Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to thy Cross I cling
Naked come to thee for dress
Helpless look to thee for grace
Foul I to the fountain fly.
Wash me, Saviour, or I die

Good Friday - Tre Ore
St. Paul / Sarasota, FL
April 13, 1990

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 23: 39 - 43:

> ONE OF THE CRIMINALS WHO WERE HANGED RAILED AT HIM, SAYING, "ARE YOU NOT THE CHRIST? SAVE YOURSELF AND US!" BUT THE OTHER REBUKED HIM, SAYING, "DO YOU NOT FEAR GOD, SINCE YOU ARE UNDER THE SAME SENTENCE OF CONDEMNATION? AND WE INDEED JUSTLY; FOR WE ARE RECEIVING THE DUE REWARD OF OUR DEEDS; BUT THIS MAN HAS DONE NOTHING WRONG." AND HE SAID, "JESUS, REMEMBER ME WHEN YOU COME INTO YOUR KINGLY POWER." AND HE SAID TO HIM, "TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

This may be Friday the 13th, but it was a Good Friday for one man rescued like a brand from the burning from the depths of death & hell.

There is a theological axiom which says, "Always look at an individual in terms of his or her potential -- look not at what that person is or has done, but look at what he or she, by God's grace & power and redeeming love, can still become."

The penetent malifactor is a case in point. He has listened with open ears to Jesus' first Word from the cross. He has listened, and he has heard, and even more importantly he has believed that this first Word is for him too. "Father," Jesus had cried, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." With eyes of faith he sees that this Jesus is nailed up to the cross -- nailed up like he was -- not to somehow procure for him and the soldiers and the chief priests, the scribes and Pharisees, and all the rest of them -- He was nailed up not to somehow procure for mankind some sort of nebulous entity called the forgiveness of sins. Rather, this malefactor sees clearly that the whole point of Jesus' death on the cross is that this is HOW HE is the Forgiver.

There is no forgiveness in which the Forgiver does not bear the cost - takes into Himself the hurt. That is the only way you can stop the cycle of Retribution. Jesus stops the cycle by not retributing. He does not pay back. He bears the hurts.

Out of the corner of his already swollen eyes, this repentant thief, watches the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. He hears the scoff & ridicule and distain of his fellow

malifactor who in his self-centered blasphemy and unbelief & save your own skin attitude wants Jesus to work some magic and save them all from this agonizing suffering, pain and death of crucifixion. He listened as this other one mocked & railed at Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" He wants this other one to see and hear what he is seeing and hearing. And He dares to confront -- dares to appeal to his conscience if he has one -- hoping against hope that this same divine insight will come to him too. "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward for our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."

"A stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." Paul calls Christ and the Crucifixion in his letter to the Corinthians, "but to those who are being saved it is the power of God." The Cross with its attendant suffering is the price Christ pays to bring us back to Paradise. Here it is that He suffers not just at the hands of a loveless world but as the Sin-Forgiver to bear the hurt. "He who loves a hundred has a hundred woes. He who loves ten has ten woes. He who loves none has no woes," "says Buddah -- and therefore in the place of love Buddha enjoins his followers to a kind of impersonal and invulnerable benevolence. But The God who is in Jesus loves no matter what the cost because that is the innermost secret of His Nature. The Love of God! - It passes Knowledge! God Himself breaks apart like the unsplitable atom - His wrath and sin & His Love meet on Calvary - and the Dividing Wall of hostility comes tumbling down like the walls of Jericho
So it is that this dying malefactor dares to cry from the depths and makes his eleventh hour plea, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your hingly power"..... Remember me! .....It is the human cry of the ages.

And Jesus says, "I will." Do you catch how preposterous the whole scene is -- from the earthly point of view? -- Two men on a gallows - the One crowned with thorns and claiming to be a King; the other a criminal and affirming the others' kingship.

Back three years ago when I stood in this pulpit and preached on this same text I said, "This is the absurdity and the audacity of a God who adorns the sky at sunrise and sundown with colors no decent painter would dream of putting together on the same canvass -- the absurdity of a God who keeps breaking back into the muck and mire, dirt and filth of our world -- the proposterousness of a God who is born in a cave only to grow up and die on a cross between two crooks.

"I will," He says, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise!" He gives forgiveness, He does. He is the King of new beginnings. He gives life! He makes whole - and if you are bold enough and humble enough to ask, You too will be with Him in Paradise!

This, after all, is the absurdity and the audacity of the Christian Faith! "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting!"

Jesus, remember us even when we do not remember You! Look at us as to what in your grace and love & power You can still make us.

Jesus, remember us, for your mercy's sake.

Amen.

I hold Thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes,
Shine thru the gloom & point me to the skies;
Heaven's morning breaks, & earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide & me.