

**Incarnate Word Tract Series #2**  
**I FORGIVE YOU YOUR SINS+**  
**HOLY ABSOLUTION: A Voice from Heaven**

**Repentance and Forgiveness**

The whole of our Christian Religion is based upon these two facts, man's need of repentance and confession and God's willingness to forgive for the sake of Christ. Our Blessed Lord's whole Gospel is based upon these two facts.

And so we find that His first public message is "Repent!" (St. Mark 1:15). He Himself says that He came to call sinners to repentance (St. Matthew 9:13).

But Jesus also preached the forgiveness of sins. God will bring His forgiveness to the penitent sinner. That most beautiful of our Lord's parables, the parable of the prodigal son, illustrates this divine mercy.

**Forgiveness through the Cross**

Jesus not only preached about God's forgiveness; but He Himself purchased this forgiveness for us at the cost of His own Life. He went to the cross "The sins of all men bearing." He was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; and by His cross He won forgiveness for us all. All forgiveness flows from Calvary, where the Son of God hangs on the cross and prays, "Father forgive them."

**Forgiveness through the Church**

On Easter morning, Jesus rose from the grave and thus triumphed over sin, death, and hell. Later in the day He appeared to the Apostles. He gave them the command and the authority to carry on His work of preaching repentance and forgiveness. More than that, He gave them the command and the power to forgive the sins of the penitent sinner. "As My Father sent Me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven, whosoever sins you retain, they are retained" (St. John 20: 21-23).

By this act and these words Jesus gave to the Apostles, and to the Apostolic Church for all time the power to administer to the souls of men the forgiveness which He won for us on the cross. This forgiveness the Church gives through her called and ordained Ministers. As we sing in the hymn: "The Minister whom Christ has sent is but His humble instrument."

**Holy Absolution**

The giving of Christ's forgiveness is called Holy Absolution. "Absolution" is a Latin word meaning "forgiveness." On the basis of the Sacred Scriptures the Lutheran Church teaches:

1) *Absolution is the Voice of the Gospel.* “Absolution is the very voice of the Gospel, that we should believe the Absolution and regard it as certain that the forgiveness of sins is freely granted to us for Christ’s sake” (The Augsburg Confession, Article XI).

2) *It is numbered among the Sacraments.* “Absolution can properly be called the Sacrament of Repentance” (Apology, Article XII). “Baptism, the Lord’s Supper and Absolution, which is the Sacrament of Repentance are truly Sacraments” (Apology, Article XIII).

3) *There are Two Parts to Absolution.* “Confession embraces two parts, the one is that we confess our sins’ the other is that we receive Absolution or forgiveness from the Confessor (Pastor) as from God Himself” (Small Catechism, Part V).

4) *The Church uses Private Absolution.* “Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches” (Augsburg Conf., XI). “Private Absolution should not be despised, but greatly and highly esteemed” (Smalcald Articles, III, Article VIII).

5) *This Sacrament is to be used often.* “Most men in our churches use the Sacrament of Absolution and the Lord’s Supper frequently in a year” (Apology, Art. XI).

### **God’s Peace through Absolution**

We usually begin every celebration of the Lord’s Supper by confessing our sins and by receiving God’s forgiveness through His Minister. This Act is the Sacrament of Holy Absolution. It is the Act through which God wills to bring us the peace of His forgiveness. And those who make earnest, intelligent and believing use of this great gift, know that it brings a peace which the world can neither give, nor take away.