



The Father of Our Synod (Mat 22:34-46).

* We begin by calling to your attention to the celebration of the 200th birthday anniversary (Oct. 25) of the Rev. Dr. C.F.W. Walther, the first Synod president. In his honor many LCMS entities and congregations will provide the special events and activities. Those of us who wish to take a closer look can attend the exciting tour and exhibition in St. Louis, and also to attend a jubilant worship service at Historic Trinity Lutheran Church where Walther served as a pastor for 45 years, after that, we could watch the “Walther” film. If all these cultural events are not acceptable for some reason, we are asked to visit www.lcms.org/walther200 where there is a lot of information about C.F.W. Walther. As for me, I’ve decided to satisfy your curiosity by speaking of our first president from this pulpit.

* As you remember, the gospel of the day from (Mat 22:34:46) narrates the episode where the Pharisees questioned Jesus on the matter of mankind’s salvation. Jesus answered them that they should love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and mind. But because it was not possible for a man to love God from all his heart, Jesus opened the discussion about a Messiah who can help to love. *What do you think about the Christ?*, he said, and *Whose son is he?* (v. 42).

* With reference to our first Synod president, we ask you the same question, *“What do you think about the man, C.W. Walter? Whose son is he?”* I am sure we will not answer this question correctly as the Pharisees did (v. 42 b) until we’ll refer to a corresponding book. Here we found that C.W. Walther is considered as a Saint by our Synod, a day of his commemoration occurs on May 7th. And with reference to another question, *Whose son is he?*, it says that he had a Lutheran pastor for a father, as well as having Lutheran pastors for his grandfather and even great-grandfather. As much as we’ve mentioned “Father” as a title, it is quite reasonable to say that as a biological father Walther had six children; but the most significant fact about this title, is that C.F.W. Walther is considered as the father of the LCMS.

* Keeping in mind the spiritual fathers from whom we’ve learned how to walk by faith, we are to make another reference to the article titled *Back to Walther* by our current president Rev. Dr. M.C. Harrison. There he wrote, *The greatest eras in the Church, the great times of advancement, always begin with the cry, Back to the Scriptures! Back to the fathers! Back to Luther!* In the end Matthew Harrison concluded, *“Forward!” I say! And that means back to Walther!* Thinking of this and its surrounded context, we are ready to answer the next question, What does it mean to be a confessional Lutheran today and in the future? First of all, we are to believe in Jesus Christ and the teaching of his apostles as it was believed and explained by the apostolic fathers! The picture we have to follow can be imagined as we descend from Walther to Luther; and further, down to the apologists of the true orthodoxy; then down to the apostles, particularly to Paul; and from Paul to Jesus Christ, our God, the source of all knowledge, wisdom, and life without end.

Therefore, to be confessional Lutheran means to be faithful to the teaching of the fathers and keep on the good traditions of the genuine Catholic Church.

* It was said that Walther loved very much the great reformer M. Luther for his outstanding character and the teaching of orthodoxy. He followed the footsteps of Luther's theology especially in the biblical teaching of the doctrine of justification. Because of this, after Walther's death, the thankful friends immortalized this fact by engraving the words of the Holy Scripture on his gravestone. The inscription recalls the verse from (Rom 3:28). It says, *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.* Walther's theological corpus leans to the Doctrine of Justification, the article by which the church stands or falls. Walther taught, ... *It wouldn't help a thing if one correctly knew all other doctrines, for example the holy Trinity, the person of Christ, etc., but would not know or believe this article.*

* Our first president came to the knowledge of justification by faith while he studied theology at the University of Leipzig. In 1829 he struggled between a strong conviction that God called him to the ministry and his heart's desire to become a professional musician. He wrote about his inner conflict to a Lutheran pastor by the name of Martin Stephan. Stephan responded to Walther's confession with a letter where he had personally applied the gospel to him, writing that his contrition was sufficient and all that he needed was faith. As to Walther, on reading the letter from Stephen it sounded to him like a spoken absolution. Next, the miracle happened, when God renewed his faith; in turn, it produced a deep conviction that his sins were forgiven for Christ's sake. At the same time his old desire to be amusing was replaced with a conviction to become a pastor. Later Walther wrote of himself in the third person, *He could not resist; he had to come to Jesus. And now the peace of God entered into his heart.*

* In his middle age, when Walther was a pastor of the Trinity in St. Louis, he continued to love music, and it made him closer to Luther as a composer and writer. In his turn, Walther also composed music and wrote the hymn *He's Risen, He's Risen*. As we've sung it today, we might pay attention not only to the beautiful tune but also to its theological context as well. The 4th stanza of this composition is completely devoted to Christ's redemptive work for us. Here it is: *O, where is your sting, death? We fear you no more; Christ rose, and now open a fair Eden's door. For all our transgressions His blood does atone; Redeemed and forgiven, we now are His own.* All Christ's redemptive work for us was done in advance with Christ' anticipation to be believed and followed by people like the blessed apostles and by men of faith after them. By virtue of their faith, apart from any merits and good works, they were called the beloved sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. *One becomes a Christian, said Walther, only when the Holy Spirit reveals in the heart that one is truly redeemed by Christ, and has the forgiveness of sins, a reconciled heavenly Father, righteousness valid before God, and can lie confidently even on one's deathbed.*

* Going back to the gospel lesson, we found here God's reflection on His Son's redemptive work for us as it was quoted by Jesus. *The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet,* (v.44). Why is God so angry toward the enemies of His Son? The apostles witnessed that Christ suffered great pain and humiliation from the hands of ungodly people. They crucified Jesus and let him die on the cross. But when Jesus rose from the dead with many evidences, they rejected to repent, and they continued to persecute Jesus in his disciples. The enemies of Jesus are still here and their behavior was not changed for better. That is why God the Father feels so angry. God's anger remains upon those who have rejected the King Jesus by their unbelief in His Son's redemptive work. *Now Christ sits at his Father's right hand, his saving work completed, to reign till every foe will lay beneath his feet,* (# 564). Isn't it a frightful picture for those who still reject believing in Jesus? In one accord with Luther, Walther responded with a rhetorical question, *Why, then, did Christ die?*

* The answer is here, You should come to Jesus; He will give you a cheerful countenance, causing you to praise God with a joyful heart when you rise in the morning and lay down to rest at night. Referring to Luther, Walther insisted on the words of the reformer where he points to Jesus under any circumstances.

Go to Him who alone knows a way – go to Christ. And here Luther meant a poor sinner who is not to strive after a righteousness on his own but fully accept Jesus' invitation, *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,* (Mat 11:28). The Scripture says clearly that Christ has come on behalf of everybody, that he has born every man's sin, that *he calls on everyone to believe in him, to rejoice and to be assured that his sins are forgiven and that in the hour of death he will depart saved.*

* Walther's death came on Saturday, May 6, 1887, on his 76th year. On Friday night, after praying with him at his request, Pastor Stoeckhardt asked him a question, just similar to that asked of Luther by his friends on the night of his death. Stoeckhardt asked Walther if he stood ready to cheerfully die upon the grace of Christ, which he had proclaimed all his life? to which question Walther answered with an audible, 'Yes.' He was fully conscious until 5:30 Saturday evening, when he quietly and peacefully fell asleep in his Lord.

* The last remark we borrow from the apostle Paul is also found on the front page of your bulletins. *Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?* and right here Paul answered, *Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* (Rom 6:1,2). Therefore, being justified by faith alone we are called to live a godly life, cheerfully obeying Christ, who wishes us at first to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind; and second, to love our neighbors as ourselves,(v. 37). By doing this Christ will be glorified through us, and we will be glorified in him even today as much as in eternity. Amen.

Beloved, let us walk in a manner worthy of God, remembering our fathers who spoke to us the word of God. *Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith,* (Heb 13:7). Amen.