



have been. Perhaps we didn't listen to the needs of someone else and were too self-centered. At the very least, we didn't love them in the way we are called to.

In situations like these it is a great time to pray the words of Psalm 19, particularly vv. 12-14, where David speaks to the Lord, **“Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. <sup>13</sup> Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. <sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”**

King David and likewise all Christians praying God's Word acknowledge that no one can discern all their errors. So rather than live in haughtiness, we live in repentance beseeching the Lord to “declare me innocent from hidden faults”; those transgressions that remain unseen because of our own blind spots. David and likewise all Christians praying God's Word also ask that the Lord “keep back your servant from presumptuous sins” that they would “not have dominion over me!” Presumptuous sins are those things we think, say, or do that cross the line of what God allows, but *we* fail to see the line where God has drawn it in the sand. In other words, if God draws the line here, our prideful arrogance puts the line there as we cast up our own wills as an idol.

A great example of this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment. God requires us to be in Church every single week that we are physically able. We should want to be in the Lord's House whenever He is present bestowing His means of grace through Word and Sacrament. But how many people will be here this year on Sunday, December 26<sup>th</sup>, the day after Christmas? How many of us will say, “Well, I was in Church on Friday for Christmas Eve and Saturday Christmas morning, I don't need to be there three days in a row! That's a lot of Church!”

You see? We often draw the lines where our reason or feelings think they belong. And most of the time I think we have the best of intentions with this, too! This is why we must pray with a humble heart the words of Psalm 19: “Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins.” This applies to all God's commandments, and we do this all the time without even realizing it! Think of how we treat the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment and issues of sexuality, cohabitation, and pornography. The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment and how we handle life issues, from natural conception to natural death. We are always tempted to compromise God's Word with the spirit of this age. We like to compromise the line in the sand with the rising and waning tide of our culture because we think that's what we need to do. That's presumptuous sin. May God keep us from it, and instead trust that where He draws the line is best for not only us, but also the whole world!

Now, let's tie in the Gospel reading. When John the Baptist was in prison, he heard about the **“deeds of the Christ”** so he **“sent word by his disciples”** to ask Jesus, **“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Mt 11:2-3)**. Jesus doesn't give a straight answer. A simple, “Yes, I am He” would have sufficed. It's just like if someone walks in here and asks me, “Are you the pastor?” I would answer, “Yes, I am”, right? But I could say, “I preach and teach the Word, and I administer the Sacraments.” That would also answer the question. It would actually answer the question better. Because you see when someone asks, “Are you the pastor?” the word pastor means a lot of different things to different people. In Baptist backgrounds, for example, a “pastor” is more like a CEO of a congregation. For others, “pastor” means he's the figurehead who runs all the meetings and he's more of a community icon. So answering, “Yes, I am the pastor” is quick and easy, but not very instructional. “I preach and teach the Word, and I administer the Sacraments”? Now we are getting somewhere. The answer actually defines what the word “pastor” means, which is much more helpful.

Likewise, look at how Jesus answers John's disciples: **“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Mt 11:4-5)**. Jesus does not give the simple answer, “Yea, I am the Christ.” He instructs the disciples. He catechizes them. He shows them how He fulfilled all the things spoken about the Christ in the Old Testament. Anyone could say, “Yes, I am the Messiah.” Only the true Messiah could do all the things prophesied of Him and say, “Go and tell what you have seen and heard.” One answer carries much more weight than the other.

Today is “rejoice” Sunday – Gaudete! It's why the rose candle is lit. The Epistle reading taught us that our works are tainted by sin. Even when we think we are innocent, we are not thereby acquitted. Even though I can answer the question, “Are you the pastor” with “I preach and teach the Word, and administer the Sacraments”, those deeds are still tainted by my transgressions. I'm not always happy to do it. I'm not doing handstands in

excitement to serve at Church three days in a row at Christmas. It's a lot of extra work. There's a practical reason Vicar is preaching one of them. I'm not faithful. I err. I forget. I get afraid and sometimes cower under that fear. I get lonely so sometimes I soften the Word because I don't want to be hated for it. The Lord will still judge. And if the Lord judged me by my works and you by yours, I'd go straight to hell along with all of you.

But today is rejoice Sunday. We rejoice because when we repent of sins known and unknown, and believe in Jesus for forgiveness, our heavenly judge does acquit us. We have a sure and certain Christ. He, too, is judged by His works, but His works were perfect. He remained obedient, even to the point of death on a cross (**Phil 2:8**). He gave sight to the blind and the crippled walked. The lepers were cleansed and the deaf heard. He raised the dead, and He will raise all the dead on the Last Day. Whereas our works are stained by sin, Jesus' works are glorified in holiness. This is precisely so because He is the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. He endured the cross and grave in our place. He took on our sin so that we could be forgiven. Rejoice!

We need Jesus whenever we can get Him. There's never too much, only too little. So receive Him who fulfilled all the things prophesied of Him, giving us confidence that He is truly the Christ! He is the God who became man for us. This God opened our eyes to see Him in faith. This God gave us the spiritual legs to walk the Way He has given us to follow. This God cleansed us in our Baptism. This God will raise all the dead on the Last Day. Believe this promise is for you. And rejoice! In Jesus' name, Amen.