

Third Sunday after Epiphany;

Matthew 8:1-13

TWO EXAMPLES OF FAITH AND LOVE; PERSONAL AND ALIEN FAITH, AND THE FAITH OF CHILDREN.

When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

I. TWO EXAMPLES OF FAITH AND LOVE.

I. Two examples of faith and love are taught in this Gospel: one by the leper, the other by the centurion. Let us first consider the leper. This leper would not have been so bold as to go to the Lord and ask to be cleansed, if he had not trusted and expected with his whole heart, that Christ would be kind and gracious and would cleanse him. For because he was a leper, he had reason to be timid. Moreover the law forbids lepers to mingle with the people. Nevertheless he approaches, regardless of law and people, and of how pure and holy Christ is.

2. Here behold the attitude of faith toward Christ: it sets before itself absolutely nothing but the pure goodness and free grace of Christ, without seeking and bringing any merit. For here it certainly cannot be said, that the leper merited by his purity to approach Christ, to speak to

him and to invoke his help. Nay, just because he feels his impurity and unworthiness, he approaches all the more and looks only upon the goodness of Christ. This is true faith, a living confidence in the goodness of God. The heart that does this, has true faith; the heart that does it not, has not true faith; as they do who keep not the goodness of God and that alone in sight, but first look around for their own good works, in order to be worthy of God's grace and to merit it. These never become bold to call upon God earnestly or to draw near to him.

3. Now this confidence of faith or knowledge of the goodness of Christ would never have originated in this leper by virtue of his own reason, if he had not first heard a good report about Christ, namely, how kind, gracious and merciful he is, ready to help and befriend, comfort and counsel every one that comes to him. Such a report must undoubtedly have come to his ears, and from this fame he derived courage, and turned and interpreted the report to his own advantage. He applied this goodness to his own need and concluded with all confidence: To me also he will be as kind as his fame and good report declare. His faith therefore did not grow out of his reason, but out of the report he heard of Christ, as St. Paul says: "Belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the Word (or report) of Christ." Rom 10, 17.

4. This is the Gospel that is the beginning, middle and end of everything good and of all salvation. For we have often heard that we must first hear the Gospel, and after that believe and love and do good works; not first do good works and so reverse the order, as the teachers of works do. But the Gospel is a good report, saying or fame of Christ, how he is all goodness, love and grace, as can be said of no other man or saint. For even if other saints have a good report and reputation, it is nevertheless not the Gospel, unless it tells alone of the goodness and grace of Christ; and if it should include other saints also, it is no longer the Gospel. For the Gospel builds faith and confidence alone upon the rock, Jesus Christ.

5. You see therefore that this example of the leper fights for faith and against works. For as Christ helps him out of pure grace through faith without any works or merits of his own, so he does for every man, and would have all to think thus of him and expect from him like aid. And if this leper had said: "Behold, Lord, I have prayed and fasted so much; I beg you to look upon this and on account of it make me clean" – if he had come in this manner, Christ would never have cleansed him. For such a person does not rest upon God's grace, but upon his own merit. In this way God's grace is not praised, loved, magnified nor desired; but one's own works deprive God of his honor and rob him of that which is his. This is to kiss the hand and to deny God, as Job 31,27-28 says: "If my mouth hath kissed my hand; this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judges; for I should have denied God that is above;" and Isaiah 2,8: "They worship the work of their own hands," that is, the honor and confidence they ought to give to God, they attribute to their own work.

6. Furthermore the example of love is presented here in the love of Christ to the leper. For you see here, how love makes a servant of Christ, so that he helps the poor man freely without any reward, and seeks neither advantage, favor nor honor thereby, but only the good of the poor man and the honor of God the Father. For this reason he also forbids him to tell anyone, in order that it may be a pure, sincere work of free and gracious love.

7. This is what I have often said, that faith makes of us lords, and love makes of us servants. Indeed, by faith we become gods and partakers of the divine nature and name, as is said in Psalms 82,6: "I said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High." But through love we become equal to the poorest. According to faith we are in need of nothing, and have an abundance; according to love we are servants of all. By faith we receive blessings from above, from God; through love we give them out below, to our neighbor. Even as Christ in his divinity stood in need of nothing, but in his humanity served everybody who had need of him. Of this we have spoken often enough, namely, that we also must by faith be born God's sons and gods, lords and kings, even as Christ is born true God of the Father in eternity; and again, come out of ourselves by love and help our neighbors with kind deeds, even as Christ became man to help us all. And as Christ is not God, because he first merited divinity by his works or attained to it through his incarnation, but has it by birth, without any works, even before he became man; so we also have not merited by works or love sonship with God, so that our sins are forgiven, and death and hell cannot injure us; but without works and before our love, we have received it in the Gospel by grace through faith. And as Christ first became man to serve us after being God from eternity; so we also do good and exercise love to our neighbor, after we have become pious, free from sin, alive, saved, and sons of God by faith. Let this suffice concerning the first example, the leper.

8. The other example is like it in respect to faith and love. For this centurion also has a heartfelt confidence in Christ, and sets before his eyes nothing but the goodness and grace of Christ; otherwise he would not have come to him, or he would not have sent to him, as Lk 7, 3 says. Likewise he would not have had this bold confidence, if he had not first heard of the goodness and grace of Christ. In this, instance also the Gospel is the beginning and incentive of his confidence and faith.

9. Here we learn again, that we must begin with the Gospel and believe it and not look upon any merit or work of our own as this centurion also advanced no merit or work, but only his confidence in the goodness of Christ. So we see that all the works of Christ exhibit examples of the Gospel, of faith and of love.

10. We also observe the example of love, how Christ freely shows him kindness, without any request or reward, as was said above. Moreover, the centurion also shows an example of love, in that he took pity upon his servant as upon himself, even as Christ also has had compassion upon us, and did the good deed freely, solely for the benefit of the servant, as Luke 7, 2 says, he did it because the servant was dear to him; just as if he said: The love and affection, which he bore to him, impelled him to consider his need and to do this. Let us also do likewise, and see to it that we do not deceive ourselves and rest satisfied in that we now have the Gospel, and yet have no regard for our neighbor in his need. This having been said of these two examples, we will now also examine some details of the text.

II. THE EXPLANATION OF TWO THOUGHTS IN THIS GOSPEL.

11. When the leper here limits his prayer and says: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." it is not to be understood as if he doubted the goodness and grace of Christ. For such a faith would be of no value, even if he believed that Christ was almighty, and was able to do and know all things. For that is living faith, which does not doubt that God is also good to us and is graciously willing to do what we ask. But it is to be understood in this way: faith does not doubt the good will, God has toward a person, by which he wishes him every good; but it is not known to us, whether what faith asks and presents, is good and useful for us; God alone knows this. Therefore faith prays in a way that it submits all to the gracious will of God, whether it is for his honor and our good, and yet it does not doubt that God will grant it, or, if it cannot be granted, that his divine will withholds it in great grace, because he sees it is better not to bestow it. But in all this faith nevertheless remains certain and sure of God's gracious will, whether he gives or withholds, as St. Paul also says in Rom 8, 26, we know not how to pray as we ought, and as the Lord's Prayer bids us to prefer his will and to pray for it.

12. This is what we have often said: we ought to believe without doubting and without limiting the divine goodness; but we ought to pray with the limitation, that it may be his honor, his kingdom and will, in order that we may not limit his will to time, place, measure or name, but leave all that freely to him. For this reason the prayer of the leper pleased the Lord so well and was soon heard. For where we submit to his will, and seek what is acceptable to him, he cannot refrain from doing in return what is acceptable to us. Faith inclines his favor to us, and submissive prayer inclines him to grant us what we pray for. As to the sending of the leper to the priests, why it was done and what it signified, enough has been said in the Postil of the ten lepers.

13. However, the saying of Christ: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel," has been discussed with solicitude, lest it should imply that Christ did not speak truly or that the Mother of God and the apostles were inferior to this centurion. Although I might say here that Christ is speaking of the people of Israel, among whom he had preached and to whom he had come, and that therefore his mother and disciples were excluded, because they travelled with him and came with him to the people of Israel in his preaching, nevertheless I will abide by the words of the Lord and take them as they stand; and for the following reasons. First, it is contrary to no article of belief that this faith of the centurion was without a parallel among the apostles or in the Mother of God. But whenever no article of faith openly contradicts the words of Christ, they are to be taken literally, and are not to be adapted and bent by our interpretation, neither for the sake of any saint, or angel, nor of God himself. For his Word is the truth itself above all saints and angels.

14. Secondly, such interpretation and adaptation spring from a carnal mind and intention, namely to estimate the saints of God not according to God's grace, but according to their person, worth and greatness; which is contrary to God, who estimates quite differently, according to his gifts alone. For he never granted to John the Baptist to perform miracles,

John 10,41, as many inferior saints did. In short, he frequently does through inferior saints what he does not do through great saints. He concealed himself from his mother, when he was twelve years old, and suffered her to be in ignorance and error, Lk 2,43. On Easter Sunday he showed himself to Mary Magdalene, before he showed himself to his mother and the apostles, Jn 20,14. He spoke to the Samaritan woman, Jn 4,7, and to the woman taken in adultery, more kindly than he ever spoke to his own mother. Jn 8, 10. And when Peter fell and denied him, the murderer on the cross stood firm in his faith.

15. By these and similar wonders he shows that he will not have his Spirit in his saints limited by us, and that we are not to judge according to the person. He wills to bestow his gifts freely, according to his pleasure and not according to our opinion, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor 12, 11. Indeed even of himself he says in Jn 14, 12: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do." The purpose of all this is to prevent men from being presumptuous toward others and from elevating one saint above another and creating divisions. All are to be equal in the grace of God, however unequal they are in his gifts. It is his will to do through St. Stephen what he does not do through St. Peter, and through St. Peter what he does not do through his mother; so that it may be he alone who does all in all without distinction of person according to his will.

16. In this sense also is it to be understood that at the time of his preaching he found not such faith either in his mother or in the apostles, whether or not he found then or afterward greater faith in his mother and the apostles, or in many others. For it may easily be possible that at the time of his conception and birth he granted great faith to his mother, and afterwards never or seldom like great faith. At times he may have permitted it to decline, as he did when for three days she had lost him, Lk. 2,48. He deals thus with all his saints; and if he did not, the saints would doubtless fall into presumption and make idols of themselves or we would make idols of them, and look more upon their worthiness and persons than upon God's grace.

17. Now learn from this how foolish and void of understanding we are in regard to God's works and wonders, when we despise the plain Christian man and think that only the "men with pointed miters" and the learned know and understand God's truth; whereas Christ here exalts this heathen with his faith above all his disciples. This is because we hold to persons and dignities, and not to God's Word and grace. Therefore with persons and dignities we also plunge into every error, and then say, the Christian church and the councils have declared so; they cannot err, because they have the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile Christ is with those despised ones and gives dignities and councils over to the devil. Therefore note well, how Christ exalts this heathen. He surpasses Annas, Caiaphas and all the priests, scholars and saints, all of whom ought by right to be the pupils of this heathen, not to say that they ought never to be above him in their opinions and judgments. God sometimes grants to a great saint no faith and to a small saint great faith, in order that one may always esteem another better than himself. Rom 12, 10.

III. THE DISCUSSION OF THE DOCTRINE OF PERSONAL FAITH AND THE FAITH OF OTHERS; ALSO, OF FAITH AND THE BAPTISM OF CHILDREN.

”Lord, I am not worthy.”

18. Herein is the great faith of this heathen, that he knows salvation does not depend upon the bodily presence of Christ, for this does not avail, but upon the Word and faith. But the apostles did not yet know this, neither perhaps did his mother, but they clung to his bodily presence and were not willing to let it go, Jn 16,6. They did not cling to his Word alone. But this heathen is so fully satisfied with his Word, that he does not even desire his presence nor does he deem himself worthy of it. Moreover, he proves his strong faith by a comparison and says: I am a man and can do what I wish with mine own by a word; should not you be able to do what you wish by a word, because I am sure, and you also prove, that health and, sickness, death and life are subject to you as my servants are to me? Therefore also his servant was healed in that hour by the power of his faith.

19. Now since the occasion is offered and this Gospel requires it, we must say a little about alien faith and its power. For many are interested in this subject, especially on account of the little children, who are baptized and are saved not by their own, but by the faith of others; just as this servant was healed not by his own faith, but by the faith of his master. We have never yet treated of this matter; therefore we must treat of it now in order to anticipate, as much as in us lies, future danger and error.

20. First we must let the foundation stand firm and sure, that nobody will be saved by the faith or righteousness of another, but only by his own; and on the other hand nobody will be condemned for the unbelief or sins of another, but for his own unbelief; as the Gospel says clearly and distinctly in Mk 16,16: ”He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.” And Rom 1, 17: ”The righteous shall live by faith.” And Jn 3, 16-18: ”Whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already.” These are clear, public words, that every one must believe for himself, and nobody can help himself by the faith of others, without his own faith. From these passages we dare not depart and we must not deny them, let them strike where they may, and we ought rather let the world perish than change this divine truth. And if any plausible argument is made against it, that you are not able to refute, you must confess that you do not understand the matter and commit it to God, rather than admit anything contrary to these clear statements. Whatever may become of the heathen, Jews, Turks, little children and everything that exists, these words must be right and true.

21. Now the question is, what becomes of the young children, seeing that they have not yet reason and are not able to believe for themselves, because it is written in Rom 10, 17: ”Belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” Little children neither hear nor understand the Word of God, and therefore they can have no faith of their own.

22. The sophists in the universities, and the sects of the pope have invented the following answer to the question: Little children are baptized without their own faith, and on the faith of the Church, which the sponsors confess at the baptism; thereupon the infant receives in baptism the forgiveness of sins by the power and virtue of the baptism, and faith of its own is infused with grace, so that it becomes a new born child through the water and the Holy Spirit.

23. But if you ask them for the proof of this answer and where this is found in the Scriptures, it is found up the dark chimney, or they will point to their doctor's hat and say: We are the highly learned doctors and we say so; therefore it is true, and you must not inquire any farther. For almost all their doctrine has no other foundation than their own dreams and imaginations. And when they prepare themselves most carefully, they drag in some quotation from St. Augustine or another holy father. But this is not enough in the things that concern the salvation of souls; for they themselves are, and all the holy fathers were, men. Who will be surety and guarantee that they speak the truth? Who will rely upon it and die by it? For they say so without Scripture and the Word of God. Saints hither, and saints thither; if my soul is at stake, either to be lost or to be saved eternally, I cannot depend upon all the angels and saints put together, much less upon one or two saints, where they show us no Word of God.

24. From this falsehood they have gone farther and have even come to the point, where they have taught and still teach, that the sacraments have such power, that even if you have no faith and receive the sacrament (provided you have no intention to sin), you shall still receive the grace and the forgiveness of sins without faith. This they have inferred from the former opinion, that little children receive grace in this way without faith, solely by the virtue and power of the sacrament, as, they dream. Therefore they also ascribe the same thing to adults and to all men, and utter such things from their own mind, and thereby they have in a masterly way eradicated and made void and unnecessary the Christian faith, and have set up human works alone by virtue of the power of the sacraments. On this subject I have said enough in what I wrote concerning the articles of the bull of Leo.

25. The holy ancient fathers have spoken somewhat better, although not clearly enough. They say nothing about this imaginary power of the sacraments, but they teach that little children are baptized in the faith of the Christian church. But since they do not explain thoroughly, how this Christian faith benefits the children, whether they thereby receive a faith of their own, or are baptized only upon the Christian faith, without faith of their own: the sophists rush in and interpret the language of the holy fathers to the effect, that children are baptized without faith of their own and receive grace solely by reason of the faith of the church. For they are enemies of faith; if only they can exalt works, faith must allow them to do so. They do not think for a moment, whether the holy fathers erred or they themselves understood the fathers aright.

26. Beware of this poison and error, even if it were the expressed opinion of all the fathers and councils; for it will not stand; it has no Scripture for its foundation, but only the imaginations and dreams of men. Moreover it is directly and manifestly opposed to the chief

texts already mentioned, where Christ says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The conclusion from this is in short, baptism avails for nobody and is to be administered to nobody, unless he believes for himself; and without faith nobody is to be baptized, as St. Augustine himself says: Non sacramentum justificat, sed fides sacramenti (Not the sacrament justifies, but the faith of the sacrament).

27. Besides these there are others, like the brethren called Waldensians. They teach that every one must believe for himself, and receive baptism or the Lord's Supper with his own faith; otherwise neither baptism nor the Lord's supper is of any benefit to him. So far they speak and teach correctly. But it is a mockery of holy baptism, when they go on and baptize little children, although they teach that they have no faith of their own. They thus sin against the second commandment, in that they consciously and deliberately take the name and Word of God in vain. Nor does the excuse help them which they plead, that children are baptized upon their future faith, when they come to the age of reason. For the faith must be present before or at least in the baptism; otherwise the child will not be delivered from the devil and sins.

28. Therefore if their opinion were correct, all that is done with the child in baptism is necessarily falsehood and mockery. For the baptizer asks whether the child believes, and the answer for the child is: Yes. And he asks whether it desires to be baptized, and the answer for the child is again: Yes, Now nobody is baptized for the child, but it is baptized itself. Therefore it must also believe itself, or the sponsors must speak a falsehood, when for it they say: I believe. Furthermore, the baptizer declares that it is born anew, has forgiveness of sins, is freed from the devil, and as a sign of this he puts on it a white garment, and deals with it in every way as with a new, holy child of God: all of which would necessarily be untrue, if the child had not its own faith. Indeed, it would be better never to baptize a child, than to trifle and juggle with God's Word and sacrament, as if he were an idol or a fool.

29. Nor is it of any use that they make a threefold distinction in the kingdom of God: first, it is the Christian church; secondly, eternal life; thirdly, the Gospel; and then say children are baptized for the kingdom of heaven in the third and first sense. That is, they are baptized, not to be saved thereby and to receive forgiveness of sins; but they are received into the church and brought to the Gospel. All this amounts to nothing and is only an invention of their imagination. For it is not entering the kingdom of heaven, if I get among Christians and hear the Gospel. The heathen can also do that without baptism. This is not entering the kingdom of heaven, however, you may talk of the first, second and third sense of the kingdom of heaven. But being in the kingdom of heaven means to be a living member of the church, and not only to hear, but also to believe the Gospel. Otherwise a man would be in the kingdom of heaven, just as if I threw a stick or stone among Christians, or as the devil is among them. All this is worth nothing.

30. It also follows from this, that the Christian church has two kinds of baptism, and that children have not the same baptism as adults. Nevertheless St. Paul says there is only "one baptism, one Lord, one faith." Eph. 4,5: For if the baptism of children does not effect and bestow, what the baptism of adults effects and bestows, it is not the same baptism: it is

indeed no baptism at all, but a sport and mockery of baptism, inasmuch as there is no baptism but that which saves. If one knows or believes that it does not save, he ought not to administer it. But if it is administered, it is not Christian baptism; for one does not believe, that it effects what baptism is to effect. Therefore it is another and foreign baptism. For this reason it were almost necessary, that the Waldensian brethren should have themselves baptized again, as they baptize our people again; because they not only receive baptism without faith, but even contrary to faith, and in mockery and dishonor of God administer another, foreign, unchristian baptism.

31. If now we cannot give a better answer to this question and prove that the little children themselves believe and have their own faith, my sincere counsel and judgment is, that we abstain altogether and the sooner the better, and never baptize a child, so that we may not mock and blaspheme the adorable majesty of God by such trifling and juggling with nothing in it. Therefore we here conclude and declare that in baptism the children themselves believe and have their own faith, which God effects in them through the sponsors, when in the faith of the Christian church they intercede for them and bring them to baptism. And this is what we call the power of alien faith: not that anybody can be saved by it, but that through it as an intercession and aid he can obtain from God himself his own faith, by which he is saved. It may be compared to my natural life and death. If I am to live, I myself must be born, and nobody can be born for me to enable me to live; but mother and midwife can by their life aid me in birth and enable me to live. In the same way I myself must suffer death, if I am to die; but one can help to bring about my death, if he frightens me, or falls upon me, or chokes, crushes or suffocates me. In like manner, nobody can go to hell for me; but he can seduce me by false doctrine and life, so that I go thither by my own error, into which his error has led me. So nobody can go to heaven for me; but he can assist me, can preach, teach, govern, pray and obtain faith from God, through which I can go to heaven. This centurion was not healed of the palsy of his servant; but yet he brought it about that his servant was restored to health.

32. So here we also say, that children are not baptized in the faith of the sponsors or of the church; but the faith of sponsors and of the church prays and gains faith for them, in which they are baptized and believe for themselves. For this we have strong and firm Scripture proof, Mt 19,13-15; Mk 10, 13-16; Lk 18, 15-16. When some brought little children to the Lord Jesus that he should touch them, and the disciples forbade them, he rebuked the disciples, and embraced the children, and laid his hands upon them and blessed them, and said: "To such belongeth the kingdom of God" etc. These passages nobody will take from us, nor refute with good proof. For here is written: Christ will permit no one to forbid that little children should be brought to him; nay, he bids them to be brought to him, and blesses them and gives to them the kingdom of heaven. Let us give due heed to this Scripture.

33. This is undoubtedly written of natural children. The interpretation of Christ's words, as if he had meant only spiritual children, who are small in humility, will not stand. For they were small children as to their bodies, which Luke calls infants. His blessing is placed upon these, and of these he says that the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Will we say they were without faith of their own? Then the passages quoted above are untrue: "He that disbelieveth shall be

condemned.” Then Christ also speaks falsely or feigns, when he says the kingdom of heaven is theirs, and is not really speaking of the true kingdom of heaven. Interpret these words of Christ as you please, we have it that children are to be brought to Christ and not to be forbidden to be brought: and when they are brought to Christ, he here compels us to believe that he blesses them and gives to them the kingdom of heaven, as he does with these children. And it is in no way proper for us to act and believe otherwise as long as the words stand: ”Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.” Not less is it proper for us to believe that when they are brought to him he embraces them, blesses them, and bestows upon them heaven, as long as the text stands that he blessed the children which were brought to him and gave heaven to them. Who can ignore this text? Who will be so bold as not to suffer little children to come to baptism, or not to believe that Christ blesses them when they come?

34. He is just as present in baptism now as he was then: this we Christians know for certain. Therefore we dare not forbid baptism to children. Nor dare we doubt that he blesses all who come thither, as he did those children. So then there is nothing left here but the piety and faith of those who brought the little children to him. By bringing them, they effect and aid that the little children are blessed and obtain the kingdom of heaven; which cannot be the case unless they themselves have their own faith, as has been said. So we also say here, that children are brought to baptism by the faith and work of others; but when they get there and the pastor or baptizer deals with them in Christ's stead, he blesses them and grants to them the faith and the kingdom of heaven: for the word and deed of the pastor are the word and work of Christ himself.

35. With this agrees also what St. John says in his first Epistle, 2, 13: ”I write unto you, fathers; I write unto you, young men; I have written unto you, little children.” He is not satisfied to write to the young men; he also writes to the children, and writes that they may know the Father. From this it follows that the apostles baptized children also, and held that they believe and know the Father, just as if they had attained to reason and could read. Although somebody might here interpret the word ”children” as adults, as Christ designates his disciples sometimes: yet it is certain that here they are meant who are younger than the young men; so that it is evident he is speaking of young people who are under fifteen or eighteen years of age, and excludes nobody down to the first year: for these all are called children.

36. But let us examine their reason why they do not think children believe. They say, because they have not attained to reason they cannot hear God's Word; but where God's Word is not heard there can be no faith. Rom 10, 17: ”Belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” Tell me is this Christian to judge of God's works by our thinking, and say, Children have not attained to reason, therefore they cannot believe? How if through this very reason you have already departed from faith, and the children come to faith through their unreason? Dear friend, what good does reason do for faith and the Word of God? Is it not reason which resists in the highest degree faith and the Word of God, so that nobody can come to faith by means of reason? Reason will not endure God's Word unless it is first blinded and disgraced. Man must first die to reason and become, as it were, a fool, and even

as unreasonable and unintelligent as a little child, if he is to become a believer and receive the grace of God; as Christ says in Mt 18,3: "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." How often does Christ hold before us that we must become children and fools, and condemn reason?

37. Tell me also, what kind of reason had the little children whom Christ embraced and blessed, and upon whom he bestowed the kingdom of heaven? Were they not still without reason? Why does he command to bring them to him and then bless them? Where did they get the faith which makes them children of the kingdom of heaven? Nay, just because they are without reason and foolish, they are better prepared to believe than adults and those possessed of reason, because reason is always in the way and with its large head is not willing to push through the narrow door. One must not look upon reason or its works when faith and God's work are under consideration. Here God alone works and reason is dead, blind and, compared to this work, an unreasonable block, in order that the Scripture may stand, which Says: "God is wonderful in his saints;" and: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways," Is 55,9.

38. But since they stick so fast in reason, we must assail them with their own wisdom. Tell me, why do you baptize a man when he has come to the age of reason? You answer: He hears God's Word and believes. I ask: How do you know that? You answer: He professes it with his mouth. What shall I say? How, if he lies and deceives? You cannot see his heart. Very well, then you baptize for no other reason than for what the man shows himself to be externally, and you are uncertain of his faith, and must believe that if he has not more within in his heart than you perceive without, neither his hearing, nor his profession, nor his faith will help him; for it may all be a delusion and no true faith. Who then are you, that you say external hearing and profession are necessary to baptism; where these are wanting one must not baptize? You yourself must confess that such hearing and profession are uncertain, and not enough for one to receive baptism. Now upon what do you baptize? How will you justify your actions when you thus bungle baptism and bring it into doubt? Is it not the fact that you must come and say that it is not becoming for you to know or do more than that he whom you are to baptize be brought to you and ask baptism from you; and you must believe or commit the matter to God, whether he inwardly truly believes or not? In this way you are excused and baptize aright. Why then will you not do the same for the children, whom Christ commands to be brought to him and promises to bless? But you wish first to have the outward hearing and profession, which you yourself acknowledge is uncertain and not sufficient for baptism on the part of the one to be baptized. And you let go the sure word of Christ, in which he bids the little children to be brought unto him, on account of your uncertain external hearing.

39. Moreover tell me, where is the reason of a Christian while he is asleep, since his faith and the grace of God never leave him? If faith can thus continue without the aid of reason, so that the latter is not conscious of it, why should it not also begin in children before reason knows anything about it? In the same way I would like to say of every hour in which a Christian lives and is busy and occupied, that he is not conscious of his faith and reason, and yet his faith does not on that account cease. God's works are mysterious and wonderful,

where and when he wills: and again manifest enough, where and when he wills. Judgment upon them is too high and too deep for us.

40. Since it is commanded here, not to forbid little children to come unto him in order to receive his blessing, and it is not demanded of us to know the exact state of faith within, and the external hearing and profession are not sufficient for the one baptized, we are to be content that it is enough for us, the baptizers, to hear the profession of the one to be baptized, who comes to us of himself. And this for the reason that we may not administer the sacrament against our conscience, as giving it to those in whom no fruit is to be hoped for. But if they assure our conscience of their desire and profession, so that we can administer it as a sacrament that imparts grace, we are excused. If his faith is not true, let that rest with God; we have not given the sacrament as a useless thing, but with the consciousness that it is beneficial.

41. All this I say in order that one may not baptize recklessly, as they do who even administer it with the deliberate knowledge that it will be of no effect or benefit to the person receiving it. For therein the baptizers sin, because they knowingly use God's sacrament and Word in vain, or at least have the consciousness that it is neither intended nor able to effect anything; which is an altogether unworthy use of the sacrament and a temptation and blasphemy of God. For that is not administering the sacrament, but making a mockery of it. But if the person baptized denies and does not believe, you have done right anyhow, and have administered the true sacrament with the good consciousness that it ought to be beneficial.

42. However, those who do not come of themselves, but are brought, as Christ bids us to bring little children, the faith of these commit to him who bids them to be brought, and baptize them by his command, and say: Lord, thou dost bring them and command to baptize them. Thou wilt answer for them. On this I rely, I dare not drive them away nor forbid them. If they have not heard the Word, by which faith comes, as adults, hear it, they nevertheless hear it like little children. Adults take it up with their ears and reason, often without faith; but they hear it with their ears, without reason and with faith. And faith is nearer in proportion as reason is less, and he is stronger who brings them than the will of adults who come of themselves.

43. These inventive spirits stumble mostly because in adults there is reason, which acts as if it believed the Word it hears. This then they call faith. Again they see that in children there is as yet no reason; for they act as if they did not believe. But they do not observe that faith in God's Word is quite a different and deeper thing than what reason does with the Word of God. For it is the work of God alone above all reason, to which the child is just as near as the adult, yes, much nearer, and from which the adult is just as far as the child, yea, much farther.

44. But this that is contrived by reason is a human work. I think, if any baptism is certain, the baptism of children is most certain, because of the Word of Christ, where he commands to bring them, whereas the adults come of themselves. In adults there may be deception

because of the reason that is manifest; but in children there can be no deception, because of their hidden reason, in whom Christ works his blessing, even as he has bidden them to be brought to himself. It is a glorious word and not to be treated lightly, that he commands us to bring the children to him, and rebukes those who forbid it.

45. But hereby we do not mean to weaken or destroy the office of preaching. For God indeed does not cause his Word to be preached for the sake of the rational hearing, since no fruit results from that; but for the sake of the spiritual hearing, which, as I have said, children also have as well and even better than adults; for they also hear the Word. For what else is baptism but the Gospel to which they are brought? However, they hear it only once, but they hear it more effectively, because Christ, who has commanded to bring them, receives them. For adults have the advantage that they frequently hear and can think of it again. Yet even in the case of adults it is a fact that the spiritual hearing is not effected by many sermons. But it may occur once during one sermon, and then he has enough forever. What he hears, afterwards, he hears either to improve the first bearing or to destroy it again.

46. In short, the baptism and consolation of children lie in the word: "Suffer the little children to come unto me; forbid them not; for to such belongeth the kingdom of God." He has spoken this and he does not lie. Therefore it must be right and Christian to bring little children to him. This can only be done in baptism. So also it must be certain that he blesses them, and bestows the kingdom of heaven upon all who come to him, according to the words: "To such belongeth the kingdom of God." Let this be enough for this time.

47. Finally it would be in order here to treat of the spiritual meaning of leprosy and the palsy. But of leprosy much has been said in the Postil of the ten lepers. Therefore it need not be treated at length here.

Content Page



First Page