

# A Little Luther



Martin Luther by Wilhelm Lindenschmit (1829-1835), wood engraving published 1879

## A Little Luther Goes a Long Way (“long” is eternal life, the “Way” is Christ Himself)!

“Even though I am a poor sinner, still Christ is holy with His Baptism, Word, Sacrament, and Holy Spirit.” This is the only genuine holiness given to us by God.”

### About A Little Luther:

Martin Luther was a German Reformer living in the 16th century. His writings contain much wisdom and understanding of God’s Holy Scriptures and are always subordinate to them, meaning the Bible itself is the sole true authority (*Sola Scriptura*). Luther simply had marvelous, God-given insight into His Word. Some of these nuggets are simply too good not to share. We’ve tried to highlight points that seem to us to summarize Luther’s teachings from these glorious passages of Scripture. May God bless your own studies of Scripture, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:16).

## The WORD

<sup>25</sup> “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016). (Jn 14:25-26). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

This is truly a very comforting verse, one that should be noted well. Earlier we heard the same thing: “He will be in you and will dwell with you forever.” Thus Christendom has the promise of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in its midst. But not only this. He will also teach the Christians and call all Christ’s words to their remembrance until the Last Day. Thus we confess: “I believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy Christian Church.” With these words we affirm that **the Holy Spirit dwells with Christendom and sanctifies it, namely, through Word and sacrament, through which He works faith in it and the knowledge of Christ.** Those are the tools and the means through which He continuously sanctifies and purifies Christendom. This also makes Christians holy before God, not by virtue of what we ourselves are or do but because the Holy Spirit is given to us. This we shall hear later.

Christians need this comfort, lest they doubt that the Christian Church will remain in the world in the midst of all the unbelievers, Turks, heathen, Jews, heretics, and sects, as well as the devil and his angels. For here is the promise, which neither lies nor deceives: **The Holy Spirit “will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”** Now we can be sure of this and joyfully glory in it; we can wager everything and live and die on our possessing the Holy Spirit if we have and believe Christ’s Word. Then we can conclude with certainty: “Let the devil, death, and sin be against me! I am holy nevertheless. I believe in Christ and have learned to know Him; I understand and use the Word and the sacraments aright—all this I owe to the Holy Spirit, not to my own brains.

A Christian, however, can glory truthfully and with good reason, and he can say: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, who makes me and all believers holy. Therefore I am a member of a holy order, not that of St. Francis but that of Christ, who makes me holy through His Word and sacraments.” “May God preserve me,” say those monkish saints, “from such presumption! I am a poor sinner.” All right, then go to Rome, to Jerusalem, and through all the orders and cloisters, and see whether you become holy! The truth, however, is this: If you yourself were holy, then you would not need the Holy Spirit at all; but since we are sinful and unclean in ourselves, the Holy Spirit must perform His work in us. He gives us the Word of Christ the Lord, Baptism, and His power, not only that you may be in a holy order, but also that you yourself may be holy. But He does so in such a way that you say: **“I am not holy through myself but through Christ’s blood, with which I have been sprinkled, yes, washed in Baptism, and also through His Gospel, which is spoken over me daily.” Thus there is nothing laudable about that stupid, false, and harmful humility which makes you want to say that your sins prevent you from being holy. That would be a denial of Christ’s blood and Baptism; that would deny that you have the Holy Spirit and are a member of the Christian Church, in which we are to assemble for the Gospel, for Baptism, and for the Sacrament.**

We must, however, distinguish between two types of holiness; or let us say that the word “holiness” must be understood in two different ways. In the first place, there is the holiness from and through ourselves. The monastic orders and self-chosen spirituality fall into this category. This amounts to no more than the word or name “holiness.” Basically, however, it is **falsehood and fiction**, and nothing but sin and stench in the eyes of God. For in us and from us grows nothing but unholiness and uncleanness. Whether I become a barefoot friar or a monk and work-righteous person of a different order, I remain a condemned sinner just as I was born from Adam. Therefore I will not call myself holy, neither of myself and for my own sake nor because of any other man; nor will I boast of holiness. I am holy because I can declare with unswerving faith and with an undaunted conscience: **“Even though I am a poor sinner, still Christ is holy with His Baptism, Word, Sacrament, and Holy Spirit.” This is the only genuine holiness given to us by God.**

**You ask:** “But how do I attain this? And what does the Holy Spirit have to do with me?” **Answer:** “He baptized me; He proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to me; and He awakened my heart to believe. Baptism is not of my making; nor is the Gospel; nor is faith. He gave these to me. For the fingers that baptized me are not those of a man; they are the fingers of the Holy Spirit. And the preacher’s mouth and the words that I heard are not his; they are the words and message of the Holy Spirit. By these outward means He works faith within me and thus He makes me holy.”

Here he employed the word “saints” freely with reference to all Christians. And in the early Christian Church it was long customary for its members to call one another saints. This custom should still prevail. For it is not arrogant on the part of Christians to call one another holy **because of Christ; it is glory and praise to God.** For by doing so we are not praising our own stinking work-righteousness; we are praising His Baptism, Word, grace, and Spirit, which we do not have out of ourselves but which have been given to us by Him.

Luther, M. (1999). *Luther’s works, vol. 24: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 14-16.* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 24, pp. 168–171). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.