



Last month, we looked at Confession; so now its Gospel counterpart:

Holy Absolution



Holy Absolution! Confession and Absolution is the first completion of what will be a constant flow of Law & Gospel throughout the Divine Service. In Confession, God's Law has shown us our sins, and in response to our repentance we experience the first proclamation of the sweet Gospel in Holy Absolution. The pastor says, "*...in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*"

Absolution is a gift from God (cf. St. Matthew 16:19 and St. John 20:21-23) that Christians should cherish because it is the Gospel of forgiveness applied to a specific individual even when proclaimed in the corporate setting of the liturgy. Absolution is for all repentant sinners whatever their sin. It is particularly comforting for terrified consciences because when we are absolved we are *truly forgiven before God!*

In the words of Holy Absolution, you pastor says, "*I forgive*" because Christ commanded His disciples saying, "*If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven*" (St. John 20:22). The pastor says "*I*" because Christ said "*you.*" In fact, most rites of Individual Confession & Absolution pose the question to the penitent: "*Do you believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?*"

We must never misinterpret Absolution as merely human words. The Lutheran Confessions speak of absolution this way, "*...it is not the voice or word of the person speaking it, but it is the Word*



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of God, who forgives sin. For it is spoken in God's stead and by God's command (AC XXV).” The confessions go on to say, “Therefore we must believe the voice of the one absolving no less than we would believe a voice from heaven. (Apology, XII).

Your pastor is merely a vocal instrument that the LORD is using to proclaim His forgiveness, grace, and mercy to His dear children...to you! And your pastor has the full authority of the Office of the Keys which is why these words are often included “...I, by virtue of my Office as a called and ordained servant of Word, and in the stead...by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ....” These words serve as a further assurance that a poor miserable sinner who dares to act as the Lord’s ambassador has the full authority granted to him by the Lord and His Church.

Absolution ends the time of preparation for Divine Service. Now you are ready to receive and hear His Word, sing His praises and be served by your Lord Jesus at His Throne of Grace!

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