Ash Wednesday
Rolling Meadows - 1965

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 23: 34 Father, Forgive them, for they know not what they do.

THE WORD OF INTERCESSION

If we know Jesus Christ at all, we expect Him to pray — especially here in the very midst of the worst that men and devils could do to Him. I am confident that I would have prayed as well. Let things get bad enough - let sorrow and suffering come - and anyone with any spark of memory with regard to the Christian faith sobs out some kind of prayer for help. But here we see how fully Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord for us. His first prayer is not for Himself - for some opium from God whereby His pain would be eased - some super-strength whereby He would be enabled to continue to the bitter end - some explanation whereby the awful evidence of hell all about Him might be given some kind of meaning. He prayed not for Himself in the midst of this hell, but for those who had created this hell for Him. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Jesus has the right to pray this way, and He knows it. You remember the Prodigal Son - how he came to his father and demanded that he give him what was his - even though it really was not his - and how the father gave it to him out of pure love. Jesus here goes to His Father and asks: Give Me, Father, what is Mine! And He has the right. That is why He is hanging there - in order that He might have that right. Ask of Me, God had said, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance. I will give Thee whatever Thou wilt, for Thou art My beloved Son in whom I am well please. But, you see, He thinks not of Himself at all - only of us. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

The great question for you and me to answer is whether we are included in this prayer of Jesus which the Father is compelled to answer because of Him who prayed it. This is a matter of faith. If we would be included in this prayer, we must also be included in its condemnation. God cannot lift us up, not even at or with the Cross, unless we are first made one with the Cross. God cannot make us alive unless the Cross has first killed us. How easy it is for us to sit comfortably in this Church tonight and conclude that we, of all people, are

completely unrelated and uninvolved with the events at Calvary. Ever so easily and ever so smugly our proud hearts are quick to condemn and criticize them -- Judas, and Caiaphas, and Pilate, and Herod, and the sadistic soldiers, and all the rest of them. And by contrast how difficult it is for us to admit and confess that we were involved and we are involved - we crucified Him - and He is praying for us: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

They know not what they do. This is our sin, as it was their sin. Always we are interested in something less than being totally guilty before God, less than guilty of crucifying His Son and labeling Him a blasphemer who deserved to die. They know not what they do. This is the thing that Jesus wants God to forgive them. This was not merely petty ignorance! This was deliberate ignorance - ignorance where there should have been knowledge, because Jesus had given the knowledge. This was darkness where there should have been light, because Jesus had made it clear that anyone who followed Him would not walk in darkness but would have the light of life. This was the damnable perversion of determined resistance against God, because Jesus had openly shown and perfectly declared God as the God who loves us all.

What an indictment of man! They know not what they do! This is the one thing that man is always so sure of - that he knows what he is doing. After all, did he not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Wasn't his whole quest for knowledge a quest whereby he would be like God? And this is where it all ends up: Hanging God on the Cross, despising God, rejecting God, spitting on God! This is what man (is doing) does in his insistence that he knows full well what he is doing!

Do we know what we are doing - even when we sit here beneath the Cross - even when we meditate upon the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do we know what we are doing in our sitting down to eat and to drink and in our rising up to play and in our getting out to work? Do we know what we are doing in our relationships with one another, and in what we call our Church work, and

in the way we spend our time and our money? We are so sure that here we are gods - that this has nothing to do with the true and living God - that this is something so fully under our control that we can decide for ourselves and do as we please. This is the essence of sin: to enthrone self and our own way, and to dethrone God and His way. This is what happens when we will not take God's Word for it, when we will not let God's Word bring Christ into our lives -- we send Him out again to the Cross, the only place left for Him if there is no room in our hearts. We crucify anew the Lord of glory, and we know not what we do because we are so sure that we know what we are doing! We know not what we do because we are so sure that this is the life and this is the way life must be lived, and you can't sit under a Cross all the time. We know not what we do, because we are so determined to indulge ourselves at all costs and to squeeze the last drop out of self-gratifying pleasures! If the crucified Jesus would not pray for our forgiveness - what would be the judgment? These things were done in the Green Tree, and He perished - what would be done in the dry? Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!

Jesus is praying for all those who did that to Him! If I am to be included in His prayer, I must also be included among those who did that to Him. This is the insight into our lives and our daily actions and our little faults -- our snide remarks, and our ongoing jealousies, and our meager response to God's love. This is the insight into our petty grudges against those who have hurt us -- into our flimsy excuses for staying away from Church, and worship, and the Lord's Supper whereby God would make us fully and totally committed to Him. Either I see these things as having brought this woe on Christ, or I am not in this prayer for forgiveness. Either I see these things as nailing the Son of God to the Cross and causing Him this unspeakable agony, or they are not forgiven, however small I may think that they are.

Do you want this prayer to apply to you? Then there is some admitting that you must do and some praying that you must offer up on your own. That's

why we are here - and here is the one place where we don't have to be ashamed to own up to it all. Here is the one place where we can let down all defenses and barriers and openly confess what we know in our hearts and what is revealed by the Cross with regard to our real being. Look again at the Crucified Lord. Hear Him pray for all who did this to Him: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

A man stood in an art gallery gazing at a painting of the crucified Savior. Finally, he sighed aloud: I love Him, my Savior! Another man, standing close by, heard the confession, put his arm on the man's shoulder and said: I, too, love Him. Before long, almost all who had come to view the painting of the Crucified stood united in silent confession: I love Him, my Savior! As I look at the Crucified tonight, and hear Him pray for me: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do, I want you to know that I love Him, my Savior. And I pray that every one of you will join me in the silent confession - aware of your unworthiness: I live Him, too, my Savior. Amen.