

## **Week of Sexagesima**

*First recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the weekly section of the Small Catechism. Then read the Proper and assigned Scripture reading followed by the devotion. Conclude with singing the hymn of the week.*



**Weekly Catechism section:** *Close of the Commandments (Luther's Small Catechism)*

**Hymn of the Week:** *Lord, Keep Us Steadfast In Your Word (TLH 261)*

*Septuagesima* is the Latin word for Seventy. It means that Easter Sunday is within seventy days. This also means that this is the third Sunday before Lent -- the forty days that lead up to Holy Week. Next Sunday is called *Sexagesima* (within sixty days of Easter), and the Sunday after that is called *Quinquagesima* (within 50 days of Easter).

**Monday - Introit (Ps. 44:23, 25-26, 1-3, 7-8)**

**Read Psalm 44.**

Psalm 44 is the song of those Christians who have been afflicted by God but continue to trust in him. You have made us turn back while our enemies get the spoil. You have made us like sheep for slaughter. You have sold your people for a trifle. You have made us a byword, a taunt, a disgrace before the peoples. You have broken us in pieces. This Psalm seems to express grumbling against God, but it is doing the opposite. It is in fact acknowledging God's great power while at the same time confidently casting our complaints on him. So we begin our *Introit*: "Awake! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Arise, do not cast us off forever!" This is a prayer of humility and confidence. We are in the dust, humbled before God who willingly afflicts us to teach us to repent of our sins; but we are also confident to call upon God to redeem us.

This is the prayer of those on the good ground who receive the seed of God's Word. We have heard what our fathers taught us. We have heard the Word of God. We heard about the seed he promised

to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, and his people Israel, that this seed -- the eternal Word -- became flesh. We heard that he was obedient unto death to save us from our sins, and he sends his Holy Spirit through the preaching of his Word. We heard the Word of his redemption. But seeing is not always perceiving and hearing isn't always understanding. It is through the trials described in our Introit that God plows our hearts, teaching us not to rely on ourselves nor on any other passing fad or care of the world, but on him who raises the dead (2 Cor 1:9). His strength is made perfect in weakness. So our boast is in Christ the Lord who was crucified for us. Such boast is not in vain, but as we sing, "In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever." This boasting in the Lord alone is what bears fruits of praise, which never end. So may we fear and tremble at God's Word, because it alone accomplishes its own purposes. But for that same reason may we also have a firm confidence in the God of our salvation.

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## **Tuesday - Old Testament Lesson (Isaiah 55:10-13)**

### ***Read Isaiah 55.***

The Word of God does not return void (Isa 55:11). This is a fact. "What if some do not believe?" Paul asks. "Does their unbelief nuliffy the faithfulness of God? Certainly not! Let God be true and every man a liar. (Rom 3:3-4)" The Sower sows his seed. Christ is the one preaching his Word through the voice of his called pastors and indeed through the voice of his entire church. This is one of the most important things for us to remember, especially when we consider the reaction we so often see to the Word

It is easy for the Church to get excited about evangelism. Who isn't thrilled to hear of more people becoming Christians? But when we consider evangelism, we should remember that it is God who works through his Word. He calls pastors to preach, and he calls all Christians to confess. He calls parents to teach their children, and all the while, he promises to work through his Word, which he himself sows. So fathers, remember St. Paul's words, "do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4);" and mothers, you

have the godly example of Lois and Eunice, who taught the gospel to their son and grandson, Timothy (2 Tim 1:5). Most confessing of the gospel is done with people you already know, especially your own family. And we should remember that, in our daily confessing of this Word, it is not our Word, but God's Word. Christ sows his seed. He preaches to you right here in church through the teaching of his prophets and apostles. His Word alone is what creates faith (Rom 10:17) and delivers judgment (Isa 11:4; Rom 2:16). So if people believe it, then rejoice with all the angels in heaven. But if they reject it, rejoice nonetheless that God's Word is confessed truthfully. It won't return empty, and you who struggle against your sin know this, because this is the same Word of the cross that continues to comfort you through the reconciling death of Christ.

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### **Wednesday - Gradual (Psalm 83:18, 13)**

#### ***Read Psalm 83.***

Our *Gradual* is from Psalm 83, a song of Asaph calling on God to bring judgment against his enemies. We can include this within the category of what are called imprecatory Psalms. These are the Psalms that call God's judgment down. Such Psalms might seem to contradict what our Lord Jesus teaches us when he tells us to pray for our enemies and do good to those who persecute us. And yet, praying for God's judgment goes hand-in-hand with what our Lord instructs us about loving our enemies. We are not to bring out our own vengeance on those who do us harm. Instead, we should call on God to bring judgment on his enemies. This way, we are acknowledging that such judgment is on God's time and not on our own. God will make his judgments known. Our role is simply to confess his Word and pray to God that his Word would be fulfilled. Of course, we are called to various other duties in this life. Some have more or less authority than others. But no matter what our callings are here on earth, our one call as Christians is to hear, confess, and depend on God's Word.

Today we consider the efficacy of God's Word. We learn that God's Word works in its own way and time. It seems to be rejected by most. Very few bear fruit. And the fruit that is

produced is borne under the cross, under God's mighty hand. And yet, we take comfort in the fact that God's Word does not return void. As surely as Christ has accomplished our salvation by his obedience and bitter death, so can we be sure that his Word bestows this salvation on us. God will make this known, no matter how many people oppose it. Our *Gradual* therefore prays, "Let the nations know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth. O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind!" This does not seem like a comforting message. But we must consider God's judgment as well as his salvation when we meditate on the enduring power of his Word. Just as he has proven time and again, especially by rising from the dead, he will be proven to be the Most High God. This is an aroma of death and judgment to those perishing, but it is life to those who wait patiently for their salvation.

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**Thursday - Epistle (2 Corinthians 11:19-12:9)**

***Read 2 Corinthians 11:19-12:9.***

St. Paul believed that the Word of God is the only thing that really mattered. After describing to the Corinthians the glory that he had seen from Christ, he refused to boast in such abundant revelation, but, rather, only in the Word of God, just as St. Peter also did (2 Pet 1:16ff). Even though it is perceived by the world as a small, weak, seed that is eaten up by the birds, and we can't often see the fruits that it bears, Paul nevertheless boasts in it. He boasts in the weakness of his preaching, because he knows that this is the very power of God's salvation. "For though I might desire to boast," he says, "I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me."

This is the desire of every faithful minister of God's Word, and indeed of every Christian. That our own strength would not be confused for God's strength, and that only God's Word would be confessed as our salvation in this life -- this is our desire and boast. It is that those who have ears to hear would hear. But the Word of God falls on deaf ears. The devil tampers with it like the birds snatch up the seed from the wayside. People often deny it or

consider it less important than other cares of this life. With naked eyes, the Word seems like a really weak thing. Yet we learn from St. Paul that God's power is made perfect in weakness. The power of God to save poor sinners was perfected in the suffering and death of his only begotten Son on the cross of Calvary. And this same saving power is proclaimed among us even in the midst of spiritual affliction. The good soil is the heart that has been shown its own weakness. It is the poor spirit that cannot possibly rejoice in its own sin-stained merits. This is the soil that God will not despise, but he plants the seed of his Word, which produces much fruit. This is the fruit of confidence and joy that our labor is not in vain and that our confession, though spoken in weakness, rests on the power of God's salvation.

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### **Friday - Alleluia (Psalm 60:1-2, 5)**

#### ***Read Psalm 60.***

In our *Alleluia verse* from Psalm 60 we are reminded of our great reliance upon God's mercy. Psalm 60 is written on the occasion of David's great conquests in Philistia, Syria, and Edom. These great victories are recorded in 2 Samuel 8 and 1 Chronicles 18. The chapter before each of these accounts (2 Sam 7; 1 Chron 17), God tells David that one of his descendants would build an everlasting house, and his kingdom would last forever. This Son of David is Jesus Christ who would bear the stripes and iniquities of men. Now, as a sign of God's promise to bring about this everlasting kingdom through the Christ, the Son of David, the next chapter goes on to describe the great victories God gave to David. He defeated Syrian kings, and one Syrian king even voluntarily paid tribute to him. Two of David's generals, were the brothers Joab and Abishai, his nephews who together struck down 30,000 of the Edomites. The land to the north, south, east, and west belonged to David. At that time there was no king on earth more exalted than David.

And yet, listen to Psalm 60: "O God, You have cast us off; You have broken us down; You have been displeased; Oh, restore us again!" David goes on to acknowledge that the Lord is the one who has made the earth shake. Apparently the Lord did not go

with them into battle at some point, and they learned that there is no strength in man's armies. They learned that only the Lord has the power to save by his right hand where the Son of David stands (Ps. 110:1; 80:17). In our Epistle Lesson from 2 Corinthians 11 and 12 Paul was brought up into the third heaven where he heard inexpressible words from God. But to keep Paul from puffing up with pride, God gave him a thorn in the flesh, a minister of Satan. This was to teach him to rely on God's grace as he learned that God's strength is perfected in weakness. So the heading of Psalm 60 says that this is a learning Psalm. And this is when we learn: under afflictions (Psalm 119:71). Even as God richly blesses us or highly honors us, he still teaches us humility. He teaches us that the suffering of our Lord by which he saved us from sin is more honorable than any honor we might enjoy here on earth.

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### **Saturday - Gospel (Luke 8:4-15)**

#### ***Read Luke 8.***

People like to see results. They want success stories. This is why companies have Public Relations departments to take pictures and write articles about the impact of their charities. But St. Paul teaches his hearers that God's Word is sown in weakness. He teaches that boasting is completely in vain unless we boast only in the Lord. When he describes how he was caught up into heaven to be shown unspeakable revelations from the Lord Jesus, he hides his own identity. Instead, he says that he will boast in his weakness. Maybe this weakness was his inability to connect with and persuade people, or maybe it was a sin he struggled against. Maybe it was someone attacking him and undermining his work of preaching the gospel. He doesn't tell us. Instead, he speaks of his weakness. He, with John the Baptist, must decrease, and Christ must increase. God's strength is perfected in weakness. Just as Christ, the eternal Son of God, perfected God's power to save by suffering for our sins in weakness, so does he teach us, his church to find this same power of the gospel even as we must live with our own weaknesses. And this teaches us to be content in season and out of season, whether we have success or failure. All that matters is that our boast is in the Lord Jesus and his true Word, which alone works faith and brings growth. He alone is the true sower of

the seed of the Word.

St. Paul does not want to boast, because boasting makes you a fool. But he figures that if you are to be a fool, then why not be a fool? Boast in your weaknesses if you must boast. Because it is in this way that you learn to boast in Christ who bore your weaknesses in his own body. And this weakness gives you strength. By the Word, which is counted as weak and irrelevant even by many who claim the name of Christ, you are given true faith, more precious than gold, which as Jesus teaches, bears fruit with patience, not with expediency. So boast in that to which your faith clings! Boast in the Word! Let it not be an ignorant anger fueled by envy, but a godly zeal filled with the knowledge of Christ's Word. So if some are offended, then you don't need to apologize for your burning passion for the truth. You speak it in love, knowing full well that it offends, kills, and always goes against the culture. It bears fruit as God pleases.

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# Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word

# 261

John 8: 31

Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort

Martin Luther, 1541

Tr., Catherine Winkworth, 1863

L. M.

Erhalt uns, Herr

"Geistliche Lieder"

Wittenberg, 1543

1 Lord, keep us stead-fast in Thy Word; Curb those who  
 2 Lord Je - sus Christ, Thy pow'r make known, For Thou art  
 3 O Com-fort - er of price-less worth, Send peace and

fain by craft and sword Would wrest the King-dom from Thy  
 Lord of lords a - lone; De - fend Thy Chris-ten-dom that  
 u - ni - ty on earth. Sup - port us in our fi - nal

Son And set at naught all He hath done.  
 we May ev - er-more sing praise to Thee.  
 strife And lead us out of death to life. A-men.