

*The German Prophet.* (John 8:31-36; Rom 3:19-28)

\* Today is the 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, the last Sunday before Reformation Day. According to the old tradition, on the 31 of October, 1517 Martin Luther, a doctor of sacred theology in the University of Wittenberg, posted Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Castle Church. When I imagine the great Reformer M. Luther nailing those 95 Theses by his own hand, it sounds to me likewise a man of a brave heart hammering a nail in the burial casket, once and forever. The effect was tremendously significant for Christendom because, by this act, Luther dared to bury the autocracy of the Roman church with all its un-Scriptural traditions and all its anathemas. Because of such a daring act some Christians during the time of the Reformation hated violently the Reformer Martin but some Christians loved him greatly. Significantly, nowadays Christians neither hate nor love Luther. First, because they don't know him; and second, because Luther has not upset them any more. It is proper for this Day of Reformation to speak on behalf of M. Luther whom we call a champion of truth. What is more, the Gospel lesson for today speaks about the truth of which M. Luther became a passionate advocate.

\* Now we will ask the Lord for help and guidance. Dear Lord Jesus, we thank you for M. Luther and other men of faith through whom the truth of our salvation you made available. We implore you; grant us the Spirit of truth and understanding so that our inner nature will be set free from the power of sin and death.

Therefore, Lord, we come, believing that your truth abides in us, through the prayer of faith receiving You – the Spirit of truth, indeed. Amen

\* When I saw the picture of the Reformer Luther after his death, drawn by Master Lukas Cranach, I paid attention to his hands crossing at his chest. His right hand was fixed upon the left. Seeing the picture of dead Luther you might not focus your eyes on his hands but rather on his face; but I focused on his hands, specifically on the right as far as I knew that by this hand he hammered 95 Theses and by this hand he wrote an enormous number of papers. I heard that the written and spoken collection of Luther's works include more than 50000 pages of printed text presented by the Erlangen edition. It is hard to believe but it is a fact. Here I conclude that the Reformer Luther worked very diligently for the sake of the Gospel and the salvation of our souls.

\* Friends, it should be fresh in your minds the words preached by the key-speaker, pastor Koepchen, last Sunday. He recounted a story from his past that took place in a dentist office. Sitting there in a chair he heard a conversation between a doctor and his assistant regarding Luther's works. That moment he couldn't participate in the discussion because his mouth was filled with the dentist's stuff. So, he listened to that conversation patiently, but when his mouth was freed, he couldn't remain silent any more. He said that the most important thing they should know about Luther's teaching is that salvation doesn't depend on our achievements in doing good work but exclusively it comes by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. With connection with the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the remark about Luther's right hand, someone might have questions. Why did Luther work so hard considering the truth – "by grace, through faith aside any good works"? Why did Luther spend countless hours praying on his knees, fasting, studying Greek and Hebrew, preaching each Sunday at church, researching Patristic History, Ecclesiology, Christology and so forth? Why did Luther participate in and conduct a great number of debates and meetings? Why did he have encounters with theologians, stand firm before the emperor, cardinals and other Catholic nobility who were extremely hostile to him?

\* Thinking over all these whys we need to take a look at our text from (Jh 8:31-36). It preoccupies with teaching that there is hidden truth that can set a man free from slavery to sin, but it is conditional! The lesson teaches that methodology of understanding the mysterious truth incorporates teaching and practice; only a man who is holding on Jesus' teaching and practice it, that one will know the truth and the truth will set him free, (v. 31,32). But how about Luther, did he gain that mysterious truth solely as a scholar or he also was a practitioner? Luther's biography shows that understanding of truth came to him after working hard on it. Luther suddenly became extremely aware with regard to what he had done and what he thought about. But contrary to his father's will, who wished his son to be a Lawyer, Martin became a monk. On July 16, 1511 he entered an Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. There he began to work eagerly on the salvation of his soul by daily fasting, praying, studying the Scriptures and even scourging himself. When he reached the age of twenty-three, his superiors considered him as the perfect example of a pious monk; and in 1507 the monastery officials ordained him as a priest. The following year Luther was called to teach theology at Wittenberg

University. Two years later Wittenberg listed him as its highest trained theologian. Yet his soul had not found the solid ground! The truth had not still been made known to him!

\* Luther kept on studying the Scriptures, so much so that it was later said of him that he knew from memory every verse in the Bible and also where each was to be found. Gradually the doctrine of justification by faith, the cornerstone of Lutheran ecclesiology, assumed its meaning. In October of 1512 the University of Wittenberg conferred upon him the degree of doctor of theology. His capacity and zeal for work seemed to be endless. Finally the mysterious truth became knowledgeable to him as it was promised, (v. 32); and the Son gave him faith to believe that truth, (v.36). The Holy Spirit opened his mind and freed him from slavery to sin and fear of death and many other fears left him alone. During Lent in 1517, besides his university lectures, he delivered two sermons daily in which his central theme was that of justification by faith.

\* Besides many evidences on behalf of Luther's pious life and his teaching, the biographical sketch includes the confession of M. Luther that was made just before his last breath. Here is a quote from *The Life of Martin Luther*, illustrated by Gustav Koenig. It says that during his last hours Luther repeatedly pronounced the same phrase, *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. Thou hast redeemed me, O God of truth!* When Dr. Jonas, Luther's faithful companion, addressed to him the question, *Reverend father, shall you die faithful to Christ and to the doctrine you have preached?* Luther answered distinctly, *Yes*. After saying this confession the eloquent lips said no more words, and in the first hour of February the 18<sup>th</sup>, 1546 the German prophet, M. Luther, passed away. Therefore by words and deeds Luther proved that he was a faithful disciple and true teacher.

\* Friends, I encourage you to trust Luther's teaching who was a true disciple of Jesus Christ; he learned the Word by heart and by practice as the Apostle Paul, for instance. Both men of faith taught *Solo Fide* (by faith only). Paul teaches, ... *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins*, (Rom 3:23-25). Luther became a zeal advocate Paul's teaching the salvation by faith alone and he left to us the explanation this doctrine in detail. Notice that Luther contrasted an *imaginary faith* that does not

regenerate and change the heart with a *true faith* that produces the fruits of the Holy Spirit. *The first sort of faith is, moreover, very harmful. It would be better not to have it at all. A philosopher who is mortal is better than a hypocrite who has such a faith.* (W 40 I, 421 – E Gal.2, 1 f -- SL 9, 357 f). Both Luther and St. Paul taught that all believers are allowed to boast, but not of their faithfulness to the law but to their faithfulness to Christ, who suffered on the cross so that all who will believe in him and practice his teachings receive the freedom from the accusation of the law. We believe that God in Christ Jesus completely redeemed us by himself so that we may get rid of the worldly desires and live for righteousness. Thanks Jesus through whom we received knowledge of truth and faith to believe in this truth.

\* In spite of accusation against the Reformer Luther, his life and death demonstrate that God was by his side. After Jesus there was no man on earth except Paul and Luther to whom religious people hated so much or loved so greatly. Regarding Luther we learned that all powers of medieval Catholicism were set with a purpose to ruin this man. But they couldn't. Do you know, during the time of the Reformation that thousands of evangelicals left their lands and hastened on to areas of safety so they could escape the Roman Inquisition. In fact many were destroyed, but God didn't allow to harm Luther, he was kept safety with great purpose.

\* In conclusion I want to introduce you to the two realities of postmodern age we are living in now. First, the people assume the idea that the truth acknowledged by the Chinese, for example, may not be acknowledged as the same truth by an American due to the difference between them in cultural, linguistic, intellectual and social dimensions. Next reality, is that postmodern individuals prefer abiding with the ideas that sound in one accord with their own preferences. When the new challenges got together with the old ones, the mysterious truth is getting less knowledgeable and less believed. Friends, look at Luther and learn from him in spite of a fact that he was not American and in spite of a fact that a man who has preached you today is Russian. Luther did many good works because he understood the truth and the truth set him free from the bondage to sin; I try to follow him. Friends, hold to Jesus who is absolute truth, and you will be never ashamed.

Beloved the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the communion with all saints including M. Luther be with you always.

Amen.