

Proper 16 (Series B)

“Lord, Help Us Ever to Retain” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #865)

This is rather a unique choice for the LSB Hymn of the Day list—a 16th century children’s hymn. But as students return to school, educational ministries gear up for another season, and confirmation classes begin, it’s especially appropriate for our liturgies. We should be faithful in teaching the songs of the Church to our young people. As 21st century neuroscience continues to discover, nothing lights up the human brain more than the doing of music—singing or playing an instrument (not so much when simply listening to music.) It is the perfect tool for teaching divine truth. And the Church has such a rich treasury of song! There are so many texts which memorably convey the basics of the Christian faith with tunes that are readily learned and remembered, songs that become a part of the soundtrack of the individual’s life. And by Christ’s Spirit, this treasury is continually being expanded with fresh insights and sounds.

Further, Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism* is not meant for students in confirmation classes alone. It’s a great “refresher course” in the basics of Christian doctrine for all of us. Just as many take a few lessons each spring to tune up their golf game, so it’s good for all of us to occasionally go back over the basics. There’s still much there for us to learn! (Another regular “basics” text for revisiting might be C. S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*.) You may want to suggest the *Small Catechism* as a study text for your small group, your staff meetings, or personal devotions.

Speaking of educational ministries, it’s always useful to examine closely curriculum materials to evaluate their strength, both in terms of content and educational technique. Today’s hymn does have its weaknesses. There’s a lot on following God’s commands, asking for strength to do so, and pleading for forgiveness when we come up short. But there’s no mention of the Gospel and the gift of Christ’s body and blood (in stanza four) is not usually available to most of our children. It would be better to include with this hymn one with a clear emphasis on the Gospel blessings. “Oh, Blest the House” (LSB 862) could be a natural choice.

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15b) “Impress these commandments on your children.” (Deuteronomy 6:7a) Let this new fall season at your Church be a time for new energy in teaching the faith to young and old, and a time for using all the proven, dynamic, effective tools at our disposal—especially the hymns of the Church!

Barry L. Bobb
Carmel IN



Lord, help us ever to retain
the Catechism's doctrine plain
as Luther taught the Word of truth
in simple style to tender youth.

Help us your holy Law to learn,
to mourn our sin and from it turn
in faith to you and to your Son
and Holy Spirit, Three-in-One.

Hear us, dear Father, when we pray
for needed help from day to day
that as your children we may live,
whom you baptized and so received.

Lord, when we fall or go astray,
absolve and lift us up, we pray;
and through the Sacrament increase
our faith till we depart in peace.

Text: Ludwig Helmbold, 1532-98; English translation by Matthias Loy, 1828-1915.

Tune: HERR JESU CHRIST, MEINS

Both the text and tune are in the public domain.

[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music. It may be downloaded and duplicated for local use.]