

## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

### Luke 2:41-52.

This sermon appeared first time under the title: “A Sermon on the Gospel of Luke, 2 chapter. On the Sunday after the day of the Three Holy Kings; in which is set forth how they fare who are true Christians; also how we are to seek Christ only in the Temple, that is, in the divine Scriptures. Doctor Martin Luther. Preached in Wittenberg, 1523.”

#### Contents:

An example of the cross. And of consolation under the cross.

#### *Luke 2:41-52.*

*And his parents went every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up after the custom of the feast; and when they had fulfilled the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and his parents knew it not; but supposing him to be in the company, they went a day's journey; and they sought for him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance: and when they found him not, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking for him. And it came to pass, after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them, and asking them questions: and all that heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when they saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? knew ye not that I must be in my Father's house? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and he was subject unto them: and his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

### **I. AN EXAMPLE OF THE CROSS. OR SANCTIFIED SUFFERING**

1. This is a Gospel that presents to us an example of the holy cross, showing us through what experiences those have to pass who are Christians, and how they ought to bear their sorrow. For he who desires to be a Christian must expect to help bear the cross. For God will place him between the spurs and thoroughly test him that he may be humble and no one will come

to Christ without suffering. Of this we have here an example, which we ought to imitate and shall now consider.

2. Although the holy mother Mary, who was highly blessed and upon whom many favors were bestowed, had undoubtedly the greatest delight in her child, yet the Lord so ruled that her joy was not without sorrow and like all others she did not attain complete blessedness until she entered heaven. For this reason she had to suffer so much sorrow, pain and anguish on earth. It was her first great sorrow that she had to give birth to her child in Bethlehem, in a strange town, where she found no room with her babe except in a stable. Then her second sad experience was that soon after the six weeks of her purification she was compelled to flee with her child into Egypt, a strange country, which was indeed a poor consolation. She undoubtedly experienced many more like trials, which have not been recorded.

3. One of them is related here, when her son caused her so much anxiety, by tarrying behind in the temple and letting her seek him so long, and she could not find him. This alarmed and grieved her so that she almost despaired, as her words indicate: "Behold, thy father and I, sought thee sorrowing." For we may well imagine that thoughts like these may have passed through her mind: "Behold this child is only mine, this I know very well, and I know that God has entrusted him to me and commanded me to take care of him; why is it then that he is taken from me? It is my fault, for I have not sufficiently taken care of him and guarded him. Perhaps God does not deem me worthy to watch over this child and will take him from me again." She was undoubtedly greatly frightened and her heart trembled and was filled with grief.

4. Here you see what she experienced. Although she is the mother of a child in whom she might have gloried before all mothers, and although her joy was immeasurably greater than any she had ever felt, yet you perceive how God deprives her of all happiness, in that she can no longer call herself the mother of Jesus. In her great dismay she probably wished, she had never known her child and was tempted to greater sins than any mother had ever committed.

5. In the same manner the Lord our God can take from us our joy and comfort, if he so desires, and cause us the greatest sorrow with the very things that are our greatest joy, and, on the other hand, give us the greatest delight in the things that terrify us most. For it was the greatest joy of Mary that she was the mother of this child, but now he has become the cause of her greatest sorrow. Thus we are afraid of nothing more than of sin and death, yet God can comfort us so that we may boast, as St. Paul says in Romans 7, that sin served to the end that we became justified and that we longed for death and desire to die.

6. The great sorrow of the mother of Christ, who was deprived of her child, came upon her in order that even her trust in God might be taken from her. For she had reason to fear that God was angry with her and would no longer have her to be the mother of his Son. Nobody will understand what she suffered who has not passed through similar experiences. Therefore we should apply this example to ourselves, for it was not recorded for her sake, but for our benefit. She is now at the end of her sorrows; therefore we should profit by her example and be prepared to bear our sorrow if a similar affliction befall us.

7. When God vouchsafes to us a strong faith and a firm trust in him, so that we are assured he is our gracious God and we can depend upon him, then we are in paradise. But when God permits our hearts to be discouraged and we believe that he takes from us Christ our Lord; when our conscience feels that we have lost him and amidst trembling and despair our confidence is gone, then we are truly in misery and distress. For even if we are not conscious of any special sin, yet in such a condition we tremble and doubt whether God still cares for us; just as Mary here doubts and knows not whether God still deems her worthy to be the mother of his Son. Our heart thinks in the time of trial thus: God has indeed given me a strong faith, but perhaps he will take it from me and will no longer want me as his child. Only strong minds can endure such temptations and there are not many people whom God tests to this degree. Yet we must be prepared, so that we may not despair if such trials should come upon us.

8. We find many examples of this in the Scriptures, as for instance in Joshua 7:6-7. God had given to Joshua great and strong promises, telling him that he would exterminate the heathen and charging him to attack his enemies courageously and vigorously, which he also did. But what happened? When his faith was strong he sent three thousand men against a city to take it. They were proud, seeing that it was a small city with only a few people to defend it. When the men of Israel approached, the enemy sallied forth from the city and defeated the people. Then Joshua fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of Jehovah until the evening, lifting up his voice and lamenting before God, saying: "Alas, O Lord Jehovah, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over the Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to cause us to perish?" His faith had become weak and he was utterly discouraged, so that God himself had to raise him up again. Thus God deals with his great saints, whom he sometimes deprives of Christ, that is, of their faith and confidence.

9. But God does all this out of his superabundant grace and goodness in order that we might perceive on every hand how kindly and lovingly the Father deals with us and tries us, so that our faith may be developed and become continually stronger and stronger. And he does this especially so as to guard his children against a twofold danger which might otherwise threaten them. In the first place, being strong in their own mind and arrogant, they might ultimately depend upon themselves and believe they are able to accomplish everything in their own strength. For this reason God sometimes permits their faith to grow weak and to be prostrated, so that they might see who they are and be forced to confess: Even if I would believe, I cannot. Thus the omnipotent God humbles his saints and keeps them in their true knowledge. For nature and reason will always boast of the gifts of God and depend upon them. Therefore God must lead us to a recognition of the fact that it is he who puts faith in our heart and that we cannot produce it ourselves. Thus the fear of God and trust in him must not be separated from one another, for we need them both, in order that we may not become presumptuous and overconfident, depending upon ourselves. This is one of the reasons why God leads his saints through such great trials.

10. Another reason is, that he wants to give us an example. For if in the Scriptures we had no examples of saints who passed through the same experiences, we should be unable to bear our trials and would imagine that we alone are thus afflicted, that God never dealt with any one in

this manner; therefore my suffering must be a sign of God's displeasure with me. But when we see that the Virgin Mary and other saints have also suffered, we are thereby comforted and need not despair, for their example shows that we should calmly and patiently wait until God comes and strengthens us.

11. We find many examples of similar trials in the Scriptures, and here we might refer to the words of David in Psalm 31:22: "As for me, I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes," just as we sometimes think that God does not want us. Such trials are unendurable and severe beyond measure, wherefore the saints passing through them lament greatly, for if God would not deliver them they would be in hell. Compared with these trials other temptations and sorrows are trivial, as for instance when our possessions and honors are taken from us, or when the innocent babes were murdered and Jesus was forced to flee into Egypt. The prophet speaks of this in Psalm 94:17: "Unless Jehovah had been my help, my soul had soon dwelt in silence." So great is the terror and anguish of such visitations. But God permitted them that we might lay hold of these examples, be comforted and saved from despair. At the end of our lives we must also pass through like trials. Therefore we must be armed and prepared for them.

## **II. AN EXAMPLE OF COMFORT UNDER THE CROSS**

12. Such is the narrative and example of the great sorrow as it is portrayed in this Gospel, but we are also shown where comfort may be found. The parents of Jesus lost him, going a day's journey and seeking for him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance, but found him not. They return to Jerusalem and after a search of three days he is found by them in the temple. Here God has pointed out how we can find consolation and strength in all our sorrows, and especially in these great trials, and how we can find Christ the Lord, namely by seeking him in the temple. Jesus said to his parents: "Knew ye not that I must be in my Father's house?"

13. The words of Luke "and they understood not the saying which he spake unto them" are especially to be noted here. With these words he silenced the idle talk of those who exalted and praised the Virgin Mary too highly, asserting that she knew everything and could not err. For you see here how the Lord permits her to seek her child for a long time in vain, till she finds him in the temple after three days. In addition to this, Jesus seems to reprimand her when he says: "How is it that ye sought me? knew ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" She understood not the saying which he spake to her. Consequently all the idle talk to which we have referred is nothing but falsehood, and the Virgin Mary does not need this fabricated and mendacious praise. God concealed much from her and led her through many trials, so that she might remain humble and not think herself better than others.

14. But the consolation of which I have spoken is that Christ is only found in the temple, that is to say in the house of God. But what is the house of God? Is it not the whole creation? It is indeed true that God is everywhere, but he is especially present in the Holy Scriptures, in his Word, more than anywhere else. We learn therefore here that nobody can presume to derive any comfort from anything but the Word of God; you will find the Son only in the temple.

Now look at the mother of Jesus who does not yet understand this and does not know that she must seek for him in the temple. When she sought for him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance, and not at the right place, she did not find him.

15. Therefore I have often said and say again, that in the Christian church nothing should be preached but the pure Word of God. With this the Gospel agrees when it says that they did not find the Lord among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. It is therefore wrong to say that we must believe what the councils have decreed, or what Jerome, Augustine and other holy fathers have written. We must point out the place where Christ may be found, which he himself points out when he says that he must be in his Father's house, which means that he can only be found in the Word of God. We should therefore not believe that our conscience may trust in the teachings of the holy fathers or derive comfort from them. Now if they say to you: Should we not believe the holy fathers? you may reply: Christ is not found among the kinsfolk and acquaintance. It would indeed be well if Christians generally were to heed this example from the Gospel and use it as a maxim against every doctrine that does not agree with the Word of God.

16. But in order to emphasize this more and to make it clearer, let us see what other doctrines have been proclaimed that do not agree with the Word of God. Up to this time we have had three different systems of doctrine. The first and coarsest is that of St. Thomas (if indeed he be a saint). This was taken from the system of pagan science and art which was written by that great light of nature, Aristotle. Now they say that his philosophy is like a bright, shining plate, and the Word of Christ is like the sun. And as the sun shines upon the plate, causing it to gleam and glitter all the brighter, so the divine light shines upon the light of nature and illumines it. With this beautiful simile they have introduced pagan doctrines into the Christian church, which have been taught and cultivated by the great universities and in which teachers and preachers have been instructed. The devil has taught them to speak in this way. Thus the Word of God is trodden under foot, for when it is given full play, it subverts all these satanic doctrines.

17. In the second place, they have taught and prescribed human laws, called the institutions and precepts of the holy Christian church. Thereby these fools have thought to lead men to heaven and to be able to comfort and pacify our conscience. These human laws prevail to such a degree that like a great deluge they cover the whole world and have submerged everything else, so that it is almost impossible that any one may be saved from going down to hell. For they clamor unceasingly as though they were insane: This has been decreed by the holy councils and that has been commanded by the church; we have observed this a long time, shall we not believe it now?

18. Therefore we should reply to this from the Gospel, as I said: Even if Mary, the Holy Virgin, had done this, it would not be surprising if she had erred. She was the mother of God, and yet she did not know where to find Christ; she sought him among her kinsfolk and acquaintance and failed to find him. Now if she did not succeed in finding Christ among her kinsfolk, but had finally to come to the temple, how shall we expect to find him outside of the Word of God in human doctrines, in the decrees of the councils or the teachings of the

scholastics? Bishops and councils have undoubtedly not possessed the gift of the Holy Spirit in as large a measure as Mary. If she erred, why should not they also be mistaken who fancy to find Christ elsewhere but in his Father's house, that is in the Word of God?

19. If therefore you find one who adheres to these two different systems of doctrine, believing them to be right and trusting in them, ask him whether he is quite confident that they will comfort his soul in the hour of death or under the judgment and the wrath of God, whether he will be able to say then with a conscience undaunted: This has been declared and decreed by the pope and the bishops in their councils, I depend upon that and am quite certain I shall not fail? He will soon be obliged to say: How can I be so certain of this? Thus, when it comes to the point and you are in the presence of death, your conscience will say: It is indeed true, the councils have decreed this, but what if they were mistaken, and who knows whether they were right? Then when you are in such doubts, you cannot hold out, and Satan will assail you and hurl you to the ground, so that you lie there helpless.

20. In the third place, besides these two theories they have also pointed us to the Holy Scriptures and said, that above every other doctrine the laws and decrees of the pope in matters of faith must be observed. But here they except the teachings of some of the holy fathers, who have interpreted the Scriptures, and whom they have exalted so highly that they place them on the same level with the pope of Rome, or a little above him, asserting even that they could not err, and clamoring: How could it be possible for the holy fathers not to understand the Scriptures? But let these fools say what they wish, always remind them of the words of Christ: "Knew ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" We must above all things have the Word of God and cling to it, for Christ will be there and in no where else. Therefore it is in vain that you seek him elsewhere. For how can you convince me that Christ must be found in the writings of the holy fathers?

21. This Gospel is therefore a severe thrust at every doctrine and every comfort of any kind that is not derived from the Word of God. You may therefore say: It matters not how highly you exalt reason and the light of nature, I reserve the right of not putting my trust in it. The councils have issued decrees and the pope or the holy fathers have taught what they wish, but that does not concern me; I will not depend upon them. We will soon agree if they decide and propose what they please, but grant me the liberty to say: If it pleases me, I shall observe it, but not as something that is especially meritorious. They will however not grant us this right; for they are not satisfied to let us use our own discretion in these things, but demand in addition that we base our trust and comfort on them, teaching that if we trust in them, it is as much as if we place our confidence in Christ and the Holy Spirit. We can not tolerate their delusions according to which they think that they are doing a good work who keep their laws, and again, that it is a sin not to keep them. For they declare that the precepts and doctrines of the pope and the church come from the Holy Spirit and are the Word of God, for which reason we ought to believe and observe them. But this is an obvious and shameless lie; for how can they prove it?

22. But, they say, the Christian church is always led by the Holy Spirit, who will not permit the church to err or go wrong. To this we answer with what we said before: However good the

church may be, it has never possessed the Spirit in as large a measure as Mary, who although she was led by the Spirit, erred nevertheless, so that we might learn from her experience. If she herself is uncertain, how can you make me certain? Whither should we then go? We must also come into the temple, that is to say we must cling to the Word of God, which is secure and will not fail us and where we will certainly find Christ. I must therefore always be with the Word, if I cleave to it. If the Word of God goes conquering through death and remains alive, I must also pass through death to life, and nothing can hinder or destroy me, neither sin nor death, nor the devil. The comfort and boldness I derive from the Word of God cannot be engendered by any other doctrine, for none can be compared with it.

23. Therefore it is necessary that we understand this clearly and not place our confidence in human doctrines and the teachings of the holy fathers. God has demonstrated this by many other examples in order to teach us not in the least to depend upon men, as the saints also may sometimes make mistakes. We read for instance in Acts 15:5f that not more than eighteen years after the ascension of Christ the apostles and the majority of the Christians held a conference. The question was raised whether the Gentiles should be compelled to submit to circumcision. There stood up the leaders of the sect of the Pharisees who believed and said: It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses. There was a great commotion and all seemed to hold the same opinion. Only Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James were opposed to this view, and Peter especially rose up and said unto them: God has given the Holy Spirit unto the Gentiles who have heard the Gospel from me, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now if they received the Holy Spirit and were not circumcised, why would you force them and put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they.

24. You notice that many Christians were at this council who were true believers, at a time when the church was in its youthful vigor and almost perfect, and yet God permits them all to err with the exception of three or four men. If these few men had not protested, erroneous doctrines would have been taught and a law not in accordance with the Gospel of Christ been established. Yet we are such blind fools as to say continually: The councils and the church have commanded this or that, and as they cannot be in error, their decrees must be observed.

25. Later on we read that even the most prominent leaders, both Peter and Barnabas, fell into error and all the other Jews with them. Then Paul alone rose up and rebuked Peter publicly, as he himself writes in Galatians 2:11. Now if these holy councils and holy men erred, why should we put our trust in our own councils? For they cannot for an instant be compared with the councils held by the apostles.

26. Why does God permit these things to occur? He does it that we may not depend upon or derive comfort from the words and doctrines of men, however holy they may be, but place our confidence only in the Word of God. If then even an apostle came or an angel from heaven, as St. Paul says in Galatians 1:8-9, who would preach another Gospel, we should openly declare it is not the Word of God and refuse to listen to it. Do not forget that the child can be found in

no other place but the temple, or the house of God. Mary indeed sought him among the kinsfolk, who are the great, learned and pious people, but she did not find him among them.

27. There are many similar examples and types elsewhere in the Gospel which point out the same truth, namely, that nothing should be taught but the Word of God and no other doctrine should be accepted, because Christ can be found only in the Scriptures. Thus we read in the Gospel for Christmas, Luke 2:12, where the angel, who announced the birth of Christ, said to the shepherds: "And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger." Why does he not direct them to Mary and Joseph, but only points them to the swaddling clothes and the manger? The reason is that God will not point us to any saint, not even to the holy mother herself, for they may all err. Therefore a special place must be pointed out where Christ is, namely the manger, where he surely may be found, even if Joseph and Mary were not present. This signifies that Christ is completely wrapped in the Scriptures, just as the body is wrapped in the clothes. The manger is the preaching of the Gospel, where he is lying and where he is apprehended, and from which we take our food. Now it would indeed appear that the child should lie where Joseph and Mary are, these great and holy people. Yet the angel points only to the manger, which he will not have overlooked or dishonored. It is an insignificant and simple expression, but Christ is found in it.

28. The same truth is also pointed out in other narratives, as for instance in that of holy Simeon, who had received a promise from God that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord Christ. He came in the Spirit into the temple, found the child and received him into his arms. But here it is only emphasized that he finds Christ in the temple. From all this we learn that God would warn us against human doctrines, however excellent they may be, advising us not to depend upon them, but cleave to the only true guide, the Word of God. Lay aside everything else. Their declarations and decrees may indeed be good and right, but our heart cannot trust in them.

29. This then is the comfort we derive from this Gospel in our great trials, of which we have spoken above. We know that consolation may be found only in the Scriptures, the Word of God. For this reason God caused this to be recorded, so that we might learn these lessons, as St. Paul writes to the Romans: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope." Romans 15:4. Here he says that the Scriptures are comforting, that they impart patience and comfort. Consequently there can be nothing else that comforts the soul, not even in the most trifling temptations. For everything else with which man comforts himself, however great it may be, is altogether uncertain, and the heart inquires constantly: Who knows whether it is right? if I only were sure about it! etc. But when the heart clings to the Word of God, it may say without any wavering: This is the Word of God, which can not lie nor err, of this I am certain. And this is our greatest struggle that we keep and hold firmly to the Word; for if that is taken from the heart, man is lost.

30. Let us then be prepared for their representations and expostulations to the effect that the Christian church can not err, so that we may know how to meet them, and say: Here is not the word of man, but the Word of God. We read in this Gospel that his mother, Mary, was filled



with the Holy Spirit, and yet she erred. Likewise we read in the Acts that there was a Christian council of such who believed and who had the Spirit, and yet they stumbled and would have established an unchristian law, if others had not protested. We should therefore not believe any council or, saint, if they come without the Word of God. This is then the sum total of this Gospel, and if anything else is to be said on it, we will let those explain it who have leisure; but he who studies it faithfully, will easily understand it.

31. Some have broken their heads over the meaning of the words of Luke where he says that Christ advanced in wisdom and grace, for they assume that as true God he possessed all wisdom and grace from the time of his conception. But here they have shamefully altered the text with their commentaries. Therefore refrain from such idle talk and let the words stand just as they are without any commentary. We must understand them simply as saying that he grew continually and waxed strong in the Spirit, just as any other man, as we have explained it more fully in the Gospel for the Sunday after Christmas.



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## **FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.**

### **SECOND SERMON - LUKE 2:41-52.**

Contents:

The manifestation of Christ is an example of the cross, and the teaching where Christ is to be sought.

#### **I. AN EXAMPLE OF THE CROSS AND OF SEVERE SUFFERING**

1. Hitherto, under the blindness of the papacy, nothing was taught concerning the blessed saints of God except to cover them with extravagant praise and laudation, and to praise them for exalted devotion and celestial joy, as if on earth they had not also been human beings and as if they had never suffered and felt the adversities, misfortunes and frailties of men; and as if they could not be honored sufficiently, unless they were represented in wood and stone. They have sought to strengthen this idea by means of false and shameful lies and idle tales, as if in this way the saints were highly honored and men spoke of them only in wonder and saw only such examples in them as no one could realize in this life, nor find comfort in them. In consequence they have been turned into idols and men have been taught to call upon them, instead of the Lord Jesus Christ, as intercessors, mediators and helpers in need, to the shameless blasphemy and denial of our blessed Savior and high-priest, Jesus Christ.

2. Thus they also falsely imagined to exalt the mother of Christ and know of no greater honor for her than to fill and over-load her with graces and gifts, as if she had never suffered temptations, had never faltered nor failed in reason, nor in anything else. The holy Scriptures and this Gospel, on the other hand, show how God deals with his saints in a wonderful

manner, according to Psalm 4:4 and in a way altogether contrary to human reason; and that the more highly he endows them with grace and exalts and honors them, the deeper he thrusts them into sorrow and suffering, yea, even into dishonor, shame and desertion.

3. Human reason would undoubtedly teach and advise God not to permit his own Son to be shamefully and ignominiously dealt with as a murderer and malefactor, and allow his blood to be shed, but rather see to it that the angels should bear him on their hands, all kings and nobles fall at his feet and render him all honor. For human wisdom consists in this, that it neither sees, nor seeks, nor desires anything except that which is high and precious, and that which brings honor; and, again, neither shuns nor flees from anything more readily than dishonor, contempt, suffering, misery, and the like. Thus God reverses the order and acts in a contrary way, deals so harshly and offensively, according to human reason and opinion, with his dearly beloved Son as he would not deal with any man on earth, as if he were not the Son of God, or of man, but the child of Satan! In the same way he also dealt with his well-beloved servant, John the Baptist, of whom Christ says, Matthew 11:11, that among those that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than he, and yet upon him he conferred the honor of being beheaded by a knave. This was, indeed, a most dishonorable and shameful death.

4. In like manner he dealt with his dear mother, so that she was compelled to learn and experience how wonderfully God deals with his saints, and the Gospels point out with sufficient clearness, that he very seldom permitted them to see and experience what was noble, precious and joyous, but for the most part caused them to experience suffering and anxiety, as the aged and holy Simeon had foretold her, as a type for all Christians. Besides, he spoke harshly to her and repulsed her in an unfriendly manner.

5. Accordingly, this Gospel presents, first of all, the mother of Christ as an example of cross-bearing and of great suffering, such as God permits his saints to endure. For although the holy Virgin was greatly blessed with all grace and was a beautiful temple of the holy God and in preference to all was accorded the high honor of being the mother of the Son of God, and doubtless had the greatest possible pleasure and joy in her child, more so than any other mother, as was natural; yet God so ordered that she did not merely have exalted pleasure, but also great distress, pain and sorrow because of him. For her first distress was that she was in a strange place when he was born at Bethlehem, where she found no place for her child but a common stable. Her other distress was that within six weeks after his birth she was compelled to flee with the child and remain an exile for seven years. Besides she must have endured many things that are not recorded.

6. One of these afflictions, and not the least, is the misery he caused her to suffer when he permitted himself to be lost to her in the temple, and allowed her to search for him so long. By this he so terrified and saddened her that she might have despaired of finding him, as she confessed when she exclaimed, "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." For let us think for a moment, how she must have felt and grieved. Every father and mother can easily understand the misery and sorrow caused by the unavoidable separation from a dear child, when they know only that the child is lost. And even if the separation should last only an hour, how great are not the sorrow and lamentation, and how many tears are not shed, without consolation, without strength to eat, drink, sleep or rest, and with such misery that they would

prefer to die. How much greater the suffering, if this condition were to continue for a day and a night, or even longer, when each hour must seem like a hundred years!

7. Now, on the other hand, behold this mother who, first loses her only son, a son like whom neither she nor any one else can have; who is alone her son and she alone his mother, without a natural father; yea, who is truly the only-begotten Son of God and in a special manner given and entrusted to her by God, that she, as his mother, should wait on him, care for him, and look after him with all diligence. Hitherto she had nourished him, not without much care and sorrow, and had strenuously defended him among strangers and enemies. Now that he has grown some and she could have her greatest joy and comfort in him, she must suddenly lose him, when she thought he was most secure and her sorrows past, and lose him not only for two hours, nor for a day and night, but three whole days, so that she was compelled to think he was lost for ever. Who can think or say how her motherly heart must have been agonized and afflicted during the three whole days she was searching for him? It was marvelous that she lived through this great sorrow.

8. The affliction and suffering she was compelled to endure were not of a nature that they had occurred without her fault, but her conscience forced her to remember how God had entrusted the child to her and that no one else was accountable for him, and hence storms burst and thundered in her heart: Behold, thou hast lost the child. This is no one's fault but thine own; for thou shouldst have waited on him and looked after him, and not permitted him for a moment to go out of thy sight. How wilt thou give an account of this before God, since thou hast failed to watch over him? This is the result of sin and thou art no longer worthy to be his mother; yea, thou hast deserved to be condemned by him before all people, inasmuch as he has conferred on thee the great honor and favor of choosing thee for his mother.

9. Should not her heart have failed and fainted here from anxiety, for two reasons? First, because she lost her son and was unable to find him; secondly, which was the most severe of all and which could not happen to other mothers, making the pain all the more severe, because she must abhor herself before God, the only Father of the child, that he would no longer have or regard her as his mother, and hence she must be more sorrowful and sad at heart than any other woman on earth. In her own heart she regards herself guilty of the same sin as Eve, the first mother, who brought the whole human race to ruin. For what are all sins compared with this one, that she has neglected and lost this child, the Son of God and the Savior of the World? And if he should not be found, or, since he could not be lost, if God should have taken him back to himself, she would be the cause of preventing the completion of the work of the redemption of the world. Such and doubtless many other thoughts filled her heart with great fear, especially since she, as a pious child of God, had a very tender heart and conscience.

10. Here you may see how God dealt with the most holy person, the mother of his Son, even though she had been most highly honored by him and her joy in her Son had been immeasurably great, such as no mother ever had; and yet God so assailed her and she must be so divested of her honor and comfort that she cannot say, I am the mother of the Son. Previously she had been exalted to heaven, now she has been suddenly cast into deepest hell

and is in such terror and sorrow that she might have despaired and died, and have wished that she had never seen the child, nor heard of him; and thus she might have committed a more grievous sin than any other person ever committed.

11. Thus you see, that God can deal with his saints in a way to deprive them of happiness and comfort whenever he pleases, and cast them into the greatest fear concerning that in which they have their greatest joy. So, likewise, he can again confer the greatest joy. For this was the greatest joy of this holy Virgin, that she had become the mother of this child, but now she has no greater terror and sorrow than that caused by this Son. Thus, we can have no greater terror than that caused by sin and death; and yet God can comfort us even in this, so that we may glory in the fact, as St. Paul says, Romans 5:20-21, that sin was compelled to serve to the end that grace might be greater and much more abound. And death, overcome by Christ, furnishes the reason why we may desire death and be able to die with gladness.

12. Again, if God has given us a precious faith and we therefore live in strong confidence of the fact that we have a gracious God through Christ, we are in paradise. But before we are aware, it may happen that God may cause our hearts to fail and we may think that he wants to tear Christ cut of our hearts, and Christ may be so hidden from us that we can find no consolation in him, but instead receive only horrible thoughts into our hearts from the devil; so that we may feel as if we had lost Christ and then struggle and tremble as if on account of our sins we had deserved nothing from him but wrath and condemnation.

13. Yea, though it may not be a matter of open sin, the devil can make sin of that which is no sin, and so move and terrify the heart that it will plague itself with the thought: Who knows, if God will accept thee or Christ be favorable to thee? So here; this dear mother doubted whether he would still regard her as his mother and felt in her heart as if she had neglected and lost her Son, although she was innocent in the whole matter, since he was not lost. Thus the heart speaks in temptation: Yea, God has indeed given thee an excellent faith; but perhaps he will no longer give it thee. Thou hast deserved this from some cause or other.

14. And this is the greatest and most severe trial and suffering which God at times visits upon and exercises over his saints, namely, that which we are accustomed to call deserted by grace (*desertionem gratiae*), on account of which the human heart feels as if the grace of God had been withdrawn, so that no matter where it turns it sees nothing but wrath and terror. But this great trial is not experienced by every one, and no one can understand its significance unless he has experienced it. A strong spirit is required in order to endure such blows.

15. Yet these examples are held up to us, in order that we may learn from them how to guard and console our selves in temptation and to prepare ourselves for the time when God may see fit to assail us with similar great trials, in order that we may not be led to despair. For this has not been written for the sake of this Virgin, the mother of Christ, but for our benefit, in order that by it we may be taught and comforted.

16. For the same reason numerous examples of the great trials of other exalted saints are presented in Scriptures, among whom undoubtedly was that of the patriarch Jacob, of whom Moses writes, Genesis 32:24, that he wrestled the whole night with God; again, of Joshua. Joshua 7:7, to whom God had given the great and powerful promise that he should be able to overcome the heathen that opposed him, admonished him to be comforted and undismayed, for he would be with him, etc. On the strength of this promise Joshua went joyously forward, boldly struck out against his enemies, and gained a great victory. But what happened? Even while he possessed such faith and courage and in the same faith had taken and destroyed Jericho, it came to pass that not more than three thousand men from among all the people of Israel were sent to Ai to conquer and destroy it. They were proud and audacious, because the city was small and the enemy few in number. But when they arrived at the city, they were suddenly seized with fear, turned their backs and fled from the enemy, although not more than thirty six of their number were slain. Joshua himself lost courage, prostrated himself on the ground and lay on his face all day and cried to God: "Alas, O Lord, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us? would that we had been content and dwelt beyond Jordan." Behold the great and valiant hero lies there on the ground with his faith, who had received the strong Word of God, and God alone can raise him up again. Why is he so despondent? Simply because God, in order to try him, had concealed himself and therefore had disheartened him, in order that Joshua might learn to realize what man is and can do without the divine help.

17. Sufferings like these are immeasurably heavy and unbearable to human nature; therefore the saints cry and complain woefully and wretchedly under them, many examples of which are found in the Psalms, as Psalm 31:23, "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes," that is, "I knew and felt nothing else than that my heart said to me, God does not care for you." And if God would not support them by his power and help them out of their sufferings, they would have to sink into hell. Thus Psalm 94:17 says "*Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had soon dwelt in silence.*"

18. Therefore, this holy Virgin was a real martyr for three days, and these days were heavier to her than was the external pain of martyrdom to other saints. She had had such anxiety on her Son's account that she could not have suffered any more bitter pain, For that is the greatest torture and woe, when the heart is attacked and tortured. All other sufferings that assail the body are more endurable; yea, amid them the heart can be joyful and can scorn all bodily suffering, as we read concerning St. Agnes and other martyrs. That is only half-suffering when the body alone is afflicted, while the heart and soul remain full of joy; but when the heart alone is compelled to endure suffering only great and noble spirits, and special grace and strength, are able to endure it.

19. Now, why does God permit these afflictions to come upon his loved ones? Certainly not without reason, nor from wrath or lack of grace, but from motives of great grace and mercy, in order to show us how, in all things, he deals with us in a friendly and paternal manner and how faithfully he cares for his own and so guides them that their faith may be more and more exercised and become stronger and stronger. But he does this especially for the following reasons.

20. First, that he may guard his own against presumption, so that great saints, who have received special grace and gifts from God, may not presume and depend on themselves. For if they should at all times be strong in spirit, and experience only joy and sweetness, they might finally fall into the fatal pride of the devil, which despises God and trusts in self. Hence they must be seasoned and tempered so as not always to feel the power of the Spirit; but that their faith may at times tumble and their hearts tremble, in order that they may see what they are and be compelled to confess that they cannot do anything unless God sustains them by his pure grace. Thus God keeps them in humility and the knowledge of themselves, so that they do not become proud nor carnally secure in regard to their faith and holiness, as it happened to St. Peter, when he boasted he was willing to lay down his life for Christ, John 13:37.

21. Thus the prophet David confesses that he was compelled to learn this lesson, Psalm 30:6-7; "I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved. Thou didst hide thy face, I was troubled." And St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 complains of the great affliction that befell him in Asia, saying: "We would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life; yea, we ourselves have had the answer of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead." And in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 he says that there was given him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, that he should not be too highly exalted, on account of the great revelation which he had received; and that God would not remove this, although he had prayed thrice, but had to cling to the consolation which God afforded him, namely, that he should be satisfied with his grace and by means of it overcome his weakness. Therefore, such a trial of the saints is as necessary or even more necessary than food and drink, in order that they may remain in fear and humility, and learn to adhere alone to the grace of God.

22. Secondly, God permits his saints to suffer these trials as an example for others, both to alarm the carnally secure and to comfort the timid and alarmed. The wicked and impenitent may learn from this how to amend their ways, keep themselves from sin, since they can see that God deals even with the saints in a way to produce anxiety, in order that they may feel nothing but wrath and disfavor, and become alarmed as if they had committed the grossest sins that man can commit. So here, the mother of Christ was forced to contend, even till the third day, with a heavy heart, which accused her as if she had lost the Son of God, a sin the like of which no one else on earth had committed, and she had to fear only the Most High; and yet truly there was no such sin, nor wrath, nor disfavor.

23. If, therefore, the hearts of the godly are overwhelmed with such heavy and unbearable alarm and anxiety, what shall become of others who lie securely and continue impenitent in real sins, and who deserve and heap up the wrath of God? How shall they be able to stand when suddenly seized by fear, which may happen at any moment?

24. Again, such examples are intended to serve as a means of comfort for alarmed and anxious consciences, when they see that God has attacked not only them, but also the most exalted saints and permitted them to suffer the same trials and anxieties. For if we had no examples in Scripture, showing that these things happened to the saints, we would not be able to endure, and timid consciences would be led to cry out: Yea, I alone am compelled to endure

these sufferings; when did God permit the pious and holy ones to be thus tempted? Hence, it must be a sign that God will have nothing to do with me. But when we see and hear that God has in like manner dealt with his saints and did not spare even his own mother, we have the knowledge and comfort that we need not despair in our trials, but remain quiet and wait until he helps us, even as he has helped all his saints.

25. In the third place, we note the true reason why God does this, namely, in order that he may teach his saints to seek true comfort and prepare themselves that they may find Christ and keep him. The principal part of this Gospel lesson is to teach us how and where we are to seek and find Christ. So the text says that Mary and Joseph sought the child Jesus for three days without finding him, neither in Jerusalem, nor among their friends and acquaintances, until they came to the temple where he sat among the teachers and where the Scriptures and God's Word are studied. And when they were astonished and began to complain how they had sought him with sorrow, he said to them:

## **II. THE TEACHING AS TO WHERE WE ARE TO SEEK CHRIST.**

*“How is it that ye sought me? Knew ye not that I must be in my Father's house (in the things of my Father)?”*

26. *What is meant by “I must be in the things of my Father?”* Are not all creatures the Father's? All things belong to him; but he gave us the creatures for our use, that we should use them in our earthly life according to our best understanding. But one thing he reserved for himself, which is holy and is called God's own, and which we are in a special manner to receive from him. This is his holy Word, through which he rules the hearts and consciences, and makes holy and saves. Therefore, the temple is also called his holy place or his holy dwelling place, in order that he may there manifest himself and be heard through his Word. Hence Christ is in the things of his Father, when he speaks to us through his Word and by means of it leads us to the Father.

27. Behold, he punishes his parents because they had erred and had sought him among earthly and human affairs, among friends and acquaintances, not thinking that he must be in that which is his Father's. He wishes to indicate by this, that his kingdom and the whole essence of Christianity consists alone in the Word and in faith, not in external things (as the external and hypocritical sanctity of Judaism), nor in temporal and worldly ordinance or government. In a word; he will not permit himself to be found, either among friends and acquaintances, nor in anything outside of his Word. For he does not wish to be worldly, nor in that which is worldly, but in that which is his Father's, even as he always manifested himself from his birth through his entire life. He was, indeed, in the world, but he did not conform to the world, as he also said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” He was among friends and acquaintances and came to them, but did not identify himself with any of their affairs in the world, except that he sojourned in the world as a guest and used it to satisfy the wants of his body; but he waits alone on that which is his Father's i.e., the Word. There he can be found; there he who wishes truly to find him, must seek him.

28. Hence, as I have already said, God will not tolerate that we depend on anything else and permit our hearts to trust in anything that is not Christ in his Word, be it ever so holy and spiritual. Faith has no other foundation on which it can stand. Hence, it happened that the wisdom, thoughts and hopes of the mother of Christ and of Joseph must fail and everything be lost while they were seeking him in other places. For they did not seek him as they ought, but as flesh and blood do, which always grope after other comfort than that of the Word; for it always wants what it can see and feel, and acquire by meditation and reason.

29. Therefore God permits them to fall and fail, in order that they may learn that all comfort not based on the Word, but on flesh and blood, on men and all other creatures, must inevitably fail. Here everything must be abandoned; friends, acquaintances and the whole city of Jerusalem, all art, wit and everything belonging to these and to men; for all this neither gives nor aids comfort, until the Lord is sought in the temple, since he is in that which is his Father's. There he can truly be found and the heart is made to rejoice, or else it would have to remain without the least comfort.

30. Accordingly, if God permits us to be thus sorely tried, we should learn then not to follow our own opinion, or human counsel, which directs us hither and thither, nor to depend on ourselves and others, but we should consider that we must seek Christ in the things of his Father; that is, that we cling simply and alone to the Word of the Gospel, which directs us Christians in the right way and gives us correct knowledge. Therefore, if you desire to comfort others or yourself, learn in this and all other spiritual trials to say with Christ; Why is it that you run hither and thither and so torment yourself with anxious and sorrowful thoughts, as if God had no more grace for you and as if Christ was not to be found, and that you will not be satisfied unless you find him by your own efforts and can feel yourself holy and without sin? Nothing can result from this; it is merely lost effort and labor. Do you not know that he does not wish to be found, except in that which is his Father's? Not in that which you or all other men are or have. It is not the fault of Christ and his grace; he indeed is not nor does he remain lost, he may always be found. But the fault lies in you, because you do not seek him rightly where he is to be found, since you judge according to your own feelings and think you can lay hold on him through your own thoughts. You must come to this, where neither your work and rule, nor that of any human being, but that of God is, namely, his Word. There you shall meet him, and hear and see that there is neither wrath nor displeasure there, as you feared and dreaded would be, but pure grace and sincere love toward you and as a friendly and dear mediator he entreats the Father most earnestly and effectually for you. Nor does he send such trial upon you in order to cast you off, but that you may the better learn to know and the more closely cling to his Word, to punish your lack of understanding and that you may experience how earnestly and faithfully he cares for you.

31. Behold, here is the precious doctrine of this Gospel, namely, how rightly to seek Christ and how he may be found; and it points out the real comfort that can satisfy troubled consciences, take away all terror and anxiety and again rejoice the heart and at the same time give it a new life. But the heart must become heavy before it can attain and lay hold of this truth; it must first run and experience that everything else is lost and useless in the search for Christ, and finally no counsel is to be had, unless you give yourself, without your own and all



human comfort, to the Word alone. In bodily mishaps and straits you may seek comfort in gold, possessions, friends and acquaintances; but in these matters you must have something that is not human but divine, namely, the Word, through which alone Christ deals with us and we can deal with him. This how ever, is especially to be noted, as the Evangelist says: *“They understood not the saying, which he spake unto them.”*

32. This should shut the mouths of vain babblers who exalt the holy Virgin Mary and other saints as if they knew everything and could not err; for you can see here how they err and falter, not only in this that they seek Christ and know not where to find him until they accidentally come to the temple, but also that they could not understand these words with which he censured their ignorance and is compelled to say to them: “Knew ye not, that I must be in the things of my Father.?” The Evangelist has pointed this out with great diligence, in order that men should not give credence to such falsehoods as ignorant, inexperienced and conceited teachers of workrighteousness present in exalting the saints, even setting them up as idols.

33. The holy Virgin is not in need of such falsely invented praise. God led her in such a way that he concealed much from her and daily permitted many things to happen which she had not known beforehand, in order that he might keep her humble, so that she should not regard her self better than others. And this is praise and honor enough for her, that he guided and sustained her by his grace, although he had endowed her with many far greater gifts than others; and yet so that she, like others, was compelled, through manifold temptations and sorrows, to learn daily and grow in grace.

34. Examples like this are useful and necessary to show us that even the saints, who are the children of God and highly favored above others, still have weaknesses so that they frequently err and blunder, yea, retain many faults, at times even commit great sins; yet not intentionally and willfully, but from weakness and ignorance, as we see again and again in the lives of the apostles. This happens in order that we may learn neither to build nor depend on any man; but, as this Gospel teaches, to cling to the Word of God only; and in order that we may find comfort in such examples and be not led to despair, although we may be weak and ignorant; and yet that we should not become bold and carnally secure on account of such grace as the haughty and pretended saints are wont to do.

35. In a word, you have in this Gospel a strong example with which to overthrow the common cry both of the false saints and the great critics, which they still keep up, in order that contrary to the Word of God they may continue in their trifling; to wit, that they may reproach us with the writings and teachings of the fathers and the decrees of the church and councils; for, they say, these had the Holy Spirit, therefore they could not err, etc. In this way they desire to mislead us concerning the Scriptures and the true place to which Christ himself points and where he can surely be found; in order that what happened to Mary the mother, and to Joseph may happen also to us, namely, that we seek Christ everywhere and yet find him nowhere except at the place where he is to be found. The same thing has been carried on with great power in Christendom through the cursed government of the pope, who has striven both by

his teachings and actions, threats and punishments to cause men to fail in seeking or finding Christ in the Scriptures.

36. As was stated in the exposition of the Gospel for the preceding Sunday, they filled the world with three kinds of doctrines by which men have been led away from the Word of God. The first was the very gross one written by St. Thomas (of doubtful sanctity) and others by the schoolmen (scholastics) which proceeds from heathen art and natural reason, concerning which they have said: The light of nature is like a beautiful and bright tablet, and Scripture is like the sun shining on this tablet, causing it to shine all the more brightly. So also the divine light shines on the light of nature and illumines it. With this comparison they introduced this heathen doctrine into Christendom. According to this view they have both taught and conducted the high schools in a way to reverse the comparison and thereby attempted, by means of reason and Aristotle, art and teaching, to illumine Scripture, which nevertheless is the only true light, and without which all the light of reason is simply darkness in divine things and in the articles of faith, as we have often said before.

37. In the second place, the world has been filled with the teachings and commands of men and the so-called ordinances and commands of the church concerning fasts, celebrations, prayers, singing, vestments, monkery, etc., with which all the trickeries of the pope and the books of the Summists are filled and by means of these they have held out to the people the false hope of leading them to heaven. This has burst upon men like a flood and drowned the world, ensnared and captured all consciences, so that it is almost impossible to rescue any one from these jaws of hell. On the basis of this the examples of the saints and the deceived have been so led, and this has been confirmed by the popes and councils, that they were forced to regard them as of equal value with the articles of faith. Therefore they shouted like the insane, without intermission: Aye, the councils have decreed this, the church has commanded it, it has been maintained ever so long, and like statements.

38. In the third place, besides these two doctrines they have abandoned Holy Scripture; yet so as to attach it to some of the writings and expositions of the fathers, nevertheless not any farther than it pleased the pope and would not prove contrary to his law, and that no one should use Scripture except in accordance with the pleasure of the pope, to whom alone pertains the interpretations of Scripture and whose knowledge and judgments every one is bound to accept. Yet, in spite of this, they so far honor the fathers as to demand that their interpretations and explanations should be followed. All the world accepted this and so received all that the fathers said, as if they could not err, and shouted again: Aye, how could it be possible that so many holy, learned and highly intelligent men should not have understood the Scriptures?

39. To this we should reply as is taught in this Gospel: Be they called holy, learned, fathers, councils, or any other name, even though they were Mary, Joseph and all the saints it does not follow that they could not have erred and made mistakes. For here you learn that the mother of Christ though she possessed great intelligence and enlightenment, showed great ignorance in that she did not know where to find Christ, and in consequence was censured by him because she did not know what she should have known. If she failed and through her

ignorance was brought to such anxiety and sorrow that she thought she had lost Christ, is it a wonder that other saints should often have erred and stumbled, when they followed their own notions, without the guidance of Scripture, or put their own notions into Scripture.

40. Hence, it amounts to nothing, if one asserts that men must believe and adhere to the decrees of councils or the teachings and writings of the holy fathers; for all these can and may err. But on the other hand, a definite place must be designated where Christ is and desires to be found, namely, as he here himself points out, when he says: He must be in that which is his Father's.

41. It would be well for us Christians if we always followed the example presented in this Gospel and make it a maxim against all teachings and whatever can be set up against the Word of God, and say: Christ should not be sought among kinsfolk and acquaintances, nor in anything that men may have, no matter how holy, pious, or great they may be; for the mother of Christ herself erred and sinned because she did not know or understand this.

42. Therefore conscience cannot establish itself on any saint or any creature, but on Christ alone. I may regard and honor reason and natural light ever so highly, but this will I reserve that I dare not depend on it. Whatever the holy fathers and councils may have taught, decreed and ordered, as seemed good to them, I let pass for what it is worth, yet only so, that I am not to be bound by them, as if I were compelled to observe them or depend upon them. In a word, you may allow all these things to remain and stand for their true worth in human affairs, which are regulated as we deem best; but we dare not substitute them for Christ, that is, the comforts of our souls for them, but regard them merely as being concerned about the outward human life before the world.

43. If the papists had been willing to admit this, as the Word of God teaches, we would long ago have been united with them, would have been satisfied that they should order and establish these human affairs as it pleased them, reserving, however, the freedom for ourselves not to be forced to maintain them further than it is our pleasure, not from necessity or as if they had any value before God. They are not indeed willing to do this, but have hung their additions to it so that men are bound to observe their ordinances as if they were necessary to salvation, and call them the commands of the Church of Christ and their non-observance a mortal sin. We neither can nor will do or allow any thing of the kind.

44. Yea, say they, the church, the holy fathers, and the councils have decreed and determined many things in controversial articles against the heretics, that have been received, which each one must believe and observe; therefore what has been decreed by the church and councils concerning other matters must also have authority.

45. Answer: here they must again permit us freedom of judgment, so that we may not be bound, without any exception, by what the councils decreed or the fathers taught; but be allowed to maintain this distinction, namely, if they have determined and established anything in harmony with the Word of God, we accept it, not for their sake, but because of the Word itself, on which they ground themselves and to which they direct us. In this case, they do not

act as mere men, but lead us to that which is God's, and are no longer among friends and acquaintances, but sit among those who hear Christ and inquire of him about the things of Scripture. Then we gladly honor them by listening to them. But when they determine anything contrary to and outside of this rule concerning other matters, not according to the Word of God, but according to their own opinion, this does not concern the conscience. Hence, it is to be regarded as a human affair by which we dare not be bound, nor be compelled to regard them as if they contained Christian faith and doctrine, but as St. Augustine has correctly said: *Totum hoc genus habet liberas observationes*, – as to what this thing is, we are free to observe or not.

46. You say further: Yea, the church and the fathers were endowed with the Holy Spirit, who kept them from error. The answer to this is not difficult: The church and councils may have been ever so holy, they did not have the Holy Spirit in greater measure than Mary, the mother of Christ, who was also a member, yea, at the time, the most eminent member of the Church. And although she had been sanctified by the Holy Spirit; yet he permitted her at times to err, even in the important matters of faith. From this it does not follow, that the saints, who were endowed with the Spirit, could on this account not err, nor that everything they said would have to be correct. Great weakness and ignorance may be found to exist even in the most eminent people and hence we cannot judge concerning doctrines and matters of faith on the basis of personal holiness, for all this can fail. But here you come to the Word of God which is sure and infallible, where you shall certainly find Christ and the Holy Spirit, and can be and remain firmly fortified against sin, death, and the devil.

47. Examples like these, which show that even the saints and the great mass called the church may err, we find elsewhere in the Scripture, especially in Acts 15, where it is shown that only eighteen years after the Ascension of Christ, the apostles and the whole body of Christians came together in Jerusalem. At that time the most eminent and learned of the Pharisees, who had become believers, arose and taught that converts from heathenism would have to be circumcised and be compelled to observe the law of Moses and by this teaching drew nearly the entire body of believers to their views. Then Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James stood alone in opposition to this view and concluded from Scriptures that the Gentiles should not be burdened with the observance of the Law, since God had bestowed on them, without the Law, through the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit even as upon the Jews. Behold, here were so many Christians who had faith at a time when the church was young and at her best, and yet all of them, except those three or four, fell into the error of thinking that the Law of Moses was necessary to salvation. If these few had not contended against this error, an erroneous article and command against Christ would have been established and confirmed. Again, at a later period St. Peter, who had maintained the true doctrine, stumbled with Barnabas at the same article, in that they dissembled with the Jews who refused to eat with the Gentiles and thereby gave offense to the Gentiles, in the breach of this freedom, so that St. Paul was compelled to reprimand them publicly, as he does in Galatians 2:11. Therefore, let us learn from this example to be prudent in the matters that concern faith and Christ, not allowing ourselves to be led by men, but adhering to the Word and maintaining the rule which St. Paul lays down in Galatians 1:8-9, that, even though an angel should come from heaven and preach

another Gospel, he should be accursed; and the fact remains that Christ can be found nowhere else than in that which is God's.

48. The same truth has been previously presented in many figures and examples, as in the Gospel for Christmas, Luke 2:12, where the angels give no other sign to the shepherds by which they might find Christ than the manger and the swaddling clothes. There they should find him lying and wrapped up, not in the bosom of the mother, nor on her lap, which would have seemed credible. That is, God does not wish to direct us to any saint or person of man, but only to the Word or Scripture, in which Christ is wrapped as in swaddling clothes, and in the poor manger (that is the preaching of the Gospel), which is so highly esteemed, and serves merely for the feeding of the cattle. Again, we have also heard from the aged and holy Simeon who, as had been promised him by God, should not die until he had seen Christ, but who does not recognize him until by the instigation of the Holy Spirit he enters the temple. So also the wise men from the east who, when they came to Jerusalem and no longer saw the star, hear of no other sign concerning Christ, as to where he was born and where he could be found, than the Scripture of the prophet Micah. So much may be said concerning the most important teaching and the principal parts of this Gospel. Finally, it is also to be noted that the Evangelist says: *“His mother kept all these sayings in her heart.”*

49. This is also given for our admonition, in order that we may endeavor to keep the Word of God in our hearts, as the blessed Virgin did, who, seeing she had erred and lacked understanding, became all the more diligent to keep in her heart all she heard from Christ. She furnishes another example, that above all things we should adhere to the Word and not permit it to go out of our hearts, but constantly use it, learn to gain strength from it, find comfort in it, and increase in it, as is indeed necessary for all of us. For when we come to the point where we shall be tried and tempted, we are liable to be forgotten or dropped even by those who are diligent.

50. Whatever else might be said concerning this Gospel, as how Christ went home with his parents and was obedient and subject to them, etc., is easy and may readily be ascertained. Again, how we are to understand that Christ increased in wisdom and in favor was presented in the Gospel for a previous Sunday.

