubting or opposition then; this occupation was agreeable to us, and we had fists and strength of iron to believe. But here where Christ, the Truth itself, offers us his fellowship, even invites and urges us in the most affectionate manner, saying: Beloved, receive me as your Brother, he cannot succeed in leading us to believe and accept it. So mightily do the flesh and the devil resist and oppose it.

27. Therefore, I say, it is best for each one, when he goes into his closet and begins to pray, to make an effort to understand what he is saying, and properly to weigh two words, "Our Father." For example: My friend, what are you praying? How does your heart respond? Do you truly regard God as your Father, and yourself as his dear child? No, indeed, says the heart, I do not know; how can I presume to ascribe a thing so great and glorious to myself? Then why do you not refrain from prayer, when with your lips you call God your Father, while your heart gives the lie to yourself and to him as he has revealed himself in his Word? Rather, confess your weakness and say: I indeed call thee

my Father, and ought to call thee so, according to thy Word and command; but I am afraid that my heart is lying like a knave. And the worst of it is, not that I myself alone am lying; but that I accuse thee also of falsehood. Help me, dear Lord and Father, that I may not make thee a liar; for I can not become a liar myself without first having made thee one.

28. Therefore, though I realize and experience, alas, that I cannot say “Our Father” with my whole heart, as indeed no man on earth fully can, else we would already be in heavenly blessedness, yet will I make an attempt and begin, as a little child begins to nurse at its mother’s breast. If I cannot believe it fully, yet will not I count it a falsehood, nor say, nay. Though I cannot play the game as is proper, I will beware lest I play in opposition as the monks and the despairing hearts do, who fail to regard Christ as their Brother, but as an enemy and a taskmaster; for that would be turning him into the very devil. But I would daily spell at the letters, until I am able to repeat “Our Father” and this Sermon of Christ as well or as poorly as I may. God grant that though I stammer and stutter or lisp, I may to some degree at least accomplish it.

29. For, as already stated, this is the sin of all sins, that when God is gracious and wants all our sins forgiven, man by his unbelief rejects God’s truth and grace, and casts it away from him, and will not let the death and resurrection of Christ the Lord avail. For, indeed, I cannot say that this brotherhood, which brings us forgiveness of sins and every blessing, is my work and doings, or that of any man, or that anybody labored or sought for it. For this resurrection occurred and was accomplished before any man knew aught about it; and that it is proclaimed and preached to us is likewise not done through the word of man but by that of God; wherefore it cannot fail or lie. Since then it is solely the truth and work of God, it behooves us, under penalty of God’s extreme wrath and displeasure, to accept it as coming from God, and to hold it fast by faith, so that we may not fall into the sin that is unpardonable.

30. For whatever other sins there are, contrary to God’s command and Law, which consist of all that we are to do and that God demands of us, these are all covered by forgiveness, since we are never entirely free from them during our whole life; and if God were to reckon with us according to our life and conduct, we could never be saved. But he who will not believe the Word of Christ nor accept his work, sins a hundred thousand times more; for he strives against grace, and robs himself of forgiveness. For it is grace that saith: The law shall not hurt nor condemn thee, although thou hast sinned against it exceedingly, but these sins shall all be forgiven and taken away by Christ; since that is why he (lied for thee and rose again, and now presents all this to thee, through this proclamation of his brotherhood. Now if you will not believe nor accept this, but stubbornly set your head against it, and say: I want no grace, what will then help you? Or what will you seek further, to obtain forgiveness and be saved? Yea, I will be a Carthusian friar, go barefooted to Rome and buy an indulgence, etc. Very well, go ahead as you will, not in God’s, but in the wretched devil’s name; for by this you have denied

not only grace, but also the law, and are fallen from God completely, inasmuch as you seek such works and holiness as are not commanded by God, yea, are even forbidden.

31. Should not God be angry and punish us for daily babbling, singing and reading the Lord's Prayer and the Creed without understanding, faith and heart, and for thinking nothing not only of Christ, but also of God's Law; boasting instead and bringing before God only our own efforts and false spirituality, over and above and opposed to his grace and command, expecting thereby to reconcile him and earn heaven from him? This is what we deserve for despising God's Word and this glorious, comforting proclamation of Christ; to be shamefully blinded and cheated by the devil, and punished and plagued by the pope; as though God thereby said: Very well, if you will not have my Son as your Brother, and me for your dear Father, then take the pope with his monks, who point you away from the Gospel, the Creed and the Ten Commandments, to their shabby, stinking cowls and the devil's brotherhood.

32. For since they did not want Christ to be and remain our Brother without our merit and worthiness, and to bring us God's grace and forgiveness of sin; what is this but really and actually denying faith in God and his Son, as St. Paul says, Titus 1:16, even though they confess him with their lips? Just as I too did in my former blindness, when I helped to sing and read these words with others, and yet thought far more highly of my monkery and my own works. For if I had accepted as true and certain what St. Paul says in Romans 4:25 that Christ died for our sins and was raised again for our justification, in order that we might become his brethren, then I would thereby have learned that my own works and my monk's hood could not obtain this for me. Otherwise what need would there have been for Christ to go and take my sins and the wrath of God upon himself in his cross and death, and by his resurrection to place me into the inheritance of the forgiveness of sins, of eternal salvation and glory?

33. But now, inasmuch as they cling to their monkery, and seek God's grace by their own merits, desiring thereby to get rid of and atone for their sins, they bear witness against themselves that they do not believe what they say with their lips: I believe in Jesus Christ who died for me and rose again, etc.; but they believe, on the contrary, in the cowl and cord of the barefooted monks, in St. Ann, St. Anthony, and in the devil (pardon me), in his rump. Because it is impossible for one who knows Christ in this brotherhood to be engaged in such follies as are taught and observed not only without faith and contrary to it, but also contrary to the commandments, and which are real diabolical sins, the sins of all sins.

34. Therefore, in opposition to all this, a Christian ought to acquire the custom of praying the Lord's Prayer, firmly crossing himself and saying in thought: Keep me, dear Lord, from the sin against the Holy Ghost, that I may not fall from faith and thy Word, and may not become a Turk, a Jew or a monk and a papal saint, who believe and live contrary to this brotherhood; but that I may hold fast to a little fringe of the garment of this

brotherhood. Let it be sufficient that we have believed and lived contrary to it so long; now it is time to pray God to make this faith sure and steadfast in us. For if we have this faith, then are we healed and delivered from sin, death and hell, and are able to try all other spirits, to discern and reject all error, deception, and false faith, and to pronounce the sentence: He who dons the cowl and shaves his head in order to become holy, or joins the brotherhood of monks, is a mad, senseless fool, yea, a blind, miserable, unhappy and despairing creature; he who tortures himself with much fasting and castigation, like the Carthusian friars or Turkish saints, is already separated from God and Christ and condemned to hell. For all this is nothing but blasphemy and contradiction of the blessed heavenly brotherhood of Christ. They may indeed pray and read a great deal about it, as Isaiah 29:13 says: "This people draweth nigh to me with their lips," cometh before my face in the churches: with singing and ringing, "but their hearts are far from me." What pleasure, think you, can he have in such saints, who outwardly act as though they were real children of God, reading and singing the Gospel, employing the most beautiful words and celebrating a glorious Easter festival in processions, with banners and candles, and yet, do not try to understand or believe it, but rather oppose it by their doctrine and life?

35. For if they understood and believed it, they would not cling to their mockery and vanities, but would forthwith trample their cowls and cords under foot, and say: Fie upon this shameful brotherhood! To the wretched devil with it, for opposing the brotherhood taught me by the Creed and the Lord's Prayer! For it is not worthy of notice or attention. Thus Paul in Philippians 3:5, pronounces judgment upon his own holy life in Judaism: I was, says he, a pious, blameless man, not only in my own vain estimation, but according to the law of Moses; but when I learned to know Christ, I counted all my righteousness under the law loss, yea, not only loss, but I counted it refuse and filth. I indeed thought I was a great saint, that I had kept the law strictly and with all diligence, and counted this my highest treasure and greatest gain; but when I heard of this brotherhood and inheritance of the Lord Jesus Christ, O how my pride and the boast of my own righteousness left me so completely that I now shudder at it, and do not even want to think of it.

36. See, he extols the righteousness this brotherhood brings us in such a way that he belittles and thoroughly despises the life and the holiness of all men even when it is at its best according to the law of God, which law must indeed be kept, and than which there is verily nothing more praiseworthy and better on earth. And yet, because it still is our own effort and life, it cannot and shall not have the honor and glory of making us God's children, and of acquiring the forgiveness of sins and eternal life; but this is effected when you hear the word of Christ, saying: Good-morning, my dear brother; in me thy sin and death are overcome, for all I have done, I have done for thee, etc.

37. This is the ground of St. Paul's defiance of sin and death: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" 1 Corinthians 15:55 and Hosea 13:14. As though he wished to say: In times past you were mighty, terrible foes, before whom all men, no

matter how holy and pious, had to tremble and despair; but where are you now? How did I lose you so completely? Why, he replies, everything is swallowed up and completely drowned in a victory. But where is the victory, or whose is the victory? “Thanks be to God”, he replies in verse 51, *“who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

38. This indeed is glorious and great boldness, possible, however, for such faith alone as that of St. Paul; yet which, as he himself laments, was not as strong as he desired it to be; still, he certainly had it, and was able to maintain it against the wrath and power of the devil. That we are not able to do likewise and are still so fearful and terrified at death and hell, is an evidence that we still have too little faith. Therefore we have the more reason to impel us to call upon God and pray and also to ask the supplications of our brethren to that end, and daily to work the Word into our hearts, until we too, in some degree, obtain this assurance.

39. Let our adversaries laugh us to scorn and derisively say that we know how to teach nothing but faith, and let them cry that we must rise far higher and do far more. But if we only had faith enough, we would soon attend to everything else. For the chief and most necessary thing, of which they know nothing, is, how to get rid of the terror of sin, death and hell, and how to acquire a peaceful conscience before God, so that we may be able truly and heartily to pray “Our Father.” Where this has not been found everything else is in vain, though we should torture ourselves to death with our works. But since everybody comes short in this respect, we need not be ashamed of learning and being concerned about these things daily, as we are about our daily bread, and in addition we should ask God to give us power and strength. Amen.

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