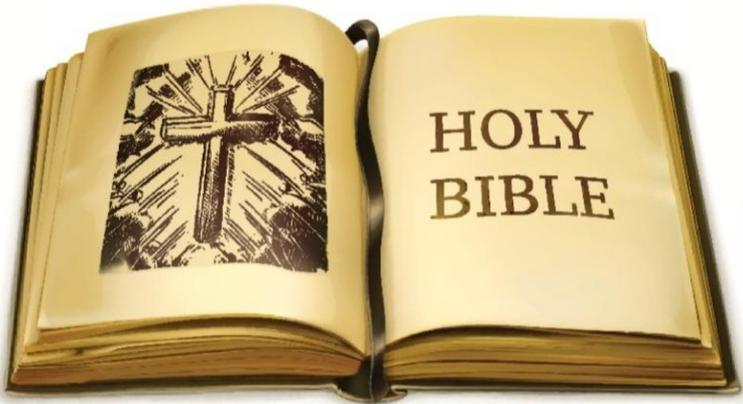


Each Day in the Word



February 1-28, 2026

FOREWORD

This booklet is compiled by the pastors of the Confessional Lutheran Ministerium for congregations and individuals not necessarily affiliated with any Lutheran denomination. Indeed, it is for anyone who finds it in their hands whether they are Lutheran or not. It is our prayer that God's people will be edified by this humble offering.

While it is tempting for everyone when reading daily devotional booklets to skip the Scripture lesson and read only the devotional material, it is highly recommended that the reader set their attention on the Scripture lesson before reading the devotion itself. The Holy Spirit tells us in Hebrews 4:12 that "the word of God is living and powerful." As the Scripture is the very Word of God, we ought to devote time and attention to it each day so that through it, God the Holy Spirit may strengthen our trust in His promises and kindle in our hearts love for God and our neighbor.

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Quotations from Martin Luther works are taken from Luther's Works, American Edition, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86), hereafter AE.

Verse 16 states that Paul’s “spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city (Athens) was given over to idols.” This, in turn, led Paul to engage in conversations with the Athenians in the marketplace daily and caused some to believe that Paul was a “proclaimer of foreign gods.” Would that we knew exactly what those conversations entailed; we don’t, of course, because the Holy Spirit has not revealed that information.

What we do know is that Athens was basically a polytheistic city; it held to the idea that there are many gods. Greek gods filled the lives and superstitions of all its residents – gods which must be placated, pleased, and kept happy...or else!

However, today’s text reveals that the Athenians expressed some interest in Paul’s message. This reminds us that in this ungodly world we never know when or where God will give us opportunities to speak to others about Him. Most often we will meet with opposition, but there will be times when we are called upon to confess the faith and speak clearly about God’s work of paying for the sins of all mankind in His Son Jesus, and that folks actually will want to hear what we have to say. Thanks be to God when they do!

This world is full of idols – things and people that replace the one true God. And every time we notice this, our spirit, like Paul’s, should also be “provoked within” us. We Christians must never give credence to any but the one true God for, of a truth, all other gods are false. We have the only saving message in all the world: that Jesus Christ, God’s one and only Son, took on our human flesh, lived in perfect obedience to God for us, suffered and died for us, and then rose again to defeat even death for us. His payment for all our sins has set us free to live a life of thanksgiving and praise to God for His great love. May that move us to speak truthfully and lovingly to anyone who may listen.

Let us pray: O Lord, open my lips that my mouth may proclaim Your praise. Amen.

In today's reading Jesus healed a woman from a 12-year flow of blood and raised a young girl from the dead. In this we see that Jesus most certainly has power over sickness and death.

Sin, death, and the devil are constant companions to all of us in this sin-sick and falling-apart-at-the-seams world; they are our enemies, and they are bound together. But Jesus picks them off one by one, overcoming them and destroying them. Our Savior won the victory over sin; He rose again, destroying death. And we know that the devil ultimately will be toppled from his throne and cast down, for, as we confess in the Catechism, "where there is forgiveness of sins, there also is life and salvation." With Jesus there is always life in the place of death. With Jesus there is always salvation and freedom instead of captivity by the devil.

Wherever Jesus is, there is life. And wherever Jesus overcomes death, He is also overcoming sin and the devil. And this is a good thing, for while our three enemies are bundled in their assault against us, they are also bundled together in their defeat. When one goes down, they all go down. On Jesus' cross they are bound together in a bundle of divine destruction.

Take heart, dear fellow redeemed, that when those enemies come to fight against us, the Lord Jesus comes to fight against them. This is what Jesus came to do and still does: He fights sin, death, and the devil.

In this life we are surrounded by death because of sin. But Jesus has taken hold of us, He has paid for our sins, He has set us free from the devil, and He has raised us from the fear of death, knowing that when He returns He will raise us as well from the grave and grant us eternal life before His face in the new heaven and the new earth.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for defeating our enemies. Strengthen our faith in You through Your Word and Sacraments so that we may be with You forever in heaven. Amen.

There's a lot going on in today's reading, and it sums up the world in which we live.

First, Jesus is relatively unknown and unbelieved in His own country. The people were astonished at His teaching in the synagogue but were unable to get past the fact that He was from their neighborhood. Therefore, Jesus could not be the Messiah, at least to their thinking; they didn't know or just didn't believe the prophecies which Jesus Himself was fulfilling.

Later, Jesus sends out His disciples to preach repentance, and gave them His power over unclean spirits. In some places they were received, in others not so much. We, too, will be both received and rejected in this life for telling others the truth about Jesus – that He paid for the sins of the world and that people must believe in Him for salvation. When the Holy Spirit gives saving faith, we rightly rejoice. But when the Gospel is rejected, remember that it is not we who are being rejected, but Christ. It is not any of our doing that anyone comes to faith; but like it was with us, people are called by the Gospel, enlightened with God's gifts, and sanctified and kept in the true faith through the power of God's Word alone.

Finally, we hear of John's beheading at the hand of evil Herod. John's "sin" was telling Herod that it was wrong for him to have his brother's wife. It was a gutsy call on John's part, but he spoke the truth in order to call Herod to repentance that he, too, might be saved. We, too, are encouraged always to "speak the truth in love" to others so that they will hear of Christ's endless love for all mankind by His holy, innocent, suffering and death by which He paid for the sins of the world. It may even be, God forbid, that we lose our lives for that, but we will have given God the glory and possibly be used by Him for the salvation of another. We count all things as loss for the excellence of knowing Jesus Christ and His eternally wonderful payment for all our sins.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, use us for Your glory and the good of others. Amen.

In today's reading the disciples have returned from being sent by Jesus as yesterday's reading revealed. After their adventures our Lord invites them to rest from their labors. When Jesus sees the multitudes, Mark records that He "was moved with compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus then goes on to feed well over 5,000 people, multiplying bread and fish to satiate them all, and there are plenty of leftovers to boot! Then Jesus calms the disciples when they were caught in the midst of a storm and healed all who came to Him.

Jesus gives, multiplies, provides, calms, and heals. This is exactly what our good and gracious God does every time we participate in the Divine Service. He Himself is our Good Shepherd who has given us His undershepherds, His pastors, to give, multiply, provide, calm, and heal us through their faithful delivery of Word and Sacrament – through their faithful delivery of Jesus for you.

No one should be without a shepherd. The "shepherds" in Jesus' day were the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, who knew nothing of Jesus as Messiah and fulfiller of all OT prophecies and Who came to bring forgiveness. Therefore, they could not comfort, feed, guide, or calm the people. The only message they had to deliver was Law and fear.

If you, by God-given faith, believe that Jesus died for your sins, rose from the dead, and will come again to take you to be with Him in heaven, you have forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. That comfort, healing, guidance, and calm is the "glue" that holds you together throughout this life. Jesus is your Savior. He is your Good Shepherd. He has paid for your sins and continues to feed you with His forgiveness and strength through the Gospel rightly preached and His Sacraments rightly administered.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for paying for my sins. Keep me in the one true faith until You call me Home. Amen.

Appearances are everything...to some people. That certainly was the case with the Pharisees who were all about keeping up appearances and making sure other people saw them acting pious and holy. And because they were like that, they thought they had the right to chastise Jesus' disciples for not following their – the Pharisees' – rules.

But appearances are merely the veneer, the thin coating which covers up what's underneath. Like the thin veneer of a countertop or a cheap piece of furniture, what's underneath isn't natural wood; it isn't worth much. With the veneer, what you see is not what you get.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees with the very Scriptures they thought they knew. He tore off their misleading veneer of self-righteousness and false piety by rubbing their noses in the Word of God. He chastised them for keeping their own traditions instead of being obedient to God's Word. He chided them for their evil words and actions.

But the Syro-Phoenician woman had no veneer; she wasn't a fake Christian; she wasn't superficial or pseudo-pious. She clung to Jesus and was willing to receive anything, even a crumb, from Him because she had faith in Him. And she received more than crumbs, for Jesus healed her dear daughter of demon-possession.

We need to repent of being Pharisaic about our faith from time to time. Our sinful nature wants to hold up our own goodness and works as the reason God loves us. But God doesn't save or forgive based on anything we do or are. He saves and forgives because it is His nature. He demonstrated His love for all mankind by sending His Son to pay for the sins of the world, and He grants forgiveness and salvation to all who believe in His work for them. And He continues to deliver His forgiveness and strength through the Holy BAGS – Baptism, Absolution, Gospel, and Supper. Those things have no veneer. Like Jesus, they're solid, genuine, and sure.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for Your genuine love, mercy, and forgiveness. Amen.

Jesus warned His disciples to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod.” The Pharisees’ teachings functioned like leaven, or yeast, that spread throughout Jerusalem like a cancer and turned people away from the truth of Scripture. Their teachings were nothing more than rules by which to live and their own erroneous interpretations and applications of the Scriptures over which they claimed to have authority. Although they were the religious leaders, they didn’t believe in Jesus as the fulfiller of Old Testament prophecies; they didn’t believe He was the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Any preaching or teaching in the church by anyone claiming to be “religious” that does not point to Jesus as the only One who has fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies and Who gave His life on the cross to pay for the sins of all mankind is leaven. It is false and misleading. It is a cancer that ultimately and eternally kills.

What saves and gives life is the confession and teaching that Peter gave: Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (the fuller presentation from Mt. 19:16), a confession that, according to Matthew, was given from God the Father. That is the only truth that matters in this world. That is the only truth that gives not only the certainty of sins paid for and the promise of heaven, but also the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.

Forgiveness of sins is given to us through God-given faith in Christ’s work for us on the cross. In Holy Baptism we die to sin as Christ did and rise to life as Christ did. His death and resurrection become ours in those wonderful waters by the power of the Word of God. And through regular hearing of Christ’s Gospel and reception of Christ’s Sacramental gifts, we continue to proclaim Christ’s death until He comes and are strengthened in our various vocations as living confessions of Christ to those around us.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Your death and resurrection are solid truth. Keep us in that one true faith until You call us Home to be with You forever. Amen.

Today's text tells of Jesus' Transfiguration, His healing of a demon-possessed boy, and yet another declaration of His death and resurrection.

Our Lord's Transfiguration is an amazing site for Peter, James, and John as they were taken by Him to a high mountain by themselves and witnessed His highest glory, as later in Gethsemane they were to be witnesses of His greatest humiliation. Luke's account records that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were talking about the Lord's departure that He would accomplish in Jerusalem – His suffering, death, and burial.

Further, the appearance of Moses and Elijah underscores that there is indeed a resurrection from the dead. Their bodies had been in the grave for centuries, and yet here they are with Jesus. This is a prefigurement of the resurrection that Jesus Himself would guarantee for all who die in Him by His own rising from the dead. The faith and confession of Moses and Elijah testified of the Messiah to come – the Messiah who would defeat death and the grave for all who believe in Him and who would, by His own resurrection, make certain that all who die in Him will also be raised.

Our Lord then released a young boy from a terrible demon-possession demonstrating yet again His power and authority over evil spirits and even the devil himself. Indeed, the devil is powerful, the second-most powerful being ever. But Jesus rules over him, proving by His own resurrection from the dead that the devil's lynchpin – death – is undone and overcome by Jesus.

Dear Christian, Christ died to pay for all your sins and rose from the dead for you. If you, by God-given faith alone believe that, you also have the promise of forgiveness and eternal life, a promise and truth that will sustain you in this life until God calls you Home to be with Him forever. And you need not even fear death, for your Lord and Savior Jesus has overcome that for you as well.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for dying and rising for me and all mankind, and for giving me faith to believe in You. Amen.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Well, who is able to say they don’t have an ear? Honestly, no-one! Even deaf people ‘have’ an ear and they also are able to receive “what the Spirit says to the churches;” it’s just through a different medium. All of these messages to the churches reveal how God takes the proclamation of His Word extremely serious. So, it’s always shocking when someone is encountered who treats God’s Word flippantly. But, sadly and frustratingly, it happens — a lot!

It’s imperative to keep in mind who the Spirit is as God speaks through the written word. The Spirit is called the “teacher” at many places of Holy Scripture (see Nehemiah 9:20; John 14:26; Luke 12:12; and 1 John 2:27). Being familiar with the terminology, we Lutherans, could call God’s Spirit the ultimate “catechist” (teacher) when it comes to the “catechesis” (teaching) of God’s Word. God’s Holy Scripture could then be looked upon as the ultimate “catechism” (book of teachings); and we could be viewed as the Holy Spirit’s “catechumens” (students).

This gives a whole new perspective to Luther’s words, “Let me ever remain a student of the catechism!” Obviously, Luther was speaking about the catechisms (large and small) that he had created. But the same applies when it comes to all of God’s Word. It is the Spirit who, thankfully, reveals the spiritual things of God. Those things are not discerned by man. Every word spoken by any teacher of Holy Scripture needs always to be held accountable to “what the Spirit says” — for what He speaks, through Law & Gospel, is what brings about true repentance and belief in Jesus. Rejoice that you have heard!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Usually when you hear someone quoting the passage “for with God all things are possible,” it is meant to imply what great things that individual can do if he just has God working for him; this is because they take it out of context. When you read this verse *in context*, however, it is not talking about God making possible what mankind does — rather, it is about salvation!

Only God can save. Mankind cannot do anything that will bring him salvation. Obeying the Commandments cannot do it. That’s why confessional Lutherans are so blessed to have the explanation to the Third Article professed through their lips: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.” Not even selling all you have and giving it to the poor can do it. With mankind, salvation is impossible, period! But with God, salvation is possible.

Our Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself and became man so that the impossible task of fulfilling the Commandments might be accomplished for mankind; this is called His *active obedience*. He even humbled Himself further by selling all that He had, even His very life, to suffer our punishment on the tree of the holy cross to atone for the breaking of the Commandments by all mankind; this is called His *passive obedience*. On account of the merits and work of Christ, we believers now have treasure in Heaven, an eternal life with our Redeemer and all the saints. This why Christ the crucified is the focal point of the Christian Church. His scars are glorious in our eyes of faith!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

You are presented with two very different – and somewhat contrasting – scenes after Jesus instructs His disciples in what was about to happen to Him. In the first scene, James and John request that they be given the highest seats of authority in the kingdom — to sit on the Lord's left and right. They seek power and authority.

Yet again, man's flesh does not comprehend the spiritual things of God! These men have no idea what they are asking. Man's flesh will ever wrestle with the understanding of God working through crosses – or suffering. To sit with the Lord Jesus means to endure His suffering and pain, His mocking and scourging. Oh, they will indeed drink this cup of the Lord, even though it is not what they expect to happen.

The second scene involves a blind man, Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. What is his request of the Lord? It is not a fleshly request for glory or fame, but a spiritual petition from the New Man for mercy. He cries out with a loud voice until his prayer is answered, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Bartimaeus suffers blindness as a result of being conceived and born into the darkness of this world full of sin.

In their spiritual darkness, James and John ask for something fleshly that cannot be given to them. Bartimaeus, with eyes of faith, however, sees the Lord Jesus as the source of light. Not only is He the source of light which cures Bartimaeus' blindness, but He shines in this dark world to conquer sin through His life, death and resurrection, enlightening all those who believe on Him. Rejoice that you are among those enlightened!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Lord knows that it is not the season for figs, but the Lord is hungry and decides to use the opportunity to teach. He sees a fig tree with no figs on it and then curses the tree. This would seem odd to any reader at first. However, there is something hidden in Jesus' words. The temple in Jerusalem is located at both ends of this text regarding the fig tree, for Jesus visits the temple before and after the scene. With this in mind, the curse spoken against the fig tree, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again," is really a curse against the temple in Jerusalem.

Upon His return to the temple, the Lord drives out the money changers — the ones who were using the sins of mankind as a means to make a profit. They were profiting from man's misery, even though most people just considered them to be providing a service.

The Lord was preparing the way for the true Temple — the Temple of His Body — which will provide the one and only sacrifice needed for the full atonement of all sins. Salvation is revealed only in Christ's sacrifice for you on the cross. Those who buy and sell forgiveness contradict God's truth, cause confusion, take the focus off of Christ, and are frauds. They will be held accountable for such false teachings. Salvation is a free gift – given through Holy Baptism and the other means of grace – to all those who flee in faith to God's Mercy Seat, promised through the One who is just that: Christ Jesus! He is the One who has made full payment for your sins. No other payment can be made or purchased. Praise God who has supplied the way of refuge and peace through faith in His only begotten Son!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

A question is posed to Jesus by the Pharisees about paying taxes to Caesar. They were scheming to get the Lord to admit to paying the tax; that way they could say He was not really the Messiah, because the Messiah would not hold allegiance with Caesar. The irony in this, however, comes later when, in order to get the Lord Jesus crucified, they themselves claim they have no king but Caesar.

The Sadducees similarly try a scheme of their own. They question Jesus about the resurrection — something they do not even believe in. They only read the Torah, the five books of Moses, and disregarded the rest of the Word of God. Just as He did with the devil in the wilderness when he was tempting Him, the Lord Jesus refutes the Sadducees with the proper use of God's Word. He is the God of the living. Even after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were many years in the grave, they were still living in Heaven when the Lord spoke to Moses.

Scripture reveals Scripture: this explains how the *Son* of David can be the *Lord* of David, because David was still living in Heaven. The Lord Jesus was Lord over David because He was both God and man. He was the Son who was the Lord. And by His sacrifice on the tree of the cross, which He made holy through His precious blood, He made sin, death, and the devil—His enemies – to serve as His footstool and give you freedom from their power over you. Thanks be to God, indeed!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

God in His infinite wisdom chose not to supply any history about Jesus' life after His questioning the teachers of the Law when He was twelve years old. He eventually appears before John the Baptist to be baptized; and consequently, He consecrated all waters of Holy Baptism to be holy through His blood. After having been tempted by the devil for forty days of fasting, the Lord Jesus returns to Galilee and then on to Nazareth where He grew up. God's Word reveals that He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. This was Jesus' custom.

So, what's the first thing that the Lord reads after His Holy Baptism and temptation? Not coincidentally, He reads the passage from Isaiah which was quoted to the disciples of John the Baptist when they were sent to ascertain whether He was the One sent from God, or if they were to look for another. The very prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in the midst of those in Nazareth on this Sabbath. And what do they do? They reject Him. They think He cannot be the Messiah, for He is only Joseph's son. Their reaction was a testament to the lowly upbringing of the Lord, who was born in a humble way and lived a humble life with parents who were not people of high standing.

What, then, does the Lord do after His rejection? He continues to do the things that Isaiah said He would do: He casts out demons and heals the sick, thereby destroying the kingdom and stronghold of the devil. He completed the defeat of the devil's kingdom with His death on the cross. And He did it for you!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Within this text God demonstrates His authority, as only He has, along with the power to heal, as only He can do! There are different kinds of healing taking place. Some physical, some spiritual.

Some people, effected by the fallenness of this world, suffer from maladies in their bodies, and they need healing. God's Word uses physical maladies to display man's inner – or inescapable – corruption of original sin. God's Word is revealing that all of mankind is in need of spiritual healing!

Although God can pick and choose who He would or would not heal physically – as His will is always best – God's will was also best in that He secured full atonement for the sins of the entire world through the only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus! That salvation is always there for man to receive by faith.

The paralytic and his friends demonstrate what God-created faith does, just as it did with the leper and tax-collector. Faith desires Jesus and what Jesus has fully merited to offer out, namely, forgiveness of sins. So the paralytic and his friends, called by the Gospel, decide to go through the roof.

Jesus, being the Good-physician, heals the paralytic's greatest need first: the need of his soul. His sins are forgiven because Jesus sees the paralytic's faith. "Only God has the authority to forgive sins!" is grumbled. But since the Son of Man has that authority, He then reveals it by healing the paralytic's body.

Rejoice that you have been – and continue to be – called by the Gospel, and that God-created faith continues to bring you to do what faith desires, namely, continually partaking of Jesus and the forgiveness that He offers through His means of grace!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Seeing, hearing, and faith. Those themes run through the devotions this week. In today's Gospel from Luke 18, Jesus, in His state of humiliation showed His disciples what lay ahead for Him: suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus laid out the plan for them to "see," but they didn't understand it at the time. Meanwhile, the blind man trusted even without seeing, which resulted in his sight being granted.

In today's reading from Revelation, Jesus, in His state of exaltation reveals to His Church the content of the sealed scroll, the decrees and judgments of God concerning what lies ahead for the Church.

Jesus is worthy to know and to reveal the Father's decrees both as true God and as true Man, and as both the Lion and the Lamb: as the Lamb, because He gave Himself as a sacrifice for the world's sins and cleansed His Church with the washing of water by the Word; as the Lion, because He conquered sin and death and reigns over all things for the Church.

Jesus alone is worthy to reveal the Church's future, and what He reveals is that the Church's path resembles the path of Christ Himself. Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. We must face suffering, rejection, and death. But like Jesus, we, too, will be resurrected and glorified. As with the Head, that is, Christ, so with the Body, that is, the Church.

Having seen the plan, learn from both the disciples and the blind man in Luke 18. You may not understand everything that Christ has revealed about these last days of the earth. But in this case, trust can be blind, because we have already seen the goodness and mercy of God in Christ. Trust in His good and merciful plan for His Church, and eventually, like the blind man whose faith saved him, your trust will be rewarded with sight, too.

Let us pray: O Lamb of God, You are worthy of all honor and praise. When we are unable to see how Your plans fit together, send forth Your Holy Spirit to enlighten our eyes and to strengthen our faith. Amen.

There was a prevailing blindness in Israel with regard to the Sabbath law, and all God's laws, at the time of Jesus. Most of the Jewish leaders thought that their religion was about doing things for God, obeying His commandments in order to earn His favor. They viewed the Sabbath law as Israel's special obligation to "work" by not working.

Jesus exposes their blindness in today's reading. The disciples were not breaking God's Sabbath law by having a bite to eat on the Sabbath, and Jesus was not breaking God's Sabbath law by healing on the Sabbath. The ceremonial aspect of the Sabbath law—the part about not doing any work on the Sabbath—was not an absolute commandment that was to be obeyed to the detriment of one's own body or the body of one's neighbor. On the contrary, the Sabbath law was God's merciful gift to Israel. It was given for man's benefit, as a way to ensure some rest in the midst of this world's toil, and as an opportunity to help one's neighbor in need. But the people's focus on themselves and their own works made them unable to see or to reflect God's mercy.

The same blindness prevails in today's world, too. Those who think they have a chance to earn their way into heaven despise the free favor and mercy of God in Christ, just as those who love their sin despise God's condemnation of it and His insistence that all must come to repentance. In either case, they are unable to see how hopeless their situation is and that the only thing that can save them is resting in God's mercy and in Christ's work on our behalf.

May our eyes be open – both to our sin and to God's mercy toward sinners. Then, having received mercy from God, we will finally be able to see how to be merciful toward those around us, just as the Lord Christ always was.

Let us pray: Merciful Lord God, turn our eyes toward the needs of our neighbor and warm our hearts by Your mercy to show mercy to those around us. Amen.

In the verses just prior to today's reading, Jesus warned His disciples to make sure they were able to see clearly before trying to correct their neighbor's sight. In other words, before you try to fix your neighbor, you have to fix yourself. He expands on this with another illustration about good and bad trees. As you go about dealing with your own faults, it will do you no good to try to fix the outward behaviors that are sinful and evil. No; if you are to produce good fruit, you first have to be made good. Otherwise, like a bad tree, you will produce only bad fruit.

How can you be made good? Not by ignoring the words of the Lord Jesus and taking matters into your hands to improve yourself. The truth is, you can't fix yourself. Only God can do that, and He will do it through His Word. He shows you your sin as His Word reveals what is right and wrong. He convicts you of sin as His Word is applied to you. He shows you your Savior Jesus who loved you and gave Himself for you. And then He shows you Jesus as the true Vine, the good Vine, into whom you must be grafted by Baptism and faith.

Once you are made into a good tree, or into a branch that is grafted into the good Vine, then the Word of God teaches you to work together with the Holy Spirit, to apply yourself to hearing and meditating on God's Word, and to devote yourself to living according to it.

When you do, you are like that man who built his house on the solid rock foundation. No storm or wind will be able to move you from it. But if you ignore Jesus' Word and rely on yourself instead, then, like the house built on nothing, you will come to nothing.

Let us pray: O Lord Jesus, we are nothing without You. Keep us from relying on ourselves. Forgive us for the evil we have done and the good we have failed to do, and graciously continue to send preachers of Your Word, that we may hear it and believe it and put it into practice. Amen.

Seeing is not necessarily believing. Many people in Israel saw the signs Jesus was doing and, instead of believing, kept demanding more and more signs. Not so with the Roman centurion. He had already seen enough. Or better, he had already heard enough.

It seems clear that the centurion had never met Jesus or watched Him perform His miracles. But he had clearly heard the word about Christ, that He was good and merciful, and that He behaved as a Commander over disease, and over nature, and even over demons, and that His commands were readily obeyed. The word about Jesus created such faith in the centurion's heart that, even when given the opportunity to see Jesus and have Him come under his roof, he refused. Why should he desire something so unnecessary when a simple word from the Commander will do?

Why should we? Why should we desire to see the Lord's plan for His Church beyond what He has already revealed in His Word? Why should we desire to see more evidence of His loving care than the cross He willingly bore for us?

Let God's Word be enough. If He has promised it, it must be done; it must come true. He has proven Himself dependable and reliable. He doesn't have to keep proving His faithfulness over and over again, does He? If He has not said it, then we don't need to know it, nor should we expect it. But if He has said it, then let us believe it, without having to see a thing, knowing that, in the Lord's time, we will see everything turn out just as He said.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, You are the mighty Commander and Ruler over all things. Grant us Your Spirit to strengthen our faith, that we may trust steadfastly in Your word and look to You for mercy at all times. Amen.

As John the Baptist sat in prison, his faith needed strengthening; so he wisely turned to Jesus for help, and he was given exactly the help he needed. John's disciples were to see the miracles Jesus was performing, hear the message Jesus was preaching, and report what they saw and heard back to John. That report, that word about Jesus, which was also connected to the Old Testament word about the Messiah, would give John all the strength he needed to be faithful unto death.

Jesus also reminded the crowds who were with Him of the power of the word as preached by John. It wasn't his fine appearance or fancy clothing or elegant preaching that brought tax collectors and sinners to faith. It was the simple word of God, the Law that exposed their sins, and the Gospel that promised the forgiveness of sins through Christ.

Of course, not everyone saw and heard and then believed. Most did not receive the word humbly. Most were like children in the marketplace who made up their own rules for how John and Jesus were to behave and preach. But their unbelief is contrasted in today's reading with the faith and gratitude of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet. His preaching of free forgiveness to all who came to Him for it was enough to persuade her that even her many sins would be forgiven by Him. And she was not alone. While the leading men of Israel mocked Jesus and rejected Him, many women were brought to faith by His word and devoted themselves to serving Him in whatever way they could.

May all these examples move us to hear the word of God humbly, not placing ourselves and our reason above it, but always beneath it. Consider the goodness and mercy of Christ that you have heard reported in Holy Scripture, and may His great love for you move you to great acts of love for others.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, keep us focused on the words and works of Your beloved Son. Grant that we may always receive Your word humbly and believe it steadfastly. Amen.

“Take heed how you hear,” Jesus says in today’s reading. Hearing the word of God is good, but simply hearing the sounds is not enough. He calls on us to pay attention to what we hear, to meditate on it, to believe it, to remember it, and to put it into practice. Those who do are as close to Him as His mother and brothers and sisters. In fact, they become His mother and brothers and sisters!

The disciples ought to have taken heed to how they heard when they got into the boat with Jesus that day. “Let us cross over to the other side of the lake,” He said. Could they have perished before reaching the other side? “From now on you will be fishers of men,” Jesus had told them earlier on. Could they have perished before their fishing for men even began?

No. But they lost sight of Jesus’ promises. They forgot His Word. The storm arose, and all they could think about was the storm. “Where is your faith?” Jesus asked them after calming the storm with a word. Faith in what? That God must always protect His children from perishing in a storm? No, but faith in the Word of Jesus that had already promised them a safe arrival on the other side. The disciples should have taken heed how they heard the Word of Jesus.

And not as the demons do! The demons, as demonstrated by our reading, know full well the power of Jesus’ Word. They do not forget His Word or think little of it. No, they believe with full assurance that Jesus has the power to do with them as He pleases. But, being demons, they place no trust in Jesus and do not believe Him to be good. They do not rely on His Word or love His Word or yearn to hear it.

Take heed how you hear as did the woman with the flow of blood and Jairus. They sought out Jesus, yearning for His help, yearning for a word of healing, and trusting in both His power and His goodness, and they were not disappointed!

Let us pray: O Lord Christ, be merciful to us in our weakness and help us to hear Your word rightly. Amen.

Of the disciples who had been hearing the word of Christ, Jesus chose twelve and sent them out to preach His Word, adding also the power to heal disease and to drive out demons. And they fulfilled their first mission admirably, preaching, teaching, and performing miracles by the power of Jesus' Word.

Isn't it strange, then, that none of them could even imagine where they could possibly get food for those thousands of people who had spent the day with them? Isn't it astonishing that they so quickly went back to relying on their own power and resources, causing them to despair? Isn't it amazing that they didn't immediately look to Christ Himself for help? "Lord, we are unable to do this thing. But You can!"

No, they had heard and seen so much from Christ, but in the moment, they still wavered. That turned out to be for their good and ours as it allowed Jesus to provide even more words and signs to bolster our shaky faith so that we do not waver quite so much.

In spite of their pattern of hearing and then forgetting, the Word of God was still powerful and effective in them. They made the good confession upon which the Church is built: "You are the Christ of God."

Of course, that confession has implications. If Jesus is the Christ of God, then surely we must follow Him! Surely we must hear Him and do as He says! And what does He say to those who confess Him? "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Yes, we are called to follow Jesus along the path of self-denial, suffering, and death, where all appears hopeless and bleak. But if we are listening, if we are willing to see with the eyes of faith, then we know that nothing is hopeless and nothing is bleak, for there is life and light and victory on the other side of the cross.

Let us pray: Father in heaven, in the midst of our weakness and in the face of the cross, fix our eyes on Jesus and open our ears to His word, that we may be victorious over this world and become participants with the King in His glory. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was dead but now lives, warns the faithful that they are about to suffer for the Faith. They have already suffered tribulation and poverty (although they are rich in spiritual blessings). Now the devil will whip up the Jews of Smyrna to persecute them so that some are imprisoned. The devil does this easily because the Jews are of his synagogue. They think they are God's people—Abraham's seed—but do not believe God's promise as Abraham did or do his works. Instead, they do the work of their father, the devil.

Even if these Christians' imprisonment ends with their executions, the saints are to be faithful until death. The one who is faithful until death will not be hurt by the second death—the eternal suffering and condemnation of Hell.

Christ strengthens them for their imprisonment and the possibility of death by reminding them of who He is. "These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life." Their Lord Jesus Christ was faithful until death. He did not succumb to the devil's temptations. He did not give up in the face of persecution from the synagogue of Satan. He was faithful in the midst of temptation, suffering, and death to pay for the sins of the world. He gives the crown of life to all who remain faithful to His promises, endure persecution, temptation, and tribulation, by the strength the Holy Spirit gives.

The Lord uses the devil's temptations and the world's persecutions to test all Christians. Though the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh mean to destroy our faith, God works all things for the good of those who love Him. Temptations and tribulations try our faith, patience, and perseverance and show the genuineness of our faith. This encourages us in our weakness. It strengthens others to steadfastness. It glorifies God whose strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Let us pray: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Your majesty to defend us from those that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Today's reading covers several events that, at first glance, seem unconnected. After Jesus' transfiguration His disciples fail to cast out a demon, argue about who among them is the greatest, complain about those who act in Christ's name without being of the Twelve, and want to retaliate against those who won't receive their Lord. Then several double-minded men approach Jesus, desiring to be his disciples.

The thread that connects each of these events is the work of the devil. A demon possesses a boy and Jesus casts out the demon. The devil tempts the disciples to conceit and puffing themselves up over against their brothers. Jesus destroys this thinking by teaching humility: "He who is least among you all will be great." The devil tempts the disciples to conceit against those whom Jesus hasn't called to be His apostles and against those who refuse to receive Him. In all these temptations, the disciples forget the manner of spirit they are of. Jesus has called them to a spirit of service, humility, and gentleness. The devil tempted the double-minded to conceit as well, so that they imagined they could follow Christ on their own terms. But such double-mindedness makes one unfit for the kingdom of God, just as the desire to honor oneself over others makes one unfit for the kingdom.

The spirit of service, humility, and gentleness to which Jesus has called them is the spirit in which He serves us: "The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." To save men's lives from the power of the devil, Jesus will be betrayed into the hands of men. There is no conceit in Jesus. Although He possesses divine glory as God's only-begotten beloved Son, He humbles himself to the point of death so that He might atone for the world's sins and destroy the works of the devil in those who repent of their sins and believe in Him. Receiving His humble service offered in the gospel, we put aside the temptation to conceit and humbly serve our neighbors as Christ serves us.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, destroy the subtle works of the devil in us, and create in us a single-minded spirit of service, humility, and gentleness toward others. Amen.

Jesus sends the seventy disciples to prepare His way in the cities and places where He was about to go. He gives them authority to heal sickness, cast out demons, and trample on Satan's agents. The casting out of demons is a visible manifestation that the kingdom of God has come to them. It is also a visible manifestation of what the seventy's preaching does in the hearts of those who hear and believe. The gospel that the kingdom of God draws near in Jesus frees men from the kingdom and tyranny of the devil. The gospel dislodges demons and brings the Holy Spirit to dwell in men's hearts. It forgives sins and removes them as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). It unburdens consciences, brings peace, and empowers believers to live a holy life.

When the seventy return, they rejoice that the demons are subject to them in Jesus' name. Jesus tells them what He saw during their ministry: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Whenever the Gospel is preached and believed, Satan falls from his position as accuser of men before God. Those who are freed from the devil's accusations for their sins can join with the voice which says in Revelation 12:10, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down."

The seventy are to rejoice, not in the fact that the demons are subject to them in Jesus' name, but that their names are written in heaven. Christ has revealed God the Father to them and His will that they believe in Christ and have freedom from the devil and victory over temptation in His name. For as awe-inspiring as the ability to cast out demons is, it is but a picture of what Christ does for them—and all who believe the gospel—each day. Through faith in the Gospel Satan falls from heaven and his accusations can harm us no longer.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, increase our faith in the Gospel so that we may rejoice that our names are written in heaven and be victorious over every temptation. Amen.

Martha busies herself with meal preparation while Mary busies herself with the word of Jesus. By telling Martha that her sister has chosen the good part that won't be taken from her, Jesus is not condemning household duties, meal preparation, and the things of this life. He is teaching her that "man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3). Martha is worried about earthly food at the moment when the Lord, the Bread of Life Himself, is sitting in her home teaching the words of eternal life. Far from diminishing service to one's neighbor, Jesus teaches Martha to prioritize His Word when it is preached and taught.

At another time, Jesus' disciples approach Him and ask to be taught how to pray. Jesus teaches them to ask their Father in heaven for everything they need, including daily bread. However, before He teaches them to pray for daily bread He teaches them to pray for the good part that Mary chose; He teaches them to pray that God's name be hallowed, which means that His Word is taught purely and correctly and that they live holy lives according to it. He teaches them to pray that God's kingdom come—that God give them His Holy Spirit so that they may believe and live godly lives. He teaches them to pray that God's will be done—that God would strengthen and keep them in His Word and faith until the end. They also ask for forgiveness, the strength to overcome every temptation, and protection from every evil according to God's will.

Jesus teaches us to prioritize His Word, for we do not live by bread alone, by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. He teaches us to pray for everything we need, especially the Holy Spirit, since it is only by His Spirit that we believe His Holy Word and live holy lives according to it. If we, who are evil by nature, know how to give good things to our children, how much more will our heavenly Father give us the Holy Spirit through His Word?

Let us pray: Give us Your Holy Spirit, heavenly Father, that we may steadfastly hear Your holy Word, confidently believe it, and live holy lives according to it. Amen.

The Ninevites, who were Gentiles, received Jonah as a sign of repentance. The Queen of Sheba, also a Gentile, traveled to hear Solomon's wisdom. Jonah's time in the belly of the great fish and his expulsion prefigured Jesus' time in the tomb. Solomon was wise indeed, but Christ Jesus is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). He is greater than Jonah and Solomon, yet the Jews of Jesus' day neither repented of their sins, nor did they gladly hear His wise teaching.

Many of Jesus' hearers assume they see Jesus correctly. They assume their eyes are full of light. In reality, their eyes are darkened with unbelief and impenitence, which is why they seek a sign from Jesus. If Jesus performed a sign for them, they still wouldn't believe because their eyes were darkened with unbelief. John writes of another context: "Although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him" (John 12:37).

If the eye is good the whole body is full of light. Having a good eye means seeing Jesus in faith. When the eye sees Jesus in faith, the whole body is full of the light of the gospel, living in repentance, hearing His wisdom and leading a holy life according to His teaching. When the eye is bad—darkened by sin, self-righteousness, and unbelief—the whole body is full of darkness. Like many of the Jews of Jesus' day, the devil and our flesh tempts us to darken our eyes with sin and self-righteousness. If we do this, the light we think we have in us is actually darkness: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6). So Jesus warns us, "Take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness." Look upon Jesus each day as the one greater than Solomon, who has the words of eternal life. Look upon Jesus as the one greater than Jonah, who was crucified, died, and buried for our sins and raised to justify and sanctify believers. Then the eye is good and the whole body filled with the light of Christ.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, grant us Your Holy Spirit that we see Christ through the eyes of faith, so that we walk in the light of His heavenly wisdom. Amen.

The Pharisee who invites Jesus to dine in his home is astonished that Jesus doesn't perform the ceremonial washing prescribed by Jewish tradition. He thought that performing such outward observances truly cleansed. Jesus responds: "You Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness." The Pharisees have misunderstood the entirety of God's law because they think it only concerns the outward man, not the whole man, including the heart. All the woes Jesus pronounces on the Pharisees condemn them for this hypocrisy. Outwardly they appear clean. Inwardly they are filthy with sin.

The scribes – those who teach the law – fare no better. Their fathers persecuted the prophets who spoke God's law to them, and they ratify their persecutions and murders by building the prophet's tombs. This is how the self-righteous hypocrites have behaved toward the righteous from the beginning when Cain murdered righteous Abel. In persecuting the prophets' doctrine and teaching the people their own traditions as if they were God's doctrine, they took away the key of knowledge. They didn't enter into God's kingdom themselves and they deterred their students from entering. Jesus upbraids them so that they might repent and seek the righteousness that God gives through the divinely-instituted washing of holy baptism, which is "not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21).

We cannot cleanse our hearts from sin and guilt. But "according to His mercy [God] saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Man-made ceremonies can be used to discipline our sinful flesh, but only the washing of water combined with God's Word gives a new heart and new spirit within, by which we are cleansed from sin and enlivened by the Holy Spirit to begin to live righteously.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, cleanse our hearts by Your Gospel, and give us Your holy Spirit so that we may live as ones whom you have cleansed and declared righteous. Amen.

The sinful flesh which remains in the baptized is afraid of those who not only can kill the body, but can make life miserable because we believe in Christ. When we suffer anything for the sake of confessing Christ – whether mockery, murder, or anything in between – the flesh tempts us to deny Christ in order to make the persecution stop. When we find ourselves more concerned about what others think than what God commands, we are making an idol out of worldly praise.

Instead, we are to fear the one who, “after He has killed, has power to cast into hell.” But the fear of God to which Jesus calls us is not servile. It is filial fear such as a child has for father. He does not forget the sparrows. Neither does He forget you, but knows the very hairs of your head. Fearing and loving God leads you to confess Christ before men, no matter the cost. Having Christ confess you as His brothers and sisters before the angels is far greater than any praise men can give.

The sinful flesh which remains in the baptized is also afraid of being deprived of anything we need—or want—in this life. When we have plenty, we are tempted to hoard and build bigger barns so that we don’t face lack. When we lack what we need the flesh tempts us to worry as to whether or not God will provide. Both are covetousness, which is idolatry (Col 3:5).

Instead, we are to trust God our Father for every good thing. Jesus points to the ravens and lilies to show us that if He provides what these need, He will most certainly provide us with everything we need for the support of this body and life. Our heavenly Father knows what we need and how best to give it to us. Trusting in God above all things, we prioritize the kingdom of God, His gracious rule in our hearts through His Word and Holy Spirit.

There is no need to fear the enemies of Christ or the things of this life. Our heavenly Father is pleased to give us His kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray: Give us Your Holy Spirit, heavenly Father, so that we may fear, love, and trust in you above all things, and in that faith, confess Christ before men. Amen.