2nd Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows -- 1977

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

ST. LUKE 22: 39-46

All of us have learned how difficult it is to understand the SORROW and SUFFERING of another person. And to try to go BEYOND UNDERSTANDING to FEELING is even more difficult. When TRAGEDY strikes a friend, we can and should be SYMPATHETIC. We should SUFFER with that person.... But we have also learned that no matter HOW HARD we may TRY, we can really never enter the INNER RECESSES of another person's HEART. We may express our SYMPATHY -- but words always seem FEEBLE and WEAK. The LAST & deepest MEASURE of SUFFERING and SORROW is beyond our reach -- and we are not able to CROSS THE FINAL BARRIER between THEIR LIVES and OURS.

The reason why I mention this is because the TASK we have set before us tonight is to TRY TO UNDERSTAND as clearly as we possible can THE SUFFERING OF A MAN. And to make matters even more difficult THIS SUFFERING MAN was not only MAN -- but also GOD. And we must try to UNDERSTAND HIS SUFFERING not only with our MINDS -- but with our HEARTS. We must really SYMPATHIZE WITH -- SUFFER WITH -- at least part of HIS SORROW. Some of HIS SORROW must become OUR SORROW -- and some of HIS PAIN OUR PAIN!

If you ask, "Why must this be so?" there is only one answer. The SUFFERING MAN in the Garden WAS and IS our Savior. ALL OF US were IN HIS HEART that night in a way we will never completely understand this side of eternity. But the fact remains -- YOU and I

were a part of the AGONY of Gethsemane. The SIN which we committed SO EASILY and SO CARELESSLY yesterday or today was in that Garden. It was the BASIC, ULTIMATE, and TERRIBLE REASON for the "drops of blood" -- the SWORD IN HIS HEART -- the AGONY OF HIS SOUL.

Certainly there has NEVER been anything like this in the LONG and BITTER STORY OF MAN. It may be that for SOME OF US there will be in the years ahead some DARK VALLEYS -- some AGONY OF SOUL -- some GREAT LONELINESS. BUT WE SHALL NEVER KNOW ANYTHING LIKE THIS! Here our Lord JESUS CHRIST lies on His face beneath the olive trees. His "SWEAT" falls like "DROPS OF BLOOD" upon the earth! He is experiencing ALL THE WORLD'S ACHING SADNESS -- this DRYING UP OF THE FOUNTAINS OF LIFE -- this UNIMAGINABLE SICKENING OF SOUL! This was GOD and MAN suffering --- and GOD CAN SUFFER more than men.

OF DEATH OR DYING

In passing, let's be clear about one thing: JESUS WAS NOT AFRAID TO DIE! No one TOOK HIS LIFE from Him. As ST. JOHN says, "He laid it down freely." And if we look closely at HIS PRAYER in the Garden, we see that He speaks to His Father NOT ABOUT TOMORROW or about WHAT WOULD HAPPEN ON FRIDAY AFTERNOON. Rather, He is IN AGONY over something that is happening RIGHT NOW -- THIS HOUR -- "THIS CUP!" He is asking His Father in Heaven to HELP HIM in the CLIMAX of the ATONING LIFE AND WORK which would go on until

Friday afternoon. HIS AGONY of BODY and MIND and SOUL was over something that STRUCK HIM under the OLIVE TREES while the DISCIPLES WERE SLEEPING -- and the WORLD WAS AT SILENT MIDNIGHT -- and the UNCALLED LEGIONS OF ANGELS LOOKED ON IN HORRIFIED WONDER!

All of this boils down to the OLD, OLD STORY OF SIN AND GRACE. What struck JESUS in the Garden -- PIERCED HIS SOUL -- PAINTED INCREDIBLE AGONY ON HIS FACE -- and MADE HIM "SWEAT BLOOD" was S I N ! There were VOICES - far and unheard - in the Garden that night: "FOR OUR SAKE GOD MADE HIM TO BE SIN WHO KNEW NO SIN." .... "THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL." ... "BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD." In some MYSTERIOUS WAY known only to God, all the TIMELESS SIN and SORROW of ALL LIFE AND HISTORY gathered in His soul that night in the Garden. ALL OF IT WAS THERE! NONE OF IT WAS MISSING! HE BORE IT ALL -- AND HE BORE IT ALONE! NO ONE WAS WITH HIM IN THE WINEPRESS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT! ..... HE WAS SIN! HE WAS SIN AND EVIL INCARNATE DURING THAT HOUR! HE WAS SIN FOR US!

And having said that, we still shall never REALLY KNOW what it FULLY MEANS -- because this was one of the GREAT, UNIQUE EXPERIENCES of the GOD-MAN. And it is the HEART OF OUR ENTIRE CHRISTIAN FAITH -- the TOTAL TRANSFER OF SIN to the BLEEDING HEAD in the Garden and on the Cross.

There is, however, ONE THING we can understand. We may never FULLY GRASP its meaning FOR HIM -- but its meaning FOR US is perfectly clear. We can leave this church tonight QUIET, FREE, and FORGIVEN by our faith in HIS ATONING SUFFERING as OUR SUBSTITUTE. OUR FACES can now be CALM AND PEACEFUL because HIS FACE was TORN BY AGONY. We can LOOK UP TO GOD because He LOOKED DOWN into the LOWEST CORNER OF OUR HELL. Every EVIL THING that worries us -- every HIDDEN SIN -- every FAULT ---------- we can LEAVE IT ALL there in the GARDEN with Him! ..... HE TOOK CARE OF IT! IT IS HIS AND NO LONGER OURS!

No wonder we come to the COMMUNION TABLE to GIVE THANKS and to CELEBRATE! There is nothing else like this under the sun! THINK OF IT -- "HIS BODY GIVEN FOR US. HIS BLOOD SHED FOR US!" There is NO GREATER WAY for us to live now than to "LIVE FOR HIM WHO LOVED US AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR US." We must be resolved to HELP WHEREVER WE CAN -- and to GIVE AND LOVE until there is NOTHING LEFT TO GIVE and our LOVE is NAILED TO OUR OWN CROSS....,... The CROSS is NOW, and ALWAYS, the SIGN OF HIS AGONY FOR US and the SIGN OF OUR JOY IN HIM and OUR SALVATION. Amen.