

Greetings to you! On the 31st October 2017 we will be marking 500 years of the Reformation. It was on this day when Martin Luther protested against the sale of indulgences and wrote 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 95 Theses. He posted that on the church of All Saints in Wittenberg. On 31st October people around the world will be celebrating the culmination of this 500th year celebration. I was fortunate last year to be in Germany for the inauguration service of the 500th year Jubilee of the Reformation at St. Mary's Church, Berlin. The Federal President Joachim Gauck spoke about the grace of God. He said, "Grace was a key word back then – now it is perhaps a foreign concept. And yet it seems to be, grace is what we need more than anything else especially today."

The church in the pre-reformation time had forgotten what grace was all about and faith had become like a barter system. Martin Luther, Calvin and Zwingli and all the other reformers objected to the corruption within the church and particularly among the clergy. They spoke against the Pope who had given permission for the sale of indulgences. Indulgences were bought for a price which would relieve one of temporal punishments and moved them out of purgatory. The Reformation spread throughout Europe as the reformers taught that salvation was by faith alone, by grace alone and through Christ alone. They also believed that the Bible contained all knowledge for salvation and holiness and therefore it should be made available in the language of the people.

Just like how the reformers were interested in inward change so too Jesus wants us to change from within. Jesus reserved his harshest words not for thieves or prostitutes but to a segment among the religious folks whom he identified as hypocrites. Jesus was committed to exposing these people who claimed to represent God and his ways, while not living out what they claim to be. Perhaps, the most frightening thing about 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 the authority of scripture, in the supernatural, Satan, Angels, Heaven and Hell and the resurrection of the dead. However, the Pharisees did not exemplify what they preached. They were more bothered about the external show of holiness rather than holiness of the heart. In pursuing the truth and the attempt to carry out the will of God, we too can get caught up in the spirit of self-righteousness which wants others to recognise our holiness and also to see that what they do is according to what we believe it should be.

Jesus criticises them for neglecting God's love and justice and paying more attention to tithing and rituals. They were always seeking public honour and self-aggrandisement because of their pride and their need to feel important. Jesus comes down with a very graphic picture of calling them as unmarked graves. Unmarked graves are rotting inside, whereas people cannot see anything outside. They also defile people who come in contact with it. The Pharisees, who saw themselves as the paragon of purity, were in fact leaders of spiritual uncleanness who led people to death; though the Pharisees themselves thought they were leading their followers in the path of life.

Jesus also challenged the Pharisees and accuses them of killing the Prophets. They were not interested in the prophetic critique of their lives but they wanted status quo to remain. They did not want to be challenged. They were more interested in building monuments for the Prophets rather than listening to them.

Just as the Reformers challenged corruption in the church, today we too are called to stand up against corruption within the church. Corruption has come to rest within the church and greed for money has come to plague the church through the manipulation of accounts, nepotism, self-serving interests, and quick money, unauthorised sale of property and abuse of power. All of us as Bishops, clergy and lay people have fallen prey to the god of Mammon and have forgotten the living God, our Lord Jesus Christ. The need of the hour is repentance and reformation within the church. The call to serve has been forgotten by the Bishops, clergy and our institutions. Any reformation can only take place when there is repentance backed up by prayers. Repentance needs to be of a corporate nature.

God calls each one of us as his people to reform our ways and actions. Reform needs to begin with repentance. May we turn to Christ and seek his forgiveness corporately so that we would be cleansed and made holy. We are called to stand up and speak the truth without fear or favour. May God use us as his agents of reformation