

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Perhaps one thing you don't think about is how often each day you look at yourself in the mirror. It's one of those routines in life you forget when you have done it. Why is this case? Well, there is, to be sure, an element that people place way too much value on physical appearance. Think about the great deal of time you make yourselves look the way you want to look or the way you think we should. But there is, to be sure, some value in this daily experience as well. Being well groomed and taken care of is a sign of being professional, a sense of good hygiene, maturity, and caring about looking presentable before others. Mirrors do that as they show an image or reflection of the person or thing before it. What you see in the mirror is revealing.

There is a thought progression, drawn from the Scriptures, in the Small Catechism when it comes to understanding Confession and Absolution and practicing it in your lives. Luther first asks, "What is Confession?" Next the question is asked, "What sins should we confess?" Lastly, the question we ask ourselves, "Which are these?" The Small Catechism confesses, "Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?"

Something is put before you in those words because Luther appeals to God's law as that perfect mirror by which your life is examined and judged before God. The law of God reflects God's holy, righteous, and eternal will so when you look at your life according to the Ten Commandments you are looking into a perfect mirror established by God himself. The chief function of the law is to reveal your sin. God reveals to you what his will is, and it is good. You see that as you go through the various stations or vocations of your life you have sinned against him.

This practice of using God's law as a mirror by which one prepares for confession and absolution has a long history in the Christian church. There is a German word for this it's a "Beichtspiegel" and roughly translates as a "Confessional mirror." They are used much like the way Luther speaks about the Ten Commandments in this part of the catechism. Each commandment is listed and then you ask yourself some questions according to it. An example of this from one contained in the *Treasury of Daily Prayer* is, "The First Commandment You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. What or whom do I fear most? In what or whom do I trust most for financial security, physical safety, or emotional support? Do I fear God's wrath and therefore avoid every sin? Is my love of God evident in my daily life? Do I expect only good from God in every situation, or do I worry, doubt, complain, or feel unfairly treated when things go wrong?"

Another, example is: "The Eighth Commandment You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way. Do I speak the truth or have I lied in any way? Do I gossip or take pleasure in talking about the faults and mistakes of others? Do I uphold and defend the name and reputation of others? Have I judged others without being duly authorized to do so? Have I gladly and willingly found ways to explain in the best possible way the words or actions of those who hurt me? Am I the first to admit my own mistakes, or do I cover up my sins and make myself look better than I am?"

You see in these, and the example given in the Small Catechism, how you are to look at your life and examine it according to the law of God. This is not only a helpful exercise before Confession and Absolution but can be done before going to church on Sunday morning or on Saturday evening when you have your devotions with your family. You hold before your eyes the mirror of God's law and it shows you that you have sinned against God, and you need redemption. There is too a teaching here that instructs you about your new life in Christ as you go forth in the forgiveness of Jesus and desire to serve him and his holy people. Even as your sin is revealed in this mirror you also, as a Christian, are guided to see what your new life in Christ is to look like according to God's perfect law.

Service of Corporate Confession and Absolution on Wednesday of Holy Week—March 27, 2024

The purpose in all of this, however, is not sheer legalism where you are beat down by the law and then burdened with it again. No, seeing your sin and considering your place in life you look to Christ who has redeemed you. The Ten Commandments are fulfilled by Jesus as his whole life is a life of perfect obedience to God's law and his life is that perfect spotless lamb sacrifice for you who have sinned against the Lord. Scripture proclaims to you, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Now your sin is forgiven, and his life and righteousness are imputed or reckoned to you through faith. Galatians 2 proclaims, "For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Today, a few minutes ago, you heard the Passion of your Lord according to St. Luke. When you hear this and all the accounts, you see Jesus, you see your faithful Savior. Everything that Jesus does, says, and does not say is good, right, and just. He fulfills God's law even as he endures great physical suffering, torment, and death. You, then examine your life according to God's law. You confess your sin and turn from it and go running to Jesus who has redeemed you.

You cry out, "But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay!" Baptized into Christ you see what God sees when he looks at you. In Galatians 3 God says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Now, the Lord doesn't see that sinner staring at him, instead God sees Jesus who has covered you in those baptismal waters. He sees the marks of the nails in the hands and feet of Jesus. He sees the pierced side out of which flowed blood and water. All those things are marks of your redemption. Jesus has atoned for your sin, that sin which is revealed through God's law. All those things you see where you have sinned against God in your life and Jesus has died for you and paid for those sins and the sin of the whole world. In Christ, God sees you as forgiven, righteous, holy, and his own dear child as Christ is your righteousness.

What a joy it is to behold such a wonder that God has done all for you out of his grace and mercy in Christ. Though your sin is great and rightly deserves hell, you have one who has taken your place and gives you salvation in return. Know and examine your life. Take sin seriously for unrepentant sin and faith cannot exist with one another. See that sin in your life staring back at you in the mirror and repent. Look to Christ. Fix your eyes on Jesus crucified for you. Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Have the same confidence to know you will indeed see and be with the Lord in Paradise as Jesus speaks to you, through the mouth of your pastor, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Rejoice and be glad. Say with Isaiah, "I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love."

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