18th Sunday After Trinity 19th after Pentecost
October 10, 1971, Rolling Meadows, Illinois
1st in the Series on Martin Luther

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IN NOMINE JESU

Psalm 22: 1: MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?

During these NEXT several weeks we want to TAKE a LOOK at the MAN whose NAME we bear MARTIN LUTHER. Just what KIND of a man was MARTIN LUTHER - DEVIL or SAINT? And what, if ANYTHING, did he DO for the CHURCH? Why do we today STILL bear his name and DARE to HOLD our HEADS HIGH as we CALL OURSELVES, "LUTHERANS?"

First of all, ~~one~~ you must bear in MIND that LUTHER lived during a PERIOD when a GREAT DEAL of CORRUPTION was PREVALENT in the CHURCH. NO ONE denys that. Historians [both Roman Catholics as well as Protestants] have always ADMITTED THAT. The ABUSES were of various kinds.

There were MORAL abuses - CONCUBINAGE was exceedingly prevalent. The ATTEMPT to IMPOSE CLERICAL CELIBACY had actually LEAD to CLERICAL CONCUBINAGE.

There were FINANCIAL abuses - the PAPACY was a great FINANCIAL INSTITUTION. It engaged in WARS - ~~CRUSADES~~ - and wars are COSTLY. Various DEVICES were used to RAISE MONEY.

There were POLITICAL abuses. The CHURCH in the 16th CENTURY did NOT succeed in making itself an ARBITER ~~toward~~ for JUSTICE - but was itself a PARTICIPANT in the POWER STRUGGLE. The FACT is that the ROMAN EMPEROR and the POPE actually engaged in such a POWER STRUGGLE that resulted in the SACK of ROME in 1527.

While others have endeavored to CLEANSE the CHURCH from its CORRUPTIVE LIFE, Luther's Reformation had a DIFFERENT ORIGIN. He himself said, "What differentiates me from

PREVIOUS REFORMERS is this: Thay they ATTACK the LIFE , but I attack the DOCTRINE!" It WASN'T that he APPROVED of the LIFE - he had a GREAT DEAL to SAY ABOUT the ABUSES. But it was the THEOLOGY which he ATTACKED! And this came out of HIS OWN DEVOTION for the CHURCH and his TREMENDOUS ZEAL in pushing everything that the CHURCH had to OFFER for SALVATION.

Luther's BASIC PROBLEM was the problem of DEATH. It was a CONFRONTATION with DEATH which began his TORTUOUS CAREER. He had been PREPARING for the LAW. His father hoped that he would take the DEGREE and then be able to PROVIDE for his PARENTS in their OLD AGE . Luther was STUDYING at the University of Erfurt. He had been HOME to VISIT his parents and was returning when he was OVERTAKEN by a THUNDERSTORM - a stroke of LIGHTENING KNOCKED him OFF his HORSE to the GROUND - and he cried, "St. Anne help me - I'll turn MONK!"

Once he had TAKEN the VOW there was NO TURNING BACK. He knew that his parents would NOT approve - but he hastened [and within 2 weeks] he became a NOVICE of the Augustinian Order. And his father DID NOT APPROVE - he was HIGHLY GRIEVED! He continued to be VERY resentful until the DEATH of an older brother appeared to him to be a DIVINE JUDGMENT upon him because of his resentment. And he strove to OVERCOME it.

Luther in the MONASTERY said that at times he felt HIGHLY ELATED. "During the 1st year," he said, "the DEVIL is relatively QUIET." But ~~eht~~ the DEVIL came BACK after a while - and the 1st occasion which TOUCHED OFF another religious UPHEAVEL in his life was, I think, his 1st MASS.

The saying of the 1st MASS was always an ORDEAL. One might very well be TERRIFIED at the THOUGHT that he, as a HUMAN INSTRUMENT, is bringing the BODY of GOD to the ALTAR.

But the INITIATE was schooled in ADVANCE. If he were overcome with FRIGHT, a PRIEST stood at his side to TAKE OVER. And Luther does NOT appear to have approached the day with any particular TREPIDATION. He looked FORWARD to it with JOY and EVEN INVITED his father. In fact, he set the DATE at a time when his father was ABLE to COME. And the father RESOLVED to do the HANDSOME THING - riding in with 20 HORSEMEN and a PRESENT for the MONASTERY.

As Luther stood at the ALTAR, all went WELL UNTIL he came to the words, "to the TRUE, the ETERNAL, the LIVING GOD." And he thought, "To whom am I SPEAKING? - God. He SITS upon the CIRCLE of the EARTH - before Him ANGELS bow down - at His NOD the earth TREMBLES! - if in the PRESENCE of an EARTHLY KING one should tremble, - how MUCH MORE in the PRESENCE of the KING of KINGS? Who am I, a PIGMY, to say I want this - I WANT that? Who AM I, DUST and ASHES, that I should COME into the PRESENCE of the ALL HOLY

Following this FRIGHTFUL ORDEAL, Luther came in - UTTERLY LIMP - and SAT DOWN at the BANQUET table. He sat NEXT to his FATHER. Having trembled in the presence of the HEAVENLY FATHER, he sought some SOLICE. And turning to his father he said, "Father, are you STILL DISTURBED that I became a MONK? The LIFE HERE is so GODLY." And this was a little TOO MUCH for his father who was trying his best to CONTAIN himself - and SUDDENLY he FLAIRED UP and said, "You wise FOOL, you know that the SCRIPTURE COMMANDS you to take care of YOUR PARENTS and you let your MOTHER and ME to take CARE of OURSELVES in our OLD AGE."..... ...."But father, I can do MORE for you by my PRAYERS in the MONASTERY than if I had STAYED in the WORLD - and besides, I was CALLED - I had a HEAVENLY VISION."....."Ah ha ! God grant that it WASN'T of the DEVIL."

Now that was the WEAK POINT of all MEDIEVAL RELIGION. There was no doubt about the SUPERNATURAL WORLD - but the supernatural world was DIVIDED ITSELF between ANGELS and DEVILS. And the devil could DISGUISE himself as a very ANGEL OF LIGHT. There was a

a STORY that once the DEVIL DID appear as the REDEEMER. He APPEARED before St. Martin, and St. Martin LOOKED upon him - resplendent - and said to him, "And where are the NAIL PRINTS?" And the APPARATION VANISHED....."Where are the NAIL PRINTS? - Was it the VOICE of GOD or was it the very INSINUATION of the FIEND which LED him to take the VOW in THAT THUNDERSTORM?"

Luther was determined to become the very BEST MONK POSSIBLE. He began by nearly STARVING himself. In the 1st WOOD-CUTS, his CHEEK BONES are PROTRUDING. He would go WITHOUT BLANKETS in the COLD of WINTER - - but always he was saying to himself, "Are you POOR enough, COLD enough, are you HUNGRY enough?" There was NEVER any "ENOUGH" that could SATISFY GOD or CONSTITUTE a CLAIM upon God.

He began CONFESSING - HOURS on end - until his CONFESSOR STAUPITZ, grew rather TIRED of it and said, "Now look here, young man. If you are going to come in here and CONFESS so much - why don't you go out and DO something worth CONFESSING - - KILL your father and mother instead of TROTTING in here with all these LITTLE SINS." But with Luther the question was NOT if he did BIG ones or LITTLE ones - but whether he had confessed EVERYTHING. For it was the teaching of the late SCHOLASTICS that EVERY SIN must be CONFESSED. And Luther was DISTURBED by the REALIZATION that he could not REMEMBER ALL his sins. He would confess for 6 HOURS and then go out and think of something that he had OVERLOOKED and TROT back in again to start all over again. And then there were those sins which he had NOT just FORGOTTEN - but which he did NOT even RECOGNIZE. That LED him into such DEPRESSION that he NEARLY had a NERVOUS BREAKDOWN.

It was just at THIS TIME that his CONFESSOR, STAUPITZ, came to him one day and told him ~~that he~~ to take his DOCTOR'S DEGREE and become a PROFESSOR of the Bible at the University of WITTENBERG. ~~This was a new University recently FOUNDED by Frederick the Wise.~~ And wha

STAUPITZ did was perfectly AUDACIOUS. To take a young man, who seemed to be just on the VERGE of what we would call a MENTAL BREAKDOWN - and decide to make him a professor.

But what Staupitz did proved to be Luther's HEALING BALM. He began LECTURING on the PSALMS - and it appears to me that he was DEEPLY AFFECTED by PSALM 22. He could not MISTAKE Jesus' reference from the CROSS, when he quoted this very VERSE - FORSAKEN - CHRIST FORSAKEN! And he thought to himself, "That's EXACTLY the way that I feel - and I thought I was the ONLY ONE in the whole HISTORY of the WORLD. But that Christ felt forsake - How could that be? I KNOW why I FEEL that way. I am WEAK - He was NOT WEAK. I am SINFUL - He was NOT SINFUL. WHY THEN? It could only be that He who was WITHOUT SIN took to Himself the INIQUITIES of us ALL - and so IDENTIFIED HIMSELF with our sinful humanity, and so felt Himself on OUR SIDE that He cried, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?"

With that UNDERSTANDING of GOD - the God of MERCY who by HIMSELF overcomes HIS OWN WRATH - - the REAL REFORMATION ~~really~~ BEGAN. And Luther could say - this is the ONLY thing that COUNTS. This is JUSTIFICATION by FAITH. And once I understood this - the very GATES of PARADISE were OPENED." Amen.