

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! The time for spring cleaning has arrived. I just got back from taking my recyclables into town, but I still have a long way to go to finish. I hope your spring cleaning is going more smoothly than mine! For now, though, let's take a break and reflect on Luther's writings for us from the Large Catechism.

Spring Cleaning, and Confessing?

Following up on his words on the Sacrament of the Altar is an exhortation made by Luther to Confession. He wrote that we are free to go to confession, rather than compelled as believers used to be under the Pope. "These three things have now been removed and made voluntary: that we may confess without coercion or fear; that we are released from the torture of enumerating all sins in detail; finally, that we have the advantage of knowing how to use confession beneficially for the comforting and strengthening of our conscience (BoC, p.476)."

Luther continues "Unfortunately, people have learned it only too well; they do whatever they please and take advantage of their freedom, acting as if they should or need not go to confession anymore (BoC, p.476)." Remember the words of St. Paul, dear friends, that we are not to use our freedom as a cover up for evil. To ones who do such things, Luther saw it fit that they not hear the preaching of the Gospel or the ability to share in any part of our liberty. Bear in mind that you are free to come to me privately to confess, but that "in addition to the confession we are discussing here, there are two other kinds, which have an even greater right to be called the common confession of Christians. (He refers) to the practice of confessing to God alone or to our neighbor alone, asking for forgiveness (BoC, p.477)."

We make these kind of confessions in the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." "Indeed, the entire Lord's Prayer is nothing else than such a confession. For what is prayer but a confession that we neither have nor do what we ought and a plea for grace and a joyful conscience (BoC, p.477)?" This may be news to some of you. Yes, even prayer is a time for confession. After all, who do we go before other than God Himself? And remember Isaiah's thoughts when he went before God's throne—look at all the good things I've done! No, he thought he was about to die! But just as Isaiah was received by a merciful God who cleansed his unclean lips with coals, we are received by a merciful God in our Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, we are saints, but still sinners, and "confession should and must take place continuously as long as we live. For this is the essence of a genuinely Christian life, to acknowledge that we are sinners and to pray for grace (BoC, p.477)."

We'll get to the second way next month. In the meantime, I pray that you continue to have a blessed Lententide going into the celebration of our Lord Christ's resurrection on Easter, giving us the assurance of confessing and praying to a merciful God.

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh