

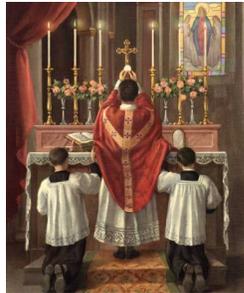
Reformation Reflections

WORSHIP

In April of 1507, Martin Luther was ordained as a priest. His first time to say the mass happened a few weeks later on May 2nd.

The warnings and requirements put upon the new priest made his first mass a momentous, often fearful, occasion. The Roman Catholic Church taught and still teaches that Christ is sacrificed in the mass, both for those in attendance as well as for those who *“have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified”* (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1371).

Offering the Roman mass required making the sacrifice to God in the proper way. In Luther's day, to do something wrong, even to dress improperly, was considered a grave sin. More than that, Luther was terrified at his first mass because he thought he “had to speak to God without a Mediator.”



“I was so frightened,” he said years later, “that I would have fled if I hadn't been admonished by the prior.” Then he asked, “Who can bear the majesty of God without Christ as Mediator? ... I almost died because no faith was there. I reflected only on the dignity of my person, that I wasn't a sinner, that I shouldn't leave anything out.”

By way of contrast, true God-pleasing worship is not about our ability to cleanse ourselves so that we are holy, without sin, and worthy to approach the almighty hater of sin. For apart from Christ, by our own efforts, we are never able to offer anything holy or acceptable to God. Besides, he does not want us to make ourselves worthy. Attempting to do so is an affront to Christ and a dishonor to his name.

Instead, Jesus Christ has already made full atonement for us. We are fully and completely forgiven. The blood of Jesus **“cleanses us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7). There is no deed or work that we can do to make ourselves cleaner or more worthy. He is our Mediator through whom we have access to God.



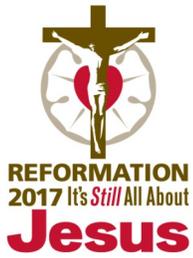
For the sake of Jesus, God has declared that you are righteous. So, let that declaration go all the way through your ears and to your heart. Trust God's promise, not your own good works.

Luther eventually denounced the Roman mass as an abomination in his Smalcald Articles. He realized that the benefit of the Sacrament does not depend on human performance but on the word of God.



He rightly concluded that the worthy one at Communion is the one who has faith in the words of Jesus: **“Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins”** (Luther's Small Catechism). Together with him, we confess that worship is chiefly **“the desire to receive the forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness”** (Augsburg Confession).

Believing his promise of righteousness, we offer praise, we sacrifice time to hear him, we bring our children to him, we bear the cross which he puts on us, etc. Such acceptable sacrifices flow from faith in his promise of righteousness for Christ's sake.



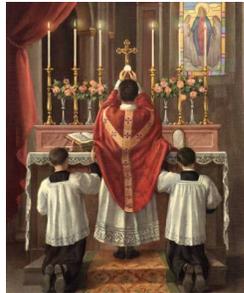
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