

Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

You can learn the same thing also from the daily government of the household. When the master of the house sees that the servant does not do what he ought, he admonishes him personally. But if he were so foolish as to let the servant sit at home and went on the streets to complain about him to his neighbors, he would no doubt be told, “You fool, how does that concern us? Why don’t you tell it to the servant?” Look, that would be acting quite brotherly, so that the evil would be stopped, and your neighbor would retain his honor. As Christ also says in the same place, “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother” [Matthew 18:15]. Then you have done a great and excellent work. For do you think it is a small matter to gain a brother? Let all monks and holy orders step forth, with all their works melted together into one mass, and see if they can boast that they have gained a brother.

Further, Christ teaches, “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” [Matthew 18:16]. So the person concerned in this matter must always be dealt with personally, and must not be spoken of without his knowledge. But if that does not work, then bring it publicly before the community, whether before the civil or the Church court. For then you do not stand alone, but you have those witnesses with you by whom you can convict the guilty one. Relying on their testimony the judge can pronounce sentence and punish. This is the right and regular course for checking and reforming a wicked person. But if we gossip about another in all corners, and stir the filth, no one will be reformed. Later, when we are to stand up and bear witness, we deny having said so. Therefore, it would serve such tongues right if their itch for slander were severely punished, as a warning to others. If you were acting for your neighbor’s reformation or from love of the truth, you would not sneak about secretly nor shun the day and the light [John 3:19–20].

THE LORD'S PRAYER – THE FIFTH PETITION

There is here attached a necessary, yet comforting addition: “As we forgive.” He has promised that we shall be sure that everything is forgiven and pardoned, in the way that we also forgive our neighbor. Just as we daily sin much against God, and yet He forgives everything through grace, so we, too, must ever forgive our neighbor who does us injury, violence, and wrong, shows malice toward us, and so on. If, therefore, you do not forgive, then do not think that God forgives you [Matthew 18:23–25]. But if you forgive, you have this comfort and assurance, that you are forgiven in heaven. This is not because of your forgiving. For God forgives freely and without condition, out of pure grace, because He has so promised, as the Gospel teaches. But God says this in order that He may establish forgiveness as our confirmation and assurance, as a sign alongside of the promise, which agrees with this prayer in Luke 6:37, “Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Therefore, Christ also repeats it soon after the Lord’s Prayer, and says in Matthew 6:14, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,” and so on.

A BRIEF EXHORTATION TO CONFESSION

Everyone is now aware of this. But unfortunately people have learned it only too well. They do as they please and apply their freedom wrongfully as if it meant that they ought not or must not go to Confession. For we readily understand whatever is to our advantage, and we find it especially easy to take in whatever is mild and gentle in the Gospel. But, as I have said, such pigs should not be allowed near the Gospel nor have any part of it. They should stay under the pope and let themselves continue to be driven and pestered to confess, to fast, and so on. For whoever does not want to believe the Gospel, live according to it, and do what a Christian ought to be doing, should not enjoy any of its benefits either. Imagine their wanting to enjoy only the benefits without accepting any of the responsibilities or investing anything of themselves—what sort of thing is that! We do not want to make preaching available for that sort nor to grant permission that our freedom and its enjoyment be opened up to them. Instead, we will let the pope and the likes of him take over and force

them to his will, genuine tyrant that he is. The rabble that will not obey the Gospel [2 Thessalonians 1:8] deserves nothing else than the kind of jailer who is God’s devil and hangman. But to others who gladly hear the Gospel we must keep on preaching, admonishing, encouraging, and coaxing them not to forget the precious and comforting treasure offered in the Gospel. Therefore, we here intend to say also a few words about Confession in order to instruct and admonish the uninformed....

Similarly, the other of the two confessions, the one that every Christian makes to his neighbor, is also included in the Lord’s Prayer. For here we mutually confess our guilt and our desire for forgiveness to one another [James 5:16] before coming before God and begging for His forgiveness [Matthew 5:23–24]. Now, all of us are guilty of sinning against one another; therefore, we may and should publicly confess this before everyone without shrinking in one another’s presence. For what the proverb says is true, “If anyone is perfect, than all are.” There is no one at all who fulfills his obligations toward God and his neighbor [Romans 3:10–12]. Besides such universal guilt, there is also the particular guilt of the person who has provoked another to rightful anger and needs to ask his pardon. So we have in the Lord’s Prayer a double absolution: there we are forgiven both our offenses against God and those against our neighbor, and there we forgive our neighbor and become reconciled to him.