
Just after I had completed my “Reflections”, the following devotion came across my desk from “God Pause” which is an Email resource from Luther Seminary. I felt that it was very timely, and that the two would complement each other well. I’ve included it below.

My mom was strict. She laid down the law. Not just God’s law, but also rules like “don’t dry your hands with the dish towel” and “never let anything go to waste.” It was hard to please her. Even so, there was never a shred of doubt that I had a place in my family—a home to go to—a place I belonged. If I disobeyed, though, I could expect to pay a price.

Consequently, I tend to think about God that way. I trust that I am sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. But I know I’ve fallen short. How can I presume to come to God’s presence and expect mercy and forgiveness...again? How can there NOT be punishment? How can it be that Jesus paid the price for MY sin? Well, I guess there are still earthly consequences, but God promises forgiveness every time. Furthermore, in Christ, God takes my bad choices and even their consequences and uses them for good, in me and in the world.

Prayer

Holy God, your promises free me from the fear of eternal death. I know I am yours and have a place with you always. Forgive me my continual turning away from you. Forgive me for clinging to my own self-made worthiness. Make me ever more yours. Amen.

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Reflections on Faith and Life for October 25, 2020

Today we remember Martin Luther's *95 Theses*, the long list of ways in which the Roman Catholic Church was misinterpreting or misrepresenting God's holy Word. The basic problem for Luther was the selling of *indulgences*. The Church was trying to raise money to complete St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, so they promised forgiveness of sins (either after or before they were committed!) if you paid a certain amount.

- "You wanna go out on the town next week? For only 25 lira I can guarantee God won't hold it against you!"
- "You did *WHAT* last week?? That'll cost you 100 lira! Better pay up right now!"
- Or even this: "You're worried about your great aunt Hepzibah? When did she die? Was she a good Catholic woman? Okay, if you put 30 lira in the box her soul will rise to the top of purgatory." The slogan handed down in Lutheran writings is this: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul up into heaven springs."

A seminary classmate of mine, Jay Gamelin, wrote the devotions for *Christ in Our Home* for August 16-31. He titled the text for August 17th "Free is free," and the theme is welcoming people into their fellowship for worship. *"Every Sunday the presiding pastor shares that the table [altar for communion] is a place of grace. Grace, by definition, is free, and "free" means free. If there is anything you have to do to earn your way to the table, it is no longer free but a paycheck, earned by being a certain age, taking a class, or meeting some other qualification."*

Learning to accept God's grace as *free* is a life-long struggle for many Lutherans. If we could just work hard enough to *deserve* it, we'd feel a lot more confident. For me personally, the moment I realized God loved me just the way I was, and that there was nothing I *had to do* or *could do* to get him to love me more—that was when my relationship with Jesus changed.

Theologian A. W. Tozer wrote this prayer: *"I am sure that there is in me nothing that could attract the love of One as holy and as just as You are. Yet You have declared Your unchanging love for me in Christ Jesus. If nothing in me can win Your love, nothing in the universe can prevent You from loving me. Your love is uncaused and undeserved. Help me to believe the intensity, the eternity of the love that has found me. **Then love will cast out fear; and my troubled heart will be at peace, trusting not in what I am but in what You have declared Yourself to be.** Amen. (bold print mine)*

But, we still need to remember that we are at the same time both *saint* and *sinner*. Contemporary writer Randy Alcorn writes, *"Any concept of grace that makes us feel more comfortable sinning is not biblical grace. God's grace never encourages us to live in sin, on the contrary, it empowers us to say no to sin and yes to truth."*

On that note I'll leave you with Jesus' words in today's gospel. When asked which commandment was the greatest, he replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."