

**Letter to Margaret Luther, my mother**  
**Christ's victory and an opportunity for gratefulness to God**

May 20, 1531

“My dearly beloved Mother! I have received my brother James’s letter concerning your illness. Of course this grieves me deeply, especially because I cannot be with you in person, as I certainly would like to be. Yet I am coming to you personally through this letter, and I, together with all the members of my family, shall certainly not be absent from you in spirit.

I trust that you have long since been abundantly instructed, without any help from me, that God be praised, you have taken God’s comforting Word into your heart, and that you are adequately provided with preachers and comforters. Nevertheless I shall do my part too and, according to my duty, acknowledge myself to be your child, and you to be my mother, as our common God and creator has made us and bound us to each other with mutual ties, so that I shall in this way increase the number of your comforters.

First, dear Mother, by God’s grace you well know by now that sickness of yours is God’s fatherly, gracious chastisement. It is a quite small chastisement in comparison with that which he inflicts upon the godless, and sometimes even his own dear children, when one person is beheaded, another burned, a third drowned, and so on. And so all of us must sing: **‘For Thy sake we are being daily killed and regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’** (Romans 8:36) This sickness therefore should not distress or depress you, On the contrary, you should accept it with thankfulness as being sent by God’s grace; you should recognize how slight a suffering it is – even if it be a sickness unto death – compared with the sufferings of his own dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did not have to suffer on behalf of Himself, as we have to do, but who suffered for us and for our sins.

Second, dear Mother, you also know the true center and foundations of your salvation from whom you are to seek comfort in this and all troubles, namely, Jesus Christ, the cornerstone. (1 Peter 2:6) He will not waver or fail us, no allow us to sink or perish, for He is the Savior and is called the Savior of all poor sinners, and of all who are caught in tribulation and death, and rely on Him, and call on His name.

Christ says: **‘Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.’** (John 16:33) If He has overcome the world surely He has also overcome the sovereign of this world (John 12:31) with all His power. But what else is the devil’s power but death, by which he has made us subject to himself, and held us captives on account of our sin? But now that death and sin are overcome, we may joyfully and cheerfully listen to the sweet words: **‘Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.’** We certainly are not to doubt that these words are indeed true. More than that, we are commanded to accept this comfort with joy and thanksgiving. Whoever would be unwilling to be comforted by these words would do the greatest injustice and dishonor to the dear Comforter, as if it were not true that He bids us to be of good cheer, or as if it were not true that he has overcome the world. If we acted thus, we would only restore within ourselves the tyranny of the vanquished devil, sin, and death, and oppose the dear Savior. From this may God preserve us.

“Let us therefore now rejoice with all assurance and gladness, and should any thought of sin or death frighten us, let us in opposition to this lift up our hearts and say: ‘Behold, dear soul, what are you doing? Dear death, dear sin, how is it that you are alive and terrify me? Do you not know that you have been overcome? Do you, death, not know that you are quite dead? Do you not know the One who says of you: ‘I have overcome the world?’ It does not behoove me either to listen to your terrifying suggestions, or heed them. Rather I should listen to the comforting words of my Savior: **‘Be of good cheer, be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.’** He is the victor, the true hero, who gives and appropriates to me His victory with this word: ‘Be of good cheer!’ I shall cling to Him, and to his words of comfort I shall hold fast; regardless whether I remain here or go yonder, I shall live my this word, for He does not lie to me.

You would like to deceive me with your terrors, and with you lying thoughts you would like to tear me away from such a victor and savior. But they are lies, as surely as it is true that He has overcome you and commanded us to be comforted.

Saint Paul also boasts likewise and defies the terrors of death: ***‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy victory? O hell, where is thy sting?’*** (1 Corinthians 15:54) Like a wooden image of death, you can terrify and challenge, but you have no power to strangle. For your victory, sting, and power have been swallowed up in Christ’s victory. You can show your teeth, but you cannot devour, for God has given us the victory over you through Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be praise and thanks. Amen.

By such words and thoughts, and by none other, let your heart be moved, dear Mother. Above all be thankful that God has brought you to such knowledge and not allowed you to remain caught in papistic (sic) error, by which we were taught to rely on our own works and the holiness of monks, and to consider this only comfort of ours, our Savior, not as a comforter but as a severe judge and tyrant, so that we had to flee from him to Mary and the saints, and not expect of Him any grace or comfort. But now we know it differently, because we know about the unfathomable goodness and mercy of our heavenly Father: that Jesus Christ is our mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), our throne of grace (Romans 3:25), and our bishop (1 Peter 2:25) before God in heaven, who daily intercedes for us and reconciles all who believe in Him alone, and who call upon Him (Romans 8:34); that He is not a judge, nor cruel, except for those who do not believe in Him, or who reject His comfort and grace; and that he is not the man who accuses and threatens us, but rather the man who reconciles us with God, and intercedes for us with His own death and bloodshed for us so that we should not fear Him, but approach Him with all assurance and call Him dear Savior, sweet Comforter, faithful bishop of our souls, etc.

To such knowledge I say God has graciously called you. You possess God’s seal and letter of this calling, namely, the gospel you hear preached, baptism, and the sacrament of the altar, so that you should have no trouble or danger. Only be of good cheer and thank God joyfully for such great grace! For He who has begun His work in you will also graciously complete it (Philippians 1:6), since we are unable to help ourselves in such matters. We are unable to accomplish anything against sin, death, and the devil by our own works. Therefore, another appears to us and in our stead who definitely can do better; He gives us His victory, and commands us to accept it and not to doubt it. He says: ***‘Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world’***; and again: ***‘I live, and you will live also, and no one will take your joy from you.’*** (John 14:19, and John 16:22)

The Father and God of all consolation grant you, through His holy Word and Spirit, a steadfast, joyful, and grateful faith blessedly to overcome this and all other trouble, and finally to taste and experience that what He Himself says is true: ***‘Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.’*** And with this I commend your body and soul to His mercy. Amen.

All your children and my Katie pray for you; some weep, others say at dinner: *‘Grandmother is very sick.’* God’s grace be with us all. Amen.”

Your loving son,  
Martin Luther

*Commentary: What makes this letter very special, is Margaret Luther was raised as a Roman Catholic and only understood salvation by the rules of the church, daily confession, purchasing indulgences, and doing good works. It is because of the insights of her son, Martin, that God’s grace is freely given to everyone with faith. He uses the words of Jesus in John 16:33 and St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:54 as the basis for his letter to his mother whose life on earth will end on June 30, 1531 at the age of 70. (1460 – 1531, nee Lindemann).*