

**From the Old Testament of the Day: So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide." [Genesis 22.14]**

**From the Holy Gospel, according to the Greek text: Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. [John 8.27]**

This Fifth Sunday in Lent, known as "Judica: Vindication Sunday," gets its Latin name from the beginning of the Introit: "Vindicate Me, O God." The focus of this Sunday is on a vindication before the throne of God, where our heavenly Father gives His people His Word of Vindication for the life-long journey through the world, and then, as it will be for you under the New Heavens and on the New Earth, with Christ.

Your dear Lord speaks these words – "Vindicate Me, O Lord" – as prophesied by Holy Scriptures in the Old Testament.

They indicate that just as Christ is vindicated by the surprising, often word of God the Father, even so, on this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, God's Word invites you to see how, day by day, especially in response to the words of condemnation coming from your conscience, that God indeeds vindicates you by His authorized Word of Holy Absolution, which we need considering "The Sorry Lot of Christians like us."

I.

Let's face it! Confession is not popular in the Church. So, why does the Church of the Lutheran Confessions urge and practice both general confession and absolution each Sunday and other holy days, and also individual confession and absolution? The answer is simple: Confession and Holy Absolution is a gift of God, and a right of a Christian has been purchased by the blood of Christ. You have a right to Confession and Holy Absolution! You can demand it of God's Church, because Christ puts it there for you.

II.

In the Holy Gospel of the Day, Jesus challenges the notion of the religious leaders of His day, who wished to impose on people their notions, and not God's Word. So, Our Lord says, "Whoever is of God hears the Words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not of God." With these words, Jesus asserts the truth that God's Word is what God gives, regardless of popularity, regardless of what people would rather hear for their spiritual lives. And He sets forth what is, quite frankly, as stark possibility, namely that, if God offers something and you say, "Ah, no thanks!" this very rejection could well be a sign that, in Jesus' words, "you are not of God."

Those are stark words. But this is a vital issue. Christianity is not a results of mankind's creation – and therefore it is not a matter of what Christians think that they might want or might not want. Christianity is shaped by the Words and Institutions of Christ Himself.

Christianity involves what Christians absolutely need and absolutely must have for salvation. Anyone who gets in the way of what God clearly offers, gives, applies, and certifies, gets in the way of Christ Himself, and that person is not of God.

More than anything else, at all times and in all circumstances, sinners need the forgiveness of sins, and they need the forgiveness of sins from all the sources through which God ordains to give it. Christians are a sorry lot – even as are the rest of the mankind. I am a sinner before, during, and after I am made into a Christian by the Holy Ghost. As I, a Christian, remain a sinner in this present life, so also I remain a beggar before God, a beggar who has no right to pick and choose from the promises of God those which I like and those which I'd just as soon pass by.

You are Christians – that means you are sinners. That also means that you are a constantly endangered species in this life – "Take heed, how you stand, lest you fall!" As such, you have no business, no promise from

God, and no future, if you begin to pick and choose among the holy things that God gives you for your spiritual welfare.

### III.

Confession and Holy Absolution is just such medicine. It is what God provides, on purpose and as result of divine, Fatherly wisdom. That others abuse this gift is no reason for you to miss what God has for you there. It is a remedy for sin and a cause for holiness of living. Holy Absolution is indeed the voice of God in your life and in your language. It is a practice that God ordains in His Church to do precisely, on a daily basis, what the Epistle declares: "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." That is precisely what the voice of Holy Absolution does in your hearing and for your living: It purifies your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." That is what Holy Absolution is doing for you as you hear it. It is God's personal gift to you, in the ongoing struggle with the conscience that repentant sinners will always face in this life. Just as God worked in the life of Abraham to provide a lamb for the sacrifice for sins, so God provides by His own voice, spoken through His appointed spokesman the forgiveness of specific sins, which otherwise would nag the conscience and wound the spirit.

In the Holy Gospel of the Day, Jesus says to His opponents: "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here." Well, God is your Father, by the miracle of rebirth through water and the word. He is your Father, and through your elder Brother, Jesus, the first-born of many brethren, you have the right and privilege to receive all the truly good things, right things, holy things, that Jesus' Father and yours intends for you, that His blood as bought for you, and that His Spirit daily applies to you through the Word in all its appointed forms. You are of God! So, hear the Words of God, for they are forgiveness and they are life for you, now and forever!