

The Divine Service (Preparation): Exhortation 11th-19th C.

P Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness. [Hebrews 10:22; 1 John 1:8-9]

P Our help is in the name of the Lord,

C who made heaven and earth. *Psalms 124:8*

P I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,

C and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Psalms 32:5*

A “mini-sermon” and psalmody introduce confession and absolution, which are the heart of the *preparation*. The “mini-sermon” exhorts us as “beloved in the Lord” to draw near God’s throne of grace (read Heb 4:14-16; 10:19-30) for the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from all sin (read 1 John 1:5—2:6).

It reminds us that we ask for forgiveness (indeed, for all mercy and good) “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” that is, for his sake. We come not on the basis of our sorry-ness or our sincerity, nor for God to favor us because we’ve changed our ways or promised “never again.” We come “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” having been baptized into “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We ask this God, who has thus made us his, to forgive us and to hear our prayers simply for the sake of Jesus’ innocent suffering and death for us. In this way, we may *confidently*, that is, in faith purely in what Jesus has done, draw near to confess our sins.

We’re exhorted to be so confident as to come “with a true heart,” single-mindedly desiring all God here means to do and give, earnestly seeking forgiveness not only for our sinful nature (*original sin*) but for “our [*actual*] sins,” which we sin by thought, word, and deed. A true heart sees things simply, without hiding behind excuses or mitigating factors. We see in Christ’s righteous death for all sin the wages even of sins we consider small. We hear from him that the Law is a *spiritual* matter, condemning not only outward acts but the vain words of our mouths and evil thoughts of our hearts (Matt 5:17-48). We see in his life and death what it means truly to “love the Lord your God with all your strength and soul and mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:34-38). We see, finally that even the sins we ourselves think hurt no one in fact hurt us most of all. For to spare such sins we’ve taught ourselves not to listen to God who loves us, endangering the faith that lives by his word, especially of the forgiveness of sins, and saves us.

The exhortation presumes that we have, or will learn to have, examined ourselves for such sins before coming to ask for God’s forgiveness. For the one who goes to the doctor surely ought take note of his symptoms. And this is much more than that, dealing not only with temporal but with eternal life. Such an examination might lead us to private confession and absolution for a particular application of Christ’s forgiveness to stubborn or troublesome sins.

The psalmody from Psalms 124 and 32 (read the remainder of these Psalms) build our confidence in the Lord as we approach his throne of grace.