**September 15th 2024 Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity**

**Text: Luke 9:46-56** 0737

**Theme: The Hierarchy of Christ’s Church.**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ever be shed abundantly upon you all that we may never think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but be humble and thankful to the One Head of the church. Amen. Dear kings and priests of the Church: Very recently the so-called ‘head of the Christian church’, the pope of Rome, visited Indonesia as a part of his Asia-Pacific tour. Indonesia is predominately not a Christian nation, but an Islamic one. Many may think the Pope Francis went there to give encouragement to the Christians there, to comfort them in their persecution, to guide them to stay faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. However the trip was no such thing, as we would expect of the Antichrist. Rather it was “to promote tolerance by celebrating diversity and interfaith dialogue.” (ABC News) Now we might know right away by reading the purpose of the trip that it was nothing short of heresy and a complete departure from the Christian faith. In one of these interreligious forums, where the pope was speaking to the leaders of the Islamic faith, he said: “All religions are paths to reach God. They are, to make a comparison, like different languages, different dialects, to get there.” Now the Roman Catholic Church has denied that the pope ever made such a statement, but I have read the quotes and seen the video myself. He did indeed say it, and no matter how much they may deny it, or try to explain it away, the fact remains the so-called ‘head of Christendom’ equated all religions and declared that they are just different expressions of one and the same thing. That each one will lead you to God and heaven, and that each one does so in its own unique way. Now certainly ABC News, and the world at large love these statements, for they play right into the hand of Satan, they delude the Christian faith into a one of many, and equalize heathenism with faith. In fact, many news sources were quite thrilled to report on the progressive nature of the tour, but after much backlash have begun to spin the narrative. Be that as it may, the result remains the same. Millions of people have been told that Christianity and all the world’s religions are equal and therefore it does not matter which one you hold to, or which doctrine you believe, so long as you believe that a god exists you are covered. Millions of people have been vindicated now in their attacks on Christians who will not agree with that one and the same approach of the pope. The thought, which has pervaded many for decades, that hardline Christians are bigots and hateful, intolerant and non-diverse. Thus, we have come to a situation where doctrinally sound and steadfast Christians have become outcasts, and now viewed as the plague of society.

It is due to the prevailing opinion that the pope is the head of Christendom that has lent itself to the problem we now face. The insistence that the pope is the ‘vicar of Christ upon earth’ causes there to be a hierarchy within the visible church and therefore, any and all opinions and statements made by those at the top are to be taken as gospel and followed without question. It is spiritual tyranny engaged in by the visible church to enslave souls and to make of them merchandise, to be bought and sold as slaves on earth under the guise of Christianity. Today we will look at the true hierarchy of Christ’s Church, and see what is any such hierarchy exists. In so doing we will find some glorious truths and learn of our true place in the kingdom of Heaven and within the visible and invisible churches. We will do so according to our text for today which is found in the ninth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke beginning at verse forty six.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O most righteous Lord of heaven and earth, Thou who didst create all things by the Word of Thy mouth, who didst order all things and cases the planets and stars to run in their courses; who dost inhabit the sea and feedest all living things; as we come before Thee today we must acknowledge the truth that Thou alone art the ruler over Thy Church. No one man can make claim to be Thy vicar upon earth, for Thou hast spoken for Thyself and revealed unto us Thy good and gracious will. Give unto each of us the spirit of humility that none of us may think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, but to honor and prefer one another. Keep us from glorifying ourselves in our service toward Thee, but being ever reminded of our own unworthiness to give all the glory to Thee alone. Remind our ministers that they are servants and not lords; that they serve their Lord Jesus and His flock, and that they do nothing through strife or envy, but always out of thankfulness for Thy Gospel. Keep us, O Lord, in the humility of true and saving faith, that when Thou shalt appear in the clouds of heaven we may receive Thy glory forevermore. Amen.

Guided then by God’s Spirit let us learn of the hierarchy of Christ’s Church, seeing first:

1. **The greatest.** We read verses forty six, and forty nine through fifty four of our text: **read verses here.** The apostle Paul n the book of Romans said: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” (Rom. 12:1-3)* Our text presents to us thinking which is antichristian, which looks to oneself as the greatest among all the Christians. The disciples disputed about which one of them would be the greatest. Peter thought that he would be the greatest, John the same. Each one in turn, whether they voiced it or not, stated that they would in fact be the greatest. This same thinking is apparent when John forbids a man who was casting out devils and preaching the Gospel. It is also apparent when James and John ask is Jesus wanted them to call fire down from heaven to consume the village of Samaritans who would not receive Jesus. It is the thinking and spirit of pride and self-glorification bound up in the heart of a sinner. Each person wants to think of themselves as ‘the one.’ Each person wants to think that when he is gone from this earth that everything will fall apart, for how can they possibly go on without me? It is this spirit that Christ seeks to eradicate from the heart of His disciples, from our heart, and from the visible church. The true fact of the matter is that there is a hierarchy within the Church, but it is not made up of men. Christ is the Head of the Church and the Savior of the body. All Christians are brothers and sisters, servants of Jesus Christ alone. None are greater than another, none more fitting for heaven or for service to God. Each of us must come to the hard realization that we are not needed. God does not need us. If any one of us were to be taken from this earth tomorrow, the Church of God would continue on. This is because the true Christian faith is not bound up in a man or in a group of men, but in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and for this reason the Church on earth continues after our departure. Think on what we would call the greatest Christians to ever live. When Moses departed this life the nation of Israel, the Old Testament Church, did not immediately dissolve, but it continued on under the leadership of Joshua. When Elijah was taken to heaven, his mantle was taken up by Elisha. When Paul died, other men continued preaching. When Luther died the Lutheran faith continued on. This is because it does not depend on man, but on the Head of the Church. Indeed God gives leaders to His church. He gave prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These men lead as servants. They lead using the Word of the Lord. In truth though there is not one thing that makes them special. They are not more holy, they are not less sinful, they are not the greatest. In fact, they are the least in the Kingdom of heaven.

What we are really talking about here is the office of the keys, and who has received them. The first thing that must be acknowledged by all Christians is that these keys are the true possession of Christ alone, for He has gained them by His perfect life and His innocent death. Once this has been acknowledged, then it is no hard task to understand that when Christ gives these keys to the Church, that they are to be used according to the Word of Christ alone. And that they are not the sole possession of any one Christian, but belong to the Church as a whole. It is not hard to understand also that when one man s chosen and called to be a minister, that the keys have not been turned over to him, but simply entrusted to him to dispense in the name of the congregation publicly. When these things are made manifest and taught in their purity t becomes crystal clear that no one man is over all other Christians, and has no right therefore to declare that all religions are equal; in fact, no one man has the right to declare anything of himself, but only that which Christ has commanded. Then and only then is the Church led in righteousness and truth, for it is then led by the holy God of heaven and earth, without error, without compromise. And here we find the truth behind Paul’s words that we heard earlier. We present our bodies a living sacrifice, meaning that we acknowledge we are nothing and Christ is everything,, and that he may do with us as it pleases Him. Further then, by grace and faith we are transformed in the renewing of our minds, never thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, but glorifying the true Savior and Head of all Christendom, even Jesus Christ. Thus we have seen that Christ s the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and we are:

1. **The least.** We read verses forty seven and forty eight, and fifty five through fifty six of our text: **read verses here.** In our text three times does Jesus teach of humility, of having the spirit of love and mercy, the spirit of kindness and simplicity. First He shows His disciples how they should think of hierarchy. Jesus takes a little child and presents him to the disciples, and says that they should receive him as they would any other Christian, as a brother or sister, and never presume to think that they are higher, but to consider themselves the servants of even the little children. *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” (Phil. 2:3)* Second Jesus teaches that just because a Christian is not doing things the way we think they should be done, we should not rebuke him and forbid him from serving the Lord as the disciples did. If another Christian is serving God and in so doing is sinning, we should rather assist them, we should commend them, even if we would have done it in a different way, for who are we to declare the one proper way to serve Christ? Now if they are doing it and preaching false doctrine, or causing others to sin then we should rebuke them. But otherwise we should look upon them as brethren and fellow servants, working out of love for the Savior. Thirdly Jesus teaches the disciples, and us of course, to cease thinking of those who reject Christ as those who must be conquered, but rather as those who need so desperately the love of God in Christ Jesus. In other words to cease pretending that we are better than they in some way. Rather acknowledging that our sins deserve the same damnation as theirs, and that without the grace of God we would also be rejected and condemned. Let us then give glory to God, and give love to our neighbor.

Jesus once said: *“When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of hm; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (Luke 14:8-11)* Here then we see the truth of the hierarchy within the church: Christ is the head, and He has the preeminence; all Christians are brethren, and the clergy are the servants. Every Christian looks to others in preference to himself, and all look to serve Christ and one another. In this way is the true Christian faith made manifest, and all men give glory to our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, who is All in All. Amen.