

The First Sunday in Advent;

Matthew 21:1-9

1. In the preface I said that there are two things to be noted and considered in the Gospel lessons: first, the works of Christ presented to us as a gift and blessing on which our faith is to cling and exercise itself; secondly, the same works offered as an example and model for us to imitate and follow. All Gospel lessons teach us first faith and then good works. We will therefore consider this Gospel under three heads: speaking first of faith; secondly of good works, and thirdly of the lesson story and its hidden meaning.

I. CONCERNING FAITH

2. This Gospel encourages and demands faith, or it pre-figures Christ coming with grace, and none may receive or accept save he who believes him to be the man, and has the mind, as this Gospel portrays in Christ. Nothing but the mercy, tenderness and kindness of Christ are here shown, and he who so receives and believes on him is saved. He sits not upon a proud steed, an animal of war, nor does he come in great pomp and power, but sitting upon an ass, an animal of peace fit only for burdens and labor and a help to man. He indicates by this that he comes not to frighten man, nor to drive or crush him, but to help and to carry his burden for him. And although it was the custom of the country to ride on asses and to use horses for war, as the Scriptures often tell us, yet here the object is to show that the entrance of this king shall be meek and lowly.

Again it also shows the pomp and conduct of the disciples towards Christ who bring the colt to Christ, set him thereon, and spread their garments in the way; also that of the multitude who also spread their garments in the way and cut branches from the trees. They manifested no fear nor terror, but only blessed confidence in him as one for whom they dared to do such things and who would take it kindly and readily consent to it.

3. Again, he begins his journey and comes to the Mount of Olives to indicate that he comes out of pure mercy. For olive oil in the Scriptures signifies the grace of God that soothes and strengthens the soul as oil soothes and strengthens the body.

4. Thirdly, there is no armor present, no war-cry, but songs and praise, rejoicing and thanksgiving to the Lord.

5. Fourthly, Christ, as Luke 19,41 writes, weeps over Jerusalem because she does not know nor receive such grace; yet he was so grieved at her loss that he did not deal harshly with her.

6. Fifthly, his goodness and mercy are best shown when he quotes the words of the prophets, Isa. 62, 11; Zach. 9,9, and tenderly invites men to believe and accept Christ, for the fulfilling of which prophecies the events of this Gospel took place and the story was written, as the Evangelist himself testifies. Therefore we must look upon this verse as the chief part of this Gospel, for in it

Christ is pictured to us and we are told what we are to believe, and to expect of him, what we are to seek in him, and how we may be benefitted by him.

7. First he says: "Tell ye" the daughter of Zion. This is said to the ministry and a new sermon is given them to preach, namely, nothing but what the words following indicate, a right knowledge of Christ. Whoever preaches anything else is a wolf and deceiver. This is one of the verses in which the Gospel is promised of which Paul writes in Rom. 1, 2; for the Gospel is a sermon from Christ, as he is here placed before us, calling for faith in him.

8. I have often said that there are two kinds of faith. First, a faith in which you indeed believe that Christ is such a man as he is described and proclaimed here and in all the Gospels, but do not believe that he is such a man for you, and are in doubt whether you have any part in him and think: Yes, he is such a man to others, to Peter, Paul, and the blessed saints; but who knows that he is such to me and that I may expect the same from him and may confide in it, as these saints did?

9. Behold, this faith is nothing, it does not receive Christ nor enjoy him, neither can it feel any love and affection for him or from him. It is a faith about Christ and not in or of Christ, a faith which the devils also have as well as evil men. For who is it that does not believe that Christ is a gracious king to the saints? This vain and wicked faith is now taught by the pernicious synagogues of Satan. The universities (Paris and her sister schools), together with the monasteries and all Papists, say that this faith is sufficient to make Christians. In this way they virtually deny Christian faith, make heathen and Turks out of Christians, as St. Peter in 2 Pet. 2,1 had foretold: "There shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them."

10. In the second place he particularly mentions, "The daughter of Zion." In these words he refers to the other, the true faith. For if he commands that the following words concerning Christ be proclaimed, there must be some one to hear, to receive, and to treasure them in firm faith. He does not say: Tell of the daughter of Zion, as if some one were to believe that she has Christ; but to her you are to say that she is to believe it of herself, and not in any wise doubt that it will be fulfilled as the words declare. That alone can be called Christian faith, which believes without wavering that Christ is the Saviour not only to Peter and to the saints but also to you. Your salvation does not depend on the fact that you believe Christ to be the Saviour of the godly, but that he is a Saviour to you and has become your own.

11. Such a faith will work in you love for Christ and joy in him, and good works will naturally follow. If they do not, faith is surely not present; for where faith is, there the Holy Ghost is and must work love and good works.

12. This faith is condemned by apostate and rebellious Christians, the pope, bishops, priests, monks, and the universities. They call it arrogance to desire to be like the saints. Thereby they fulfill the prophecy of Peter in 2 Pet. 2, 2, where he says of these false teachers: "By reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of." For this reason, when they hear faith praised, they think love and good works are prohibited. In their great blindness they do not know what faith, love and good works are. If you would be a Christian you must permit these words to be

spoken to you and hold fast to them and believe without a doubt that you will experience what they say. You must not consider it arrogance that in this you are like the saints, but rather a necessary humility and despair not of God's grace but of your own worthiness. Under penalty of the loss of salvation, does God ask for boldness toward his proffered grace. If you do not desire to become holy like the saints, where will you abide? That would be arrogance if you desired to be saved by your own merit and works, as the Papists teach. They call that arrogance which is faith, and that faith which is arrogance; poor, miserable, deluded people!

13. If you believe in Christ and in his advent, it is the highest praise and thanks to God to be holy. If you recognize, love, and magnify his grace and work in you, and cast aside and condemn self and the works of self, then are you a Christian. We say: "I believe in the holy Christian church, the communion of saints." Do you desire to be a part of the holy Christian church and communion of saints, you must also be holy as she is, yet not of yourself but through Christ alone in whom all are holy.

14. Thirdly he says: "Behold." With this word he rouses us at once from sleep and unbelief as though he had something great, strange, or remarkable to offer, something we have long wished for and now would receive with joy. Such waking up is necessary for the reason that everything that concerns faith is against reason and nature; for example, how can nature and reason comprehend that such an one should be king of Jerusalem who enters in such poverty and humility as to ride upon a borrowed ass? How does such an advent become a great king? But faith is of the nature that it does not judge nor reason by what it sees or feels but by what it hears. It depends upon the Word alone and not on vision or sight. For this reason Christ was received as a king only by the followers of the word of the prophet, by the believers in Christ, by those who judged and received his kingdom not by sight but by the spirit-these are the true daughters of Zion. For it is not possible for those not to be offended in Christ who walk by sight and feeling and do not adhere firmly to the Word.

15. Let us receive first and hold fast this picture in which the nature of faith is placed before us. For as the appearance and object of faith as here presented is contrary to nature and reason, so the same ineffectual and unreasonable appearance is to be found in all articles and instances of faith. It would be no faith if it appeared and acted as faith acts and as the words indicate. It is faith because it does not appear and deport itself as faith and as the words declare. If Christ had entered in splendor like a king of earth, the appearance and the words would have been according to nature and reason and would have seemed to the eye according to the words, but then there would have been no room for faith. He who believes in Christ must find riches in poverty, honor in dishonor, joy in sorrow, life in death, and hold fast to them in that faith which clings to the Word and expects such things.

16. Fourthly: "Thy king." Here he distinguishes this king from all other kings. It is thy king, he says, who was promised to you, whose own you are, who alone shall direct you, yet in the spirit and not in the body. It is he for whom you have yearned from the beginning, whom the fathers have desired to see, who will deliver you from all that has hitherto burdened, troubled, and held you captive.

Oh, this is a comforting word to a believing heart, for without Christ, man is subjected to many raging tyrants who are not kings but murderers, at whose hands he suffers great misery and

fear. These are the devil, the flesh, the world, sin, also the law and eternal death, by all of which the troubled conscience is burdened, is under bondage, and lives in anguish. For where there is sin there is no clear conscience; where there is no clear conscience, there is a life of uncertainty and an unquenchable fear of death and hell in the presence of which no real joy can exist in the heart, as Lev. 26, 36 says: "The sound of a driven leaf shall chase them."

17. Where the heart receives the king with a firm faith, it is secure and does not fear sin, death, hell, nor any other evil; for he well knows and in no wise doubts that this king is the Lord of life and death, of sin and grace, of hell and heaven, and that all things are in his hand. For this reason he became our king and came down to us that he might deliver us from these tyrants and rule over us himself alone. Therefore he who is under this king cannot be harmed either by sin, death, hell, Satan, man or any other creature. As his king lives without sin and is blessed, so must he be kept forever without sin and death in living blessedness.

18. See, such great things are contained in these seemingly unimportant words: "Behold, thy king." Such boundless gifts are brought by this poor and despised king. All this reason does not understand, nor nature comprehends, but faith alone does. Therefore he is called thy king; thine, who art vexed and harassed by sin, Satan, death and hell, the flesh and the world, so that thou mayest be governed and directed in the grace, in the spirit, in life, in heaven, in God.

With this word, therefore, he demands faith in order that you may be certain that he is such a king to you, has such a kingdom, and has come and is proclaimed for this purpose. If you do not believe this of him, you will never acquire such faith by any work of yours. What you think of him you will have; what you expect of him you will find; and as you believe so shall it be to you. He will still remain what he is, the King of life, of grace, and of salvation, whether he is believed on or not.

19. Fifthly: He "cometh." Without doubt you do not come to him and bring him to you; he is too high and too far from you. With all your effort, work and labor you cannot come to him, lest you boast as though you had received him by your own merit and worthiness. No, dear friend, all merit and worthiness is out of the question, and there is nothing but demerit and unworthiness on your side, nothing but grace and mercy on his. The poor and the rich here come together, as Prov. 22, 2 says.

20. By this are condemned all those infamous doctrines of free will, which come from the pope, universities and monasteries. For all their teaching consists in that we are to begin and lay the first stone. We should by the power of free will first seek God, come to him, run after him and acquire his grace. Beware, beware of this poison! It is nothing but the doctrine of devils, by which all the world is betrayed. Before you can cry to God and seek him God must come to you and must have found you, as Paul says, Rom. 10, 14-15: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent?" God must lay the first stone and begin with you, if you are to seek him and pray to him. He is present when you begin to seek. If he were not you could not accomplish anything but mere sin and the greater the sin, the greater and holier the work you will attempt and you will become a hardened hypocrite.

21. You ask, how shall we begin to be godly and what shall we do that God may begin his work in us? Answer: Do you not understand, it is not for you to work or to begin to be godly, as little as it is to further and complete it. Everything that you begin is in and remains sin, though it shines ever so brightly; you cannot do anything but sin, do what you will. Hence, the teaching of all the schools and monasteries is misleading, when they teach man to begin to pray and do good works, to found something, to give, to sing, to become spiritual and thereby to seek God's grace.

22. You say, however: Then I must sin from necessity, if by my free will I work and live without God? And I could not avoid sin, no matter what I would do? Answer: Truly it is so, that you must remain in sin, do what you will, and that everything is sin you do alone out of your own free will. For if out of your own free will you might avoid sin and do that which pleases God, what need would you have of Christ? He would be a fool to shed his blood for your sin, if you yourself were so free and able to do aught that is not sin. From this you learn how the universities and monasteries with their teachings of free will and good works do nothing else but darken the truth of God so that we know not what Christ is, what we are and what our condition is. They lead the whole world with them into the abyss of hell, and it is indeed time that we eradicate from the earth all chapters and monasteries.

23. Learn then from this Gospel what takes place when God begins to make us godly, and what the first step is in becoming godly. There is no other beginning than that your king comes to you and begins to work in you. It is done in this way: The Gospel must be the first; this must be preached and heard. In it you bear and learn how all your works count for nothing before God and that everything is sinful that you work and do. Your king must first be in you and rule you. Behold, here is the beginning of your salvation; you relinquish your works and despair of yourself, because you hear and see that all you do is sin and amounts to nothing, as the Gospel tells you, and you receive your king in faith, cling to him, implore his grace and find consolation in his mercy alone.

But when you hear and accept this it is not your power, but God's grace, that renders the Gospel fruitful in you, so that you believe that you and your works are nothing. For you see how few there are who accept it, so that Christ weeps over Jerusalem and, as now the Papists are doing, not only refuse it, but condemn such doctrine, for they will not have all their works to be sin, they desire to lay the first stone and rage and fume against the Gospel.

24. Again, it is not by virtue of your power or your merit that the Gospel is preached and your king comes. God must send him out of pure grace. Hence, not greater wrath of God exists than where he does not send the Gospel; there is only sin, error and darkness, there man may do what he will. Again, there is no greater grace, than where he sends his Gospel, for there must be grace and mercy in its train, even if not all. Perhaps only a few, receive it. Thus the pope's government is the most terrible wrath of God, so that Peter calls them. the children of execration, for they teach no Gospel, but mere human doctrine of their own works as we, alas, see in all the chapters, monasteries and schools.

25. This is what is meant by "Thy king cometh." You do not seek him, but he seeks you. You do not find him, he finds you. For the preachers come from him, not from you; their sermons come from him, not from you; your faith comes from him, not from you; everything that faith works in you comes from him, not from you; and where he does not come, you remain outside; and where

there is no Gospel there is no God, but only sin and damnation, free will may do, suffer, work and live as it may and can. Therefore you should not ask, where to begin to be godly; there is no beginning, except where the king enters and is proclaimed.

26. Sixthly, he cometh "unto thee." Thee, thee, what does this mean? Is it not enough that he is your king? If he is yours how can he say, he comes to you? All this is stated by the prophet to present Christ in an endearing way and invite to faith. It is not enough that Christ saves us from the rule and tyranny of sin, death and hell, and becomes our king, but he offers himself to us for our possession, that whatever he is and has may be ours, as St. Paul writes, Rom. 8, 32: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?"

27. Hence the daughter of Zion has twofold gifts from Christ. The first is faith and the Holy Spirit in the heart, by which she becomes pure and free from sin. The other is Christ himself, that she may glory in the blessings given by Christ, as though everything Christ is and has were her own, and that she may rely upon Christ as upon her own heritage. Of this St. Paul speaks, Rom. 8, 34: "Christ maketh intercession for us." If he maketh intercession for us he will receive us and we will receive him as our Lord. And I Cor. 1, 30: "Christ was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." Of the twofold gifts Isaiah speaks in 40, 1-2: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins."

Behold, this means that he comes to you, for your welfare, as your own; in that he is your king, you receive grace from him into your heart, so that he delivers you from sin and death, and thus becomes your king and you his subject. In coming to you he becomes your own, so that you partake of his treasures, as a bride, by the jewelry the bridegroom puts on her, becomes partner of his possessions. Oh, this is a joyful, comforting form of speech! Who would despair and be afraid of death and hell, if he believes in these words and wins Christ as his own?

28. Seventhly: "Meek." This word is to be especially noticed, and it comforts the sin-burdened conscience. Sin naturally makes a timid conscience, which fears God and flees, as Adam did in Paradise, and cannot endure the coming of God, the knowing and feeling that God is an enemy of sin and severely punishes it. Hence it flees and is afraid, when God is only mentioned, and is concerned lest he go at it tooth and nail. In order that such delusion and timidity may not pursue us he gives us the comforting promise that this king comes meekly.

As if he would say: Do not flee and despair for he does not come now as he came to Adam, to Cain, at the flood, at Babel, to Sodom and Gomorrah, nor as he came to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai; he comes not in wrath, does not wish to reckon with you and demand his debt. All wrath is laid aside, nothing but tenderness and kindness remain. He will now deal with you so that your heart will have pleasure, love and confidence in him, that henceforth you will much more abide with him and find refuge in him than you feared him and fled from him before. Behold, he is nothing but meekness to you, he is a different man, he acts as if he were sorry ever to have made you afraid and caused you to flee from his punishment and wrath. He desires to reassure and comfort you and bring you to himself by love and kindness.

This means to speak consolingly to a sin-burdened conscience, this means to preach Christ rightly and to proclaim his Gospel. How is it possible that such a form of speech should

not make a heart glad and drive away all fear of sin, death and hell, and establish a free, secure and good conscience that will henceforth gladly do all and more than is commanded.

29. The Evangelist, however, altered the words of the prophet slightly. The prophet says in Zech. 9, 9: "Rejoice greatly, 0 daughter of Zion; shout, 0 daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass." The Evangelist expresses the invitation to joy and exultation briefly in these words: "Tell the daughter of Zion." Further on he leaves out the words: "just and having salvation." Again the prophet says, "he is lowly," the Evangelist, "he is meek." The prophet says: "upon the colt, the foal of an ass," he mentions the last word in the plural number; the Evangelist says: "upon the colt, the foal of an ass that is used for daily and burden-bearing labor." How shall we harmonize these accounts?

30. First, we must keep in mind that the Evangelists do not quote the prophets word by word, it is enough for them to have the same meaning and to show the fulfillment, directing us to the Scriptures so that we ourselves may read, what they omit, and see for ourselves that nothing was written which is not richly fulfilled. It is natural, also, that he who has the substance and the fulfillment, does not care so much for the words. Thus we often find that the Evangelist, quote the prophets somewhat changed, yet it is done without detriment to the understanding and intent of the original.

31. To invite the daughter of Zion and the daughter of Jerusalem to joy and gladness the prophet abundantly gives us to understand that the coining of this king is most comforting to every sin-burdened conscience, since he removes all fear and trembling, so that men do not flee from him and look upon him as a severe judge, who will press them with the law, as Moses did, so that they could not have a joyful confidence in God, as the knowledge and realization of sin naturally come from the law. But he would arouse them with this first word to expect from him all grace and goodness. For what other reason should he invite them to rejoice and command them even to shout and be exceeding glad! He tells this command of God to all who are in sorrow and fear of God. He also shows that it is God's will and full intent, and demands that they entertain joyful confidence in him against the natural fear and alarm. And this is the natural voice of the Gospel which the prophet here begins to preach, as Christ speaks likewise in the Gospel and the apostles always admonish to rejoice in Christ, as we shall hear further on.

It is also full of meaning that he comes from the Mount of Olives. We shall notice that this grace on account of its greatness might be called a mountain of grace, a grace which is not only a drop or handful, but grace abundant and heaped up like a mountain.

32. He mentions the people twice while the Evangelist says only once, daughter of Zion. For it is one people, daughter of Zion and daughter of Jerusalem, namely the people of the same city, who believe in Christ and receive him. As I said before, the Evangelist quotes the Scriptures only briefly and invites us to read them ourselves and find out more there for ourselves. That the Evangelist does not invite to joy like the prophet, but simply says: Tell it to the daughter of Zion, he does it to show how the joy and exultation shall be carried on. None should expect bodily but spiritual joy, a joy that can be gathered alone from the Word by the faith of the heart. From a worldly aspect there was nothing joyful in Christ's entrance, his spiritual advent must be preached and believed; that is, his meekness; this makes man joyful and glad.

33. That the prophet gives Christ three titles, lowly, just, and having salvation, while the Evangelist has only one, meek, is again done for brevity's sake, he suggests more than he explains. It seems to me that the Holy Ghost led the apostles and evangelists to abbreviate passages of the Scriptures for the purpose that we might be kept close to the holy Scriptures, and not set a bad example to future exegetes, who make many words outside the Scriptures and thereby draw us secretly from the Scriptures to human doctrines. As to say: If I spread the Scriptures verbatim everyone will follow the example and it will come to pass that we would read more in other books than in the holy writings of the principal book, and there would be no end to the writing of books and we would be carried from one book to another, until, finally, we would get away from the holy Scriptures altogether, as has happened in fact. Hence, with such incomplete quotations he directs us to the original book where they can be found complete, so that there is no need for everyone to make a separate book and leave the first one.

34. We notice, therefore, that it is the intention of all the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament to direct and drive us to the Old Testament, which they call the Holy Scriptures proper. For the New Testament was to be only the incarnate living Word and not scripture. Hence Christ did not write anything himself, but gave the command to preach and extend the Gospel, which lay hidden in the Scriptures, as we shall hear on Epiphany Sunday.

35. In the Hebrew language the two words meek and lowly do not sound unlike, and mean not a poor man who is wanting in money and property, but who in his heart is humble and wretched, in whom truly no anger nor haughtiness is to be found, but meekness and sympathy. And if we wish to obtain the full meaning of this word, we must take it as Luke uses it, who describes how Christ at his entrance wept and wailed over Jerusalem.

We interpret therefore the words lowly and meek in the light of Christ's conduct. How does he appear? His heart is full of sorrow and compassion toward Jerusalem. There is no anger or revenge, but he weeps out of tenderness at their impending doom.. None was so bad that he did or wished him harm. His sympathy makes him so kind and full of pity that he thinks not of anger, of haughtiness, of threatening or revenge, but offers boundless compassion and good will. This is what the prophet calls lowly and the Evangelist meek. Blessed he who thus knows Christ in him and believes in him. He cannot be afraid of him, but has a true and comforting confidence in him and entrance to him. He does not try to find fault either, for as he believes, he finds it; these words do not lie nor deceive.

36. The word "just" does not mean here the justice with which God judges, which is called the severe justice of God. For if Christ came to us with this who could stand before him.? Who could receive him, since even the saints cannot endure it? The joy and grace of this entrance would thereby be changed into the greatest fear and terror. But that grace is meant, by which he makes us just or righteous. I wish the word justus, justitia, were not used for the severe judicial justice; for originally it means godly, godliness. When we say, he is a pious man, the Scriptures express it, he is justus, justified or just. But the severe justice of God is called in the Scriptures: Severity, judgment, tribunal.

The prophet's meaning, therefore, is this: Thy king cometh to thee pious or just, i.e., he comes to make you godly through himself and his grace; he knows well that you are not godly. Your piety should consist not in your deeds, but in his grace and gift, so that you are just and

godly through him. In this sense St. Paul speaks, Rom. 3, 26: "That he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." That is, Christ alone is pious before God and he alone makes us pious. Also, Rom. 1, 17: "For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith," that is the godliness of God, namely his grace and mercy, by which he makes us godly before him, is preached in the Gospel. You see in this verse from the prophet that Christ is preached for us unto righteousness, that he comes godly and just, and we become godly and just by faith.

37. Note this fact carefully, that when you find in the Scriptures the word God's justice, it is not to be understood of the self-existing, imminent justice of God, as the Papists and many of the fathers held, lest you be frightened; but, according to the usage of Holy Writ, it means the revealed grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ in us by means of which we are considered godly and righteous before him. Hence it is called God's justice or righteousness effected not by us, but by God through grace, just as God's work, God's wisdom, God's strength, God's word, God's mouth, signifies what he works and speaks in us. All this is demonstrated clearly by St. Paul, Rom. 1, 16: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God (which works in us and strengthens us) unto salvation to everyone that believeth. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God," as it is written in Hab. 2, 4: "The righteous shall live by his faith." Here you see that he speaks of the righteousness of faith and calls the same the righteousness of God, preached in the Gospel, since the Gospel teaches nothing else but that he who believes has grace and is righteous before God and is saved.

In the same manner you should understand Ps. 31, 1: "Deliver me in thy righteousness," i.e. by thy grace, which makes me godly and righteous. The word Saviour or Redeemer compels us to accept this as the meaning of the little word "just." For if Christ came with his severe justice he would not save anyone, but condemn all, as they are all sinners and unjust. But now he comes to make not only just and righteous, but also blessed, all who receive him, that he alone as the just one and the Saviour be offered graciously to all sinners out of unmerited kindness and righteousness.

38. When the Evangelist calls his steed a burden-bearing and working foal of an ass he describes the animal the prophets mean. He wants to say: The prophecy is fulfilled in this burden-bearing animal. It was not a special animal trained for this purpose, as according to the country's custom riding animals are trained, and when the prophet speaks of the foal of the ass it is his meaning that it was a colt, but not a colt of a horse.

II. CONCERNING GOOD WORKS.

39. We have said enough of faith. We now come to consider good works. We receive Christ not only as a gift by faith, but also as an example of love toward our neighbor, whom we are to serve as Christ serves us. Faith brings and gives Christ to you with all his possessions. Love gives you to your neighbor with all your possessions. These two things constitute a true and complete Christian life; then follow suffering and persecution for such faith and love, and out of these grows hope in patience.

40. You ask, perhaps, what are the good works you are to do to your neighbor? Answer: They have no name. As the good works Christ does to you have no name, so your good works are to have no name.

41. Whereby do you know them? Answer: They have no name, so that there may be no distinction made and they be not divided, that you might do some and leave others undone. You shall give yourself up to him altogether, with all you have, the same as Christ did not simply pray or fast for you. Prayer and fasting are not the works he did for you, but he gave himself up wholly to you, with praying, fasting, all works and suffering, so that there is nothing in him that is not yours and was not done for you. Thus it is not your good work that you give alms or that you pray, but that you offer yourself to your neighbor and serve him, wherever he needs you and every way you can, be it with alms, prayer, work, fasting, counsel, comfort, instruction, admonition, punishment, apologizing, clothing, food, and lastly with suffering and dying for him. Pray, where are now such works to be found in Christendom?

42. I wish to God I had a voice like a thunderbolt, that I might preach to all the world, and tear the word "good works" out of people's hearts, mouths, ears, books, or at least then the right understanding of it. All the world sings, speaks, writes and thinks of good works, everyone wishes to exercise themselves in good works, and yet, good works are done nowhere, no one has the right understanding of good works. Oh, that all such pulpits in all the world were cast into the fire and burned to ashes! How they mislead people with their good works! They call good works what God has not commanded, as pilgrimages, fasting, building and decorating their churches in honor of the saints, saying mass, paying for vigils, praying with rosaries, much prattling and bawling in churches, turning nun, monk, priest, using special food, raiment or dwelling, -who can enumerate all the horrible abominations and deceptions? This is the pope's government and holiness.

43. If you have ears to hear and a mind to observe, pray, listen and learn for God's sake what good works are and mean. A good work is good for the reason that it is useful and benefits and helps the one for whom it is done; why else should it be called good! For there is a difference between good works and great, long, numerous, beautiful works. When you throw a big stone a great distance it is a great work, but whom does it benefit? If you can jump, run, fence well, it is a fine work, but whom does it benefit? Whom does it help, if you wear a costly coat or build a fine house?

44. And to come to our Papists' work, what does it avail if they put silver or gold on the walls, wood and stone in the churches? Who would be made better, if each village had ten bells, as big as those at Erfurt? Whom would it help if all the houses were convents and monasteries as splendid as the temple of Solomon? Who is benefitted if you fast for St. Catherine, St. Martin or any other saint? Whom does it benefit, if you are shaved half or wholly, if you wear a gray or a black cap? Of what use were it if all people field mass every hour? What benefit is it if in one church, as at Meissen, they sing day and night Without interruption? Who is better for it, if every church had more silver, pictures and jewelry than the churches of Halle and Wittenberg? It is folly and deception, men's lies invented these things and called them good works; they all pretend they serve God thus and pray for the people and their sins, just as if they helped God with their property or as if his saints were in need of our work. Sticks and stones are not as rude and mad as

we are. A tree bears fruit, not for itself, but for the good of man and beast, and these fruits are its good works.

45. Hear then how Christ explains good works, Math. 7, 12: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them; for this is the law and the prophets." Do you hear now what are the contents of the whole law and of all the prophets? You are not to do good to God and to his dead saints, they are not in need of it; still less to wood and stone, to which it is of no use, nor is it needed, but to men, to men, to men. Do you not hear? To men you should do everything that you would they should do to you.

46. I would not have you build me a church or tower or cast bells for me. I would not have you construct for me an organ with fourteen stops and ten rows of flute work. Of this I can neither eat nor drink, support neither wife nor child, keep neither house nor land. You may feast my eyes on these and tickle my ears, but what shall I give to my children? Where are the necessaries of life? O madness, madness! The bishops and lords, who should check it, are the first in such folly, and one blind leader leads the other. Such people remind me of young girls playing with dolls and of boys riding on sticks. Indeed, they are nothing but children and players with dolls, and riders of hobbyhorses.

47. Keep in mind, that you need not do any work for God nor for the departed saints, but you ask and receive good from him in faith. Christ has done and accomplished everything for you, atoned for your sins, secured grace and life and salvation. Be content with this, only think how he can become more and more your own and strengthen your faith. Hence direct all the good you can do and your whole life to the end that it be good; but it is good only when it is useful to other people and not to yourself. You need it not, since Christ has done and given for you all that you might seek and desire for yourself, here and hereafter, be it forgiveness of sins, merit of salvation or whatever it may be called. If you find a work in you by which you benefit God or his saints or yourself and not your neighbor, know that such a work is not good.

48. A man is to live, speak, act, hear, suffer and die for the good of his wife and child, the wife for the husband, the children for the parents, the servants for their masters, the masters for their servants, the government for its subjects, the subjects for the government, each one for his fellow man, even for his enemies, so that one is the other's hand, mouth, eye, foot, even heart and mind. This is a truly Christian and good work, which can and shall be done at all times, in all places, toward all people. You notice the Papists' works in organs, pilgrimages, fasting, etc., are really beautiful, great, numerous, long, wide and heavy works, but there is no good, useful and helpful work among them and the proverb may be applied to them: It is already bad.

49. But beware of their acute subtleties, when they say: If these works are not good to our neighbor in his body, they do spiritual good to his soul, since they serve God and propitiate him and secure his grace. Here it is time to say: You lie as wide as your mouth. God is to be worshiped not with works, but by faith, faith must do everything that is to be done between God and us. There may be more faith in a millerboy than in all the Papists, and it may gain more than all priests and monks do with their organs and jugglery, even if they had more organs than these now have pipes. He who has faith can pray for his fellow man, he who has no faith can pray for nothing. It is a satanic lie to call such outward pomp spiritually good and useful works. A miller's

maid, if she believes, does more good, accomplishes more, and I would trust her more, if she takes the sack from the horse, than all the priests and monks, if they kill themselves singing day and night and torment themselves to the quick. You great, coarse fools, would you expect to help the people with your faithless life and distribute spiritual goods, when there is on earth no more miserable, needy, godless people than you are? You should be called, not spiritual, but spiritless.

50. Behold, such good works Christ teaches here by his example. Tell me what does he do to serve himself and to do good to himself? The prophet directs all to the daughter of Zion and says: "He cometh to thee," and that he comes as a Saviour, just and meek, is all for you, to make you just and blessed. None had asked nor bidden him to come; but he came, he comes of his own free will, out of pure love, to do good and to be useful and helpful.

Now his work is manifold, it embraces all that is necessary to make us just and blessed. But justification and salvation imply that he delivers us from sin, death, hell, and does it not only for his friends, but also for his enemies, yea, for none but his enemies, yet he does it so tenderly, that he weeps over those who oppose such work and will not receive him. Hence he leaves nothing undone to blot out their sin, conquer death and hell and make them just and blessed. He retains nothing for himself, and is content that he already has God and is blessed, -thus he serves only us according to the will of his father who wishes him to do so.

51. See then how he keeps the law: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them." Is it not true, everyone heartily wishes that another might step between man and his sin, take it upon himself and blot it out, so that it would no more sting his conscience, and deliver him from death and hell? What does everyone desire more deeply than to be free from death and hell? Who would not be free from sin and have a good, joyful conscience before God? Do we not see how all men have striven for this, with prayer, fastings, pilgrimages, donations, monasteries and priesthood? Who urges them? It is sin, death, hell, from which they would be saved. And if there were a physician at the end of the world, who could help here, all lands would become deserted and every one would hasten to this physician and risk property, body and life to make the journey.

And if Christ himself, like we, were surrounded by death, sin and hell, he would wish that some one would help him out of it, take his sin away and give him a good conscience. Since he would have others do this for him, he proceeds and does it for others, as the law says, he takes upon himself our sins, goes into death and overcomes for us sin, death and hell so that henceforth all who believe in him, and call upon his name, shall be justified and saved, be above sin and death, have a good, joyful, secure and intrepid conscience forever, as he says in John 8, 51: "If a man keep my word, he shall never see death," and John 11,25-26: "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live I and whosoever liveth and believeth on me, shall never die."

52. Behold, this is the great joy, to which the prophet invites, when he says: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!" This is the righteousness and the salvation for which the Saviour and King comes. These are the good works done for us by which he fulfills the law. Hence the death of the believer in Christ is not death but a sleep, for he neither sees nor tastes death, as is said in Ps. 4, 8: "In peace will I both lay me down and sleep, for thou, Jehovah, alone makest me dwell in safety." Therefore death is also called a sleep in the Scriptures.

53. But the Papists and their disciples, who would get rid of death, sin and hell by their own works and satisfaction, must remain in them eternally for they undertake to do for themselves what Christ alone did and could do, of whom they should expect it by faith. Therefore they are foolish, deluded people who do works for Christ and his saints, which they should do for their neighbor. Again, what they should expect of Christ by faith they would find in themselves and have gone so far as to spend on stone and wood, on bells and incense what they should spend on their neighbors. They go on and do good to God and his saints, fast for them and dedicate to them prayers, and at the same time leave their neighbor as he is, thinking only, let us first help ourselves! Then comes the pope and sells them his letter of indulgence and leads them into heaven, not into God's heaven, but into the pope's heaven, which is the abyss of hell. Behold, this is the fruit of unbelief and ignorance of Christ, this is our reward for having left the Gospel in obscurity and setting up human doctrine in its place. I repeat it, I wish all pulpits in the world lay in ashes, and the monasteries, convents, churches, hermitages and chapels, and everything were ashes and powder, because of this shameful misleading of souls.

54. Now you know what good works are. Think of it and act accordingly. As to sin, death and hell, take care that you augment them not, for you cannot do anything here, your good works will avail nothing, you must have some one else to work for you. To Christ himself such works properly belong, you must consent to it that he who comes is the king of Zion, that he alone is the just Saviour. In him and through him you will blot out sin and death through faith. Therefore, if anyone teaches you to blot out your own sin by works, beware of him.

55. When in opposition to this they quote verses of the Bible like Dan. 4, 27: "Break off thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor," and I Pet. 4, 8: "Love covereth a multitude of sins," and the like, be not deceived, such passages do not mean that the works could blot out or remove sin, for this would rob Christ of his word and advent, and do away with his whole work; but these works are a sure work of faith, which in Christ receives remission of sins and the victory over death. For it is impossible for him who believes in Christ, as a just Saviour, not to love and to do good. If, however, he does not do good nor love, it is sure that faith is not present. Therefore man knows by the fruits what kind of a tree it is, and it is proved by love and deed whether Christ is in him and he believes in Christ. As St. Peter says in 2 Pet. 1, 10: "Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble," that is, if you bravely practice good works you will be sure and cannot doubt that God has called and chosen you.

56. Thus faith blots out sin in a different manner than love. Faith blots it out of itself, while love or good works prove and demonstrate that faith has done so and is present, as St. Paul says, 1 Cor. 13, 2: "And if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." Why? Without doubt, because faith is not present where there is no love, they are not separate the one from the other. See to it then that you do not err, and be misled from faith to works.

57. Good works should be done, but we should not confide in them, instead of in Christ's work. We should not touch sin, death and hell with our works, but direct them from us to the Saviour, to the king of Zion, who rides upon an ass. He who knows how to treat sin, death and hell, will blot out sin, overcome death, and subdue hell. Do you permit him to perform these works while you

serve your neighbor - you will then have a sure testimony of faith in the Saviour who overcame death. So love and good works will blot out your sin for you that you may realize it; as faith blots it out before God where you do not realize it. But more of this later.

THE LESSON STORY AND THE FALSE NOTIONS THE JEWS HELD CONCERNING THE MESSIAH.

58. In the story of this Gospel we will first direct our attention to the reason why the Evangelist quotes the words of the prophet, in which was described long ago and in clear, beautiful and wonderful words, the bodily, public entrance and advent of our Lord Jesus Christ to the people of Zion or Jerusalem, as the text says. In this the prophet wanted to show and explain to his people and to all the world, who the Messiah is and how and in what manner he would come and manifest himself, and offers a plain and visible sign in this that he says: "Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, meek, and riding upon an ass," etc., so that we would be certain of it, and not dispute about the promised Messiah or Christ, nor wait for another.

He therewith anticipates the mistaken idea of the Jews, who thought, because there were such glorious things said and written of Christ and his kingdom, he would manifest himself in great worldly pomp and glory, as a king against their enemies, especially the Roman empire, to the power of which they were subject, and would overthrow its power and might, and in their place set up the Jews as lords and princes. They thus expected nothing in the promised Christ but a worldly kingdom and deliverance from bodily captivity. Even today they cling to such dreams and therefore they do not believe in Christ, because they have not seen such bodily relief and worldly power. They were led to this notion, and strengthened in it, by their false priests, preachers and doctors, who perverted the Scriptures concerning Christ and interpreted them according to their own worldly understanding as referring to bodily, worldly things, because they would fain be great earthly lords.

59. But the dear prophets plainly foretold and faithfully gave warning that we should not think of such an earthly kingdom nor of bodily salvation, but look back and pay attention to the promises of a spiritual kingdom and of a redemption from the pernicious fall of mankind in paradise; of which it is said in Gen. 2, 17: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The first prophecy of Christ is also against it, Gen. 3, 15: "The seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head." Which means, he shall deliver all mankind from the power of the devil and the captivity of sin and eternal death and, instead bring justification before God and eternal life. Hence this prophet calls him "just and having salvation." This truly is a different salvation than that of bodily freedom, bodily power and glory, the end of which is death, and under which everything must abide eternally.

They ought to have considered this and rejoiced in it, since the prophets had heartily yearned and prayed for it, and this prophet admonishes to such great joy and gladness. But they and their shameless preachers made a temporal affair out of this misery and unhappiness, as if it were a joke about sin and death or the power of the devil, and considered it the greatest misfortune that they lost their temporal freedom and were made subject to the emperor and required to pay taxes to him.

60. The Evangelist therefore quotes this saying of the prophet, to punish the blindness and false notions of those who seek bodily and temporal blessings in Christ and his Gospel, and to

convince them by the testimony of the prophet, who shows clearly what kind of a king Christ was and what they should seek in him, in that he calls him just and having salvation and yet adds this sign of his coming by which they are to know him: "He cometh to thee meek and riding upon a colt, the foal of an ass." As if to say: A poor, miserable, almost beggarly horseman upon a borrowed ass who is kept by the side of its mother not for ostentation but for service. With this he desires to lead them away from gazing and waiting for a glorious entrance of a worldly king. And he offers such signs that they might not doubt the Christ, nor take offense at his beggarly appearance. All pomp and splendor are to be left out of sight, and the heart and the eyes directed to the poor rider, who became poor and miserable and made himself of no kingly reputation that they might not seek the things of this world in him but the eternal, as is indicated by the words, "just and having salvation."

61. This verse first clearly and effectively does away with the Jewish dream and delusion of a worldly reign of the Messiah and of their temporal freedom. It takes away all cause and support for excuse, if they do not receive Christ, and cuts off all hope and expectation for another, because it clearly and distinctly announces and admonishes that he would come on this wise and that he has fulfilled everything. We Christians thus have against the Jews a firm ground and certain title and conviction from their own Scripture that this Messiah, who thus came to them, is the Christ predicted by the prophets and that no other shall come, and that in the vain hope of another's coming they forfeit their temporal and eternal salvation.

III. THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF THIS GOSPEL

62. This has been said about the history of this Gospel. Let us now treat of its hidden or spiritual meaning. Here we are to remember that Christ's earthly walk and conversation signify his spiritual walk; his bodily walk therefore signifies the Gospel and the faith. As with his bodily feet he walked from one town to another, so by preaching he came into the world. Hence this lesson shows distinctly what the Gospel is and how it is to be preached, what it does and effects in the world, and its history is a fine, pleasing picture and image of how the kingdom of Christ is carried on by the office of preaching. We will consider this point by point.

"And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and came unto Bethphage, unto the Mount of Olives."

63. All the apostles declare that Christ would come at the end of the world, and that the Gospel would be the last preaching, as is written in 1 John 2, 18: "Little children, it is the last hour, and as ye have heard that Antichrist cometh, even now hath there arisen many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour," etc. He mentions here the Antichrist. Antichrist in Greek means he who teaches and acts against the true Christ. Again, 1 Cor. 10, 11: "All these things were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come." As the prophets came to man before the first advent of Christ, so the apostles are the last messengers of God, sent before the last advent of Christ at the last day to preach it faithfully. Christ indicates this by not sending out his apostles to fetch the ass, until he drew nigh unto Jerusalem, where he was now to enter. Thus the Gospel is brought into this world by the apostles shortly before the last day, when Christ will enter with his flock into the eternal Jerusalem.

64. This agrees with the word "Bethphage," which means, as some say, mouth-house, for St. Paul says in Rom. 1, 2, that the Gospel was promised afore in the Holy Scriptures, but it was not preached orally and publicly until Christ came and sent out his apostles. Therefore the church is a mouth-house, not a pen-house, for since Christ's advent that Gospel is preached orally which before was hidden in written books.

It is the way of the Gospel and of the New Testament that it is to be preached and discussed orally with a living voice. Christ himself wrote nothing, nor did he give command to write, but to preach orally. Thus the apostles were not sent out until Christ came to his mouth-house, that is, until the time had come to preach orally and to bring the Gospel from dead writing and pen-work to the living voice and mouth. From this time the church is rightly called Bethphage, since she has and bears the living voice of the Gospel.

65. The sending shows that the kingdom of Christ is contained in the public oral office of preaching, which shall not stand still nor remain in one place, as before it was hidden with the Jewish nation alone in the Scriptures and foretold by the prophets for the future, but should go openly, free and untrammelled into all the world.

66. The Mount of Olives signifies the great mercy and grace of God, that sent forth the apostles and brought the Gospel to us. Olive oil in Holy Writ signifies the grace and mercy of God, by which the soul and the conscience are comforted and healed, as the oil soothes and softens and heals the wounds and defects of the body. And from what was said above, we learn what unspeakable grace it is that we know and have Christ, the justified Saviour and king. Therefore he does not send into the level plain, nor upon a deserted, rocky mountain, but unto the Mount of Olives, to show to all the world the mercy which prompted him to such grace. There is not simply a drop or handful of it, as formerly, but because of its great abundance it might be called a mountain. The prophet also calls in Ps. 36, 6, such grace God's mountain and says: "Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God," that is, great and abundant, rich and overflowing. This he can understand who considers what it means that Christ bears our sin, and conquers death and hell and does everything for us, that is necessary to our salvation. He does not expect us to do anything for it, but to exercise it towards our neighbor, to know thereby whether we have such faith in Christ or not. Hence the Mount of Olives signifies that the Gospel was not preached nor sent until the time of grace came; from this time on the great grace goes out into the world through the apostles.

"Then Jesus sent two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village that is over against you."

67. These two disciples represent all the apostles and preachers, sent into the world. The evangelical sermon is to consist of two witnesses, as St. Paul says in Rom. 3,21: "A righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." Thus we see how the apostles introduce the law and the prophets, who prophesied of Christ, so that it might be fulfilled that Moses spoke in Deut. 17, 6 and Christ in Math. 18,16: "At the mouth of two witnesses or three, every word may be established."

68. When he says: "Go into the village over against you", not mentioning the name, it signifies that the apostles are not sent to one nation alone, as the Jews were separated from the Gentiles

and alone bore the name "People of God" and God's word and promise of the future Messiah were with them alone. But now when Christ comes he sends his preachers into all the world and commands them to go straight forward and preach everywhere to all the heathen, and to teach, reprove, without distinction, whomsoever they meet, however great, and wise and learned and holy, they may be.

When he calls the great city of Jerusalem a village and does not give her name, he does it for the reason that the name Jerusalem has a holy significance. The kingdom of heaven and salvation are the spiritual Jerusalem, that Christ enters. But the apostles were sent into the world amongst their enemies who have no name.

69. The Lord here comforts and strengthens the apostles and all ministers, when he calls the great city a village, and adds, she is over against you. As if he would say, like Math. 10, 16: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of the wolves", I send you into the world, which is against you, and seems to be something great, for there are kings, princes, the learned, the rich and everything that is great in the world and amounts to anything, this is against you. And as he says in Math. 10, 22: "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." But never fear, go on, it is hardly a village, do not be moved by great appearances, preach bravely against it and fear no one. For it is not possible that he should preach the gospel truth, who fears the multitude and does not despise all that the world esteems highly. It is here decreed that this village is against the apostles, therefore they should not be surprised if the great, high, rich, wise and holy orders do not accept their word. It must be so, the village must be against them; again, the apostles must despise them and appear before them, for the Lord will have no flatterer as a preacher. He does not say: Go around the village, or to the one side of it: Go in bravely and tell them what they do not like to hear.

70. How very few there are now who enter the village that is against them. We gladly go into the towns that are on our side. The Lord might have said: Go ye into the village before you. That would have been a pleasing and customary form of speech. But he would indicate this mystery of the ministry, hence he speaks in an unusual way: Go into the village that is over against you. That is: Preach to them that are disposed to prosecute and kill you. You shall merit such thanks and not try to please them, for such is the way of hypocrites and not that of the evangelists.

"And straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them and bring them unto me."

71. This is also offered as consolation to ministers that they should not worry as to who would believe or receive them. For it is decreed, Is. 55,11: "My word shall not return unto me void." And St. Paul says, Col. 1, 6: "The Gospel is in all the world bearing fruit." It cannot be otherwise than that where the Gospel is preached there will be some, who accept it and believe. This is the meaning of the mystery that the apostles shall find the ass forthwith and the colt, if they only go. As if he would say: Only go and preach, care not who they are that hear you. I will care for that. The world will be against you, but be not afraid, you will find such as will hear and follow you. You do not know them yet, but I know them; you preach, and leave the rest to me.

72. Behold, In this way he consoles them that they should not cease to preach against the world, though it withstands and contradicts them ever so hard, it shall not be in vain. You find people

now who believe we should be silent and cause no stir, because it is impossible to convert the world. It is all in vain, they say; pope, priests, bishops and monks reject it and they will not change their lives, what is the use to preach and storm against them? This is the same as if the apostles had said to Christ: Thou tellest us to go into the village that is over against us; it is against us, what use is it that we enter there, let us rather stay outside.

But the Lord refutes this and says: Go ye there and preach, what does it matter if it is against you? You will find there what I say. We should now do likewise. Although the masses storm against the Gospel and there is no hope that they will be better, yet we must preach, there will yet be found those who listen and become converted.

73. Why does he have them bring two asses or not both young or old ones, since one was enough for him to ride upon? Answer: As the two disciples represent the preachers, so the colt and its mother represent their disciples and hearers. The preachers shall be Christ's disciples and be sent by him, that is, they should preach nothing but Christ's doctrine. Nor should they go to preach except they be called, as was the case with the apostles. But the hearers are old and young.

74. Here we should remember that man in Holy Writ is divided into two parts, in an inner and an outer man. The outer man is called according to his outward, visible, bodily life and conversation; the inner man, according to his heart and conscience. The outer man can be forced to do the good and quit the bad, by law, pain, punishment and shame, or attracted by favor, money, honor and reward. But the inner man cannot be forced to do out of his own free will, what he should do, except the grace of God change the heart and make it willing.

Hence the Scriptures say all men are liars, no man does good of his own free will, but everyone seeks his own and does nothing out of love for virtue. For if there were no heaven nor hell, no disgrace nor honor, none would do good. If it were as great an honor and prize to commit adultery, as to honor matrimony, you would see adultery committed with much greater pleasure than matrimony is now held sacred. In like manner all other sins would be done with greater zeal than virtues are now practiced. Hence all good conduct without grace is mere glitter and semblance, it touches only the exterior man, without the mind and free will of the inner man being reached.

75. These are the two asses: The old one is the exterior man; he is bound like this one, with laws and fear of death, of hell, of shame, or with allurements of heaven, of life, of honor. He goes forward with the external appearance of good works and is a pious rogue, but he does it unwillingly and with a heavy heart and a heavy conscience.

Therefore the apostle calls her "subjugalem," the yoked animal, who works under a burden and labors hard. It is a miserable, pitiable life that is under compulsion by fear of hell, of death and of shame. Hell, death and shame are his yoke and burden, heavy beyond measure, from which he has a burdened conscience and is secretly an enemy to law and to God. Such people were the Jews, who waited for Christ, and such are all who rely upon their own power to fulfil God's commands, and merit heaven. They are tied by their consciences to the law, they must, but would rather not, do it. They are carriers of sacks, lazy beasts of burden and yoked rogues.

76. The colt, the young ass, of which Mark and Luke write, on which never man rode, is the inner man, the heart, the mind, the will, which can never be subject to law, even if he be tied by conscience and feels the law. But he has no desire nor love for it until Christ comes and rides on

him. As this colt was never ridden by anyone, so man's heart has never been subject to the good; but, as Moses says, Gen. 6, 5 and 8, 21, is evil continually from his youth.

77. Christ tells them to loose them, that is, he tells them to preach the Gospel in his name, in which is proclaimed grace and remission of sins, and how he fulfilled the law for us. The heart is here freed from the fetters of conscience and things. Thus man is loose not from the law, that he should and joyful, willing and anxious to do and to leave undone all things. Thus man is loose not from the Law, that he should do nothing, but from a joyless, heavy conscience he has from the law, and with which he was the enemy of the law, that threatens him with death and hell. Now he has a clear conscience under Christ, is a friend of the law, neither fears death nor hell, does freely and willingly, what before he did reluctantly. See, in this way the Gospel delivers the heart from all evil, from sin and death, from hell and a bad conscience through faith in Christ.

78. When he commands them to bring them to him, he speaks against the pope and all sects and deceivers, who lead the souls from Christ to themselves; but the apostles bring them to Christ; they preach and teach nothing but Christ, and not their own doctrine nor human laws. The Gospel alone teaches us to come to Christ and to know Christ rightly. In this the stupid prelates receive a heavy rebuke at their system of bringing souls to themselves, as Paul says in Acts 20, 29-30: "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." But the Gospel converts men to Christ and to none else. Therefore he sends out the Gospel and ordains preachers, that he may draw us all to himself, that we may know him as he says, John 12, 32: "And I, if I be lifted tip from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." "And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say., The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them."

79. St. Paul, in Gal. 4, 2, compares the law to guardians and stewards, under whom the young heir is educated in fear and discipline. The law forces with threats that we externally abstain from evil works, from fear of death and hell, although the heart does not become good thereby. Here are, as Luke writes, the masters of the ass and its colt, speaking to the apostles: What, do ye loose the colt? Where the Gospel begins to loose the conscience of its own works, it seems to forbid good works and the keeping of the law. It is the common speech of all the teachers of the law, and of the scribes and doctors, to say: If all our works amount to nothing and if the works done under the law are evil, we will never (to good. You forbid good works and throw away God's law; you heretic, you loose the colt and wish to make bad people free. Then they go to work and forbid to loose the colt and the conscience and to bring it to Christ and say, You must do good works, and keep people tied in bondage to the law.

80. Our text shows how the apostles should act toward such persons. They should say: "The Lord hath need of them," they should instruct them in the works of the law and the works of grace and should say: We forbid not good works, but we loose the conscience from false good works, not to make them free to do evil deeds, but to come under Christi their true Master, and under him do truly good works; to this end he needs them and will have them. Of this Paul treats so well in Rom. 6, where he teaches that through grace we are free from the law and its works; not so as to do evil, but to do truly good works.

81. It all amounts to this, that the scribes and masters of the law do not know what good works are; they therefore will not loose the colt, but drive it with unmerciful human works. However, where wholesome instruction is given concerning good works, they let it pass, if they are at all sensible and honest teachers of the law, as they are here represented. The mad tyrants, who are frantic with human laws, are not mentioned in this Gospel. It treats only of the law of God and of the very best teachers of the law. For without grace, even God's law is a chain and makes burdened consciences and hypocrites whom none can help, until other works are taught, which are not ours, but Christ's and are worked in us by grace. Then all constraint and coercion of the law is ended and the colt is loose.

"Now this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken through the prophet,* saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion."

82. This verse has already been sufficiently explained. The Evangelist introduces it that we may see how Christ has come not for the sake of our merits, but for the sake of God's truth. For he was prophesied long a- before we, to whom he comes, had a being. God out of pure grace has fulfilled the promises of the Gospel to demonstrate the truth that he keeps his promises in order to stir us confidently to trust in his promise, for he will fulfil it.

And this is one of the passages, where the Gospel is promised, of which Paul speaks in Rom. 1, 2: "Which he promised afore through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ," etc. We have heard how in this verse the Gospel, Christ and faith are preached most distinctly and consolingly.

"And the disciples went, and did even as Jesus appointed them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their garments, and he sat thereon, (and they set him thereon.)"

83. These are the ministers who by the Gospel have freed the consciences from the law and its works and led them to the works of grace, who made real saints out of* hypocrites, so that Christ henceforth rides upon them.

84. The question arises here, whether Christ rode upon both animals. Matthew- speaks as if the disciples put him on both, while Mark, Luke and John mention only the colt. Some think he sat first on the colt and, because it was too wanton and untamed, he then sat on its mother. These are fables and dreams. 'Ale take it that he rode only on the colt. He had them both brought to him on account of the spiritual significance above mentioned. When Matthew says he sat on them as though he rode on both, it is said after the manner of the Scriptures and the common way of speaking by synecdoche, where a thing is ascribed to the community, the whole people, which applies only to a few of them; for example, Matthew writes: the thieves on the cross reviled him, while only one did it, as Luke tells us, Christ says in Mat. 23, 37, that the city of Jerusalem stoned the prophets, while only a few of the city did it. You say, the Turks killed the Christians, although they killed only a few. Thus Christ rode on the asses, though he rode only on the colt, because the two are compared to a community. What happened to one is expressed as if it happened to all.

85. Now consider the spiritual riding. Christ rides on the colt, its mother follows, that is, when Christ lives through faith in the inner man we are tined him and are ruled by him. But the outer man, the ass, goes free, Christ does not ride on her, though she follows in the rear. The outer man, as Paul says, is not willing, he strives against the inner man, nor does he carry Christ, as Gal. 5,

17 says: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary, the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would." Because the colt carries Christ, that is, the Spirit is willing by grace, the ass, that is, the flesh, must be led by the halter, for the Spirit - chastises and crucifies the flesh, so that it becomes subject.

86. This is the reason Christ rides upon the colt and not upon its mother, and yet uses both for his entrance into Jerusalem, for both body and soul must be saved. If, here upon earth, the body is unwilling, not capable of grace and Christ's leading, it must bear the Spirit, upon which Christ rides, who trains it and leads it along by the power of grace, received through Christ. The colt, ridden by Christ, upon which no one ever rode, is the willing spirit, whom no one before could make willing, tame or ready, save Christ by his grace. However, the sack-carrier, the burden-bearer, the old Adam, is the flesh, which goes riderless without Christ; it must for this reason bear the cross and remain a beast of burden.

87. What does it signify that the apostles, without command, put their garments on the colt? No doubt again not all the disciples laid on their garments, nor were all their garments put on, perhaps only a coat of one disciple. But it is written for the spiritual meaning, as if all the garments of all the disciples were used. It was a poor saddle and ornaments, but rich in meaning. I think it was the good example of the apostles, by which the Christian church is covered, and adorned, and Christ is praised and honored, namely, their preaching and confession, suffering and death for Christ's sake, as Christ says of Peter, that he would glorify God by a like death, John 21, 19. Paul says in one of his epistles, we shall put on, Christ, by which he doubtless wishes to show that good works are the garments of the Christians, by which Christ is honored and glorified before all people. In the epistle Paul says, Rom. 13, 12: "Let us put on the armor of light." By this he means to show that good works are garments in which we walk before the people, honorably and well adorned. The examples of the apostles are the best and noblest above all the saints, they instruct us best, and teach Christ most clearly; therefore they should not, like the rest, lie on the road, but on the colt, so that Christ may ride on them and the colt go under them. We should follow these examples, praise Christ with our confession and our life and adorn and honor the doctrine of the Gospel as Tit. 2, 10 says.

88. Hear how Paul lays his garments on the colt, I Cor. 11, 1: "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ," and Heb. 13, 7: "Remember them that had the rule over you, men that spake unto you the Word of God; and considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith." No saint's example is as pure in faith as that of the apostles. All the other saints after the apostles have an addition of human doctrine and works. Hence Christ sits upon their garments to show that they are true Christian and more faithful examples than others.

89. That they set him thereon must also signify something. Could he not mount for himself? Why does he act so formal? As I said above, the apostles would not preach themselves, nor ride on the colt themselves. Paul says, 2 Cor. 1, 24: "Not that we have lordship over your faith." And 2 Cor. 4, 5: "We preach not ourselves, 'hut Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." Again, 1 Pet. 5, 3: "Neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you." They preached to us the pure faith and offered their examples, that Christ might rule in us, and our faith remain undefiled, that we might not receive their word and work as if it were their own, but that we might learn Christ in their words and works. But how is it today? One follows St. Francis,

another St Dominic, the third this, and the fourth that saint; and in none is Christ alone and pure faith sought; for they belong only to the apostles.

"And the most part of the multitude spread their garments in the way; and others cut branches front the trees, and spread them in the way."

90. The garments are the examples of the patriarchs and prophets, and the histories of the Old Testament. For, as we shall learn, the multitude that went before, signifies the saints before the birth of Christ, by whom the sermon in the New Testament and the way of faith are beautifully adorned and honored. Paul does likewise when he cites Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Peter cites Sarah, and, in Heb. It, many patriarchs are named as examples, and by these are confirmed faith and the works of faith in a masterly way. The branches mean the sayings of the prophets, one of which is mentioned in this Gospel, which are not stories nor examples but the prophecy of God. The trees are the books of the prophets. Those who preach from these cut down branches and spread them in the way of Christian faith.

91. All this teaches the character of an Evangelical sermon, a sermon on the pure faith and the way of life. It must first have the word Christ commands the apostles, saying: Go, loose and bring hither. Then the story and example of the apostles must be added which agree with Christ's word and work, these are the garments of the apostles. Then must be cited passages from the Old Testament, these are the garments and branches of the multitude. In this way the passages and examples of both Testaments are brought home to the people. Of this Christ speaks in Math. 13, 52: "Every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." This signifies the two lips of the mouth, the two points of a bishop's hat, the two ribbons on it and some other like figures. But now none of these is kept before the eyes, the devil through the Papists throws sulphur and pitch in the way, himself rides on the colt and banishes Christ.

92. To spread garments in the way, means that, following the example of the apostles, we should with our confession and our whole life, honor, adorn and grace Christ, by giving up all glory, wisdom and holiness of our own and bowing to Christ in simple faith; also that we turn everything we have, honor, goods, life, power and body to the glory and advancement of the Gospel and relinquish everything for the one thing needful. Kings and lords and the great, powerful and rich should serve Christ with their goods, honor and power; further the Gospel and for its sake abandon everything. The holy patriarchs, prophets and pious kings in the Old Testament did so by their examples. But now everything is turned around, especially among the papal multitudes, who usurp all honor and power against Christ and thus suppress the Gospel.

93. To cut branches from the trees and spread them in the way means also the office of preaching and the testimony of the Scriptures and the prophets concerning Christ. With this the sermon of Christ is to be confirmed and all the preaching directed to the end that Christ may be known and confessed by it. John writes in 12, 13 that they took branches of palmtrees and went forth to meet him. Some add, there must have been olive branches also, because it happened on the Mount of Olives. This is not incredible, although the Gospels do not report it.

94. There is reason why palm-branches and olive-branches are mentioned. They signify what is to be confessed, preached and believed concerning Christ. It is the nature of the palm-tree that when used as a beam, it yields to no weight but rises against the weight. These branches are the words of divine wisdom; the more they are suppressed, the higher they rise. This is true if you firmly believe in those words. There is an invincible power in them, so that they may well be called palm-branches, as St. Paul says in Rom. 1, 16: "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth;" and as Christ says, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Math. 16, 18. Death, sin, hell and all evil must bend before the divine Word, or only rise, when it sets itself against them.

95. Olive branches are named, because they are words of grace, in which God has promised us mercy. They make the soul meek, gentle, joyful, as the oil does the body. The gracious Word and sweet Gospel is typified in Gen. 8, 11, where the dove in the evening brought in her mouth an olive branch with green leaves into the ark, which means, that the Holy Spirit brings the Gospel into the Church at the end of the world by the mouth of the apostles.

"And the multitudes that went before him, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest."

96. For this reason they carried palm-trees before kings and lords, when they had gained a victory, and celebrated their triumph. Again, the carrying of palm-branches was a sign of submission, especially of such as asked for mercy and peace, as was commonly done among ancient people.

By their pomp before Christ they indicated that they would receive him as their Lord and King, sent by God as a victorious and invincible Saviour, showing themselves submissive to him and seeking grace from him. Christ should be preached and made known in all the world, as the victorious and invincible King against sin, death and the power of the devil and all the world for those who are oppressed and tormented, and as a Lord with whom they shall find abundant grace and mercy, as their faithful Priest and Mediator before God.

The word of the Gospel concerning this King is a word of mercy and grace, which brings us peace and redemption from God, besides invincible power and strength, as St. Paul in Rom. 1, 16 calls the Gospel "a power of God unto salvation" and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," as Christ says in Math. 16, 18.

97. Paul says, Heb. 13, 8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea, forever." All who will be saved from the beginning to the end of the world, are and must be Christians and must be saved by faith. Therefore Paul says, 1 Cor. 10, 3-4: "Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink." And Christ says in John 8, 56: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad."

98. Hence the multitudes going before signify all Christians and saints before Christ's birth; those who follow signify all the saints after the birth of Christ. They all believed in and adhered to the one Christ. The former expected him in the future, the latter received him as the one who had come. Hence they all sing the same song and praise and thank God in Christ. or may we give anything else but praise and thanks to God, since we receive all from him, be it grace, word, work, Gospel, faith and everything else. The only true Christian service is to praise and give

thanks, as Ps. 50, 15 says: "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

99. What does "Hosanna to the son of David" signify? Hosanna in Ps. 118, 25-26, means: "Save now, we beseech thee, O Jehovah; O Jehovah, we beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of Jehovah." This verse was applied to Christ and is a well-wishing as we wish happiness and safety to a new ruler. Thus the people thought Christ should be their worldly king, and they wish him joy and happiness to that end. For Hosanna means: "O, give prosperity;" or: "Beloved, help;" or: "Beloved, save;" or whatever else you might desire to express in such a wish. They add: "To the son of David," and say: God give prosperity to the son of David! O God, give prosperity, blessed be," etc. We would say: O, dear Lord, give happiness and prosperity to this son of David, for his new kingdom! Let him enter in God's name that he may be blessed and his kingdom prosper.

100. Mark proves clearly that they meant his kingdom when he writes expressly in Mark 11, 10, that they said: "Blessed is the kingdom that cometh, the kingdom of our father David: Hosanna in the highest." When some in the churches, read it "Osanna", it is not correct, it should be "Hosanna." They made a woman's name out of it, and her whom they should call Susanna they call Osanna. Susanna is a woman's name and means a rose. Finally, after making a farce out of baptism, the bishops baptize bells and altars, which is a great nonsense, and call the bells Osanna. But away with the blind leaders! We should learn here also to sing Hosanna and Hazelihana to the son of David together with those multitudes, that is, joyfully wish happiness and prosperity to the kingdom of Christ, to holy Christendom, that God may put away all human doctrine and let Christ alone be our king, who governs by his Gospel, and permits us to be his colts! God grant it, Amen.

Content Page



First Page