2ND WEDNESDAY IN LENT
Holy Cross, 1993

REV. CARL F. THRUN

IN NOMINE JESU

ST. LUKE 22: 39-53

THE BARBED CROSS

The theme for our meditation is "THE BARBED CROSS!" The dictionary definition for a "BARB" is "A POINT PROJECTING BACKWARD ON A SHARP WEAPON, AS ON AN ARROW, FISHHOOK, OR SPEAR, INTENDED TO PREVENT EASY EXTRACTION." There is no mistaking the fact that there was "NO EASY EXTRACTION" of any of the PEOPLE mentioned in our text from JESUS' LOVE! Nor is there any "EASY EXTRACTION" of any one of us from JESUS' LOVE! So much does He want to ENFOLD AND BLESS! So much does He CARE!

There is obviously NO WAY to MEASURE the PAIN and the AGONY OF THAT NIGHT in the GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE. As Matthew tells the story, they are ALL TIRED and BONE WEARY when Jesus tells them, "MY SOUL IS EXCEEDING SORROWFUL, EVEN UNTO DEATH!" Then He asks the disciples to STAY AWAKE and WATCH WITH HIM while He goes OFF TO PRAY! ..... One thinks of the STIRRING and NOBLE WAY others have met their DEATHS --- the COMPOSURE OF SOCRATES as he raised the HEMLOCK to his lips -- the HIGH EXALTATION OF JOAN OF ARC as they bound her to the stake -- or NATHAN HALE'S, "I ONLY REGRET THAT I HAVE BUT ONE LIFE TO GIVE FOR MY COUNTRY!" ..... JESUS sounds like NONE OF THEM. Maybe it is because JESUS is so FULLY ALIVE -- yes, the SOURCE of LIFE AND BREATH ITSELF -- that the BARB OF THE CROSS and DEATH comes so unbearably.

Kneeling down there in the GARDEN, His PRAYER is, "FATHER, IF YOU ARE WILLING, TAKE THIS CUP FROM ME; YET NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS BE DONE!" The PULLING, TEARING BARBS are SO TORMENTING that His "SWEAT WAS LIKE DROPS OF BLOOD FALLING TO THE GROUND." He goes back to find SOME SOLACE in the company of His FRIENDS only to find them ALL ASLEEP when He gets there. NOT ONE OF THEM "ON GUARD WITH HIM!" NOT ONE OF THEM "WATCHING WITH HIM, SUPPORTING HIM!" He had COUNTED ON THEM and they LEFT HIM DOWN! Another "BARB" to tear at His SOUL!

And there are "MORE BARBS" just ahead. JUDAS has led the AUTHORITIES to the GARDEN. He has PREARRANGED A SIGNAL to indicate which the the MEN standing there in the DARK was JESUS. The WAY HE SIGNALED, of course, was by GOING UP TO JESUS and KISSING HIM. .....When DANTE came to write his "INFERNO" it was because of "THIS KISS" that he placed JUDAS in the NETHERMOST CIRCLE OF HELL -- his TORMENT being to SPEND ETERNITY in the ICY LAKE OF COCYTUS while SATAN -- WINGED LIKE A BAT -- gnaws at his FROZEN FLESH.

But I suggest the "WORST BARBS" in life are not always OVERT. They often come very SUBTLY and UNEXPECTEDLY, especially from LOVED ONES and FRIENDS and ACQUAINTANCES. They are often ACTIONS which lack any REAL HEART or MEANING. "THIS PEOPLE DRAWS NIGH UNTO ME WITH THEIR MOUTH," laments Jesus, "AND HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME!"..... Speaking only for myself, I cannot even begin to COUNT the NUMBER OF TIMES I have said the "OUR FATHER" thoughtlessly -- just MEANINGLESS WORDS coming out of my mouth! Or HOW OFTEN I have KISSED MY DEAR WIFE GOODBYE and it was NOTHING MORE than a MECHANICAL GESTURE -- more of a "KISS OFF" than a KISS. The same is true for HANDSHAKES and HUGS -- how often they are EMPTY GESTURES. And when it comes to "STANDING UP FOR JESUS" and "SPEAKING UP FOR HIM" in a world that still wants to DENOUNCE HIM and CRUCIFY HIM -- well, I'M GUILTY of all too often JUST STANDING BY and SAYING NOTHING IN HIS DEFENSE! No wonder the Scriptures say HIS SOUL is "PIERCED THROUGH WITH MANY SORROWS" These are the DEEP AND INTENSE "BARBS" which continue to PIERCE HIS SPIRIT in our own time.

Jesus resigns Himself to the FATHER'S WILL on our behalf! Like a LAMB He ENDURES THE "BARBS" and is "LED TO THE SLAUGHTER" of Crucifixion! So much does HE LOVE US! So much does He want to CLAIM US FOR HEAVEN and NOT FOR HELL! His HANDS ARE RAISED to ENFOLD US and BLESS US! (In contrast I am reminded of DOSTOEVSKI'S FATHER ZOSSIMA, who said, "FATHERS AND TEACHERS, I PONDER, 'WHAT IS HELL?' I MAINTAIN THAT HELL IS THE SUFFERING OF BEING UNABLE TO LOVE."

The CHIEF PRIESTS and the TEMPLE SOLDIERS ~~and~~ are there with their SWORDS AND CLUBS. Jesus reminds them that He was WITH THEM DAILY in the TEMPLE COURTS. There is NO DOUBT in JESUS'MIND what they want to do with Him! There is NO DOUBT in JESUS' MIND what the KISS OF JUDAS MEANS! And the "CRUEL BARB" -- the HURTFUL REALITY is that IT IS THE CHIEF PRIESTS and the SOLDIERS AND THE ELDERS and JUDAS and ALL THE REST OF THEM and ALL OF US that He is prepared to GO TO THE CROSS AND DIE FOR! ..... JUDAS is only the FIRST of a PROCESSION OF BETRAYERS two thousand hears long. And if JESUS were to EXCLUDE JUDAS from His LOVE and FORGIVENESS, to ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER He would have to EXCLUDE ALL OF US!

Maybe this is what is on JESUS' MIND as He stands there in the GARDEN that night --- as He He feels HIS FRIEND'S LIPS graze His CHEEK -- as He feels the "BARBS" pierce His SOUL. It is another of His LAST TIMES! He has eaten His LAST MEAL, and this is the LAST TIME He will ever feel the TOUCH of ANOTHER HUMAN BEING EXCEPT IN TORMENT! Here are TWO OLD FRIENDS embracing in the Garden -- because they BOTH KNOW they will NEVER SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN! Talk about PAINFUL BARBS! Talk about REDEEMING THE TIME while we are still in the Way with HIM! Amen.

Let us seek the Lord while He ~~may be found~~ is near