

## The Minor Festivals of the Church Year

### Reformation Day: October 21

#### St. Anne's Monk

In the summer of 1505, a young University of Erfurt law student was on a sixty mile trek back to school from his home in Mansfeld, where he had visited his parents. All of a sudden a tremendous tempest was whipped up around him. The lightening flashed, the thunder crashed, and the storms in his heart led him to cry out, "St. Anne, help me, and I will become a monk." The storm subsided and this young man seeking peace for his soul was convinced that St. Anne had saved him. He felt conscience bound to enter the monastery.

On July 17, 1505, to the great dismay of his friends, and in spite of their objections, Martin Luther entered the cloister of the Augustinian Order of Hermits, also known as the Black Cloister because of the black cowls that they wore. He took his three-fold vow—poverty, celibacy, and obedience to the pope and to the head of his order.

What brought him to this point? He had been raised with a strict Roman Catholic upbringing. He learned to know Jesus, not as a loving and forgiving Savior, but as an unrelenting, harsh Judge. He was taught that if he didn't do enough good works to make up for the temporal punishment of his sins, he would have to go to a place called purgatory and fry in flames for a few million years to be purged of his sins before he could go to heaven. His parents were strict disciplinarians, and the punishments at school were severe. He had a loud and accusing conscience which tormented him with the fear of death and punishment.

He was hopeful that in the cloister he would be able to find peace for his soul. He chopped the wood; he scrubbed the floors; he emptied the chamber pots; he worshiped five times a day; he spent nights and days praying and fasting, nearly starving himself to death. He even tried to whip the evil out of himself. But the more he tried, the more he felt the sentence of God's judgment coming down hard on him.

Martin Luther once said, "If it had not been for Dr. Johann Staupitz, I should have sunk in hell." Staupitz was the Vicar-General of the Augustinians. He is the one who first pointed Luther to Jesus Christ. He said, "Throw yourself into the arms of Jesus. After all, don't we confess, 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins?'"

That set Martin Luther on the right track. In addition, when he entered the monastery, he had received a red, leather bound Bible as a gift. He began devouring its contents like a starving man gorging himself on food. Through the years, the Holy Spirit slowly pulled back the blinders so that he could see the light of the Gospel of forgiveness through Jesus' birth, life, death on the cross and resurrection.

It didn't happen overnight. In 1507 he became a priest. In 1511 he was called to be a teacher of God's Word at the University of Wittenberg and a preacher in the Town Church. In 1512 he became a Doctor of Sacred Scriptures. Most likely in 1514, as he was preparing his lectures on Psalm 71, he had his "Tower Experience." In his study in the tower of the Augustinian Cloister, he came to the conviction that we are saved by God's grace alone (Sola Gratia), through faith in Jesus Christ alone (Sola Fide), and that all of this comes to us through Holy Scripture alone (Sola Scriptura). He commented that when the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of his heart to see this life-giving truth, "it was as if the gates to paradise had been flung wide open for him." Finally, he was free—free from an accusing conscience,

free from Satan's torments, free from terror at the thought of death, free from the fear of eternal damnation, free, knowing that he would one day be received into the glorious inheritance of the children of God—which was a gift freely given to him in Christ.

October 31 is the Festival of the Reformation. It is the anniversary of when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. His Theses questioned the teaching about purgatory and the sale of indulgences (worthless pieces of paper that the Pope said would grant the purchaser time out of purgatory). Little did he realize that his hammer blows would be heard around the world and through the centuries.

As children of the Lutheran Reformation, may we thank God for the labors of faithful confessors of the Truth who risked life and limb so that the Truth of the Gospel could be handed down to us. May we do all that we can to preserve the Truth in our midst and to faithfully hand it down to the next generations.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10.... as today's Scripture Lesson.

In Christ,  
Pastor Zuberbier