



Jesus, Refuge of the Weary

Text: Girolamo Savonarola (1454-1498)

Tune: Johannes Thommen (1711-1783)

When we look at the hymns contained in *e Lutheran Hymnal* we don't often think of Italian hymns. Especially with the German background of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, we think more of the German hymns. However, there are two Italian hymns in *e Lutheran Hymnal*, both of which are in the Lent section. The first is today's hymn, "Jesus, Refuge of the Weary" and the other is "Glory Be to Jesus."

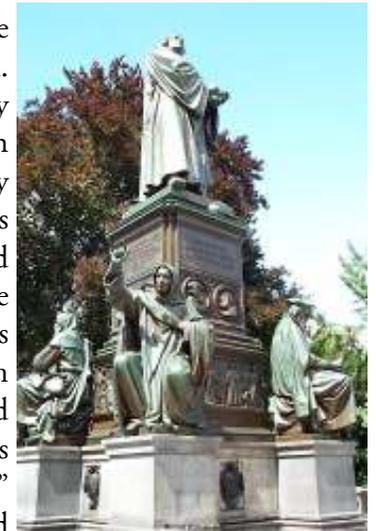


Girolamo Savonarola

Savonarola was born in 1454 to a family in Ferrara, a city in northern Italy. He was highly intelligent and initially studied philosophy and medicine. In 1474 on a trip he heard a sermon on repentance and resolved to leave behind his worldly ways and enter the religious life. He acted on this immediately, without telling his parents. He entered the Dominican Order at Bologna and immediately began to write against the depravity of the Renaissance, especially seen in his poem, "On the Decline of the Church."

While at the monastery he became highly trusted by the leadership and was entrusted with the instruction of the novices, the newest men at the monastery. In 1481 he was sent by his superior to Florence to preach. Now in the center of the Renaissance, his opposition to the immoral life becoming prevalent was more noticeable. His preaching was often directed against the court of Lorenzo de Medici. Though few were impacted by his preaching, he kept on. In 1486 he began preaching on the Book of Revelation and became highly absorbed in ideas about God's judgment of his own era, especially against the Church for its seeming complicity

with the immorality of the age. He predicted a reformation of the Church. By 1496 he was preaching openly against the Roman Catholic Church and he was excommunicated on May 12, 1497. However, he ignored this excommunication and continued preaching and even conducted the Christmas Mass that year. His preaching and actions caused such an uproar that he was eventually executed on May 22, 1498 for "the enormous crimes which he had committed." However, because of his prediction and calling for a reformation in the Church, he is often referred to as a forerunner of the Reformation, and a statue of him is at the feet of the statue of Martin Luther in Worms. Next to Savonarola are other forerunners of the Reformation—Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, and Jan Hus.



Savonarola at Luther's feet in the monument at Worms.

Little is known of the tune's composer, Johannes Thommen, other than that he was the compiler of the *Musikalischer Christenschatz* in Basel in 1745.

The hymn, "Jesus, Refuge of the Weary," while it fits with Savonarola's theme of the immorality of his age, is also a good Lenten hymn for our personal reflection. In stanza one we ask ourselves what kind of sins Our Lord sees us commit. However, the comfort is there that although we sin, "upon the cross extended," Christ "didst bear the sin of all." In the second stanza we are confronted with the sins we commit, though we know the price Christ paid for them. However, we again see the Love of Christ that even though we sin, His "sinless death hath brought us life eternal, peace, and rest" and this is the only thing that "calms the sinner's stormy breast." Finally in stanza three we ask that the Holy Spirit call to our constant remembrance Christ's crucifixion so that we turn from our sin and remember Christ Crucified until we stand in glory, "parted never from the blessed Savior's side."