

In Nomine Jesu

Prayer Upon Entering Church: O Lord God, Heavenly Father, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your Faithful People, keep them steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and comfort them in all temptations, defend them against all enemies of Your Word, and bestow on Christ's Church Militant Your saving peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Text

1 Corinthians 2:13

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

John 17:22-23

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

The Sermon

They were a busy three weeks – the last weeks of Martin Luther – Doctor of Theology – Confessor of the Faith – and Renewer Of The Church. Besides listening to two nobles and their lawyers argue – Luther preached three sermons – helped distribute the Lord's Supper – and took part in ordaining two pastors. Most of the time he appeared reasonably well – although he had to cut short his sermon on February 14.

That same day – Luther wrote Katie and encouraging note: “Dear Katie” – he said – “we hope to come home (to Wittenberg) this week – if God so wills.” February 17 began happily. On that day the two nobles finally settled their last differences – and agreed to live peaceably in the future in Mansfeld. Luther relaxed – and looked forward to returning home to Wittenberg.

That evening after supper – Luther excused himself and went to his rooms to rest. Martin and Paul went with their father. Later - several others – including Justas Jonas – joined them. All at once Luther complained of a pain in his chest near his heart. Those present quickly called for the doctors. Those doctors applied hot cloths to Luther’s chest and massaged the area to increase the blood circulation.

Then – after giving Luther a dose of the strongest medicine available in those days – they carried him to the couch – where he slept for about an hour. Luther awoke at 10pm. Surprised at seeing the visitors still present in his suite of rooms – Luther said: “Are you still up? Don’t you people want to go to bed? Well – whatever you do – I’m going to bed right now.” With that he said goodnight – retired to his bedroom – and fell asleep almost at once.

Jonas and another friend stayed with Luther for the next hours. About two in the morning – they heard a cry of pain from the bedroom. Rushing in – they saw that Luther had suffered another severe heart attack. “Oh my God!” – Luther moaned - “I’m in great pain! Dear Jonas – I believe I’ll stay right here in Eisleben – where I was born and baptized.”

Despite the pain – Luther got out of bed and walked into the next room. Here he sat down on the couch. While his friends worked to comfort him – Luther continued to pray – and someone wrote down that prayer for posterity: “Father – into Your hands I commend myself. I thank You that You have given me Your dear Son Jesus Christ – in whom I believe – whom I have preached and confessed – loved and praised. Heavenly Father – if I must leave this body and depart – I am certain that I’ll be with You forever – and can never - never - tear myself out of Your hands.”

That was the last prayer that Luther ever prayed. Shortly after that – he had a third massive heart attack – much worse than either of the first two. The doctors were called again – but they

quickly gave up all hope. Sensing that the end was near – Justas Jonas stepped over to the couch and asked in a loud voice: “Reverend Father – are you willing to die in the Name of Christ – and the doctrine which you have preached?”

“Yes!” – came the answer – loud enough for all to hear. And with this final confession of faith – Luther fell asleep – asleep in Jesus – no less. Martin Luther – age 62 – died at about 3am – on the morning of February 18 – in the year of our Lord 1546. Luther’s friends removed his body – so that it could be readied for the funeral service.

The funeral was held the next day in St. Andrew Church – just across the street from the house where Luther had died. Justas Jonas preached the sermon. A messenger sent by Jonas to announce Luther’s death arrived in Wittenberg that day – three days before the funeral procession. The town – and the university – were totally unprepared for the news.

It was early morning – and – as usual during the semester – Philipp Melanchthon – Luther’s long time colleague and comrade in arms – stood in the lecture hall – explaining St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans for his students. In the middle of the class – the messenger burst in with the news of Luther’s death. Melanchthon struggled for control – unable to speak as he read the note – but finally – his voice faltering – told his students what had happened – breaking out in anguish with Elisha’s horrified cry – as he saw Elijah ascending to heaven in the tornado of fire: *“My father – my father – the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!”* (2 Kgs 2:12)

A second funeral service was held early on the 20th. Then – about noon – several men carried Luther’s tin coffin out of St. Andrew’s – and placed in on a rough wagon. Soon the long trip to Wittenberg got under way. Accompanied by a large escort of princes – soldiers – and friends – the funeral hearse slowly jolted its way along the rough road. In Halle – where Luther’s corpse was to rest overnight – people – horses – and

wagons – were so thick – that the funeral procession had trouble even moving.

Finally – on February 22nd – Luther's corpse arrived in Wittenberg – on its way to the waiting grave in the Castle Church. Amid the tolling of bells – two mounted knights in armor – and sixty horsemen of the cavalry – moved ahead of the hearse carrying the coffin. Luther's wife Katie – his three sons and daughter Margaret – and relatives and friends – followed in carriages in the funeral cortege.

Walking slowly behind came the teachers of the faculty and the student body of the University of Wittenberg – the members of the town Council – and many leading citizens. Then long lines of the common people who loved Luther so dearly – completed the procession of mourners – wending its way through the narrow streets. Luther's body was carried into the church through the same door upon which he had nailed the 95 Theses nearly thirty years earlier.

Inside – crowds filled the church to overflowing so that the floors creaked. Philipp Melancthon and John Bugenhagen reminded the mourners of the importance of Luther's life – and of his labors – and of the doctrine he rediscovered for the darkened Church of the Middle Ages. As the last echoes of the service faded – the Reformer's corpse was lowered into its final resting place – under the floor in front of the very pulpit from which Luther has so loved to preach.

Martin Luther was dead. And many mourned with Katie and the people of Wittenberg. Some however rejoiced. They reasoned that without a leader – his followers wouldn't know which way to turn. But by a miracle of God's grace and mystery – Luther continued to live on in the lives of those whom he had touched both directly and indirectly.

In Germany and Denmark – in Norway and Iceland – in Sweden and Finland – Luther's teachings flowed down through the centuries – into all parts of the world: into the Americas –

into Africa – Asia – Australia – and even into the islands dotting the oceans.

Luther was a man who took God at His word – and fearlessly told the world so. The Gospel which Luther preached was Christ’s Gospel – the Gospel of a crucified Savior-God who rose from the dead for His People. And that Gospel became a power and wisdom that not even the devil could resist – during Luther’s lifetime – and in all the centuries following. Yes – Luther’s wisdom and power were the wisdom and power of the Gospel of that crucified and risen Savior Jesus who lived – suffered – died – rose again – and ascended – out of an everlasting love for sinners in need of Him. Luther was imperfect. He had many faults. He was an earthy man. Yet even these faults served their purpose in God’s plan for his life.

As Melanchthon put it in the funeral sermon: “Some have complained that Luther was too severe – too earthy. I will not deny this. But I will answer in the language of Erasmus: “Because the sickness was so great – God gave this age – a rough doctor.”” This then – is the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther – the Christian who fought his foes with the two-edged sword of Scripture and Sacrament. As Luther often said – all he did was drink Katie’s beer – prayed hard – preached the Word fearlessly – and God did all the rest.

His birth in 1483 was unnoticed by this world. Yet his death in 1546 brought grief to hundreds of thousands. And to this very day he lives on – **Luther redeivivus** – a hero of faith inspiring new generations of men and women – “*to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the Head – even Christ.*” (Eph 4:15) Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds + in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!

