Good Friday
Rolling Meadows - 1964

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 27: 24-26 When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them; and when he had scourged Jesus he delivered Him to be crucified.

ARE YOU INNOCENT OF THE BLOOD OF THIS JUST MAN?

Another Good Friday finds the world less ready than ever before to recei Christ and acclaim Him Redeemer and Lord. The whole black, ugly scene involves so much of us and our world - God in His love and mercy and grace - Man standing prou in his sin and his hate, determined to excuse himself and whitewash his actions. You can see it all along the Way of Sorrows - the blood-dripping anguish of Gethsemane, the open court of the Sanhedrin, the lying witnesses, the mocking soldiers, the clowning king, the weak Roman governor, the disciples fleeing off into the night - these witnesses of His miracles and His glory and His love - not one of them faithful, not one of them loyal or true to their discipleship. This is the way it was - and this is the way it is still. Most of us go our way without feeling the full horror of our sin. We have heard Him say that He is a King, but we make a mockery of it. We forget, as they forgot, that He is coming again and all His Holy Angels with Him to judge the living and the dead.

Tonight the message is clear: We must not forget! And if we do forget, we must repent and love Him and serve Him again. His blood will either be on us and on our children for our cleansing and help and healing - or it will be on us and on our children to our eternal judgment and condemnation. Not a single one of us is excluded - not one of us is innocent of the blood of this just Man!

Look at Pontius Pilate. He played this game of buck-passing to its horrible and hellish end. Our Text tells the story: When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tulmult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.

Pilate understood very well that Jesus had been delivered into his hands out of envy. The historical record makes it clear that the governor made a number of serious attempts to have Jesus released. He cross-examined Jesus several times, becoming more and more convinced that He was innocent. Again and again he announced his intention to release Jesus, but was hooted down by the mob. With some political sagacity Pilate suggested that the Sanhedrin, the religious council, pass judgment on Jesus, knowing full well that this body had no legal authority to impose the death penalty. Failing in this attempt, he appealed to sentimentality, scourging Christ with leather thongs and refusing to intervene when the soldiers placed a crown of thorns on His head. As a final resort the governor took advantage of the custom to release a minor prisoner in connection with the Passover Festival as a sign of the governments goodwill and generosity. In this case, however, Pilate offered not a minor prisoner but a seditionist guilty of murder and rebellion. But the crowd kept on shouting, Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Let Him be crucified - and they asked for the release of the murderer, Barabbas.

You ask yourself, How is it possible for people to forget how good He was how He helped and healed, the great miracles He did, how He made their dead to rise again. You wonder how people like the Scribes and Pharisees could arouse the people to such hate. But there it is - the same as it has been a thousand times since then. There is no place where anyone can hide from hate when he forgets the love of God.

Pilate could find no way out. When he saw that he was getting nowhere, but rather that a riot was developing, he took water and washed his hands in a basin before the crowd, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person. Then he delivered Jesus to be crucified. Pilate was fully aware that what he was doing was wrong. This fact troubled him personally, but he was not about to let it interfere with his position. A riot was worse than the death of an innocent man, he reasoned. Better to let justice take a vacation with one lone prisoner than to throw a whole country into possible chaos. So he took the only action he considere

possible under the circumstances and washed his hands of the whole nasty matter.

The truth is that every one of us has at one time or other been in the same boat with Pilate. Like Pilate, we close our eyes to the little dishonesties, the unimportant duplicities, the ready willingness to put up with less than what is right, and the hidden deceptiveness that so often motivates our actions. It is not my fault, we say, that the world is in such a mess. It is not my fault that atomic bombs had to be dropped on the Japanese cities or that the threat of atomic warfare hangs over the entire world today. It is not my fault that the president of the United States was shot and murdered. It is not my fault that food has to be destroyed while half of the world is starving. This is part of the structure of things, we say, and I wash my hands of it. It is not my fault that cheating appears to be necessary in school or in business and that the complexity of income tax reports offers the temptation of falsifying returns. It is not my fault that this is a world of dirty jokes and suggestive movies, of cheap cursing and swearing It is not my fault that people have to pursue a set a materialistic values in order to keep up with the Joneses. It is not my fault that some people never get a chance, no matter how hard they work, because if the situation were reversed they would probably be treating me in the same way. It is not my fault that my husband or wife or children do not come to church or worship or partake of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. You can hardly expect me to make myself uppopular, to take an uncomfortable stand for what is right, and honest, and true, to sacrifice my position, to nail myself to the cross with the condemned Jesus. Of this whole business I wash my hand. It is no concern of mine.

There are two legends which sum up beautifully all that is involved for us at Calvary. The first legend concerns Veronica, the Jewish maiden who freed herself from the overwhelming pressure of the crown along the Way of Sorrows in order to wipe the perspiration from our Savior's brow. Out of gratitude for such love, our Lord left the imprint of His Image on her veil. It is only a legend, but the meaning is clear. Whoever looks into the Face of Jesus with faith and love,

to him He gives the image of the Thorn Crowned Head as the abiding treasure of his heart. This must become our most precious possession and endless prayer: On mine heart, imprint Thine Image.

The other legend tells of that poor citizen of Jerusalem, Ahasverus. Jesus sank down for a moment on his doorstep and held onto the door posts. Violently he insisted that Jesus had to leave and get away from him. According to th legend, Jesus is supposed to have told him, So you shall wander without rest over the whole earth until I come again on that last great day. The legend of the Wandering Jew has been repeated over and over again, but he is actually only a symbol of all men who have rejected Him - have locked their doors against Him - have despised His great love and refused Him rest. Without rest - Why? Our Lord Himself says, He that believeth on the Son has everlasting life; but he that believetl not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

You see, no one can escape the responsibility of saying Yes or No to Jesus - the decision as to whether or not we will take up our cross and follow Him. The way is not easy - you will be hated, & mocked, & persecuted, & perhaps even crucified for being His disciples. But what does it matter? We can afford to lose all else - but not this. Tonight you kneel at the altar, and in the Holy Communion you become partakers of all He has done for you - all of His love, and goodness, and forgiveness - you receive His very body and blood given and shed for you. Here is help and strength and courage to be all that you have promised to be. And this you must know: His blood is upon you - you are not innocent - His blood is upon you and now given to you in the Sacrament either for life or for death, for blessing or for cursing. May you, like Veronica, take the image of our Lord into your life, imprinted foreve on your hearts. Then this will be not a Black Friday - but a Good Friday for you - now & forever. Luther said it well long ago: There are only two places where the burden of your sin can rest - either on Him Who bore them for us, or on you - to destroy you. Amen.