

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fourth Sunday after Easter, May 14, 2017

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 156, 22:1-2, 317, 382, 324:7-8.

Lessons: 2 Samuel 12:1-14, Romans 3:19-26, Luke 18:9-14.

Sermon Text: 1 John 1:8-10.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The church must teach both God's moral law so that the Law may work repentance and also Christ's gospel of forgiveness since only the Gospel can comfort sinners with forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation. Because of what Jesus Christ did, the forgiveness of sins is at the very heart and center of all Scripture teaching. In the life of the Christian, confession of sins is a daily occurrence. But in our worship services, confession of sins is a special part of the first part of the service.

In fact, confession before God is essential. Surely, God knows our hearts. But

SCRIPTURE TEACHES US ABOUT CONFESSION OF SIN

- 1. The first part of confession is that we confess our sins.**
- 2. The second part of confession is that we receive absolution or forgiveness.**

You learned from the catechism: First: WHAT IS CONFESSION? Confession has two parts. The one is that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution or forgiveness from the pastor as from God himself, not doubting but firmly believing that our sins are thus forgiven before God in heaven.

Second: WHAT SINS SHOULD WE CONFESS? Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. But before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts. With the Psalmist we admit "*Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.*" Psalm 19:12 (NIV) Proverbs tells us "*He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*" Proverbs 28:13 (NIV)

Because God knows all our sins, we should plead guilty of any and all sins we may have committed in thought, word, and deed. We should not try to hide our sins, deny, or excuse them, but honestly and penitently confess them. Whoever is willfully impenitent in even one sin forfeits the forgiveness for all his sins, because willful impenitence kills faith, and without faith we cannot have any forgiveness.

The catechism goes on: Third: HOW CAN WE RECOGNIZE THESE SINS? Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, employer, or employee? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you hurt anyone by word or deed? Have you been dishonest, careless, wasteful, or done other wrong? "*Through the law we become conscious of sin.*" Romans 3:20 (NIV)

Luther reminds us that in addition to the public, or general, confession before God we have the opportunity for private confession before the pastor. But a Christian should not be forced to make a private confession before the pastor. This has been practice in the Catholic Church since before the time of Luther. He states that before God we should plead guilty of all sins, as we do in the Lord's Prayer, when we pray "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We forgive others because God first forgives our sins. But Luther points out that before the pastor we may confess those sins which we know and feel in our hearts. The benefit we derive from making such private confession is that when we confess our sins to our pastor and ask for forgiveness (absolution) of such sins which especially burden our conscience, we personally receive the comforting assurance that these sins are forgiven. You read of such personal absolution often in

Scripture, such as Jesus assuring a penitent: ***“Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”*** Matthew 9:2 (KJV) Remember that in any such personal confession the pastor to whom I have privately confessed my sin must keep such confession strictly to himself. Even courts in our land cannot force a minister to testify about crimes which have been confessed to him.

At the beginning of our worship service, we really begin with a confession of sins. Please look at page 5 in the front part of the hymnal. After acknowledging where our help comes from, we state that we will confess our sins unto God.

Then follow words of confession. Perhaps the words most obvious that we are personally confessing our sins are found in our communion liturgy on page 16, where the Minister and the Congregation shall say: “O almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended Thee and justly deserved Thy temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray Thee of Thy boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.” Some congregations even today, have the custom that the members of the congregation kneel or be seated to make this confession of all our sins.

In this most beautiful prayer of confession we plead guilty before God of all our sins, and we confess that we sincerely repent of them, and we ask that for Christ's sake God would forgive us all our sins.

The fact that with sincere hearts we ask God for forgiveness shows that we believe that we shall obtain it. When the Publican—the penitent tax collector—prayed, ***“God be merciful to me, a sinner”***, he obtained forgiveness, and went down to his house justified. Luke 18:13 (KJV) This is a confession we should repeat often in our private devotion.

On page 6 in the hymnal in our typical Sunday worship service, the minister speaks part of a confession of sins and the congregation joins in part of it. The minister says: “Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against Thee by thought, word, and deed. Wherefore we flee for refuge to Thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Thy grace for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He is speaking not only for himself but for all in our worship service, stating ***“we poor sinners.”*** We run for refuge, a safe place, to God’s boundless mercy – his love and compassion. We don’t approach him because we are good people, as the Pharisee in our Gospel lesson tried to do. We dare to approach him because of what Jesus Christ did for us.

When the congregation joins with the minister, we ask three things: Give us forgiveness for all our sins, and let us grow in the proper knowledge of God and his will, and let us be truly obedient to your word, O God. We ask all this so that we may receive eternal life in heaven.

Then the congregation joins the minister: “O most merciful God, who hast given Thine only-begotten Son to die for us, have mercy upon us and for His sake grant us remission of all our sins; and by Thy Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of Thee and of Thy will and true obedience to Thy Word, to the end that by Thy grace we may come to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

After confessing our sins, we learn: Fourth: **HOW WILL THE PASTOR ASSURE A PENITENT SINNER OF FORGIVENESS?** He will say: “By the authority of Christ, I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. “

On communion Sundays, after we have publicly confessed our sins, the minister shall pronounce the Absolution: Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and 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 Ghost.

Other Sundays, we hear these words from the minister: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, hath had mercy upon us and hath given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins. To them that believe on His name He gives power to become the sons of God and hath promised them His Holy Spirit. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Grant this, Lord, unto us all. God forgives all our sins, to everyone who believes. He recognizes them as children of God through faith in Jesus Christ and promises that they, too, shall receive forgiveness of sins. Then the idea is repeated with words from Mark 16: ***“He that believeth and is***

baptized shall be saved.” Mark 16:16 (KJV) It has become customary in our churches that the minister face the altar, as if facing God, and asks also for himself as well as the congregation: “Grant this, Lord, unto us all.”

So we see that faith is necessary to truly receive absolution. When we receive the precious gift of forgiveness of sins, given to us by faith, we become partakers of all the spiritual blessings of heaven.

Absolution, a word that comes from the verb "absolve", meaning to "loose" and "set free", means to declare loose and free from sin, to forgive sin. Absolution by the pastor does not mean that he does the actual forgiving. Only God, against whom we have sinned, can do this. With complete atonement for our sins by Christ, God's Word assures us that we ***“are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.”*** Rom. 3:24-25 (NIV) and that ***“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.”*** Eph. 1:7 (NIV) Scripture is abundantly clear that Jesus Christ ***“is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”*** 1 John 2:2 (NIV) Make no mistake ***“that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.”*** 2 Cor. 5:19 (NIV) The words of absolution and absolution itself presuppose that Christ has atoned for all our sins, and that God has forgiven them, and it means that this forgiveness, which in the Gospel is proclaimed as an accomplished fact, is offered, applied, and assured by the pastor to those who make confession and believe.

So although a man is pronouncing the absolution, we should regard the absolution as if pronounced by God himself and in no way doubt, but firmly believe, that by it our sins are thus forgiven before God in heaven. Jesus plainly told his disciples: ***“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*** John 20:23 (NIV)

We should firmly believe the words of absolution, because the pastor does not proclaim his own forgiveness, but God's forgiveness, and Christ definitely states that whenever pastors forgive sins to penitent sinners, then the sins are forgiven. Scripture assures us: ***“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*** Matthew 18:18 (NIV)

Everyone who believes the words of absolution has what those words say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins. We have and hold this forgiveness as long as we have faith, but as our faith often weakens, we should again and again receive absolution to strengthen our wavering faith.

But we must be careful to examine ourselves, because hypocrites, that is, people who with their lips confess their sins, but are impenitent at heart, do not receive forgiveness; for they do not accept the grace of God that is offered to them in the absolution. We read in Scripture: ***“the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.”*** Hebrews 4:2 (NIV)

So far we have been talking about public confession of sins, usually in worship services. But we must ask: Should a Christian confess his sins to his neighbor whom he has offended and grieved? Absolutely! Anyone who is not willing to do this shows clearly that also before God he does not repent of his sins. We read in James: ***“Confess your sins to each other.”*** James 5:16 (NIV) Matthew even gives this illustration: ***“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”*** Matthew 5:23-24 (NIV)

Let us not neglect the assembling of ourselves together in worship (Hebrews 10:24) so that we may frequently and regularly receive the forgiveness of all our sins for Jesus' sake. Amen.