

From the Epistle: **Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.** [1 John 3.18]

From the Holy Gospel: “But they all alike began to make excuses. [Luke 14.18a]

On this 2nd Sunday after Trinity, your thoughts are invited by the lessons of the day to the topic of love, in particular the love that you are commanded by God to have toward other people. This topic of love is often discussed under the category of “sanctification.” In the Scriptures, the term “sanctification” means “making holy,” and it describes the manner in which God makes and keeps a holy people. Now, the word “holy,” means “set apart for sacred purposes.” We use “holy” in this way when, for example, we speak of “Holy Baptism,” “Holy Communion,” “Holy Absolution,” “Holy Days,” and “Holy Bible.” In the same way, the Apostles speak of how God makes a people, set apart for sacred purposes, a holy people.

But, in these days, and sadly, in our Lutheran churches, the term “sanctification” has come to be used to describe some process that God supposedly uses to make sinners more and more holy in the passing days and years of Christian years. Moreover in this unfortunate use of the term sanctification, the picture is given of some Christians being more holy than others, and of some pastors being negligent in helping their parishioners to be more holy than they have been and, be logical implication, being more holy than other Christians. This use of the notion of “sanctification” is both unfortunate and wrong, both mistaken and harmful to Christian faith and life.

Today, these texts just read to you teach you about love in the Christian life, and thus they uncover the error of wrong teaching about sanctification.

I.

In the Holy Gospel, the parable of the great banquet. There are two banquet parables taught by your Lord Jesus and recorded in the Holy Gospels. One is known as “The Great Marriage Feast Parable,” found recording in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, and the other is known as “The Great Supper Parable,” which is today’s Holy Gospel from St. Luke.

The two parables have similar themes, but the distinct details. St. Matthew’s parable teaches that the same manner of salvation exists in both the Old and New Testaments, namely, by grace alone, and that the promise of grace alone is opposed and fought against in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Great Supper parable in our text today likewise teaches the promise of grace along, but the context is the confusion that exists about the Gospel particularly among the Pharisees. They don’t fight against Christ and His Gospel in the way that the prophets were opposed in the Old Testament, often by killing them. In today’s Holy Gospel, the religious leaders just dismiss the gracious call of God – they excuse themselves from it.

But in the end, the result is the same. Only those who are called, gathered, and kept by the Holy Spirit – purely on the basis of grace alone – end up in God’s kingdom. They are the “holy ones.” They are the “set apart ones.” And by God’s gracious choosing and activity, you are among those set apart ones by Holy Baptism. You remain among the gathered, enlightened, and kept holy ones, the set-apart ones, through Holy Absolution, the proclaimed Holy Word of God, and the consecrated and distributed Holy Communion.

Notice that your behavior, before, during, and after the banquet of grace, has nothing to do with how you are among God’s holy ones, God’s set-apart ones! That God elects you, calls you, converts you, and keeps you in the faith is your sanctification.

II.

In the Epistle of the Day, you hear: “By this we know love, that He laid down His life for

us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” In this matter of daily life, of this teaching about love, many say that we are hearing about sanctification. They assert that this should be the message ringing in our ears as we leave the services of God’s house each week – “go home and love, love more and more.” They assert that this message about more love is what makes us more sanctified?

Such teaching will not increase your holiness – in fact, it may harm it, because such a message sends you home under the law, under the demand to do things to increase your sanctification. Such a message is the opposite of what we find in the Holy Gospel and hear in the Old Testament of the Day: “Leave you simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight.” That insight – that holiness by pure grace alone – will cause growth in the sense that it will cause maturity.

The fact is that you are set-apart by the Gospel, and that fact alone, is what God the Holy Spirit uses to cause your life in the Spirit, and your spiritual growth. It is in knowing the love of God toward you that the Holy Spirit brings maturity to your soul. He – the Holy Ghost – then becomes the author of all good things in your daily life. He creates them, and you live in them, to the joy of heaven and the benefit of others on earth.

So then, the gift of the Spirit is faith, and in that faith the gift of the Spirit is hope, and in that hope the gift of the Spirit is love, and in that Spirit-created and –sustained love you know that you have passed out of death into life!

“Come! Eat my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed! Leave your simple ways and live--you will walk in the way of insight!” And that insight, and not your behaviors or intentions, is your sanctification!