



GOSPEL FOR THE SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

John 20:19–31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe."

Eight days later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

1. The first part of this Gospel reading is the same history which we heard in the Gospel for Easter Tuesday.¹ On the evening of Easter day (which the evangelists call "the first of the Sabbaths"² [Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1]), Christ first appeared to His frightened disciples as they

¹ See sermon for Easter Tuesday on Luke 24:36–47; and Easter Tuesday—Another Sermon on Luke 24:36–47.

² That is, the first day of the week. The Greek word *σάββατον*, sometimes translated "Sabbath," can also mean "week."

were all together (except for St. Thomas), comforted them, and strengthened their faith in His resurrection. Thus we hear again what the power and benefit of His resurrection are, namely, that Christ, when He comes with this preaching, brings peace and joy, which are the true fruits of faith, as also St. Paul lists them among the other fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 6 [5:22-23]).

2. When He comes, He finds them still sitting in fear and fright, both outwardly because of the Jews and inwardly because of their consciences. Their hearts are still too weak and heavy to believe, even though they have heard from the women and some of the disciples that He had risen. While they were troubled about this and were talking with one another about it, He is there and bids them a friendly greeting in the manner of the Hebrew language: "Peace be with you" [John 20:19], which in our language would be: "All good wishes." They call it "peace" when it is going well and the heart is content and cheerful. Those are the friendly words which Christ always brings along, which He then in this history repeats a second and a third time [John 20:21, 26].

3. However, this peace of Christ is very secret and hidden from the eyes and the senses, for it is not a peace such as the world portrays it and seeks it, or such as flesh and blood understand. The situation of Christians is that for the sake of Christ they cannot have any peace or anything good from His enemies, the devil and the world. They must daily suffer misfortune and hostility. The devil alarms them, oppresses and afflicts them with fear of this sin and punishment for it; the world alarms them with its persecution and tyranny; and the flesh alarms them with its own weakness, impatience, etc.

Therefore, this is not a visible or tangible peace which is sensed externally, but internally and spiritually in faith, which grasps and lays hold of nothing but what it hears, namely, these friendly words of Christ which He speaks to all who are frightened and distressed: "*Pax tibi*. Peace be with you. Do not be afraid" [John 20:19], etc. So [the believer] is satisfied and content with the fact that Christ is his friend and God wants to offer him everything good, even though externally in the world he perceives no peace, but only its opposite.

This is the peace of which St. Paul says, "May the peace of God, which is higher than all reason, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4 [7]). Christ says: "I have said this to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have anxiety" (John 16 [33]), etc.

4. The devil cannot bear to let a Christian have peace. Therefore, Christ must give peace in a different way than the world has and gives, namely, by soothing the heart, making it content, and inwardly taking away the fear and fright, even though outwardly hostility and misfortune remain.

You see here what happened to the disciples of Christ. They sit there, locked up because of their great fear of the Jews; they dare not go out, and they have death before their eyes. Even though they outwardly have peace and no one does anything to them, yet inwardly their hearts tremble, and they have no peace or rest. In this fear and anxiety the Lord comes, soothes their hearts, and sets them at peace—not by taking away the danger, but by their hearts being unafraid. The malice of the Jews was not taken away or changed, for they are angry and rage as before, and outwardly everything remains as it is. But they are inwardly changed, so that they are comforted and immovable and no longer care if the Jews are still raging.

5. The true peace that can soothe the heart is not the one at the time when there is no misfortune present, but the one in the midst of misfortune, when externally only hostility is visible. That is the difference between worldly and spiritual peace. Worldly peace means that the evil which causes hostility is taken away. For example, when an enemy is camped before a city, there is hostility, but when they go away, there is again peace. So when poverty and sickness oppress you, you are not at peace, but when they go away and you are freed from that misfortune, then there is again peace and rest externally. However, the one who endures this is unchanged; he remains just as despondent whether or not it is there, except that when it is present, he feels it and is anxious about it.

6. But Christian or spiritual peace turns that around, so that outwardly the misfortune remains, such as enemies, sickness, poverty, sin, devil, and death. They are present, do not cease, and are encamped all around; nevertheless, inwardly there is peace, strength, and comfort in the heart, so that it does not care about misfortune and even becomes more courageous and bold when it is there than when it is not. For that reason it is correctly called “the peace that is higher than reason and all understanding” [Phil. 4:7]. Reason understands and seeks no more than the peace that comes outwardly from the goods the world can give; it knows nothing about how to put the heart at peace and take comfort in times of need, when all of this is lacking.

When Christ comes, He lets the external adversities remain but strengthens the person. Out of timidity He makes a fearless heart; He makes a trembling heart bold; He makes a restless conscience peacefully quiet. Then the person is confident, courageous, and cheerful in the things in which otherwise all the world is frightened, that is, in death, fear of sin, and all distresses in which the world can no longer help with its comfort and goods. That is a true and lasting peace, which remains forever and is invincible as long as the heart clings to Christ.

7. So this peace means nothing else than that the heart is certain that it has a gracious God and the forgiveness of sins, for without that it cannot persist in any distress or be put at peace with any possession on earth.

8. However, this happens and comes only when Christ points us to His hands and side, that is, when He shows us through the Word that He was crucified for us, shed His blood and died, and thus paid for our sins and appeased and warded off God's wrath. That is the true sign which comforts frightened consciences and hearts and assures them of divine grace and the forgiveness of sins. He shows them this so that they will not doubt, but be certain that it is He Himself who is not angry with them but is their dear Savior. This peace is not so easy for them and all distressed consciences to lay hold of because they are alarmed and conflicted. Therefore, He comes and strengthens them both with the Word and with visible signs.

9. He still continues to do this after His resurrection, not visibly but through the preaching office (which we are to believe, even though we do not see Him, as He says at the end of this Gospel reading [John 20:29]), through which He also reminds us of how He shed His blood for us. It is enough that He showed this to His disciples once, to strengthen both their faith and ours, that He truly has risen and is the same Christ who for our sake was nailed to the cross and pierced.

10. The second point—that which follows the friendly greeting of Christ, or the offer of peace, and the showing of His hands and side (which were received by faith)—is joy, as the text says, "The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" [John 20:20]. It is the greatest joy the human heart can feel, when it again sees and recognizes Christ who had previously been in death and with Him all comfort and joy were gone. But now it can cheerfully take comfort and know that in Him it has a dear and friendly Savior and, through Him, pure grace and comfort with God against all the fear of sin and death and against the power of the world and of hell. This is the same thing St. Paul says, "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we also have a cheerful admission or access in faith" (Romans 5 [1-2]), etc.

11. We also sing about it at this time in the common, old Easter hymn about the resurrection of the Lord: "Christ is arisen from all His agony." It is not enough to be told the history of the resurrection; rather, the hymn brings it home to us and tells us that we are to be glad in our treasure and salvation, that we have peace and every good from God. Otherwise, how could we rejoice in Him if we had nothing from Him nor could accept as our own what He has done? Therefore, He also resolves to teach us that Christ wants to be our comfort, so that we may expect this with certainty. We can and should have no other comfort to which we would cling in every need.

Through His resurrection He has conquered everything and gives us as our own everything that He has done and suffered.

12. Christ came to the disciples through the closed door in order to point out that after His resurrection and in His kingdom on earth He will no longer be bound to a bodily, visible, tangible, and worldly way of life, to time, place, space, and the like. Rather, we should recognize and believe that He is present and rules through His power everywhere, in all places and at all times, when and where we need Him, and will be with us and help us, undetained and unhindered by the world and its power.

13. Second, He also shows that wherever He comes with His governance through the office of the Word, He does not come with bragging and blustering, with storming and raging, but very gently and slowly, so that He disturbs, breaks, and destroys nothing in outward human life and government. He lets them go and remain in the estates and offices in which He finds them, and so governs Christendom that orderly government on earth is not overthrown or destroyed. Thus He deranges and disturbs nothing inwardly in a man, neither a man's thinking nor his reason, but illuminates and improves his heart and understanding.

14. The devil, on the other hand, with his sectarian spirits, rumblers, bustlers, and disturbers, deranges and ruins everything, both in the external and worldly government and life and internally in people's hearts. He makes them very disturbed and gloomy with his false spirituality. We at this time have had much experience with this in his rebellious prophets, fanatics, and Anabaptists.³

15. That is the first part of this Gospel reading, as Christ again comforts His dear disciples through His resurrection and makes them cheerful and alive again, together with Him, from the oppressive death and misery of their hearts [when they thought] that Christ was now lost and eternally dead to them. Because they now have the profit and fruit of this, and so that He may now promote this same power and comfort of the resurrection [to others], He continues and gives them the command to spread this in the world through their office, as follows:

Then Jesus again said to them: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you." And when He had said that, He breathed on them and said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whosoever sins you

³ For Luther's controversy with the Anabaptists, who rejected infant Baptism, see Luther's letter to Melancthon, January 13, 1522, LW 48:364-72; and *Concerning Rebaptism* (1528), LW 40:225-62. Luther grouped Sacramentarians and Anabaptists together with radical spiritualists such as Thomas Münzer (ca. 1498-1525) under the epithet of "fanatics" [*Schwärmer*] or "Enthusiasts"—those who rejected the spiritual power of the external Word or Sacraments.

pardon, they are pardoned to them; and whosoever [sins] you retain, they are retained." [John 20:21-23]

16. With these words the Lord points out what He has accomplished through His resurrection, namely, that He has established a government that does not have to do with and is not to handle money or gold and what concerns this temporal life, or how we are to acquire and keep them. That kind of kingdom already exists, established from the beginning of the world, subjected to human reason through God's Word when He said, "Rule over the fish in the sea and over the birds under heaven and over all the animals on earth" (Genesis 1 [:28]). This is the old government, with which the worldly government has to do and work, for which the Holy Spirit is not needed. We do not have much to teach about that in Christendom. Here lawyers can help and give advice about how it should work.

17. Alongside and above that is another government, which is over consciences and concerns the matters in which we deal with God. This government is twofold.⁴ One was established through Moses. Here the Lord established the second when He says, "As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you" [John 20:21], etc. Moses' government should serve to teach us what is sin and what is not sin and is necessary for those who do not yet know or perceive sin. For example, the Antinomians now are alleging that the Law should not be preached. It would be futile to preach much about grace among them, for where the Law is not preached, people cannot know about sin. St. Paul says, "Without the Law, sin is dead" [Rom. 7:8]. Likewise: "Where there is no Law, there is no transgression" [Rom. 4:15]. We recognize sin (no matter how great it is) and God's wrath only through the Law. Therefore, wherever this is not taught, the people will be very heathen; they will think that they are acting correctly when they are sinning abominably against God's Commandments.

18. Worldly government certainly restrains and punishes public sins, but it is far too insignificant to point out or teach what sin before God is, even if it were to take advice from all the books of the lawyers. Therefore, the Law was given so that people would learn from it what sin is. If sin remains unknown, then we cannot understand—much less desire—forgiveness and grace. Indeed, then grace is good for nothing, for grace must fight against and conquer in us the Law and sin, so that we do not despair.

A good physician must be experienced in his profession so that he first knows what kind of sickness it is. Otherwise, if he wants to help the

4 The distinction between two kingdoms [*Reiche*] or two governments [*Regimente*] was basic to Luther's understanding of God's work in the world and of human responsibility and freedom before God. See *Temporal Authority* (1523), LW 45:81-129, especially pp. 88-93; *Sermon on the Mount* (1530-32/1532), LW 21:5.

sick person but does not know the cause of the sickness, he would as soon give him dangerous poison as medicine. So sin must first and previously be known before grace is preached. The Law is necessary for that knowledge; so we must keep the catechism before people and diligently teach the Ten Commandments, for, as I have said, reason with its wisdom and the skill of all lawyers is too weak for this. Even though something from that knowledge is innate in you [Rom. 2:15; Jer. 31:33], yet it is too little and insignificant. For that reason, God established this preaching of the Law through Moses, which preaching he had previously received from the fathers.

19. Of course, Christ Himself ratified this preaching when He commanded His disciples, as we have heard in the previous Gospel reading,⁵ first to preach repentance in His name [Luke 24:47], and when He said, "The Holy Spirit will rebuke the world about sin" (John 16 [:8]), etc. Although pointing out sin properly belongs to Moses' government, nevertheless, so that Christ can enter on His government and work, He must begin with the preaching of the Law where sin is not recognized. Where that does not occur, sin cannot be forgiven.

20. The other government is what the resurrection of the Lord Christ has established. Through this He wanted to set up a new kingdom that has to do and deals with sin (which was previously recognized through the Law) and with death and hell. This does not teach anything about becoming married; about managing house, city, and country; about keeping worldly peace; about cultivating, planting, etc. Rather, it is directed to where we will be when this temporal, perishable government and life cease, when we must leave goods, honor, house, farm, world, and everything on the earth, together with this life, as we are to expect every moment.

What is necessary here is this kingdom of Christ. He has been made an eternal King because He is Lord over sin and righteousness, over death and life. His kingdom has to do with ruling over these things.

This is what the Lord means when He says here: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whosoever sins you pardon, they are pardoned to them; and whosoever [sins] you retain, they are retained" [John 20:22–23]. You can hear that He is occupied with delivering people from their sins or with leaving them stuck in them and pointing out that they are condemned.

21. Here we cannot say that by doing this He has established a worldly kingdom. The pope boasts about his binding key and loosing key, that he has the power to loosen and to bind even what is not sin—yes, even what Christ does not bind or loose; thus he makes a worldly power out of it. But Christ

⁵ See sermon for Easter Tuesday on Luke 24:36–47, and Easter Tuesday—Another Sermon on Luke 24:36–47.

explains here quite clearly what His Keys are: not to make laws and abolish them again, as the pope does, but to pardon or retain sins.

He means to say: "My kingdom is to consist of this, first, that the people recognize that they are sinners. I commanded Moses to teach and proclaim this not so that I would bind them, for they are already bound." He also does not want to make sins or to be occupied with manufacturing sins (as the pope does through his laws and with his binding key, making sin where there is no sin), but to work with those things which naturally are sins against God's Commandments, such as despising God and unbelief, slander of His name, despising His Word, disobedience, etc. These were not made sins by the pope's laws but are true [sins] which are stuck in flesh and blood and born with man, which cannot be absolved or taken away through the pope's loosing key, as he uses it, but which remain in man until the grave.

22. The goal of Christ's kingdom is that people know how they can become free from this. For that reason He everywhere calls it not a worldly or earthly kingdom, but the kingdom of heaven, for it is to begin just when this earthly [kingdom] ceases (through death), so that the people know then how they are to come into heaven. That is the way (He says) that His kingdom is to operate and consist.

"As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you." [John 20:21]

23. With these words He first of all takes from them the fleshly opinion which the disciples had after His resurrection, that He would rule and govern like a worldly king and lord, with external, physical power. Therefore, He says: "You have now seen what kind of an office I have conducted on earth, for which I was sent by My Father, namely, that I should begin a spiritual kingdom against the power of the devil, sin, and death, and through this bring those who believe in Me to eternal life. I have done this and completed it as far as My person is concerned—and took for Myself nothing at all of the worldly life and government. Yes, I have even been killed by the world because of My office and service, and thus separated from you. But now through My resurrection I have entered into glory. There at the right hand of the Father I will govern all creatures forever.

"Therefore, I am also now sending you so that you will be My messengers, not occupied with worldly affairs, but conducting and working at the same office which I have so far done, namely, to preach the Word which you have heard and received from Me." This is an office through which people who sense sin and death and want to be delivered from them are delivered from sin and death.

24. With this the apostles and their successors to the end of the world are made lords and are given just as great power and might (with regard to

their office) as Christ, God's Son, Himself had, in comparison to which all the world's might and dominion are nothing (even though before the world it neither appears to be nor is called dominion). Nevertheless, [that office] should not and cannot go further than only over what is called "sin" before God, so that wherever [sin] begins or ends, their government should also both begin and end. Everything that lives on earth and is called "man"—whether emperor or king, great or small, no one excluded—is to be subject to this government. For that reason He says, "Whosoever sins you pardon" [John 20:23]. This "whosoever" means nothing else than "all together"—Jews, Gentiles, high and low, wise and ignorant, holy or unholy. No one will come to heaven and eternal life unless he receives this from you, that is, through your office.

25. With this word they are all together thrown under sin and locked up. Through this word He points out that on earth and in the world they will find nothing but sin. He pronounces the verdict that all people to whom the apostles and their successors were sent are sinners and condemned before God in their person and life. One of two things must happen: either their sins will be forgiven and pardoned when they recognize this and desire forgiveness, or they must remain eternally bound in sin for death and damnation.

26. Now, in order to use and carry out this authority and government, special power is required which is not human but divine. Therefore, He does not give them a sword and weapons for this; He does not equip them with armor and worldly power, but He breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit" [John 20:22], namely, so that they would know that this office and work does not come from their own strength but from His power through the Holy Spirit, who will work through their office and words. So it is and is called the office of the Holy Spirit, who was given by Christ. Even though it seems to be weak preaching, nothing more than an insignificant breath out of a man's mouth, yet there is such power with and under it that sin, God's wrath, death, and hell must yield to it.

27. From this it is now also easy to answer people's question and quibbling: "How can man forgive sins, since this belongs only to God?" It is true that there is no human power or ability or merit and worthiness to forgive any sins, even if someone were as holy as all the apostles and all the angels in heaven. For that reason we ourselves also condemn the pope with his monks, who promise the people forgiveness of sins and pronounce absolution on the merit of their own works and holiness, so that the poor people who would gladly have true and sure comfort are shamefully and miserably deceived.

28. However, here we must have the true distinction—which the Papists and other sects do not know and cannot give—between what people do from their own initiative and on their own worthiness and that which Christ

commands us to do in His name and which He produces through His power. It is obviously of no value when a barefooted shorn head,⁶ at his own audacity, comes and presumes to pronounce absolution and forgiveness to a poor conscience on the basis of his own remorse and repentance and the merit of the saints and his order, as their absolution reads (we can still convince them of that through the letters that are sold to people on the basis of their brotherhood): "The merit of the suffering of Christ and of Mary, the blessed Virgin, and of all saints; the merit of this stern and severe order; the humility of your repentance and remorse of heart and all good works which you have done or will do will be given to you for the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life," etc.

That is nothing other than abominable slander of Christ and turning true absolution upside down, for even though they mention His suffering, they are not serious about it, and do not regard it as good and powerful enough for the forgiveness of sins, but must have in addition the merit of Mary and all saints, and most of all of their own order and monkery, and make them equal to Christ. They do this without any command from Christ, even against His Word and command, not from the Holy Spirit, but from their own spirit, the devil, who is the father and author of such lying doctrine [John 8:44].

29. But if the absolution is to be true and powerful, then it must come from this command of Christ, so that it says: "I absolve you from your sins not in my name or in some saint's name, or for the sake of some human merit, but in the name of Christ and by the authority of His command, who has commanded me to tell you that your sins are forgiven. So it is not I but He Himself (through my mouth) who forgives your sins, and you are obliged to accept that and believe it firmly, not as the word of man, but as if you had heard it from the Lord Christ's own mouth."

30. Therefore, though the power to forgive sins is God's alone, we should nevertheless also know that He uses and distributes this power through this external office, to which Christ summons His apostles and commands them to proclaim forgiveness of sins in His name to all who desire it. It does not say that sins are forgiven from human will and power, but from Christ's command; moreover, He then also gives the Holy Spirit [to] forgive sins.

31. God does that also for our good, so that we do not need to gape at heaven in vain when we cannot obtain it and have to say (as St. Paul quotes from Moses): "Who can climb up to heaven?" etc. [Rom. 10:6; Deut. 30:12]. Rather, so that we would be certain of the matter, He has put the forgiveness of sins into the public office and Word so that we can always have it with us in our mouths and hearts. There we are to find absolution and forgiveness;

6 I.e., the Franciscans.

there we are to know when we hear this Word proclaimed to us by Christ's command that we are obliged to believe it as if proclaimed to us by Christ Himself.

32. This is the power which was given to the Church through this office of the apostles. This is far above all power on earth, for without it no one, no matter how great and mighty he is, shall or can come to God or have the comfort of conscience that he is free from God's wrath and eternal death. Even if all emperors and kings were to gather their might and power, their money and goods together, they could not deliver themselves or any person from even the least sin. If someone's heart is frightened, what does it help if he is a powerful king or emperor? This did not help the great and powerful King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon when he became senseless, so that he was driven away from people, had to be with the irrational animals in the field and eat grass. He could not be helped in any other way than by the prophet Daniel absolving him from his sins [Dan. 4:25, 27].

33. But who can fully express what an unspeakable, mighty, and blessed comfort it is that one human being can with a word open heaven and lock hell for another? In this kingdom of grace which Christ has established through His resurrection, we do nothing other than open our mouths and say, "I forgive you your sins, not by myself or from my own power, but in the stead and in the name of Jesus Christ." He does not say, "You should forgive sins because of yourselves"; rather: "I am sending you as the Father has sent Me" [John 20:21]. I Myself have not done this by My own choice or counsel, but I was sent by the Father for this purpose. I am giving you this same command, even to the end of the world, so that you and all the world can know that this forgiving or retaining of sin does not happen by human power or might, but by the command of the one who sends you.

34. This is said not only to those who are preachers or pastors but also to all Christians. In the hour of death or in any other need, each one can comfort and speak absolution to another. Now, when you hear from me the words "Your sins are forgiven," then you are hearing that God wants to be gracious to you, deliver you from sin and death, justify, and save you.

35. "Yes," you say, "you certainly have spoken absolution to me, but who knows if it is certain and true with God that my sins are forgiven?" Answer: If I said and did that as a man, then you certainly can say, "I do not know whether your absolution is valid and effective or not."

However, so that you may be certain about this, you must be instructed from God's Word to say: "Neither the preacher nor any other man has absolved me; the pastor has not commanded me to believe that way. Rather, God has said and done it through him. I am certain of this, for my Lord Christ has commanded and said, 'As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you'

[John 20:21].” Thus He makes those to whom He gives this command completely like Him in the sending, since they are sent by Him to do and accomplish exactly what He was sent by the Father to do, namely, to pardon and retain sins. Cling to that and do that; otherwise, without such a command, the absolution would be nothing.

36. Now, if you are sad and distressed because of your sins and horrified of death, with which God will eternally punish sin, and you hear from your curate⁷ or (if you cannot have him) from your Christian neighbor who comforts you with these or similar words: “Dear brother or sister, I see that you are fearful and despondent, that you are afraid of God’s wrath and judgment because of your sins, which you now sense, and are alarmed. Listen and let me say to you: Be of good cheer; have no fear, for Christ, your Lord and Savior, who came to save sinners, has commanded that both His called servants through the public office and in necessity each one individually is to comfort another for His sake and in His name absolve from sin.”

When you hear this comfort (I say), then accept it with joy and thanksgiving, as if you heard it from Christ Himself. Then your heart will definitely be put at rest, cheered, and comforted, and you can then cheerfully say: “I have heard a man speaking with me and comforting me. I would not believe a word from him because of his person. However, I believe my Lord Christ, who has established this kingdom of grace and the forgiveness of sins and has given people this command and power to pardon or retain sins in His name.”

37. Therefore, every Christian should become accustomed, when the devil attacks him and suggests that he is a great sinner and that he must be lost and condemned, etc., not to let himself be vexed by him for a long time or to remain alone, but to go to or summon his curate, or otherwise a good friend, tell him your trouble, and ask for advice and comfort from him. Rely on the fact that Christ says, “Whosoever sins you pardon” [John 20:23], etc., and elsewhere: “Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them” [Matt. 18:20]. Whatever he says to him in Christ’s name from Scripture he should believe. It will happen as he now believes.

However, two or more come together in Christ’s name when they are dealing with one another not concerning physical things, about how they can earn or obtain money and goods, but about what serves the salvation and happiness of their souls. For example, [this happens] when you in confession or otherwise point out your weakness and temptation, and the one to whom you are telling this observes that Moses with the Law has you between his spurs,⁸ that sin is vexing and oppressing you, that death alarms and frightens

⁷ *Seelsorger*, that is, those to whom the care of souls has been committed.

⁸ *Zwischen die Sporn gefasset hat*. The reference is to a mounted rider equipped with spurs. Cf. below, sermon for Pentecost on John 14:23–31, paragraphs 87 and 100.

you, and that you sigh and lament about your own life and even utter the words: "If only I had never been born!" Likewise: "If only God would spare my life, I would improve," etc.

38. When your pastor or whoever it is begins to comfort you in a way that is not worldly, and also does not do that for the sake of money but because he sees that you are anxious and alarmed for fright of sin and death, he says to you: "Give up everything which is on earth—money, goods, the deeds and life of all people. But pay attention to this: your heart is in great anguish and thinks: 'How can I get free from my suffering, misery, and bad conscience? How can I escape from Moses with his thrusting horns?'"⁹ Listen to him (I say) when he speaks to you in this way or similarly: "I say to you in the name of the Lord Christ, who died for your sins, that you should take comfort, believe, and be certain that your sins are forgiven and that death will not harm you."

39. "Dear friend," you say, "how will you prove that this is so?" Answer: Christ our Lord has said to His disciples and to all Christendom: "I command and bid you to forgive or retain sins. Whichever you do, you do it not of yourselves; rather, because you do it at My command and order, I also do it."

Therefore, the pastor or preacher as your curate, or even any Christian in such a case, is summoned and sent to comfort you. For that reason, because he seeks nothing other than your soul's salvation, you are just as obliged to believe him as if Christ Himself stood there, laid His hand on you, and spoke an absolution to you.

40. This is the way to deal with sins so that they are loosed and forgiven. Otherwise there is no remedy or relief for it—just as the pope alleges with his lying doctrine, pointing people to their own works or satisfactions, telling them to run into monasteries, to Rome, to the saints, to chastise themselves, build churches, donate to large institutions and monasteries, hold Mass, buy indulgences, etc. This is not the right way. You can better invest your running, money, and works elsewhere. This is what happens (as was said) when Moses puts on his horns and thrusts against you, that is, when through the Law he reveals and points out how great and many are your sins and so puts you into great fright and trepidation. Then you are no longer among the great, wicked, and hardened crowd, but rather among the little group that realizes and senses its distress and misery and, therefore, is even frightened at a rustling leaf [Lev. 26:36]. Then this is the only remedy: "I," says Christ, "I have established a kingdom of grace, which is to consume and slay sin and death, devour both of them, and bring righteousness and life."

9 In Western medieval art, Moses is often depicted with horns on his forehead, based on the Vg translation of the Hebrew word קֶרֶן, which can mean either "ray [of light]" or "horn" in Exod. 34:29: *ignorabat quod cornuta esset facies sua*.

41. Therefore, do not say: "Where will I find that? Shall I run after it to Rome or to Jerusalem?" No, for even if you could climb a golden ladder to heaven, if it were possible, nothing would come of it. Rather, it must happen in this way: look to His Word and command when He says, "I am sending you" [John 20:21], etc. It is as if He would say: I must first come to you, proclaim to you My Father's will through the Gospel, and institute the holy Sacraments and Absolution, if you are to come to Me. Now, though I cannot be bodily in all places in the whole world and will not always be visibly present with you, yet I will do as My Father has done. He took for Himself a small corner on earth—namely, Judea—and sent Me there to be a preacher. There I traveled through Galilee and Judea, as much as I could personally. I preached the Gospel for the comfort of the poor sinners among the Jewish people, healed the sick, raised the dead, etc.

That was the work He was commanded to do, for which He was sent by the Father. That was where He could be found—not at the court among the gluttons and pigs; not with Annas, Caiaphas, and other holy, rich, wise people; but among the blind, lame, leprous, deaf, dead, and misled, poor, distressed sheep. They are the ones He helps in body and soul. He brings them the most precious treasure of all, which no one has, much less can give, unless he receives it from Him, namely, righteousness and salvation.

"You should do this," He says, "in every place you come to. I am sending you for just this purpose, that you would run (as My messengers) throughout the whole world. Moreover, alongside of you and after you [I will] appoint and arrange others who will run and preach and do the same thing I was sent by My Father to do; and I have sent you to the end of the world. I will always be with you [Matt. 28:19–20], so that you will know that it is not you who are doing this, but I through you."

42. From this command we have the power to comfort distressed consciences and to absolve from sin, and we know that wherever we exercise this office not we but Christ Himself is doing these things. Therefore, each Christian, in this situation as well as from the pulpit, should listen to the pastor or preacher not as a man, but as God Himself. Then he can be certain and does not at all need to doubt that he has the forgiveness of sins. Christ has established through His resurrection that when a called minister—or whoever it is in time of need—speaks an absolution to his neighbor who is alarmed and desires comfort, it will avail just as much as if He Himself had done it, for it happens at His command and in His name.

43. Therefore, when two deal with each other in this way, then they are gathered in Christ's name, for (as said above) one is not seeking the other's money or goods, as the pope's shorn heads do, who speak to the sick in this way: "Dear man, the time is at hand for you to die. Where will your

goods be then? Think about your poor soul, and give us a share; then we will pray to God for you and do much other good with it," etc. Rather, [a Christian] says to the sick: "Now is not the time to be occupied with money and goods. Let others worry about that. I see that your heart is despondent and frightened. You are struggling with despair and cannot help or free yourself. However, Christ has established a comforting and blessed kingdom on earth. He says, 'As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you' [John 20:21]. So He has consecrated us all as priests, so that one can proclaim the forgiveness of sins to another.

"Therefore, I come to you in the name of our Lord Christ and tell you not to quiver, tremble, or be afraid, as if there were no longer any comfort, help, and aid. Listen well, for Christ says that He came to save sinners (not the righteous) [Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32]. Therefore, be content, receive this cheerful message with joy, and thank Him from your heart for having me proclaim this to you without any trouble or expense to you and that He commands that your sins be pardoned. Therefore, I pronounce you free of all your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." To that you can cheerfully say, "I thank You, merciful God, heavenly Father, that You have forgiven my sins through Your dear Son, Christ," and then do not doubt that you are certainly absolved by God the Father Himself.

44. From this you can see that this section about the Office of the Keys does not at all confirm the pope's tyranny, for this is stated not so that you can make me rich, or I make you rich, or so that I can be your lord and you must be subject to me—as the pope, the chief villain and betrayer of God, wants to make worldly pomp and power out of it; but he is passing away. When I come to you in your need and anguish of conscience to advise and help you in your last hour or otherwise, I should say: "Power, money, honor, and goods should now all be neglected and wound up in a ball.¹⁰ Now we are speaking about the kingdom of Christ, through which alone and through nothing else you must be delivered from sin and death."

45. That certainly does not mean an external and worldly dominion or power, but a service. I am seeking nothing from you, but I am serving and bringing you a great and precious treasure, not gold and silver. Rather, because your heart desires to be secure and confident and to have a gracious God in heaven, I come and bring you a cheerful message, not from my own choice or opinion, but from the command and commission of Christ who says, "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will enliven you" [Matt. 11:28], etc. Likewise: "Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in

¹⁰ *Auff ein Klewel gewunden*. The image is of wool wound up into a ball, that is, not currently being used.

heaven" [Matt. 18:18]; or, as He says here: "Whosoever sins you pardon, they are pardoned to them" [John 20:23].

46. Is that not being served and freely being given an unspeakable, heavenly, eternal treasure which neither you nor the world can purchase with all its goods and riches? What are the treasures of all the world, the crowns of all kings, gold, silver, gems, and whatever the world esteems compared to this treasure called "the forgiveness of sins," through which you are liberated from the power of the devil, death, and hell and are assured that God in heaven wants to be gracious to you and is so gracious that, for Christ's sake, you are His child and heir, Christ's brother and co-heir? For that reason, it is impossible to sell such a precious treasure for money or to purchase it with money, as our Judas Iscariot, the pope, has done. It must only be given and received for free, or you are not improved by it, for God's gift is not obtained with money (Acts 8 [:20]).

47. However, I do not say this so that people would give nothing to the ministers who teach God's Word purely and faithfully. Unfortunately, people now would like to do that, and many are ready to count out every bite their pastors swallow. If they could snatch for themselves the property of the churches and pastors, and by doing so prove that they want to starve their pastors out and get rid of them, they are ready to do so. We would soon see what kind of savagery and misery would follow from this, if the government did not take notice. No, that is not at all my intention. They should be given support, for if they do not have food, drink, clothes, and other necessities, they will be unable to administer their office for long, but they will have to think about how else to support themselves. Then the Gospel will not remain for long, which is what the devil is seeking.

48. Christ Himself teaches that people are obliged to give them support when He says, "The laborer deserves his wages" (Luke 10 [:7]). St. Paul teaches: "The one who is taught the Word should share all good things with the one who teaches him" (Galatians 6 [:6]). He adds stern words: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked" [Gal. 6:7]. Again: "Let the elders" (or priests) "who administer well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the Word" (1 Timothy 5 [:17]).

If we take care of others who are in worldly offices, in which they serve the community, so that they can attend to their service, we are even more obliged to do this for the servants of the Word, for St. Paul says that, more than others, they are "worthy of double honor" [1 Tim. 5:17].

49. And if the doctrine of the Gospel is to remain pure in the pulpit in the future, so that our descendants can have and hear it, then we are obliged not only to care for the ministers, but we also are responsible to make very sure that the schools are supplied with qualified persons, whom we should

faithfully support. We should do this so that people can be trained who are not only simple, ordinary preachers, able to instruct the Christian community in the Word, but also especially learned people who can put a stop to the sects and false spirits and restrain them. Not only princes and lords should willingly and gladly give for that purpose but also townsmen and peasants.

50. From what has been said, everyone can ponder what a great and precious treasure it is to hear the Gospel or the Absolution with a correct understanding from the pastor or preacher. When he comes to you in your sickness and comforts you, then you should definitely think that Christ the Lord Himself is visiting and comforting you. Without His divine command, no one would ever dare come to you in this way, nor would he know how to help or aid you. However, because you hear that He Himself has commanded this, you can definitely and cheerfully say, "Christ Himself comes to me in my father confessor, for he does not speak his own words but God's Word, for which he was sent and has the command."

51. Here you have a sure comfort against fear and trepidation of conscience. You need not doubt or waver, as the pope's doctrine has taught us, where no one is absolved from sin unless he has sufficiently repented and purely confessed. Not the least word was mentioned about faith and the power of the Keys instituted by Christ, for this doctrine and knowledge was so completely unknown that I myself as a doctor (who should indeed have known better) held and taught nothing else than that if I was sufficiently contrite and did enough penance, my sins would be forgiven. However, if sins are not forgiven until they have been overcome by our contrition, penance, and good works, then we have no hope at all of forgiveness, for I could never come to the conclusion that my contrition and penance were sufficient. Therefore, on that basis no one can ever absolve or acquit me, whether he is called "pope" or anything else.

52. Thus, through the pope's lies, the conscience has been miserably led away from the Word of faith and the command of God to their uncertain contrition and penance. This has brought in a lot of money, and consequently many churches, monasteries, chapters,¹¹ chapels, and altars have been built and richly endowed. The pope's bulls and letters are still on hand which refer to and confirm these things, through which he has miserably deceived the whole world, so that no one can sufficiently ponder, to say nothing of fully describing, the harm and misery which has arisen from it.

That is why we faithfully and constantly admonish that whoever can should help to maintain schools, parishes, and pulpits, so that these errors or worse—which the devil definitely has in mind—may not prevail.

¹¹ Associations of clergy (such as the canons of a cathedral chapter) endowed with corporate identity, property, and rights under church law.

53. This is the correct teaching and faith about the kingdom of Christ and the Office of the Keys. When we are guided by this, then we remain Christians and in all things can deal rightly with God and man. We will also thank God from the heart that He has delivered us from the pope's coercion and tyranny. He has made nothing but pomp and worldly dominion out of the power of the Keys, though they were established and arranged by Christ to bring the whole world to this treasure, which cannot be purchased with money or goods.

54. So let us be thankful to our dear Lord Christ, who through His resurrection established this kingdom of grace. Its purpose is that in every need and anxiety we should, without ceasing, find help and comfort in this kingdom. We do not need to go far away for this precious treasure nor run after it at great labor and expense. Rather, He has given the command and full power to His apostles and all their successors, and in case of need to every Christian, until the end of the world, that they should comfort and strengthen the weak and despondent and in His name pardon their sins, etc.

THE SECOND PART OF THE GOSPEL, ABOUT ST. THOMAS¹²

1. The evangelist John further writes that Thomas was not there when the Lord first appeared to the disciples all together on Easter evening [John 20:24]. Now, it does not happen without a reason that the Lord first comes just when St. Thomas was not there, for He could certainly have come at the hour when he could find Thomas together with the other apostles. However, this happened both for our instruction and our comfort, so that the resurrection of the Lord would be witnessed and attested even more strongly. Now, on Easter He appeared to the Eleven¹³ together; eight days later, that is today, He appears to them again and at the same time to Thomas, for whose sake alone this appearance and revelation happened. This one is more beautiful and glorious than the one eight days earlier.

2. First, we see here how poor the human heart is when it begins to become weak, so that it cannot be cheered up again. The other apostles and Thomas, during the time they were with the Lord, not only heard Him teach the people with great authority—and then also saw Him confirm His teaching with the great miracles He performed as He healed the blind, the lame,

12 The latter part of this sermon was considered a separate sermon in StL 11:770–79 and Lenker 2:403–12; therefore, our paragraph enumeration starts anew. See the introduction to the sermon for Easter 1, April 4, 1540, LW 69:424–25.

13 Previously, they were called “the Twelve” (John 20:24); now they are called “the Eleven” (Mark 16:14), even though only ten of them were present at Jesus’ first appearance to the disciples.

the lepers, the deaf, etc.—but also [saw] that He raised three dead people,¹⁴ especially Lazarus, who had already been in his grave four days. Among all of them it seems that St. Thomas was the most bold and courageous, for he is the one who says (when Christ wanted to go back into Judea to the dead Lazarus): “Let us go with Him, that we may die with Him” (John 11 [:16]). The apostles of Christ were fine people—and especially St. Thomas seems to have had a more valiant heart than the others. Besides this, he had recently witnessed Christ raise Lazarus, who had already lain in his grave for four days, and who ate and drank with Him [John 11:38–44; 12:1–2]. Yet they could not believe that the Lord Himself rose from the dead and was alive.

3. So we see in the apostles that we are nothing at all when He takes away His hand and we are left to ourselves. The women—[Mary] Magdalene and the others—and now the apostles themselves had proclaimed that they had seen the risen Lord. Still St. Thomas is obstinate and will not believe; he will not be satisfied even if he sees Him, unless he sees the nail marks in His hands and puts his fingers into the nail marks and his hand into His side [John 20:25].

So by refusing to believe, the dear apostle wants himself to be lost and condemned. There can be no forgiveness of sins or salvation if we do not believe this article of the resurrection of Christ, because all the strength of faith and of eternal life are in that article. St. Paul says, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is also in vain.” “Then you are still in your sins. Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost,” etc. (1 Corinthians 15 [:14, 17–18]). St. Thomas wants to go away; he wants to be not saved but lost, because he refuses to believe that Christ has risen. He would have perished and been condemned in his unbelief if Christ had not delivered him out of it by this revelation.

4. So the Holy Spirit shows and teaches us with this example that without faith we are simply blind and completely hardened. Everywhere in Holy Scripture it can be seen that the human heart is the hardest thing, beyond all steel and diamond. On the other hand, when it is fearful, despondent, and weak, there is no water or oil as weak as the human heart [cf. Ps. 22:14].

5. You can find many examples and stories of this in Scripture. Moses did so many frightful signs and miracles before Pharaoh that he could say nothing against them, had to realize that it was God’s finger [Exod. 8:19], and for that reason he also confessed that he had sinned against God and His people, etc. [Exod. 10:16]. Yet his heart became ever more hardened and obdurate, until the Lord cast him down together with all his might in the midst of the sea [Exod. 14:26–30].

¹⁴ The young man of Nain (Luke 7:11–17), Jairus’s daughter (Matt. 9:18–19, 23–26; Mark 5:22–24, 35–43; Luke 8:41–42, 49–56), and Lazarus (John 11).

So also are the Jews. The more Christ powerfully proved by both word and deed that He was the one promised to their fathers to bless them and all the world, the more violently and bitterly they were enraged against Him. There was no measure or end to their hatred, slander, and persecution until they condemned their Lord and God to the most disgraceful death of all as a blasphemer and a rebel and crucified Him between two evildoers. Nothing could prevent it, even though Pilate himself, the judge, pronounced Him innocent in opposition to them [John 18:38; 19:4, 6]. Created things acted differently than usual and so testified that their Lord and Creator hung there on the cross, etc. [Matt. 27:45, 51–53]. Likewise, the thief frankly and publicly confessed that even though He was hanging there and dying, nevertheless He was a King who had an eternal, heavenly kingdom [Luke 23:42]. The heathen centurion publicly cried out: “Truly this was the Son of God” [Matt. 27:54], etc. All of this, I say, did not at all help to convert them.

6. This is the way the godless, condemned world always acts. The more God shows it grace and favor, the more unthankful and worse it becomes. Now it is right for us all to thank God from the heart that He has revealed His holy Word so purely and clearly before the Last Day. From it we learn what inexpressible benefits He has given us in Christ, namely, that through Him we are redeemed from sin and death and shall now be justified and saved, etc. What attitude does the world take to this? As usual, they cannot sufficiently profane, slander, and condemn this Word of grace and life; wherever they can, they persecute and slay those who confess it.

Even when they hear that God will severely punish such sin with the fires of hell and eternal damnation, they do not pay much attention to it, but go ahead securely and obdurately as if it were nothing at all, but only something to ridicule, as we now see in the pope and his crowd. Nevertheless, it is such horrible, frightful wrath, at which all creatures are horrified. Therefore, it is surely true that no stone, steel, diamond, or anything on earth is as hard as an impenitent human heart.

7. On the other hand, when a heart is despondent and frightened, it is weaker than any water or oil, so that (as Scripture says [Lev. 26:36]) it is afraid of a rustling tree leaf. When such a person is alone in a room and hears the rafters or joists crack a little, he thinks that lightning and thunder are striking him. He comes into such anxiety and fear (of which I have seen much) that no one can comfort or cheer him, and all sermons and comforting words are too few to calm him. So there is no middle ground at all with the human heart: either it is so hard like wood and stone that it cares nothing at all about God or the devil, or, on the other hand, it is despondent, fickle, and despairing.

8. Thus the apostles here are so scared and frightened by the scandal of seeing their Lord so miserably mocked, spit at, whipped, pierced, and finally crucified in the most miserable way of all that they no longer have a heart in their body. Previously, because they had Christ with them, they were so bold and courageous that James and John presumed to command fire to fall from heaven and consume the Samaritans who did not want to receive Christ [Luke 9:54]. Then they could grandly boast that even the devils were subject to them in the name of Jesus [Luke 10:17]. Thomas admonished the others and said, "Let us go with Him, that we may die with Him" [John 11:16]. Especially Peter, more than the others, quickly slashed with his sword among the crowd who wanted to lay hands on and capture Christ [John 18:10]. Now, however, they are locked up in great fear and fright and want no one to come to them.

For this reason they are also terrified of the Lord when He comes to them and greets them, but they think that they are seeing a spirit or a ghost (which is an indication that they are completely frightened and despondent) [Luke 24:36–37]. So quickly they have forgotten all the miracles, signs, and words they had seen and heard from Him. During the forty days after His resurrection, before He was separated from them, the Lord had enough to do with appearing and revealing Himself in many ways—now to the women, now to the apostles, both separately and together, even eating and drinking with them—all so that they would be certain that He had risen. Yet it was still difficult for them to accept this.

9. Likewise, during the forty days, He spoke with them from Scripture about the kingdom of God, which was now beginning and is the kind of kingdom in which repentance and the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name among all nations [Luke 24:47]. Beyond this, when He was about to be taken from them in a cloud, they began to ask Him: "Lord, will You now restore the kingdom to Israel?" [Acts 1:6]. They have completely different thoughts about the kingdom of Christ than the one of which He had been speaking. Here you can see how exceedingly difficult it is for fearful, despondent hearts to be comforted and cheered up, and then to be correctly instructed, so that they know what kind of a king Christ is and what He has accomplished by His death and resurrection.

10. So both the obduracy and the fearfulness of the human heart are inexpressible. When it is out of danger, it is beyond all measure hard and obdurate, so that it does not pay attention to God's wrath or threatening. Even after hearing for a long time that God will punish sin with eternal death and damnation, it goes on and is drowned in arrogance, greed, etc. On the other hand, if it begins to be afraid, it becomes so despondent that it cannot again be restored. It is a great misery that we are such abominable people.

If there is no trouble at the moment, then we live secure in sin without any fear and alarm; we even stiffen like a dead corpse, so that what is spoken to us does just as much good as if it were spoken to a rock.

On the other hand, if there is a change so that we feel our sins, then we are frightened of death, God's wrath, and judgment. We in turn are paralyzed by great anguish and sorrow, so that no one can again cheer us up. We even become frightened of what ought to comfort us, as the disciples were frightened of Christ, who came to them just so they would be confident and cheerful. Nevertheless, He does not immediately set them right, but has to patch them up throughout the forty days, as was said. He takes and uses all kinds of comfort and medicine and still He can hardly help them, until He at last gives them the truly strong drink, namely, the Holy Spirit, of which they become drunk and truly comforted so that they were no longer fearful and frightened, as before.

11. Finally, the power of Christ's resurrection is pointed out to us in St. Thomas. We heard above that he was so firm and even stiff-necked in unbelief that, even though the other disciples together testified that they had seen the risen Lord, he simply would not believe it. It seems that he was a fine, valiant man who had decided that he would not soon believe the others. He had seen the Lord nailed to the cross just three days before, with the nails going through both hands and feet and the spear piercing His side. That had impressed him so firmly that when the others said, "He is risen," he regarded it as nothing.

Therefore, he says very defiantly: "Unless I see in His hands the nail marks, and place my hand into His side, I will not believe" [John 20:25]. This is a strong hyperbole, that he will not believe his eyes alone but will also feel and grope with his hands. It is as if he would say: "No one will persuade me to believe, but I am so certain about this 'no' that I will not believe even if I see, as you say you saw Him. If I am to believe, then He must come so close to me that, if it were possible, I could touch His soul and look Him in the eye."

12. He is very firmly and rigidly stuck in unbelief. It is surprising that he should think of such an absurd thing as placing his hand and finger into the holes of the wounds. He should have been clever enough to figure out that if Christ was alive again, had conquered death, and was free from all the wounds from the scourging and the crown of thorns, then He would have healed and disposed of the five wounds.

13. The high apostles have to blunder and stumble as an example for us and for our comfort. In this we see how Christ treats and regards those in His kingdom who are weak. He can even endure those who are still so obstinate and stubborn (as St. Thomas is here), and He does not want to condemn or disown them for that reason, if only they want to remain His disciples and

do not maliciously slander Him or become His enemies. By doing this He teaches us not to be offended at them or despair of them, but, according to His example, to be gentle with them and serve their weakness with our strength, until they again are cheered up and even strong.

14. However (as I began to say), this serves not just to show us that the resurrection of the Lord was proved and attested by this unbelieving and stiff-necked Thomas—who was hardened and almost paralyzed for eight days in this unbelief—but also that its power becomes known and is applied to our benefit. This is to be seen in Thomas, who was brought from unbelief to faith, from doubt to certain knowledge and to a glorious and beautiful confession [John 20:18].

15. This did not happen (says the evangelist) until the eighth day after His resurrection, when Thomas had become strong in his unbelief, against the testimony of all the others, when He was dead and no one hopes that Christ will show Himself specially to him. Then He comes and shows him the same scars and wounds, as fresh as He had shown them to the others eight days before; He tells him to present his finger and hand and put them into the nail marks and into His side. He grants him so freely not only to see Him as the others but also to take hold of Him and feel, just as he had said, “Unless I see in His hands” [John 20:25], etc. He says in addition: “Do not be unbelieving, but believing” [John 20:27].

16. Here you can see that Christ does not leave it at the history. His concern is to make Thomas a believer and one who rises from his stiff-necked unbelief and sin, as indeed follows. St. Thomas soon begins to say to Christ: “My Lord and my God!” [John 20:28]. He is already a different person, not the old Thomas Didymus (which in German means “twin,” not “doubter,” as people have, without understanding, explained from this text), as he was just before when he was so paralyzed and dead in unbelief that he would not believe unless he put his finger into His wounds.

Rather, he suddenly began to make such a glorious confession and sermon about Christ—none of the apostles at that time preached so well—namely, that the person who rose is true God and man. He speaks very significant words: “My Lord and my God!” [John 20:28]. He was not drunk; he is not joking or jesting; he does not mean a false god. Therefore, he surely is not lying. Christ also did not rebuke him for this; rather, his faith is confirmed, and so it must be true and sincere.

17. So this is the power of Christ’s resurrection: St. Thomas, who had been so deeply obdurate in unbelief above all others, was so suddenly changed and became an entirely different man. He now freely confesses that he not only believes that Christ has risen but is so enlightened by the power of Christ’s resurrection that he also now believes it as certain and confesses that He, his

Lord, is true God and man. Just as he has now risen from unbelief, the chief source of all sin, through Him, so on the Last Day he will also arise from the dead and live eternally with Him in inexpressible glory and bliss. That is true not only of him but also of all who believe this, as Christ Himself further says to him: "Thomas, because you have seen you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" [John 20:29].

18. Finally, as far as putting his finger into the wounds is concerned, I will not contest whether Christ after His resurrection retained the wounds and nail marks, except that they were not hideous, as they would be otherwise, but beautiful and comforting. But whether they were still fresh, open, and red, as artists paint them, I will let others decide. Otherwise, what they represent for the common man is very fine, so that he can have a memorial and a picture which remind and admonish him about the suffering and wounds of Christ. It can certainly be that He retained the same signs or marks which will perhaps shine much more beautifully and gloriously on the Last Day than His whole body, and He will show them to all the world, as Scripture says, "They will look on Him whom they have pierced" [John 19:37; Zech. 12:10]. However, I will commend this to everyone's devotion, to ponder over.

19. However, the main point which we should learn and retain from this Gospel reading is this: we believe that the resurrection of Christ is ours and works in us so that we will be resurrected from both sin and death. St. Paul speaks abundantly and comfortingly about this everywhere, as does Christ Himself when He says here: "Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe" [John 20:29]. In the conclusion of this Gospel reading, St. John teaches and admonishes us about the use and benefit of the resurrection and says, "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that through faith you may have life in His name" [John 20:31].

20. This is also a powerful, clear passage that gloriously praises faith and testifies that through it we surely have eternal life. This faith is not an empty, dead thought about the history of this Jesus, but it concludes and is certain that He is the Christ, that is, the promised King and Savior, God's Son, through whom we all are redeemed from sin and eternal death. He died and rose again so that we would obtain eternal life only for His sake. So it says "in His name," not in Moses' nor ours nor somebody else's name, that is, not because of the Law nor our worthiness and activity, but only because of His merit, as Peter also says, "There is no other name given to men in which we are to be saved" (Acts 4 [:12]), etc.