

God Himself Is Present (Isaiah 45:1-7)

* Today is the 3rd Sunday of October. This Sunday has always been celebrated in our church as a day of its founding. However, the day and hour which relate to the genuine day of its institution is Tuesday evening, November 4th, 1919. That day the voters of the new born church gathered to sign the constitution.

But the reason that we celebrate the church's birthday on the 3rd Sunday of October rather than November 4th is found in recognition of the evangelist Saint Luke whose name our church has carried out faithfully for 92 years. Keeping this reality in mind, we have a very good reason to rejoice and to be glad as members of this church where the Lord is present.

* Trying to understand deeper the reality of this day, we are getting even more joyful as we recognize the deeds of our Lord in this congregation. Despite the common hostility and the evil wish of the world, St. Luke's has served God's people and the purpose of evangelism for 92 years. We believe that it will continue to serve at least for the next 8 years if think of the remark of the Rev. Willam Mitschke, the third pastor of our church, as a prophetic. Thus 42 years ago he said, *In the 50-year history of St. Luke's Congregation, God has been with us and freely given to us all things. For 50 years God has given us His Word and Sacraments through the hands of his servants. Throughout the years the congregation has been blessed with capable and devoted lay leadership. In response to God's love and mercy it is our objective to speak of our joy and to give praise and thanksgiving to God. Therefore, We want at this point in history to rededicate ourselves. Knowing that God's love is still with us and with the promise of the victory of his Church it is possible that we should be cheerful as we face the next fifty years.* In other words, St. Luke's of the 60s hoped on God's love as the dynamic factor for the next 50 years of being active in giving praise and thanksgiving to God. If we go with this as an inspiration, it means that ahead of us are at least 8 years of giving praise and thanksgiving to God. It also means that we and the future worshipers will rejoice at least for the next eight years at being guided and blessed, for the Lord is present. May Jesus bless us and keep us whole up to the time when everybody will be able to see Jesus' glory and understand the fullness of His being. Amen.

* If we approach the objective realities of our time with a rational mind, it seems there is a dead end ahead; that is why some of our parishioners preoccupy themselves with a pessimistic conclusion. Meantime there are many visible signs which convince of the opposite conclusion. It is not wise to believe things that the sinful flesh likes, as for example, in the case of the members of the Roman Inquisition who believed foolish things. The story we like to tell relates to the trial of the Italian astronomer Galileo. Once he was brought before the Inquisition for teaching contrary to what the medieval church had believed; particularly for the teaching that our planet is not the center of the universe. In order to prove this statement, Galileo offered to take a look through his telescope. He said that if anyone looks through the telescope, they could see the moons that orbit around Jupiter. However, the judges refused even to look, and no evidence could convince them otherwise!

In 1633, the inquisitors sentenced Galileo to life imprisonment where he died in 1642. *What do you think God will do to people like those judges?* Well, about Galileo we believe that God had encouraged the astronomer to keep on proving his discovery and to be patient until the opponents would look and believe. That was what happened, but 350 years after Galileo when John Paul II made the official announcement that the church had made a mistake in condemning Galileo. But how about friends who have been led by the rational and carnal mind, *Will they renounce their unbelief?* Hopefully so, if they take a look through the telescope of reality where God made himself visible; for God doesn't want anyone to do wrong things but that all may be turned from their evil ways, said the apostle, (2Pe 3:9).

* As it was explained before, we discerned Mitschke's insight as a prophetic connotation coinciding with the 50th Anniversary of our church. And now, thinking over (Isa 45:1-7) our Sunday reading, we find here the utterly prophetic message. Like Mitschke's message, the message from Isaiah also was very encouraging message for those Jews in the exile who would believe. Now, could we say that there is something common between Mitschke and Isaiah' messages? We believe that at this very moment there is at least one thing in common. If we are curious enough about that one, we ask you to imagine as the captive Jews whom Isaiah foretold amazing thing, then you may see "the wood for the trees."

* Only imagine, how deep our frustration should be if we forcefully would be led to the remote land as slave. At this point we may ask each other, *Why didn't God protect our city, the holy temple, and us from the brutal gentiles? Has the Lord forgotten His promises or is He powerless?* Certainly the existed realities would be turned into the dreadful test of our faith and we would not be able to pass it, but the Lord is present. By his Spirit he recalls us the encouraging message, and we bear in mind that in the appointed day the Lord will assign the king of Persia Media for a special task. The message says that the king will grant us the freedom and will assist our return to the homeland, where we'll rebuild the temple under king's patronage, (Isa 44:26-28). But knowing our weakness to believe the truth, the Lord had named our benefactor by name when our parents were not born yet. That time God said to Isaiah, *For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me, (v.4). Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, ... who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'* (44:28). This message was believed among us until it was fulfilled. Thereby we approach the objective of our faith when it turns into reality. The record says that after the decree of Cyrus the Great, God's people were returned to their homeland around 538 BC. Therefore, the fulfillment of Isaiah' prophecy in all its peculiarities evidently proves a fact that the Lord is present.

* Now we wish you to prove that the Lord is active in our congregation where we talk about the objective of our faith. First, we don't need to pretend ourselves to be in someone's shoes; and second, we need to take off the pair of shoes belonging to Galileo's opponents; otherwise, no evidence can convince us.

If we count the negative things that are specific to a small congregation as ours, then these circumstances might lead us to believe that the celebrating of the 93rd anniversary is impossible. No doubt, the realities would be turned into the dreadful test of our faith, and we would not be able to pass it, but the Lord is present. Today he has recalled to us the 42 year old saying of the former pastor of this congregation, Rev. W. Mitschke who said, *Knowing that God's love is still with us and with the promise of the victory of his Church it is possible that we should be cheerful as we face the next fifty years.* In other words it says that ahead of us are at least 8 years of giving praise and thanksgiving to God.

* Now, *Are you brave enough to state that the Lord has forgotten His promises or is He powerless?* Certainly God is present, we come to the conclusion; but if not, this congregation would have ended with the leaving of the previous pastor 7 years ago; but if not, this congregation would be closed for many other reasons including financial. Dear friends, we encourage you to not be conformed with Galileo's opponents; instead, let us look through a prism of reality. If you count the many positive things that happened during this year, you may agree that it is possible to run this church at least for another several years, even if there would be a little flock. We have all the necessary things to maintain our worship and to nourish souls with the spiritual gifts. For example, we have this beautiful sanctuary, the new liturgical books, the liturgical and hymnal music, electronics, a secretary workstation, and so forth. Our church is doing well with the preaching online for the past 1.5 years; in summary, there are over 20,000 readings of God's messages. Consider the mentioned things as the prints of God's invisible presence, we call on you, *Could you believe that the Lord has no wish to close his church? Why not believe the inspired words said by the Rev. W. Mitschke on the 50th Anniversary of our church as they would come from the Holy Spirit?*

* If our friends still persist to believe that God will run our church at least for 8 more years, it is fine but let them know – *that with God all things are possible*, (Mat 19:26). It is at least one thing in common relative to Mitschke and Isaiah's remarks which nobody can overthrow. And lastly, before saying our traditional "Amen", we wish to recall the words of the One who is present forever. He says, *If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes*, (Mar 9:23). Dear friends, may Jesus Christ clean our mind from deadly thoughts and deeds to the point that we will believe in his presence and his wish to perform the remarkable things.

Amen.