What would people think if they could hear what you were thinking? What would people say about you if they knew the thoughts that went through your mind? At one time or another, all of us have thoughts of selfishness, hatred, lust; thoughts of trying to make ourselves look better than others, thoughts that would make us ashamed of ourselves if anyone else knew what we were thinking. If people knew what you were really thinking, what would they think of you? What would ***God*** think of you?

Bo Giertz in his book, The Hammer of God, writes about a pastor who was confronted with those questions one morning. It was early Sunday morning before Divine Service when Pastor Fridfeldt was called to the bedside of one his parishioners, Frans, who lay dying. Frans was known in the congregation as a godly man who always spoke quietly, but with mature understanding about spiritual things. As the pastor made his way to Frans' home, he thought that his ministering to the dying man wouldn't be all that difficult. After all, he knew that Frans was a faithful Christian and would no doubt be well prepared for his journey into eternity. When the pastor arrived at the dying man's home, he found that he was very sick and close to death. When he tried to talk to Frans, there was no sign of recognition. Occasionally the old man would mumble something, but for the most part he was unresponsive. Frans' daughter, Lena, was there at the bedside with her father. She told the pastor that when she arrived, she had asked her dying father if he was thinking about Jesus. He answered, "I can't think any longer, but I know that Jesus is thinking of me." The daughter cried. The pastor sat in silence. He thought that the truth that Jesus is thinking of the sick one would be like a comforting pillow on which to rest one's head when death is near. Just then some-thing startled the pastor. The daughter had heard it, too. Frans was speaking, speaking plainly and clearly. But the dying man was not speaking of Jesus, rather he was speaking vulgarities. He was speaking about things he had done when he had been in the military. In his dying hallucinations Frans began talking in a rough and crude manner. Once he even touched on religious matters saying in a clear, proud voice, "She does not pray as much as I."

The pastor couldn't help but think how alike we all are within. We all have the same jealousy, the same pride, the same unloving heart. The pastor began to think how it would go for Frans. As long as he was conscious, the dying man seemed to have faith, but beneath the thin shell of his conscious faith this dark evil still dwelt within the heart. In the next moment the pastor was gripped with a terrifying thought. What if ***he*** were to have a stroke and was lying

in ***his*** bed delirious? What words might come out of his mouth? Improper rhymes he had learned as a boy? Coarse and terrible stories that he had told as a high school youth? Not to mention his conceitedness and his eagerness to keep up appearance and make a good name for himself, all of which filled his soul. What if all of this were to burst forth in ***his*** dying moments when he was surrounded by family and friends who loved him and spoke well of him? What anguish would that bring to them? How would it go with ***his*** soul? Wouldn't all those who had ever heard him preach think that his Christianity was nothing but a sham hypocrisy?

Really, what ***was*** it other than that? Here he was supposed to bring comfort to this dying man, and he realized that he was as full of sin. The only difference was that he was still in possession of his full senses, and in the interest of his good reputation, he must cover up tightly all the sinfulness within. As for the poor old man, the lid had fallen off, and everything lay bare. The thoughts of Frans' heart and mind that he had been able to hide were now being made known. Soon the old man took a series of deep breaths. His chin had fallen, and his mouth hung wide open.

Then... everything was still. He had died. The daughter tearfully asked the pastor, "Do you believe my father died a blessed death?" The question pierced the pastor's heart like a spear. What should he say? He had wanted to ask the same thing himself.

"God is very good," was his evasive reply. He tried to make his voice as reassuring as possible. Then he looked back at the clock. In 30 minutes, it would be time for church. It was Transfiguration Day and yet he felt as far away from the Mount of Transfiguration as anyone could. He should be thinking of his sermon, but he couldn't get his mind off of the dead man.

Death, he thought, could be so strange, even for a Christian. So much of the old sinful nature could be left in a man. If such a man could be saved, on what grounds would it be? His faith? But that, as they had seen, was gone at the same moment his consciousness was clouded; and under-neath it all lay sin, like rotted wood underneath the floor covering. That evil nature was there to the very end.

What about himself? Didn't he have the exact same corrupted nature as the old man? Wasn't the only difference that at this moment, his will and thought had stretched a thin coating of faith across the darkness of his sin? As long as this lean, trembling layer of faith remained, he was a believing soul. What if that thin shell should be broken and shattered? What if hardening

of the arteries should set in, and he should be unable to direct his will and speech?

It was with those thoughts of anxiety and doubt that Pastor Fridfeldt entered Divine Service on that Transfiguration Sunday. He felt like a man walking to the execution chamber, unable to clear his mind of the dark gloomy thoughts of his own sinfulness and death.

As he read the Gospel lesson for Transfiguration Sunday, it began to be made clear for him:

1After six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. 3And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." 5He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." 6When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." 8And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only." (Matt. 17:1-8)

"They saw no one but *Jesus only.*" Those words hit home. The pastor realized that he had not been looking at Jesus, but rather at his own sinful life. He'd taken account of his sins and failures but had lost sight of Jesus. He had been directing his vision onto himself rather than onto Christ. That failure to look to *Christ* had been his undoing.

It is a blessed thing when the faithful soul in prayer fixes his uplifted eyes on Jesus and Jesus only. It is blessed when he does not look around him to lay hold of his own scattered thoughts, nor behind him at Satan who threatens him with the thought that his prayers are of no use, nor within himself at his own laziness and lack of devotion. Instead, he looks to Jesus who sits at the right hand of God and goes to God on his behalf.

When faith is working in a person, it helps the person to stop looking at himself and see nothing but Jesus and Jesus only and what has been accomplished through His suffering and death.

In the same way God also doesn't see the sins of the person, but rather He sees His own dead Son who stretched out His arms on the cross to make payment for the sins of the whole world. The pastor realized that this then was the solution: ***sin always remaining yet always atoned for***. As the pastor

preached this, he realized that yes there was salvation for the old dying man and also for him. He pictured a large cross rising heavenward and overshadowing the whole community. The cross is an eternally valid and binding sacrifice, effective to cancel out God's judgment. It's a merciful love, stretching out its arms to evil hearts in which sin is still in motion.

Jesus and only Jesus was and ***is*** the answer. The same Jesus is the One, who once we have been brought to faith, works in our hearts, little by little, day by day, to transform our hearts and lives to live for Him. It's not found in our own self-disciplined, pious attempts, but instead it's found in believing in the transforming power of Jesus and Jesus only. As St. Paul wrote:

"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart." (2 Cor. 3:18-4:1)

Jesus and Jesus only-- He is the foundation of our faith. When your eyes are opened to see the state of your sins and the condemnation that you deserve, God wants you to see ***nothing else***, to ***believe*** nothing else, to ***build your hope*** on nothing else other than Jesus and ***Jesus only***. It is only through ***that*** Good News that a person can come to faith, because the Gospel deals with Jesus and Jesus only. Don't ask to be like this person or that person but pray that you may be like Jesus in His suffering, in His death, and in the hope of the resurrection. Don't attempt to imitate the gifts or the measures of grace God has given to ***them*** but walk in your ***Savior's*** footsteps and rejoice that Jesus and Jesus only has been given for you. Amen!