



Greetings in Christ!

As families begin a new school year, you also have the opportunity to help your child grow in understanding of the Scriptures and Martin Luther's Small Catechism. We rejoice that we have a wonderful and loving Teacher in Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself had many disciples: Peter, James, John, and so on. Through this year, we will grow in our discipleship, just as Peter, James, and John did. "Disciple" is a word that means "to teach by example or through actions." It comes from the same root as the word "discipline." To follow Jesus is a life of discipline, or disciple-ing. Is discipline fun? The writer of Hebrews answers that question: "For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11).

"Catechism" also means "to teach," but it emphasizes teaching words so that a student – or catechumen – learns to repeat them. Catechism comes from the same root word as "echo." So catechesis is learning to echo. In fact, this is the word St. Luke when he addressed his Gospel to Theophilus: "...that you may have certainty concerning the things in which you have been catechized" (Lk. 1:4)

Who disciplines us? Jesus, of course! What do we echo? What else but His Word! Catechism class is a focused time of discipline and echoing. We will spend time examining the Scriptures and the Small Catechism. Through these treasures, we learn to confess the Christian Faith with our words and actions.

We learn of God's standard of perfection, our inability to achieve it, and our sins against it through the **Ten Commandments**. We learn of who God is and what He has done and continues to do to save us in the **Creed**. We learn to pray "as dear children to their dear Father" in the **Lord's Prayer**. These three – the Ten Commandments, Apostles' Creed, and Lord's Prayer – are the best summary of the Christian Faith.

These three teachings come together as we look at our lives as Christians. We learn how we have been made God's children through **Holy Baptism**. We learn how to confess our sins and receive absolution through the **Office of the Keys**. We learn how God feeds us with His own body and blood as forgiveness of sins and strength for our lives in the **Sacrament of the Altar**.

From there we learn of our vocation through the **Table of Duties**, of our daily rhythm of prayer in the **Daily Prayers**, and how we ought to examine ourselves prior to reception of the Sacrament in the **Christian Questions and Answers**.

Now, does this sound like work for only children? For only a few years? For only a start of the Christian life? For only an hour or two per week with Pastor? No, of course not! Being a Christian is a matter of discipline and echoing for a lifetime!

Therefore, it's vital that parents set the example for children. Children see what's important to their parents and, whether noticed or not, they become disciples of their parents' actions and echo what their parents say. So parents, set a good example for them. Make time to learn with them, study the Scriptures with them, have devotions with them, and come to church *weekly* with them. Here at church, you confess with them, hear God's Word with them, and eventually, you will receive the Lord's Supper with them. If Christians regularly neglect going to church, they will quickly fall to the assaults of the devil, world, and sin.

Remember, your children are a gift from God. “Children are a heritage from the Lord” (Ps. 127:3). You can’t take stuff or things or reputation or jobs to heaven, but by teaching your children the Faith, you can take them to heaven. You want to see them there with you at the Resurrection when Jesus returns. You want to spend eternity with them singing God’s praises. You will do this by handing down the Faith to them – or, disciplining them in the Faith. **You are their primary teacher.** I, as pastor, am only a support.

I will close with these words of encouragement from Martin Luther in his Large Catechism.

“Many see the catechism as a poor, common teaching, which they can read through once and immediately understand. They can throw the book into a corner and be ashamed to read it again. Therefore, for God’s sake I beg such lazy bellies or arrogant saints to be persuaded and believe that they are truly, truly not so learned or such great doctors as they imagine! They should never assume that they have finished learning the parts of the catechism or know it well enough in all points, even though they think they know it ever so well. For even if they know and understand the catechism perfectly (which is, however, impossible in this life), there are still many benefits and fruits to be gained, if it is daily read and practiced in thought and speech. For example, the Holy Spirit is present in such reading, repetition, and meditation. He bestows ever new and more light and devoutness. In this way the catechism is daily loved and appreciated better, as Christ promises in Matthew 18:20, ‘For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them.

If these reasons were not enough to move us to read the catechism daily, we should feel bound well enough by God’s command alone. He solemnly commands in Deuteronomy 6:6-8 that we should always meditate on His precepts, sitting, walking, standing, lying down, and rising. We should have them before our eyes and in our hands as a constant mark and sign. Clearly He did not solemnly require and command this without a purpose. For He knows our danger and need, as well as the constant and furious assaults and temptations of devils. He wants to warn, equip, and preserve us against them, as with a good armor against their fiery darts and with good medicine against their evil infection and poison.

*Oh, what mad, senseless fools are we! While we must ever live and dwell among such mighty enemies as the devils, we still despise our weapons and defense, and we are too lazy to look at or think of them! What else are such proud, arrogant saints doing who were unwilling to read and study the catechism daily? They think they are much more learned than God Himself with all His saints, angels, prophets, apostles, and all Christians. **God Himself is not ashamed to teach these things daily.** He knows nothing better to teach. He always keeps teaching the same thing and does not take up anything new or different. All the saints know nothing better or different to learn and cannot finish learning this. Are we not the finest of all fellows to imagine that if we have once read or heard the catechism, we know it all and have no further need to read and learn? **Can we finish learning in one hour what God Himself cannot finish teaching? He is engaged in teaching this from the beginning to the end of the world. All prophets, together with all saints, have been busy learning it, have ever remained students, and must continue to be students.***

If [Christians] show such diligence, then I will promise them – and they shall also see – what fruit they will receive, and what excellent people God will make of them. So in due time they themselves will admit that the longer and the more they study the catechism, the less they know of it and the more they will find to learn. Only then, as hungry and thirsty men, will they truly relish what now they cannot stand because of great abundance and contentment. To this end may God grant His grace! Amen.”

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Christian Schultz