

IN DEPTH BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS

CLASS 15 and POWER POINT 15:

1. Nor can we judge by appearances when we suffer or when God seems distant and rejecting or not real at all. Nor when we judge by appearances when considering when bread, water and wine are used in a church service, or when the pastor reads before a book and proclaims words from a pulpit. If we were to judge by appearances would we believe that a Jewish carpenter is actually God in the flesh. His being tortured by death at Golgotha, judged strictly by appearances would be repulsive, a meaningless act of cruelty. We would never guess that it was the salvation of the world.

VOCATION: THE SPIRITUALITY OF ORDINARY LIFE

2. There is another place where God is hidden in everyday life; in making a living, shopping, being a good citizen, and spend time with one's family. God is at work through human means. Luther described these occupations; parenting, farming, laborers, soldiers, judges, retailers and the like as being "masks of God."
3. This is one of Luther's original contributions to understanding the spiritual life. This is mysticism of the ordinary life as Luther lays its groundwork. He is critical of mysticism where one rises to God as God descends to us in the means of Grace. If he denies salvation by works and insists the salvation is free thus good works take on a very difficult significance. If Luther minimizes human beings as sinful and limited, He exalts human beings to a startling degree. In the doctrine of vocation, spirituality is brought down to earth to transfigure human life.
4. Today, more in Luther's day, we define our lives by our work. Busy schedules, multiple commitments, and we are pulled in many directions, so we are exhausted. We are not clear if our priorities are right or even worthwhile. Work is detrimental to spiritual life, sometimes with moral compromises and "worldly" priorities and neglect of our families". The pressure of work whether we are or aren't as successful can be paralyzing. Yet work in one way or another remains at the center of our lives, the locus of ambitions and achievements.
5. "What are you going to be when you grow up?" we ask younger children, and we want more than a nice person, or a person who enjoys nature or hobbies. We have in mind a job. "I am a teacher, a mechanic, an executive assistant." Our very being is tied to our job description.
6. Conflating work with our selves can be a great confusion. We use our work to neglect the most important offices we hold; such as "I am a spouse, a parent, a citizen." It doesn't pay for what I do and is priceless work; like housewives or full-time parents. Work becomes a status game, as we measure one job against another and value people on the status of their jobs. We can't help but make work a benchmark of who we are.
7. In our work-a-day world, we are preoccupied by other issues, by questions about how to have a good family or raise our children. We are caught up on economic issues with needing more money and spending it on needs and wants. We are affected by politics and the responsibilities and frustrations of citizenship, by governmental policies and the legal system. All of these arenas which consume our life are given significance and direction when they are seen in the terms of the doctrine of vocation.

MASKS OF GOD:

8. God is sovereign over all of creation, He did not use one big bang and let it run on its own. He keeps it in existence, "Sustaining all things through His powerful world," Hebrews 1:3. God is involved in all that He made/exists. This includes the law of physics, the motions of galaxies, the affairs of nations, and even the fall of a sparrow. (Matt. 10:29). His care/providence extends over believers and unbelievers.
9. L theology speaks of Two Kingdoms; God rules over both the earthly and the spiritual realm in differing ways. This is the topic of the next chapter. It is important to remember that God is the king of them both. In both realms, God is active and works through means. In the Spiritual realm, He works as we know through Word and Sacrament ministry. In the Earthly realm, He works through Vocation.
10. In the Lord's prayer we ask God to give us "Daily Bread," but not as Manna dropped from heaven to the Israelites. God works through farmers, truck drivers, bakers, retailers, and the whole economic system; employers/employees, finances, banks, transportation, technology, and production. Each part is independent and interdependent if we wish to eat. Each part of his food chain is a vocation in which God works to distribute His gifts.
11. God heals the sick, sometimes directly with miracles, and in the normal course of things God heals through doctors, nurses and other medical vocations. God protects us from evil. He does this through the means of police, attorneys, judges and also the military. God teaches through teachers and orders society through government, and proclaims the Gospel through Pastors.
12. Luther points out that God could have populated the earth by creating each individual and generation separately from the dust, instead He created families. God ordained that new life come into the world, and be cared for and raised into adulthood through the work of a husband and a wife who come together into a family. Husband, wife, father and mother are vocations through which God extends His creation and exercises His love.
13. All this demonstrates that in the Earthly as well as the Spiritual realm, God bestows gifts through means. God ordained that human beings be bound together in love, relationships, and communities existing in a state of interdependence. In this context, God is providentially at work providing for His people as each contributes through their own gifts, talents, stations and opportunities, hence this is what Luther means/terms, "mask of God."
14. He writes, *"All our work in the field, garden, city, in home in struggle, in government-to what does it all amount before God except child's play, by means of which God is pleased to give His gifts in the field, at home and everywhere? These are the masks of our Lord God, behind which He wants to be hidden to do all things."*
15. God pours out His generosity on the just/unjust, believer and unbeliever alike and hides Himself in the ordinary social function/stations of life, even the most humble. To use another of Luther's examples, God himself is milking the cows through the vocation of the milkmaid. All vocations are hence channels of God's love. Gustav Wingren, the Swedish Theologian, who authored the classic book in the subject, summarizes this; ("Spirituality of the Cross," p. 75).