

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“God, Be Merciful to Me, a Sinner!” is the confession, attitude, and prayer life of the Christian.

It’s not much of a slogan, or mission statement. It doesn’t have a lot of pop and sizzle. It’s not going to fill a football stadium or build a television empire. But it is the confession, attitude, and prayer life of the Christian and the church of God in Christ Jesus. “God, Be Merciful to Me, a Sinner!”

As Luther teaches the Baptized children, and adults preparing to be Baptized, toward the heavenly banquet table of our Lord to receive His very body and blood: “When I urge you to go to confession, I am simply urging you to be a Christian.” [Large Catechism, Brief Exhortation 32]

Not every Christian will lead as holy and blameless a life and be blessed with riches and success as the Pharisee. In fact, most will not. And not every unbeliever will be as poor and miserable a sinner as the “extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector” the Pharisee names. In fact, again, most will not.

But there is something that everybody--every single one of us past, present, and future, has in common--whether the seemingly holy and blameless of the world who live lives so charmed if they fall into a pile of manure they come out smelling like a rose and counting their cash; or the poorest, most miserable sinners who can’t catch a break and seem to live from day to day going from one failure or beat down to the next--all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. Romans 3:23-25

All that is to say, no matter how perfect and blessed one’s life, it is nothing to thump one’s chest and boast about—it counts for nothing before the throne of God and will disappear in the blink of an eye at the last trumpet sound. And no matter how poor and miserable one’s life in this world, no one is beyond redemption and the hope of the life to come. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

And yet the world God has given us is all about works. In Genesis we read, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.... But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God ... made ... a woman and brought her to the man.” (Genesis 2:15, 20-21)

Paul writes, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)

John the Baptist worked hard. And yet what did he get for his efforts? John had his head served up on a silver platter for being so bold as to chastise King Herod and his adulterous marriage to his sister-in-law. John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.” Mark 6:18

In his book “Confessions,” Augustine (the Bishop of Hippo) “describes his conversion to Christianity through the devotion of his sainted mother, Monica, and the preaching of Ambrose (Bishop of Milan). When he was drawn into the moral laxity of the day and fathered an illegitimate son, they followed 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” St.

Augustine and his mother, St. Monica, give all of us who grieve over loved ones who do not yet know Christ as their Savior or who have strayed from the faith. So God used Augustine to do many great and wonderful things for the church.

Luther, trying to help people distinguish between our works and God’s works through us, wrote “We should preach the Word, but the results must be left solely to God’s good pleasure . . . I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.” (LW 51:77)

And John the Baptizer reminds us again of the purpose of the Church and the message of her ministers.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”  
Matthew 3:1-2

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29

Yes, dearly beloved of God, this is the confession, attitude, and prayer life of the Christian and the church of God in Christ Jesus. “God, Be Merciful to Me, a Sinner!” For when we so confess as we come before the altar and mercy seat of our Lord in the Divine Service and wherever the Word of Christ is proclaimed and delivered for the forgiveness of sins, with the tax collector, we leave the house of the Lord and go down to our houses—and back to work in our jobs, at school, in our neighborhoods, and in our homes--- justified and doing

“God, Be Merciful to Me, a Sinner!” Luke 18:9-14

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the work, the very labor we have been created in Christ Jesus to do,  
and which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

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