

6 July 2008
Pentecost 8
Confirmation of Robert Douthwaite
and Michael Roark

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Beating Heart of the Christian Life”

Text: Zechariah 9:9-12; Romans 7:14-25a; Matthew 11:25-30

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation.

We hear those words at the beginning of the Advent season every year, as we remember that our King came to us in human flesh, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger.

We also hear those words every year on Palm Sunday, as we remember that this very same King now enters Jerusalem in as humble a fashion as when He was born, riding on a donkey, to lay down His life for us on the cross.

And as we hear those words today, it is to remember yet another coming of our King for us and for our salvation. We remember His coming to us **here**, in the Divine Service, where each and every Sunday our King comes to us, still with human flesh and riding in humble words, water, and bread and wine, righteous and having salvation. He comes for the very same reason He came at Christmas and entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday - to save us from our sins. The forgiveness and life earned by Him then and there, given to us here and now.

And so I cannot think of a more appropriate Scripture for a Confirmation Sunday. For our King coming to us in the Divine Service is what the catechism is all about. Catechetical instruction and confirmation are *not* about achieving a certain level of intellectual knowledge and being able to pass a test. They are *not* about memorizing certain things and being able to voice all the right answers. They are *not* a type of graduation. Catechetical instruction and confirmation may have *become* all those things in recent years, but they were never intended to be so. Rather, the learning

that takes place and that leads to confirmation happens for one reason and with one goal only: **worship**. The catechism teaches what we do in the Divine Service, and why we do it. It teaches what it is that we are receiving here, from whom, and how to be a part of it. **From the catechism, we learn how to worship.**

That's why confirmation is not at all a graduation! Because having learned about this Divine Service, Robbie and Michael will now enact what they have learned for the rest of their lives. Being confirmed and then never coming back to church makes as much sense as learning how to drive a car and then never driving it! And so what they have learned through their participation as youth, and then learned in formal catechetical instruction, they will now live for the rest of their lives, growing up in their salvation as they grow into the Divine Service and it grows into them. As they come and receive the gifts of God offered here.

Now perhaps it sounds funny to say that they – and we – need to learn how to worship! But it's true. For what happens here is unlike what we do anywhere else in the world. We use different words. We act a different way. We have a different way of doing things. We bow, we sit, we stand, we kneel, we cross ourselves, we turn, we come forward, we speak together. These are not things you do in your living room on a typical night! *And* we do them in the presence of our Saviour King, who is here for us! And so we must learn. The culture of the church and the liturgy isn't natural for anyone – we *all* must learn it. That's not a bad thing. That means it doesn't belong to any one group of people. It belongs to us all. We all become here a part of something bigger than any one of us. And so we must learn. What do these words mean? What is this order of service? What are these gifts? How do we participate in the life of God given to us here? And that's exactly what the six parts of the catechism teach.

First, the **Ten Commandments** show us our sin and teach us how to confess. Then second, that we not be left in the despair of our sin, the **Apostles' Creed** teaches us of God, who He is, what He has done for us and is still doing for us, as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Then, like all disciples, we need to learn how to pray (Luke 11:1) – how to speak to our God and call on His promises. And so next we learn of the **Lord's Prayer**. Then come the gifts of God – how He gives us the forgiveness, life, and salvation He has promised to give us. First is the gift of **Holy Baptism**, by which we become children of God, and in which we live every day of our Christian lives. Then in **Confession and the Office of the Keys** we learn of the authority that Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive sins, and of the pastors He gives to

His church to give these gifts in His stead and by His command. And then finally is learned the **Lord's Supper**, the culmination of every Divine Service and of the catechism as well. That each week we are privileged to receive *not* mere bread and wine, tokens of an *absent* Saviour – but the very body and blood of Jesus, *really here* for me, placed into my mouth and poured over my lips.

And so what we *believe* (as outlined in the catechism) is *enacted* and *lived* (in the Divine Service). **It is one and the same.** For if doctrine is not lived, it is of no value. If doctrine is dry, dead stuff in a book, it will quickly be forgotten. If doctrine is just the stuff of pastors and church professionals, then it is not for me. . . . But I pray that what I've taught you, Michael and Robbie, is that it *is* for you. For Christ is for you. Doctrine matters because Christ matters.

And so I pray that you will live what you've learned all the days of your life. For the Divine Service is the beating heart of the Christian life. As the heart keeps pumping blood to keep the body alive, so the Christian keeps coming back to the Divine Service to keep the soul alive. To receive the faith and forgiveness we need, and then take that faith and forgiveness out into the world. A world which is not an easy place to live as a Christian. To live a life that will be filled with struggle, doubts, fears, and questions, as we heard St. Paul talk about today in Romans. A life that will be under the constant and unending assault of satan – who does not simply want to make you sin, but who wants to consume you. He's not playing around. He is serious – *deadly* serious.

But so is your Saviour, who came to die your death and be consumed on the cross, that in His resurrection you have His life. And to that life and victory Jesus called us today, when He said: “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*”

And so as you have done so often through your childhood days, so you will now continue to do – come to your Saviour Jesus here, in the Divine Service. You will come heavy laden with your sins, and He will remove them and give you rest. You will come and learn of Him, for your learning is not over, but just begun. You will come and find rest in His gifts and promises. You will come and find a gentle, lowly Saviour, who knows all your struggles. You will come and find a Saviour who frees, feeds, and forms, and has promised to always do those things for you. And you will come and find others just like you; your family of faith here. They are here for you

and you for them. You, and each one of them, carefully chosen and brought here by our Saviour, in this time and place, not by accident, but for a reason. They will support you, comfort you, rejoice with you, cry with you, and receive the body and blood of our Lord here with you. The church, and this church, are gifts of God, for you and for us all.

For here, *Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation.* Coming to you because He loves you. Coming to you because He wants to be with you, and wants you to be with Him forever. How awesome is the place the King comes to dwell; where He comes not to accuse but to forgive; where He comes not to be served, but to serve and to save. Robbie and Michael, come now and confess this King, and the faith you have received from Him. Come now and join us at the King's Table. Come now, and always, for your King is here for you.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.