2nd Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows - 1966

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

62-66 - KJV. IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew ~~26: 66~~ What is your judgment? They answered, "He deserves death."

THE CROSS AND MY INNOCENCE

In the Cross of Christ I glory, we sing, and if we have any idea at all of what we are singing, we must surely know that there is something heroic about such a glorying. It puts us into the noble company of St. Paul, who could look out over the mighty Roman Empire with all of its power madness and confront it wi the Cross of Christ because he was not ashamed of the Gospel. It puts us into th grand tradition of Stephen, who kept insisting on the glory of the Cross until th stones stilled his testimony and he was received by the Lord of the Cross whom he saw standing at the entrance of the open heaven. The Cross reveals us to one another - what kind of people we are. It shows us that we are not only people who meet under the Cross, not only people for whom the Cross means very much - bu actually people who share a common boast and hold out a united witness. The Cros of Christ is the only glory we would be known by, the only standing we seek befor God and men.

But, perhaps, when we begin to give it such a personal twist, we are no so sure that the Cross of Christ is so fully all that to us. The company of Paul yes, because that is indefinite enough not to call for any personal commitment; the noble army of martyrs, yes, because at present there is no power arraigned against us that would make us put our blood where our mouth is; membership in a congregation that exalts the Cross, yes, because that is still far enough removed from our daily life to make it just another promise in addition to our other promises, a promise that has religious meaning quite apart from our daily lifes. We don't want to go overboard on this sort of thing as though there were nothing else in life - as though there were nothing else to judge life by and to face life with and to interpret life under. If to glory in the Cross means to glory in it so exclusively that you don't glory in anything else - that nothing is done or contemplated except as it is done or contemplated under the Cross - well, that is something else, and we would be hypocrites if we said anything more.

And yet how else can we glory in the Cross of Christ except as we glory in nothing else besides? It still stands on the basis of no less than Christ's

own Word: You cannot serve two masters, for either you will love the one and hate the other, or else you will cling to the one and despise the other. For all of o efforts to do otherwise, you cannot serve God and mammon! If the Cross of Christ is not central to everything - then it is central to nothing, then we make it pla second fiddle and we stick it off into some dusty corner of our lives. If I glor in the Cross of Christ, then my life cannot be understood apart from it because without it my life has no glory. It has gone dead and flat just as surely as a light bulb that gives no light - just as surely as salt that has lost its taste and is now good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden underfoot of men.

To glory in the Cross means to plant it squarely in the center of life where men recognize it as our boldest claim. It means that there has been a re-arrangement of life, so much so that it really isn't the same life any more that it once was. All the things in which we once naturally gloried because they seem to have such attractiveness to us have lost their charm. This isn't a mere changing of our minds as we change our minds in a choice of hats. This is nothin less than a radical reversal, a complete about-face from what we once were, nothi less than personal death by which we die to what we once were and rise again to newness of life. This is the meaning of that paradox by which St. Paul interpret his own life: I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I no live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Without this, our glorying is not good, though we insist that it is a glorying in the Cross.

Now what are the practical implications for this kind of glorying in the Cross of Xt? ~~of all of this?~~ If we don't see it anywhere else, we must surely see it in the life of Peter. When the soldiers bound Jesus and led Him away to the High Priest, we read that all of His disciples forsook Jesus and fled, even Peter. But why even Peter? Surely we don't expect him to be some kind of superman who would be so very much different than the rest of the disciples, No, we don't think that he was a superman, but he himself thought that he was. Jesus had warned him that he and all the rest would be offended because of Him that very night. We don't hear too much from the rest of the dis-

ciples, but Peter protested loud and long that he would never be offended in Jesu even though he should die with Jesus.

Isn't this just what each one of us have said? Remember your confirmation - how you insisted before all who would listen that you would remain faithful to this Christ even unto death? Peter was also warned that though his intention was very good, his flesh was still weak, and the only way that he could offset its influence was to watch and pray. But Peter did not watch and pray, and s he fell into temptation, exactly the same temptation we fall into - not merely going to sleep now, although that is part of it, but actually denying Jesus, insisting that we do not even know Him.

What was behind all of this? Well, Peter, who had run away, no doubt figured that he had made quite a fool of himself after all his bragging. So he headed back to where Jesus had been taken bound before the High Priest, Caiaphas. What did he intend to do there? Confess Christ? Throw himself between Christ an His accusers and let himself be killed as evidence of his loyalty? The Scripture tell us that he followed afar off to see what the end would be. He merely wanted to be an onlooker, which means that he really did not want to get involved - except that here is one place where you are never merely an onlooker. You are involved - either on the side of Jesus or on the side of His accusers - either you are witnessing for Christ by insisting that you have no other life and you will really die before you give Him up, or by denying Christ as Peter did. Peter lift up his fists and swears, I never knew the Man. In saying this, he is saying just was Caiaphas and all the others were saying, He is guilty of death!

And we all stand beside Peter here. After all, there is a limit to one loyalty. You can talk all you want to about loyalty to Christ, but I must first look out for number # 1 - my life, my job, my family, my needs, my security, my opportunities, my property, my possessions. You can't buck the tide of crooked politics, crooked business deals, dishonesty, lying, cheating, immorality, gossip, drunkenness. If you can't lick 'em, join 'em. I ask you people to stand up and confess your Lord - to witness to His truth and love - I ask you what He means to

you and you will blush as I have blushed a thousand times and you will seek something else to talk about. It is so much easier that way. This makes no sharp demands on me! And we are doing just what Peter did. We are saying, Caiaphas, you are right! Members of the Sanhedrin, you are right! Listen to me, as God is my witness, I never knew the Man. But this I can tell you, He is guilty of death

On the other side of this God is speaking too. And He says exactly the same thing, He is guilty of death! The court of God is being held here, because the high priest, for all his abuse of his office, still acted on God's behalf. God was there behind the high priest, and Jesus was standing there for me - unles we have already forgotten that Jesus sweat blood in Gethsemane as He prayed that God's will might be done. And I was there before God because Jesus had declared under oath that He was truly the Son of the living God. That is what made Him guilty, my awful guilt. That is what shaped His Cross and brought Him to hell. He was guilty because He had really drunk the cup; He was guilty because He stood there fully in my place; He was guilty as hell itself is guilty because He was guilty with my guilt.

So Jesus turns and looks at me with eyes full of compassion, and love, and forgiveness. And now I know, as Peter knew, that I can stand before the righteous and holy God. I can stand there because Jesus took my guilt upon Himse His Cross, His guilt, His death, means the end of my guilt. It means nothing les than my innocence before God, my perfect innocence in the Christ who became guilt with my guilt. Under the spell of such love, what is there left to do but to go out with Peter and weep bitterly. And with these tears of repentance, there come now the new life. He becomes the heart and center of everything, our all in all, in whom we live and move and have our being. He is the First and the Last and everything in between. In the Cross of Christ I glory - You see, it is my Cross! Amen,