

This Sunday has been earmarked as Reformation Sunday in which we thank God and remember with gratitude the Reformers and the Reformation. On October 31st 1570 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 efficiency of indulgences which came to be known as the 95 theses. He posted that on the door of the church in Wittenberg. Through Luther and others like Calvin and Zwingli the movement spread throughout Europe and called for reformation within the church. Luther insisted that the Pope had no authority over purgatory and that the catholic doctrine of the merits of the saints had no foundation in the gospel. The key focus was that salvation was by faith alone, through Christ alone and by grace alone. They also said that it was necessary to go back to scriptures rather than depending on traditions. The reformation was born out of Luther's dual declaration –firstly, the discovering of the Jesus and salvation by faith alone; secondly, undermining the authority of the Pope.

Today the situation within our churches are no different. We too are in drastic need for reformation like that of Martin Luther. The church in India has been plagued with corruption, immorality and power struggles. Officials of the church who are meant to be trustees of institutions and properties are the very same people who indulge in selling properties and making money for themselves. Self-styled bishops and pastors and self-ordained pastors who have nothing to do with the church are like wolves in sheep's clothing devouring the flock. In this kind of context God calls to be reformers within the church and in our country so that we can bring about change.

Today as we remember the Reformers we are reminded of Christ's words which were read to us from the gospel of Luke. Jesus tells us that no one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it would be hidden, under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand so that people can see. Jesus says that their eyes are the lamp of their bodies. By this he means that the eye is the vehicle of perception, the source of reception. What determines the body's health is the content of one's perception. If the eye brings in light the whole person glows. But this can only happen if the eyes are healthy and can receive spiritual truth. Not to take God's light is to risk darkness.

Jesus then comes down with several 'woes' on the Pharisees. Jesus accuses the Pharisees about being clean from the outside but not inside. True reformation begins with the internal cleansing. The Pharisees were very good in keeping the laws of tithes but neglected justice and the love of God. Jesus therefore reminds them that maintaining justice and the love of God was more important than tithing.

In a second 'woe' Jesus tells them that they loved the most important seats in the synagogue and wanted the greetings of people in the market places. The Pharisees always made a beeline for the most important seats because they thought of themselves as the most important. They also liked to be greeted as teachers of the law in the market places. Their pride and their arrogance always sought attention upon themselves and were wanting to be self-glorified.

Jesus then comes up with another 'woe' saying that they were like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it. Unmarked graves are rotting inside whereas people cannot see anything outside. They also defile people who come into contact with it. The Pharisees who saw themselves as the paragon of purity are in fact leaders of spiritual uncleanness who lead people to death; though the Pharisees themselves thought they were leading their followers in the path of life. This is again a note of warning for those who are leading and teaching within God's church. An expert in the law is disturbed with these accusations and tells Jesus that he was insulting them as well. Jesus comes down with a 'woe' on them as well because they were laying heavy burdens on people of obeying traditions which they themselves did not bother to keep. Jesus continues his tirade against the teachers of the law by telling them that they were the ones who built tombs for their prophets but it was their own ancestors who had killed all the prophets. The Pharisees and their ancestors were not interested in the prophet critique of their lives. They did not want the status quo to be challenged. They were not interested in the task of teaching and building people but were more interested in building monuments. Christian leaders can easily become monument keepers. They can keep the church running and make all the building repairs but can be spiritually dead. Great Cathedrals are built over the bodies of saints but if the people of God are not involved in the mission of God and proclaiming and practicing his words then we are monuments of history. In the final 'woe' Jesus tells the experts in the law that they have taken away the key to knowledge and they have hindered others who were entering into God's kingdom.

Many times we too are like the Pharisees and the experts and Teachers of the law where we ourselves are acting like stumbling blocks to others. Reformation needs to begin from within. God calls each one of us to repent of our sins to reform our ways and to follow him faithfully. May God truly help us to be faithful followers.

Shalom,

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