

Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar, (Prov. 30:5-6)

The Righteousness Of God He Has Revealed (Rev 14:6-7; John 8:31-36; Rom 3:19-28).

* Today is Reformation Sunday. It is again a special Sunday if thinking about it along with the past two Sundays which were signified with the celebrations of the 92nd Anniversary of our church and the bicentennial of Walther's birth, the first President of our Synod. If we consider which one of these three events should come first with respect to its importance, without reservation we have to give all credits in favor of the Reformation. Around 500 years ago the Reformation brought into existence the Lutheran Church to which St. Luke's in Elizabeth belongs as do other thousands of local churches around the world. In addition, we give thanks to the Reformation for the first president of our Synod C.F.W. Walther who made the sizable contribution to Lutheran orthodoxy in the US.

* In this connection we wish to mention a couple other things. First, it is the improvement of the Roman Catholic Church in many respects due to the Reformation; and second, the renewing of Western civilization to a higher point of intellectual, moral and spiritual culture than it had ever attained before. On hearing these minor and major things, it might produce in us a considerable interest about the five hundred old event, especially if we take into account the fact that we ourselves were influenced and captivated by the outcome of this event. From this point, it is true that the Reformation of the sixteenth century is still in progress.

* Thinking about the Reformation relative to our Sunday readings, we discern the power that had affected the intellectual and spiritual faculties of the people who started the Reformation. *What in the world is that power?*, you may ask. Well, we ascribe it to the Word of God; it captivates people's hearts and minds to do the right things, and our first reading from (Rev 14:6-7) is all about it. It says how people are supposed to act on hearing the eternal Gospel. First, keeping in mind the upcoming judgment, they ought to fear God, then they ought to give Him glory and worship. *"Fear God," shouted the angel, "Give glory to him. For the time has come when he will sit as judge. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water.* (Rev 14:7).

* The observation of the contemporary world shows that many people don't fear God, even in view of an approaching judgment. Thus, along with Christians who will celebrate the Day of Reformation tomorrow, the world is going to celebrate their own invention, known as the festival of the dead, which as usual is signified with the activity of the evil spirits. *What in the world is that party?* you may ask again. Well, it is what today many people call Halloween. It somehow had happened that the title Halloween, namely "All Saints' Day," had owed its celebrators originally to Christians. In the beginning Halloween had nothing in common with

a festival of the dead except the date, October 31st. But now most people link Halloween with devils, goblins and such parade in our streets rather than with the celebration of the All Saints' vigil. Tomorrow, from the evening hours and through all night there will be a rush to places where people find funny things. Those people pay no attention to the evil context of the feast. Alas!, parents allow their children to play the dead and to be involved in the spiritual affairs with the invisible world of hosts and demons where they will be taught about death and human mortality. Next, being kept from the source of eternal life by the evil one, they may suffer a separation from the goodness of God. Meanwhile the eternal Gospel keeps on preaching to all nations and tribes until the last sinner accepts the Word of God with awe.

* In our gospel reading from (John 8:31-36) Jesus says that everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin, (v.34). Because all sinned, all are slaves of sin. In other words, people cannot stop sinning as a result of their captivity by sin. Even the mature Christians as the apostle Paul couldn't completely abstain from a certain sin. The (Rom 7:21) speaks about this misfortune. *I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong.* Those of us who struggle for perfection against their own sin, should say "Amen" after hearing Paul's revelation.

* When Luther completely discovered his own powerless on this matter, the Holy Spirit opened his mind to understand Paul's concern about man's salvation by faith alone as read in (Rom 3:19-28), our Sunday lesson. It turned out for Luther that the Church of his time didn't teach the righteousness of God in agreement with the teaching of the apostles. Listen, if God the Father, in addition to the sinner's faith in Christ Jesus, would demand from a sinner good works and love from the heart as a necessary thing for his salvation, then it would be not a gift, but a new regulation. But the righteousness of God, when it was perfected by His incredible love through Christ Jesus, had revealed to Luther the exclusiveness of God's character as a Giver. At that moment, in Luther's heart there was no a place for giving even a tiny glory and honor to his own flesh whatever good things he might do. As a result, the truth about "Solo Fide," was discovered again. It was understood as mankind's salvation by virtue of one's faith alone to which Luther assigned the central place in his theological corpus, declaring it to be the article of the standing or falling of the Church. The great reformer was unwilling to yield an inch from it, *though heaven and earth should collapse.*

* At the same time having Luther as an example, we learned what it means to die for sin and how to be alive for Christ. Recalling what I preached two years ago on the Day of Reformation, I mentioned about the picture of Luther's body after his death as drawn by Lukas Cranach. Being prepared for burial, Luther's hands were fixed by a cross at his chest. For me it was interesting to observe Luther's hands, especially his right, because we know how much Luther wrote with this hand. It says that he wrote more than 50000 pages of printed text presented by the Erlangen edition. Extra to this, he spent countless hours praying on his knees, fasting,

studying Greek and Hebrew, preaching each Sunday at church, researching Patristic History, Ecclesiology, Christology and so forth. He conducted a great number of debates and meetings. Also, he disputed with theologians, stood firm against hostility and injustice originated by Catholic officials and the emperor.

* The examples from Luther's life vividly witness about his faith. Nobody dares to say Luther's faith might abide without good fruits; even the Roman Catholic Church should thank Luther for their positive improvements due to Reformation. But it is again a gift of God who by the Holy Spirit produced all necessary qualities within and through Luther. The one thing we attach to Luther, as well as many other Christians, is that they willingly gave their bodies to God as living sacrifices to the needs of the Gospel and the glory of their Redeemer Jesus Christ. From the apostle Paul the Christians learned not to despise or neglect good works contrary to the criticism of the Roman Catholic Church, but favor. *We only subordinate good works to faith, and measure their value by quality rather than quantity. They are not the condition, but the necessary evidence of our justification; they are not the root, but the fruits of the tree. The same faith which justifies, does also sanctify.*

* Again, thinking over God and his righteousness, we have to always remember that God the Father didn't spare His beloved Son's life but allowed him to be crucified in our place. In this connection we recall the Scripture where it says about God's reaction toward people who on hearing the everlasting Gospel willingly reject it, fearing not God, giving not Him glory and honor, but worshiping idols. Here we address the rhetorical question to all such people, *Won't God reveal His righteousness again but in this case not by forgiving men's sins as a free gift but showing them Himself as a Judge?*

* Beloved, let us fear God to such an extent that we not neglect His free gift of eternal life but accept it by faith alone. Let us run not for a wish of our sinful flesh, but at first hand, looking how to please our Redeemer Jesus Christ. And the grace of God that surpasses all understanding will continue to save and preserve us in Christ Jesus.

Amen.