

Greetings to you! This Sunday is earmarked as Reformation Sunday. On October 31st 1517 Martin Luther protested against the sale of indulgences by writing a letter to the Archbishop of Mainz. He enclosed with his letter a copy of his disputation on the power and efficacy of indulgences which came to be known as the ninety-five theses. He posted that on the Church of All Saints in Wittenberg. Germany celebrates the 500th year of the Reformation beginning a year-long celebration on Oct 31st 2016. As you read this letter I am participating in those celebrations with others around the world in Germany.

Luther was upset about the Church's practice of selling indulgences. In this belief it was regarded that none of us could do enough good works to achieve salvation, but the saints had a treasury of merits which could be drawn upon. Access to the treasury was what the church sells to the sinners/people. This could be for themselves, friends and even for the loved ones who had already died and even for sins to be committed in the future. This doctrine was really a way of paying for your sins through money. For Martin Luther this was something which was unacceptable and he believed that the Catholic Church had lost its way. Luther wants to begin a debate with a set of ideas of what is wrong in the church and so he came up with a document titled Disputations on the power and efficacy of Indulgences. They went beyond the sale of indulgences to question the limits of papal power.

His 95 Theses concerning the central beliefs- that the bible is the central religious authority and that the humans may reach salvation only by their faith and not by their deeds- was to spark the Protestant Reformation. The cry was that salvation was grace alone, by faith alone and through Christ alone. They also went back to study the scriptures more than tradition. Today even as we remember the Reformers we are challenged to bring reform within our own churches. Through Luther and others like Calvin and Zwingli the movement spread throughout Europe and called for reformation within the Church.

Jesus reserved his harshest words, not for thieves, or prostitutes but to a segment among the religious folks who he identified as hypocrites. Jesus is committed to exposing these people who claim to represent God and his ways, while not living out what they claim to be. Perhaps the most frightening thing about the Pharisees was they were the group of people in the gospels which most closely resembles us. So far as the fundamentals are concerned the Pharisees believed in nearly everything we do. They believed in the inspiration and authority of the Bible (in their case it was of course the Old Testament). They believed in the supernatural, in Satan, angels, heaven and hell, and the resurrection of the dead. However, they did not practice what they believed or preached.

Our own Churches at this point of time are in desperate need of Reformation. We have self-styled bishops and pastors whose only aim in life is to grab property and sell them to make money in the quickest possible way. Corruption, Nepotism, Regionalism, immorality, violence are all found within the Church. Reformation needs to begin with us. We are called to examine ourselves and see where we have fallen short of God's standards and where we have strayed away from him. While it is very easy to point fingers at others we are called in for some introspection so that we may not end up as the Pharisees and the Teachers of the law that Jesus encountered.