**10/28/18**

**501 Years Later**

**John 8:31-36**

Today’s Gospel reading may have been one of the most straight forward readings we have got this entire year. Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” There was no code to break, or no big confusing terminology utilized. It was plain and simple. You sin and continue to sin. Unfortunately, no matter how hard you try on your own you will still be a slave to it.

Whether we like it or not, or whether we admit to it or not, sin can and will control all of our lives in various ways and in various capacities at one time or another. Unfortunately, it is a hard fact we have to deal with. We may try to drastically change things, or even do some good works in order to get on the perceived right side of God. But, that simply is not enough! We need Jesus’ help and freeing hand to no longer be bound by the eternal chains of sin. We need to accept God as our Lord and Savior into our hearts so we have a place in God’s kingdom.

I know for myself I have probably accepted God into my heart several times over and over again. Whether it was in the several churches and youth groups I grew up in, or whether it was at all of the camps I went to with the Royal Rangers. You better believe I was making sure I had all the God I could have in my heart no matter how many times I had to ask Him in!

As humans we cannot grasp or even fathom that accepting God into our hearts once is simply enough. There is no algorithm, no equation, that has been or ever will be derived for this. Once we accept Him the first time He is constantly there with us on our daily journey, and through our daily struggles. Now, we still have the ability to make choices and do things on our own through free will. Unfortunately, this is where sin and temptation can take over. No matter how good we act, or try to act. Jesus knows our every step and every choice before we even make it. The cool thing is that as a Father he sits back and watches us make decisions, and hopefully learn from those decisions too. He does not act all high and mighty and try to control us.

Remember, repenting is what allows us to recognize all of the wrongs we have done, and it also allows us to get right with Him. Fortunately, enough we get to draw that line in the sand and fix things every time we mess up. It doesn’t mean to act silly and keep making the same mistakes over and over again, or to not be grateful for the love and forgiveness our Lord shows us. He told the Jews back then, and He continues to remind us…. “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

This time of year is all too often associated with ghouls and goblins, ghosts and vampires, super heroes and villains, even witches and princesses. You can go and get the best costume out there, go out to a party or two, get some candy while walking the neighborhood trick or treating with your kids and grandkids or even your nieces and nephews. There are so many scares, haunts, and things out there to entertain you for well over the entire month that leads up to Halloween. It is very easy for one to get caught up in the popularly common holiday being celebrated, but then get lost in the corn maze of life.

As humans there are so many things in the world to keep us busy, or even distract us from what we are called to keep our eyes upon. So, I challenge you as you go along the rest of your days and evenings leading up to October 31st to think about another event, or mark in history. A date that so many people may not even be aware of in the ever so declining faith and religious communities we live in.

501 years ago the Christian Faith World was rocked, and completely turned upside down. Drastic change was coming, whether people wanted it or not! The Protestant Reformation was starting with the efforts of one man standing up to the wrongs and atrocities he had found within the faith and practices of the Catholic Church. He compiled a list of things he perceived that needed to be changed and addressed. Martin Luther attempted to contribute to a reform of practices and doctrines that seemed to be based on human authority alone, and to be in tension with or contradiction to the Scriptures. He could no longer sit on the sidelines and be a spectator. Martin Luther stood up for the Word, and was ever so convicted to help foster change to refocus the church back on the Gospel that he even ended up being excommunicated by a Papal Bull.

Excommunicated or not, 501 years later we are still able to gather together in a building to worship. This stand he took led us to worshipping in a Lutheran Church instead of a Catholic one. However, if you had no clue, Martin Luther had no intent at all to break away. His only goal was to reform and fix things.

When Luther was trying to make change a positive thing many thought that he was only causing issues. They even thought that he might have some mental issues, or even be going crazy. My question to all of this is…... How can someone be so devoted, so focused, and so educated to the problems of the day that they manage to provide such clear insight into things while being sick? We as humans tend to place blame or make excuses for things the majority, or the popular does not agree with. If they would have been more willing to listen and just see how they had strayed off the path, let alone listen and recognize that someone was just trying to give them a little nudge while warning them to get back on the right track there is a good chance we all would still be sitting in a Catholic Church instead.

Thankfully, last year during the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation Catholics and Lutherans sat down in an effort to change things. This was even documented in a book entitled ***From Conflict To Communion***. Through these efforts there continues to remain a glimmer of hope that one day we will be able to set aside our differences, and band together as one. The fact that both sides are sitting down and trying speaks volumes. We all have one main belief and focus. Hopefully the little stumbling blocks that remain in the way will manage to be worked upon and continue to be improved upon in order to no longer keep us away from gathering together at one table.

Now, you may already know, or you might be asking yourselves what exactly the main spark of the fight or separation was. Primarily, it was the trafficking of indulgences, but there were several other issues Luther would end up highlighting too. Luther actually saw the selling of these certificates as an abuse of the practice of the clergy. If you have no clue what an indulgence might be, or what weight it actually held, let me give you some background. These plenary indulgences were actually believed to reduce temporal punishment, in a place referred to as purgatory, for the sins committed by the purchasers, or even their loved ones. Unfortunately, this short cut did not permit one to actually repent or even have sorrow for their sins. Moreover, it even detracted from supporting or helping out the poor, or performing acts of kindness and mercy within one’s hometown or community. Believe it or not, buying one or more of these certificates was even found to be spiritually valuable.

People back then, and even people now, never really see themselves as slaves to sin. More often than not we constantly try to handle matters as humans on our own with our own devices, and the selling of indulgences was just that. We often forget that we have a Father in Heaven who has already saved us and redeemed us through the cross. Just remembering this allows us to have a simpler and relaxed life because we don’t have to do the work that has already been done for us.

A public debate sparked over the “Disputation on the Efficacy and Power of Indulgences,” or more commonly known to all of us as the Ninety-five Theses. Now whether they were hammered to the door on the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, or mailed out to Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz and other leaders in the church at that time there still lies one all too important and simple truth…... Luther disputed something that he felt we had already earned freely as long as we believed. For through faith alone, and the grace of God through the cross, all of us have been redeemed. That does not mean just some of us, or the select few, that means all of us! Let me repeat that…... through faith alone, and the grace of God through the cross, all of us have been redeemed.

Scripture tells us He was, “the stone the builders rejected.” The book of John says, “He came to his own and his own received him not.” Just like Jesus, Martin Luther did not stand for the conventional way of doing things, or the more commonly known way we have always done it. The Catholic hierarchy and church of the times rejected Luther’s thought process. Even though they knew they might have been wrong, they were clouded by the money and saving grace they felt they were providing with the selling of these indulgences. In his “Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses,” Luther states, “The church needs a reformation which is not the work of man, namely the pope, or of many men, namely the cardinals, both of which the most recent council has demonstrated, but it is the work of the whole world, indeed it is the work of God alone. However, only God who has created time knows the time for this reformation.”

Sometimes you just can’t cancel the subscription, or go against the popular thought of the majority? We as Christians are not called to conform to the world and its standards... we are called to follow a Savior who gave His life for us.... we are called to be radically different! Now, that does not mean I am telling you to go out there and hammer your beliefs and problems with your neighbor on their door, or even flip shelves over at the market because the prices are way too high. What I am saying to you is to go out and show some radical love to your hurting neighbor, or that person in line with you at the grocery store that is a dollar or two short. Whether we realize it or not, we actually have the ability to change and influence things in a small or very big way. Just remember, it all starts with something small or something radically different than the so-called norm of our society these days.

Today I am going to send all of you home with a magnet. This magnet is a replica of the seal Martin Luther had developed so he could put a stamp of approval, or recognition, on his works. If you have never invited Jesus into your heart then you are lacking your seal, or your stamp. And if that is the case you will continue to be a slave to sin like the Jews Jesus spoke to in our gospel reading today. You will not have secured your place in His household. I encourage you to be like Martin Luther, and no longer stand for the misguided truths we are led to believe out there in today’s world of ever increasing secular culture. Stand for change! Don’t be a slave to sin anymore, and remember whose you are, “if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

AMEN