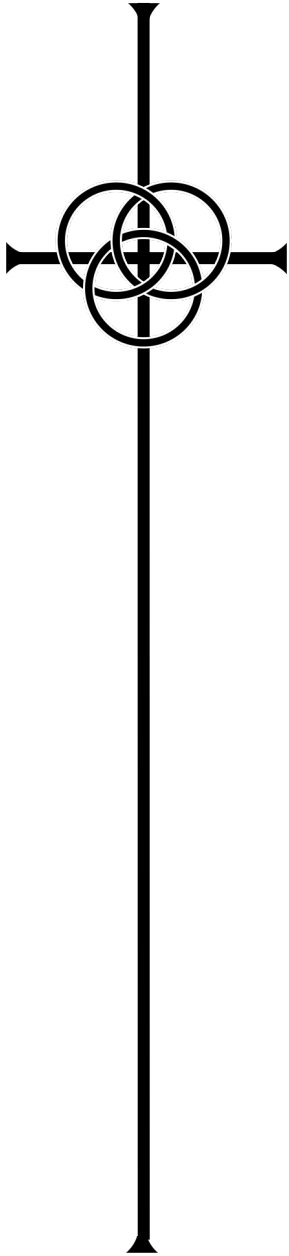


LIFE TOGETHER

RECEIVING GOD'S GIFTS ✝ SHARING GOD'S GIFTS



Dearest Saints of Holy Trinity,

Gesimatide is here already, and that means Lent is just around the corner. As it happens, Ash Wednesday falls on the Feast of St. Valentine this year. Consider taking your hot date to Divine Service that evening and reflecting upon the great gifts of love God bestows upon us.

With Lent also comes the Great Fast. If you do not practice any form of fasting, I urge you to begin. Give something up and take something up. That is the Christian rhythm. Relinquish whatever it is you think you cannot live without so that it may relinquish its hold on you. Likewise, the prayer, and other piety you think you cannot take up, do take up. Such discipline is essential to the Christian life as we learn to love Jesus more than anything else, and depend upon him in the same way.

Let us also take this Lent to appreciate all that we have, forgetting what we do not. Let us thank God for the time and space he has given us for gathering in prayer around his holy Sacraments. Let us give thanks for the beautiful pews, and for all else that adorns his holy sanctuary. We've come a long way in five and a half years, and all of it by the grace of God. Let's be sure to keep following him. If it's been this good so far, it can only get better. Jesus does know what's best.

I love you all, and am overjoyed to be your pastor. May this upcoming Lent bless you all through deep and sincere contemplation of the Lord's suffering and death on our behalf.

In Christ,

Pastor Ferguson

Fiducia Suppli-cannot:

Christian Blessing and Pope Francis' Recent Declaration

Pastor Ferguson

On December 18, 2023, the Roman Catholic Church—and by association every Western church body—erupted into absolute turmoil with the publication of Pope Francis' declaration "*Fiducia Supplicans: On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings.*" The intent of this declaration was to address the theological significance of a pastoral blessing, and attempt to clarify certain ambiguities in the definitions and practice. In this endeavor, *Fiducia Supplicans* has failed miserably.

The source of the current firestorm within the Church is *Fiducia's* insistence that the Church may approve the blessing of "same-sex couples." Yet, at the same time it claims to affirm the Church's historic teachings on marriage and sexuality. At best, this document is confusing, poorly worded, and ambiguous beyond the ambiguities it sought to clarify. At worst, it is capitulation to the world, license for church-sanctioned sodomy in practice, and a signal that Western Christianity has, at last, completely imploded. All Christians—real, Bible-believing, faithful Christians of all denominations across the board—should be disturbed by *Fiducia*, and should, appropriately, lament it.

The crux of *Fiducia's* controversy is its attempt to differentiate between the Church blessing individuals as individuals, and the Church blessing civil unions of the individuals as unions well pleasing to God. Of course, this is a distinction that must be made, as the Church cannot bless sin. Yet, as Hans Boersma writes in his critique for the editors at *Touchstone*,

As it is, the declaration . . . sows confusion by asking that we bless same-sex couples while at the same time maintaining that we're not "officially validating" such unions or changing the church's

[sic] teaching on marriage. One may find such a balancing act an insult to people's intelligence—which indeed it is.

Fiducia cheekily quotes Benedict XVI's January 1, 2012 homily in its defense:

Like Mary, the Church is the mediator of God's blessing for the world: she receives it in receiving Jesus and she transmits it in bearing Jesus. He is the mercy and the peace that the world, of itself, cannot give, and which it needs always, at least as much as bread.

The emeritus' words are certainly true, but when used within the context of *Fiducia*, the point being made neglects to admit the simple fact that, as the Rev.

"Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral."

~ *Pope Benedict XVI*

Calvin Robinson affirmed during the Oxford University Debates when the Church of England made similar declarations to that of *Fiducia*, "Jesus met with tax collectors and prostitutes, but it was they who went away changed, not him." In other words, the entirety of *Fiducia* is scandalous to the Church because it neglects to mention repentance and the fundamental change the mercy and peace of Jesus work within the repentant sinner who entreats Jesus for a blessing. Imagine if the ten lepers had walked away from Jesus' blessing without being transformed, or if Naaman had come out of the Jordan just as leprous as he was when he stepped in. What, then, is the point of Christ's blessing if it does not effect a divine transformation, and a conformation to his holy image?

Certainly it is true that "God never turns away anyone who approaches him!" That is, those who approach him in a spirit of love. God blesses those who love him, and those who love him obey him. They are blessed who delight in him, who love his law, and who abide in him. Upon them he showers

his blessings, so that they may be affirmed and strengthened in their quest for holiness. A blessing bestowed upon an individual recognizes his desire for amendment and improvement of life and living, and is itself the work of Jesus to perform just that within them. The blessing given to couples functions in much the same way, while also confessing divine approval and joy at the union itself.

Yet, to those who seek God out simply to use him or to convince him of their own worth he speaks the words of the vineyard owner: "Take what is yours and go your way." That can hardly be considered a blessing.

Fiducia also states,

A blessing offers people a means to increase their trust in God. The request for a blessing, thus, expresses and nurtures openness to the transcendence, mercy, and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live. It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered.

Yet, where is the amendment to life and practice? Where is the desire for knowing God without the need for fleeing from the lusts of the flesh (2 Tim 2:22; 1 Pet 2:11)? One cannot know God relationally while still embracing sin. This is precisely why God refers to the idolatry of Israel as harlotry. It is sin against the relationship. It is adultery, and it cannot be blessed.

Furthermore, where is the call to discipleship without denying the self and taking up crosses (Matt 16:24)? Where is the closeness of God in the midst of sins one has no will or intent to combat (Isa 59:1–8)? The Apostle John states in no uncertain terms, *He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. . . . He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked* (1 John 2:4, 6).

If, "when one asks for a blessing, one is expressing a petition for God's assistance, a plea to live better, and confidence in a Father who can help us live better," then let us reserve blessings for the penitent and contrite whose delight is in the law of the Lord (Ps 1:2). Let us reserve blessings for those who love Jesus and who in such love seek to obey him and to become holy. Let the Church not give what is holy to the dogs.

Neither let her throw her pearls before the swine (Matt 7:6). For, this warning is given to protect the Church, *lest [the pigs and the dogs] trample [the pearls] under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.*

Such rending is the only possible outcome of giving something intended for holiness to those who do not in any way seek to be holy. Even while it attempts to make distinctions, *Fiducia Supplicans* is both ambiguous enough to invite numerous interpretations, further disunifying the Western Church as a whole, while specific enough in its practical demands to cause irreparable harm to doctrine, public practice, and public appearance. In other words, perhaps it is true that the declaration does not change the teaching on marriage, but it does certainly bend the teaching, and not in a way that preserves the fidelity of the Church. A door has been opened that cannot now be closed.

It is true what Benedict XVI said in 1986: "Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral." *Fiducia Supplicans* simply is not true, and cannot, therefore, be pastoral. The culture is at odds with the Church and her teaching. It can never be permitted to create policy. But that is exactly what has happened.

As Boersma puts it, Rome has fallen at last.

God help the remnant of the Church in the West.

Kyrie Eleison.

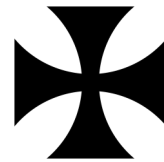
THIS MONTH AT HOLY TRINITY

Food Pantry Donations

Please help to provide for our hungry neighbors in need by donating goods to the food pantry. This is an easy addition to your regular monthly alms.

Food pantry needs for the month of February include hot cereal, canned chicken, chicken and beef broth, pudding, jello, saltine crackers and diced tomatoes.

For more information contact Debbie Ohlenschlen



Anniversaries of Baptism

- 8 Mike Burnside
- 12 Keaton Zembles
- 13 Noah Oswald
- 14 Darrel Voltmer
- 15 Hattie Kent
- 16 Lane Zembles
- 16 Hailey Quezada
- 18 Spencer Gibson
- 18 Becky Livengood
- 18 Michael Livengood
- 20 Grady Cook
- 22 Anna Ohlensehlen
- 22 Stephen Wright

Birthdays

- 2 Annabelle Ellis
- 4 Wilma Windhorst
- 5 Doug Livengood
- 5 Bill Thurnau
- 7 Lela Wright
- 7 Carol Thurnau
- 12 Sarah Quezada
- 21 Lindsey Johnson
- 21 Shirley Geib
- 23 Larry Helfers
- 25 Kevin Wright
- 26 Creed Voltmer
- 26 Hallie Grist
- 29 Emma Ohlensehlen

Anniversaries of Marriage

- 18 Jim & Becky Boyles



Saints' Days and Commemorations

- 2 The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord
- 5 Jacob, (Israel), *Patriarch*
- 10 Silas, *Fellow Worker of St. Peter and St. Paul*
- 13 Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos
- 14 Valentine, *Martyr*
- 15 Philemon and Onesimus
- 16 Philipp Melanchthon (birth), *Confessor*
- 18 Martin Luther, Doctor and Confessor
- 23 Polycarp of Smyrna, *Pastor and Martyr*
- 24 St. Matthias, *Apostle*

Serving This Month

Worship Preparation: Susan Biermann

Ushers: Liam Ellis, Holt Ellis

Greeters: Waigand Family

Acolytes:

- 4 Liam Ellis
- 11 Sadie Biermann
- 18 Lela Wright
- 21 Annabelle Ellis
- 25 Kipton Wagiand
- 28 Hattie Kent

Refreshments:

- 4 Marla Voltmer
- 11 Tabby Waigand
- 18 Jennifer Biermann
- 25 Gail Heitman

FEBRUARY 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				7:30 a.m.—Matsins Council items due to Secretary's office	7:30 a.m.—Matsins Pastor Gone to Conception Abbey	10:00 a.m.—Catechumenate
4 9:15 a.m.—Sunday School 10:30 a.m.—Divine Service Board of Education Meeting	5	6 7:30 a.m.—Matsins 6:00 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	7 7:30 a.m.—Matsins Driver's License Testing 6:00 p.m.—Midweek	8 7:30 a.m.—Matsins	9 7:30 a.m.—Matsins 2:00–6:00 p.m.—Food Pantry Open 6:00 p.m.—Council Dinner at Parsonage	10 10:00 a.m.—Catechumenate
11 9:15 a.m.—Sunday School 10:30 a.m.—Divine Service 2:00 p.m.—Lutheran Service at Tiffany Heights	12	13 7:30 a.m.—Matsins 6:00 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	14 7:30 a.m.—Matsins 6:00 p.m.—Midweek 7:00 a.m.—Ash Wednesday Divine Service	15 7:30 a.m.—Matsins	16 7:30 a.m.—Matsins Pastor Gone to Conception Abbey	17 10:00 a.m.—Catechumenate
18 9:15 a.m.—Sunday School 10:30 a.m.—Divine Service 12:00 p.m.—Potluck	19	20 7:30 a.m.—Matsins 1:00 p.m.—Ladies Guild 6:00 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	21 7:30 a.m.—Matsins Drivers License Testing 6:00 p.m.—Midweek 7:00 p.m.—Vespers	22 7:30 a.m.—Matsins	23 7:30 a.m.—Matsins 2:00–6:00 p.m.—Food Pantry Open	24 10:00 a.m.—Catechumenate
25 9:15 a.m.—Sunday School 10:30 a.m.—Divine Service Board of Elders Meeting 5:30 p.m.—Youth Group	26	27 7:30 a.m.—Matsins 6:00 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	28 7:30 a.m.—Matsins 6:00 p.m.—Midweek 7:00 p.m.—Vespers	29 7:30 a.m.—Matsins		