

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

Mercy comes naturally to God. It is His defining characteristic. It endures forever. Not so for men still infected by Eve's curse. The devil has taught us to stand up for ourselves and defend our **“rights.”** He has taught us to calculate, to manipulate with dishonesty, mislead by half-truths, and to plot our deceptions. Presumptuously pious advisors advise **“God helps those who help themselves.”** It is just a rehash of Eden's seduction: **“Take the fruit. He didn't really mean it. Only you know what is good for you.”** It is just a sly way of saying, **“Take what you want. Look after number one. God can't be trusted. Help yourself.”**

The father of lies has begotten children of lies. He does not love you. Nor is he happy or powerful. He is a wretched, disgusting creature full of agony, suffering for his rebellion and hatred. And the students are not above their teacher. You won't find happy, satisfied people in crack houses and brothels, or on the payroll of the mafia. It is a trap, a vicious cycle, a tortuous existence. Honor among thieves is the biggest lie on the planet.

And yet, we, the decent middle class, good Midwest, Church-going folk, have lusted for it. We have wanted to run wild and free, without thought of cost or consequence, indulging every dark fantasy and enacting every base desire. Repent. That is way of death. The so-called pleasures of the flesh are not pleasant. *Where, for instance, is the pleasure of drunkenness? Is it in the puking, the stumbling, the drooling, the inability to speak coherently, laughing like an imbecile, the hangover, the money down the drain, or the humiliation? Where is the fun?* Your eternal destiny is at stake. *Is it worth it?* Yet we have succumbed. We have fallen prey to lust and adulterous temptations that shouldn't even be tempting. Pathetic. Our darker fantasies, those we mostly don't act out, are even worse. *Would you risk the health of your spouse? Are you prepared to face your children and in-laws?* Repent. These things are not satisfying. You are not missing anything.

Your Father, not the devil, not the devouring father of lies, but your Father, who begot you anew in the water and the Word of Holy Baptism, the Father of your Lord, Jesus Christ, is merciful. He does not punish

you for your sins or the secret thoughts of your heart. He rescues you from death and despair. For while there is only One begotten of the Father, only One who can rightfully address Him as such, only One who came down from heaven, it is He, Jesus Himself, who bids you to stand in His stead and call His Father your Father. He says, **“Your Father is merciful.”** He teaches you to pray with boldness and confidence as dear children to their dear father. You are to address God as though you were His only-begotten, His beloved in whom He is well-pleased, the Apple of His eye, His Anointed One, without sin, without shameful past, without inside guilt and hidden thoughts; as though you were perfectly holy, abundantly gracious, and merciful.

Therein is the mercy of your Father. He accepts you for the sake of the Son as sons and daughters, the children of His adoptive, forgiving love. He lays your guilt upon the Son and sends it to death on the cross. He removes you from this horrid, killing world of self-preservation, tooth and claw, lies and power struggles. He raises His Son from your death and gives you the reward of His righteousness.

At His bidding, you stand in the stead of Christ before the Father, before your Father. You are just, righteous, and blessed. You also stand in the stead of Christ before your neighbors. Even as He bids you to come and receive His mercy, so you bid others to come and receive His mercy through you. He has removed the plank of sin from your eye with forgiveness. Now you can see clearly and remove the speck in your brother's eye with that same forgiveness. For Christ died for all. He would have all men turn and be saved. Planks and specks are not removed by rules and laws and punishment, nor by education and discipline or by ignoring or tolerating them, but by mercy, by sacrifice, by substitution.

In Christ, you will not be judged. You will not be condemned. Mercy and forgiveness will be given to you. The perfect, steadfast, unyielding love of God in Christ in good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your mouth, and from there into your bosom. The Lord Himself is present for you in His Body and Blood. It is the meal of mercy. It is prepared for you from eternity. Eat. Be satisfied. Here is rest not for the wicked, but for the forgiven, here is peace for rebels. In this Sacrament He will raise you up, remove the plank from your eye, and restore your vision. Your Father is altogether and forever merciful. In Jesus' Name. Amen.