

OPENING LITANY

Bless the Lord, who forgives all our sins.

God's mercy endures forever.

Blessed be God, who gives us life and salvation.

A gift we can never deserve or earn.

Given for you, for me, for all for the forgiveness of sins **in bread and wine, body and blood, words and presence.**

Given in grace, received by faith.

Give us truly believing hearts, O God, so that we might receive this great gift.

MARTIN LUTHER'S

The Marks of the Church

In 1539, Luther wrote "On the Councils and the Church" as part of the real possibility that the Roman Catholic church and the Lutheran church would not be reconciled in his lifetime. The third section of the book is to be studied during Lent. He identified seven marks of the church which can assure us of God's work in the world. Please join us for simple worship and meal during Lent and take home our litanies and Luther's words as part of your family's faith journey to Easter. PT

*"Well then, the Children's Creed teaches us that a Christian holy people is to be and to remain on earth until the end of the world. This is an article of faith that cannot be terminated until that which it believes comes, as Christ promises, "I am with you always, to the close of the age" [Matt. 28:20]. But how will or how can a poor confused person tell where such Christian holy people are to be found in this world?"*¹ Martin Luther

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 41: *Church and Ministry III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 148.



THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS

God's people or holy Christians are recognized by the office of the keys exercised publicly. That is, as Christ decrees in Matthew 18 [:15–20], if a Christian sins, he should be reprov'd; and if he does not mend his ways, he should be bound in his sin and cast out. If he does mend his ways, he should be absolved. That is the office of the keys. Now the use of the keys is twofold, public and private. There are some people with consciences so tender and despairing that even if they have not been publicly condemned, they cannot find comfort until they have been individually absolved by the pastor. On the other hand, there are also some who are so obdurate that they neither recant in their heart and want their sins forgiven individually by the pastor, nor desist from their sins. Therefore the keys must be used differently, publicly and privately. Now where you see sins forgiven or reprov'd in some persons, be it publicly or privately, you may know that God's people are there. If God's people are not there, the keys are not there either; and if the keys are not present for Christ, God's people are not present. Christ bequeathed them as a public sign and a holy possession, whereby the Holy Spirit again sanctifies the fallen sinners redeemed by Christ's death, and whereby the Christians confess that they are a holy people in this world under Christ. And those who refuse to be converted or sanctified again shall be cast out from this holy people, that is, bound and excluded by means of the keys, as happened to the unrepentant Antinomians.^[1]

^[1] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 41: *Church and Ministry III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 153.