

The Festival of St. Philip and St. James with the Rite of Confirmation for
Edith Wright
6 May, Anno Domini 2018
St. John 14:1-14
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Why, in the creeds, do we confess faith in not only the Christian but the apostolic Church? Is it not enough that we say we are Christian? Really, it seems like we're putting some emphasis on man that shouldn't be there. For the same reason, should we be observing these saints' days? Isn't that idolatry?

Besides the fact that our Lutheran forefathers were sure to maintain the observance of these festival days for the purpose of preaching and teaching the Christian faith, Jesus' words in today's Gospel remind us that there is only one way to the Father - Christ, the way which the apostles proclaim in the Holy Scriptures. And we must be sure that we know and follow on that way only. Unfortunately, there are all sorts of religious hucksters, otherwise known as false prophets, who try to disguise their poison under the name "Christian". Even Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses work hard to convince everyone, especially those in the Church, that they too are Christians. But you cannot be a Christian if you deny the divinity of Jesus, which both do. This is why the faithful who have gone before us were careful in assembling the creeds as we have them today. There were, and still are, errors that need to be refuted, lies that need to be condemned as contrary to our Lord and His Word because all that is contrary to God's Word is contrary and dangerous to salvation. To be apostolic is to be Christian and to be Christian is to be apostolic.

We confess the apostolic church so that we might insist upon the true Christian teaching that comes to us from the blessed apostles, Christ's chosen twelve who were with Him from the beginning of His ministry through His resurrection and ascension. We rely upon their witness which is recorded for us in Holy Scripture. In what is known as the Collect for the Church the Church prays "Merciful God, we humbly implore You to cast the bright beams of Your light upon Your Church that we, being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed apostles, may walk in the light of Your truth and finally attain to the light of everlasting life..." This isn't, of course, because

we worship the apostles or distinguish their doctrine from that of Christ, but rather, precisely because we recognize that the doctrine that comes to us through the preaching of the apostles is the doctrine and truth that come from Christ Himself. Christ Himself says in John 15, "And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." If any doctrine is contrary to what has been given to us through the apostolic Scriptures, then it is to be utterly rejected as the devil's teaching. We are not to have anything to do with any other confession of faith, any other attempt at showing us the way to God. They are not harmless. They are not indifferent. They are sent by Satan himself to lead souls away from Christ. How can we remain indifferent to them? How can we eat at the table of God and the table of demons?

There is only one way, one truth. St. Philip foolishly asked that Jesus show them the Father, as though there was more to the Father than what they saw in the Son. The Father isn't of a different mind or will than the Son. The works of the Son are those of the Father. The teaching of the Son is the teaching of the Father. There is no other teaching. There is no other doctrine than that which Jesus taught the blessed apostles and which the blessed apostles continue to proclaim to us in the Holy Scriptures. There aren't new teachings and new revelations for new times. There aren't gaps in the Scriptures or errors or misunderstandings. There is only absolute divine truth. Christ your Lord has graciously said "This is the way, walk in it. Do not stray to the right or the left for there is only sorrow and death there."

St. Philip and St. James the lesser both knew this doctrine to be the only way, the only truth, and the only life. It was for this truth that both of these apostles, and all the martyrs shed their blood. The true doctrine is life. The true confession of Jesus is life. All other doctrine is death, eternally. Those who teach false doctrine and those who associate themselves with it by word or deed or presence place themselves under the strict judgment of God because holding to false teaching is calling the Lord Jesus Christ a liar. The truth and the lies do not comfortably coexist. They are enemies and one must snuff out the other. Jesus is the way, not a way. And there are not different versions of Jesus. This is why the early church so vehemently opposed the Gnostic and Arian heresies. They talked a lot about Jesus - a lot of lies about Jesus. It is no different in our own day. We must be equally as vigilant, maybe even more so. We must know the truth and teach our children to know the truth so that they might not be led

astray from the apostolic doctrine, blown about by every new wind and fad that tries to impose itself upon the Christian Church.

Jesus doesn't satisfy the desires of the flesh nor does He comport with what our reason tries to tell us about God and salvation. Jesus full of humility and compassion and mercy isn't what our flesh wants to believe about God. Our flesh desires the God who measures us on merit, on the good that we've done. Our flesh wants to see the majesty and power of God (or so it thinks) as though seeing these things would bring peace and confidence. They won't. They bring only death and all who trust in their works, all who look to a god of justice rather than mercy, will only find God's wrath and eternal damnation. The God of the apostles is the Father who willed that His Son should bear the sins of the whole world and through His death and resurrection send the Spirit of life and forgiveness into the world that repentant sinners should be rescued from damnation. The fact that the Son did that very thing is a testament to the will of the Father because the Son does nothing other than the will of the Father because He loves the Father and the Father loves the Son.

This is the apostolic witness by both word and blood. Philip and James and the whole army of martyrs willingly staked their lives on this truth even as Edith will do this day. They and all those who have been confirmed in the faith gladly confess before heaven and earth that they would rather suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from the saving truth that is Christ and the life that we have in Him. Yes, we could deny this faith and make friends with the world and enjoy all that it has to offer. But it would come at the terribly steep price of our soul. To be friends with the world is to be enemies of God. And what is the world anyway that we should prefer its lies and its filth to the glorious riches of God which are in Christ Jesus - a clean conscience before God and the certain of eternal life? What good are the vanishing pleasures of sin when compared to the eternal rest and peace of the life and salvation we have through the Blood of God's only Son?

Edith, this is a day of great rejoicing in heaven and on earth! Your brothers and sisters gathered here this day whose ears will hear your public confession of Christ aren't the only ones. The saints and angels in heaven and your Lord Himself will also be filled with rejoicing as you confess the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be the inspired and inerrant Word of God by which you have come to know the whole saving truth of Christ and

your redemption through His cross, redemption which has been poured out to you in your Baptism and upon which we will all together feast in the Holy Supper of Christ's very Body and Blood. Together we will speak of these testimonies before kings and friends and family and enemies and we will not be ashamed. Though we may be hated and mocked and cast out of society, perhaps even martyred, we will gladly confess because our faith will one day be vindicated when we stand with our Lord on the Last Day and the whole world looks upon the Lord Jesus and gladly or otherwise confesses Him to be the Lord and His Word, that which the apostles proclaimed, to be true.

The true Jesus, the whole content of the apostolic witness is the Jesus who has been gracious to sinners. He has taken away sin and death that your heart may no longer be troubled and that you may have peace. All who confess the saving Name of Jesus and reject all false teachings and those who teach them may rest in the confidence that God will lift His countenance upon them and look upon them with His favor and blessing. We may confidently call upon Him as Father knowing that He will immediately hear the sound of our cry and immediately upon hearing it, answer. Indeed, we will, at times, have to taste the bread of adversity and the water of affliction. But when we do, let our eyes find Jesus and there be reassured that these are not the signs of God's anger against us. Let us believe the preaching of the apostles which proclaims the cross as a sign of the Father's love. For by faith you are not strangers or aliens or enemies of God. You are not far off. You are the Baptized. You have been brought near to sit at the banquet table and partake of the heavenly paschal feast. You are a member of the household of God which is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the immovable cornerstone who binds and holds us all together.

Let us then gladly confess the apostolic Church, the Church rooted in the pure apostolic doctrine, the pure doctrine of Jesus Christ for this truth alone is the saving truth which the one, true, Christian Church has always since Adam and will always into eternity confess.

In the Name of +Jesus.