

## "Fear and Worship God" Revelation 14:6-7 Reformation 2024

Dear brothers and sisters,

Why are you here today? What is the compelling factor for you to worship God? What does it mean to worship God? These are questions that eventually get to the heart of the Reformation, one of the most important events of the second millennium A.D. Martin Luther, in his desire to reform the Church and remove the errors that crept into her teaching, posted his 95 Theses. In these theses, Luther got to the heart of the Christian faith: justification by grace through faith in Christ. We are saved not through the sale of indulgences but by the blood of Christ. It is by God's grace that we are saved, not by our own works. The Church fell away from this central and most crucial teaching, poisoning it with the heresy of works-righteousness, which holds that man has an active role in his salvation.

In our text, from Revelation 14, the blessed apostle and evangelist St. John records what he saw in his vision of heaven, as the Lord revealed it to him. He saw the Lamb of God Jesus standing atop Mount Zion. The saints were there with Him, learning and singing a new song, one which, by God's grace, we'll also get to sing there. An angel flew overhead with the eternal Gospel, the Good News that transcends all times and places, the Gospel proclaimed to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. The angel had a message: "Fear God and give Him

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glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water" (v. 7). Fear God and worship Him. This is the life of the Christian. This is the life of faith. This is the life lived through the Liturgy of the Church. God acts, and faith responds. The words of the angel in our text we can only carry out in response—in faith toward God and in fervent love toward one another. You see, it is only by faith that we can do works that are truly good in the sight of God, and it is only by faith that we are able to worship God. What the Church has wrestled ever since the Reformation is how this worship takes place. The Lutheran Confessions, to which we subscribe, tell us clearly, as we believe, teach, and confess: The divine service of the Gospel is to receive gifts from God. The chief worship of the Gospel is to desire to receive the forgiveness of sins, grace and righteousness. Christ says of this worship, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40). And the Father says, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him" (Matthew 17:5).

Faith craves the gifts Christ freely gives. There is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. Why do we insist on "worshiping" God on our terms and not His? It's because we don't look at Jesus through the lens

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of the Gospel but of the Law. We cannot serve God on our own. We cannot obey God on our own.

We cannot worship God on our own, either. Faith craves God's gifts, but our sinful pride seeks to block the gifts for the sake of our own glory. One of the most glaring errors the Lutheran Confessors had to deal with was the notion that one is saved by the Mass being celebrated *ex opera operato*, that is, by the work being performed. In other words, Rome falsely taught that one is saved simply by the Mass being celebrated, merely going through the motions and calling it good enough. Do we live and act like that, too, as if "coming up for communion" earns us points with God? As if we've "done our part"? The Lutheran Confessions ask, "What else is this than to transfer Christ's glory to our works? It means that we would please God because of our works, not because of Christ. But this robs Christ of the glory of being the Mediator" between God and man.

The Holy Spirit is the One who brings you to faith in Christ. This same Spirit is the One who moves you to do good works. The Spirit of Christ also leads your faith to crave those gifts Christ freely gives—gifts that Christ won for us on the cross and now gives to us in His Sacraments. The gifts of forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation are there to be received, and faith lays hold of them. We are

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strengthened and nourished in our faith through the Means of Grace on account of Christ's atoning sacrifice for us, as He died to take away the sin of the world, including your sin and mine. Faith clings to the promises God attaches to the water and the bread and wine. Baptism "works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare." Marked by the sign of the cross, we live our Baptism—trusting God's promises—in the confession of our sins, as we did earlier this morning, for "confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven." In a few moments Christ will give us His body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar, where "that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.'" We have this faith in Christ and in His promises because, by the Holy Spirit, He has given us His Word, that same Word you heard read from that lectern, that same Word proclaimed into your ears at this very moment, that same Word you've been taught through the years. Through this Word the Spirit builds and strengthens our saving faith in Christ. The blessed apostle St. Paul reminds us in Romans 10, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom.

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10:17). Fear God and worship Him. Come and receive His gifts, given for you, thanks be to God! Amen.