

The Festival of the Holy Trinity & Saude Confirmation  
Romans 11:33-36: "To God Alone Be the Glory!"  
June 6/7, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

### In Nomine Iesu

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Almighty and everlasting God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we give You most hearty thanks that You have granted unto us a clear and abundant revelation of Your being and purpose; and we humbly ask You, give us grace to acknowledge, honor and praise You as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, who lives and reigns, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 134)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the eleventh chapter of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid?" / For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit are worthy of eternal honor, thanks, and praise, dear fellow redeemed, and especially you, Alex, Avery, Layton, and Will on your Confirmation Day:

Over the last few months, the letters "SGN" have entered our vocabulary. These three letters stand for "Some Good News," an impromptu internet show highlighting positive things happening in our country. Hundreds of years before this, the composer Johann Sebastian Bach wrote the three letters "SDG" on his musical manuscripts. The letters "SDG" come from the Latin phrase "Soli Deo Gloria," which is translated: **To God Alone Be the Glory!** So Bach, who is perhaps the greatest composer of all time (and a Lutheran by the way), wanted any glory for his achievements to go to God.

How about you? How willing would you be to put this message on the major things you accomplish? When you graduate, get a promotion, land a big contract, or are recognized for a major success, you say: **To God Alone Be the Glory!** How about you confirmands on this big day? Does God get the credit for everything you've done?

The thing is, we know how much hard work goes into the major accomplishments of our life. Shouldn't we get some credit for these things? Even Bach must have enjoyed the accolades from those who heard his music. He must have recognized that he was producing music at a higher level than many who had come before him. So did he really mean "Soli Deo Gloria," **To God Alone Be the Glory!** Or was it just an expression to make him seem more humble than he actually was?

Well that's the struggle, isn't it? In the big picture, we have nothing to boast about before God. He is our Creator. The universe we live in would not exist apart from Him. He made it, and He keeps it going. More personally, you and I would not exist if God had not granted us life in our mothers' wombs. He also sustains our life. We could not accomplish much if God did not make the food grow that we eat. And what about the sun that warms us, the rain that refreshes us, the air that we breathe? When we take all these things for granted, it is easy to think we are the masters of our environment and our fate.

But if our power and abilities could fill an ice cube tray, God's power and abilities fill the earth's deepest trench, and then some. There is no comparison between us. The Holy Spirit caused St. Paul to express this difference in the words of today's text: "*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!*" When it comes down to it, none of us has come up with one good deed, one good word, or one good thought that did not originate with God. We are copycats – and we're not even very good ones!

Ask yourself this: What useful thing do you have that did not start with God? You would not have a house, a car, clothes, food, or any other thing without the raw materials God provides in creation. We cannot make something out of nothing. Only God can do that. And yet even though all "*riches and wisdom and knowledge*" come from Him, we think we can outdo Him.

We presume to know what God is thinking where He is silent in the Bible. So for example, when there seems to be a logical gap in the question of why some are saved but not others, we supply what is missing with our reason. We say that those who are saved must be a little bit better than those who are not, or that God is waiting for us to show an interest in Him. These may be reasonable explanations, but they also contradict the plain teaching of the Bible, that we are unable to go to God because of our sin. He must come all the way to us and save us.

Or we try to advise God about what He should have said more carefully in the Bible, so that no one feels judged or left out. Or we expect Him to do what we want, when we want Him to. But we are not God. We are far below Him. Paul emphasizes this by quoting from the Old Testament books of Isaiah and Job: "*For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?*" "*Or who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid?*" (Isa. 40:13, Job 41:11).

Then he writes, "*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.*" It is no mistake that Paul uses three prepositions to describe the Lord's work: "*from,*" "*through,*" and "*to.*" He also spoke about God's "*riches and wisdom and knowledge*" – three things. This use of three is by design, because the one God consists of three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The work of each Person is emphasized here in this text.

All things come to us *from* God the Father. He is the Creator of heaven and earth. He made and continues to produce all the riches we see around us. We notice this especially in springtime, when our fields and gardens fill with growing green plants, and the flowers and leaves emerge again after the wintertime. But an even greater gift has come to us *from* the Father. He has given us His only Son to save us. This is where we see the exceedingly deep love that the Father has for us. Martin Luther wrote in one of his hymns: "*He gave His dearest Treasure*" (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #378, v. 4).

All these riches *from* the Father come to us *through* God the Son. The book of Proverbs describes the Son as God's Wisdom, who was with the Father "*before the beginning of the earth*" (Pro. 8:22). He fully participated with the Father in creation. "[A]ll things were made through Him" (Joh. 1:3). Any physical life that exists or could exist came *through* Him. The same is true of our spiritual life. We could have no spiritual life apart from His suffering and death in our place. Forgiveness and life and salvation come *through* Him and *through* Him alone.

These many blessings we have *from* the Father and *through* the Son lead us to look *to* the Lord in confidence and thanksgiving by the power of God the Holy Spirit. He brings us the saving knowledge of the true God through the holy Word. Without the work of the Holy Spirit through His Word, we would not know the Son or the Father. He has enlightened our minds and hearts. He has revealed the "*secret and hidden wisdom of God,*" the deep things about our salvation through Jesus (1Co. 2:7ff.). He strengthens the faith He has given, so that we are drawn closer and closer *to* the Holy God and our eternity with Him.

"*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.*" That means that the glory for all things belongs to Him, (including all those long hours of study in Catechism Class). Every good thing we have and accomplish comes to us by the power and grace of our merciful God. He does not have to bless us, as though He owes it to us. "[W]ho has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid?" But He loves us with a love that is so broad and long and high and deep that it cannot be measured.

He loves to supply all the things we need. In our spiritual poverty, foolishness, and ignorance, God provides His riches, wisdom, and knowledge. Where we have amassed a debt of sin before Him—all those times in life that we failed to spend ourselves in righteousness—He does not give us the wages for our sin. He gives us the free gifts of forgiveness and eternal life (Rom. 6:23). Since the time we became believers, we have been credited with Jesus' perfect life. When God the Father looks at us, He does not see our failures anymore; He sees us filled with the good works of Jesus.

All of this is foolishness to the world, and sometimes it may seem foolish to us. How could all of our sins and misdeeds be taken away just like that? The world is not impressed by grace; the world respects money and power and human ingenuity and fame. "*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong*" (1Co. 1:27). Our boasting is not in what we might accomplish, but in Jesus, "*who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption*" (v. 30).

This knowledge of our salvation through Jesus is imparted to us and grows in us every time we hear the saving Word and partake of the Sacraments Jesus instituted. We rejoice that our confirmands will now join us at the Communion rail to eat and drink the true body and blood of Jesus for their forgiveness and strengthening. This is not the day that our confirmands "graduate" from studying God's Word. They are just getting started. They have a lifetime ahead of them to continue to gain "*the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.*" The same is true for each and every one of us here. God never grows tired of giving us His gifts through His Holy Word.

What the Triune God has done and still does for us is “SGN” – “Some Good News.” We are His dear children. He has not given us what we deserved. He has given us everything by grace and given it in abundance. For this reason, we give thanks to His name. Like J. S. Bach, we write “SDG” on the manuscript of our lives: “Soli Deo Gloria.” The glory for all the good that we have and do is His alone, and His for all eternity.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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