2nd Wednesday in Lent
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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 23: 42,43 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.

It was nine o'clock on Good Friday morning. It was probably a fair an warm spring morning when the procession finally reached Calvary. Perhaps a litt rain had fallen during the night, as it does so often in the Holy Land at that season of the year. The doves were circling above the hill. The birds sang in the olive trees beneath the city wall. It was a beautiful morning, a day for jo and hope. It was an unusually good Friday.

I am certain that our Lord saw all that. He who had watched the lilie of the field, the corn ripening for harvest, the moon standing above the valley the Kidron - He would surely see once more the world as God had made it, beautif and fair, a world of song and joy and hope, a world so far removed from the pain and tears and blood and hate with which the procession came to the little hill be yond the gates of the Holy City.

And there they crucified Him! He was surrounded once more by the stran continuing goodness of all God's creation except its crown, the body and soul of man, to which evil had come. The rest of creation was so beautiful and fair, but the heart of man was black with evil and sin. They began to dig the hole for the cross. The crosspieces were fitted. His young body was laid on the beams. One nail was hammered home, then the second and the third. His arms and feet were bound tight with ropes because the nails might not hold the body racked with pain Soldiers raised the cross upright. There was a dull thud as it fell into the hol His blood started to flow from His hands and feet. The aching, tearing pain of crucifixion began. There they crucified Him!

If we are really to see the meaning of the Cross, we must now go to Calvary and stand there with Him. This will be good for us. If ever the sinful, hateful heart of man stood out in shocking contrast with the holy, loving heart of God, it was on that first Good Friday. The entire Passion Story is the story of man's hate and sin and of God's love and forgiveness. No character whose name

appears in the list of those who were in that tragic, yet glorious drama, played his part altogether nobly. There were group sins: the people of Jerusalem rejec ed Christ, the members of the Sanhedrin illegally tried Him and condemned Him to death, the Roman authorities cowardly authorized the execution, the soldiers tre ed Christ inhumanely, the disciples were unfaithful to Him, the mob made fun of Him, and even the malefactors reviled Him. There were individual sins: Judas be trayed Him, Peter denied Him, Annas hated Him and sought to incriminate Him, Cai phas hated Him and viciously accused Him of blasphemy, Herod disdainfully dismis ed Him, Pilate publicly confessed that he was condemning an innocent Man to deat and Simon had to be compelled to carry His cross. As Christ looked about from t cross He saw a sea of bitter, angry, scornful faces. They were for the most part the faces of men who were hardened in their sins, who would not admit their need of forgiveness. O man, however, became aware of the blackness of his evil, sin-infested heart in re lation to the holiness of Christ, and like the Publican in the Temple he penitentl pleaded for mercy. He was one of the two malefactors who was crucified with Chri

We know little about Christ's companions on the cross. The little we d know has eternal significance. Tradition has given the penitent malefactor the name Dysmas and the other has frequently been called Testas. They had been companions in crime; the Bible calls them thieves. Both of them joined the mob in ridiculing Him who hung between them. Their mockery was a kind of smoke screen t hide from themselves the full awareness of their own guilt. Gradually the behavior of Christ made ~~made~~ a deep impression on Dysmas. Never had he met a man s noble. He began to recognize his own guilt. Never had he seen it quite so clearly. Penitently he confessed, We receive the due reward of our deeds. Humbly he pleaded, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. Christ turned and mercifully looked upon Dysmas with the promise, Verily I say unto thee, Today sha thou be with Me in paradise. Suddenly, instantly, the gates of heaven flew open for Dysmas, and he received the assurance of complete and full forgiveness. There were no conditions attached, no "if's". There was no purgatory to face. God neve

attaches any condition to forgiveness. He does not say, Your forgiveness will g into effect when you have met certain requirements. But for this penitent crimi nal there comes the promise: Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.

It is right here that we of the 20th Century come in. We are very muc inclined to sit smug and secure in our Christianity. It is entirely possible fo us to say with our lips, Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinn against Thee by thought, word, and deed, and yet not feel the significance of su a confession in our hearts. We feel that, by and large, we are fairly good peop Our friends are fairly good people. People of other races and nations may sometimes be bad, but not we ourselves. Or if we are unusually intelligent, we go be yond this to say that the notion of man's essential sinfulness is unscientific. We kid ourselves into believing that we must throw off this burden on man which has filled him with such a sense of guilt. We musttrust in the essential goodnes of mankind. We must believe in our power to remake our environment. We must try to lift ourselves by our bootstraps into a new and better world. Is it possible that our civilization is tottering because our society is blind to its immorality because it seeks to excuse rather than penitently to confess its violation of God Law? Modern man will not heed God's call to repentance as long as he does not recognize the reality of sin.

No man can stand for long at the foot of the Cross and not come face to face with the reality of sin. This is not a crowd of unreasonable, thoughtless men. This is a mob of bad men, evil men, who have come to crucify their God. Th young man hanging there is 33 years old. He had committed no crime. For three years He had been engaged in a tremendous mission of healing and love. He had gone about doing good. And yet they were now killing Him! The last thing He see of humanity before He dies is a mob of grinning faces. The last thing He hears i a curse. The last thing He knows is hate and pain. Now, all this does not square for one moment with our theories of progress, our shallow belief in the essential

goodness of humanity, and our false and fatal optimism concerning the destiny of the human race without God.

But once we admit our guilt and see the darkness of our sin - then we can look to the Cross and ask ourselves, Why is Christ haning there? By His gra we know that He is God. Since He is God, where are the legions of angels? What keeps Him on the wooden bed of pain? Three nails? Those slivers of metal forge by human hands cannot possibly pin down God. There must be something else which holds Him to His dying! Our Lord Jesus Christ is there on the cross because He wants to be there. He had wanted to hang there from the foundation of the earth It is neither the nails nor the new ropes that hold Him to His dying. It is just love and nothing else! It is the perfect love of the perfedt God and the perfect love of a perfect man. Here we are face to face with the friendship of God pouring itself out on a world of sin. Here we meet the miracle and the mystery of forgiveness. It is the restoration of fellowship between God and man.

There is an old legend to the effect that when news was brought to heaven that man had fallen away from God, the angels volunteered, one after another, to go down to earth and teach men how to live. But God always responded t their offer, No, that is not enough. At last the Son of God Himself came forth and was born as a human being, not merely to teach men how to live, but to take all the sins of all time up to Calvary and to atone for them. Accordingly, no matter how great may be the sin of which a man becomes guilty, if he will turn to the Cross and in faith behold the Savior, his sin will be forgiven.

So an unending chorus has been rising from earth to heaven, Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. There is only one thing we can do with sin. It will do us no good merely to tell others about it. It will do us no good to try to make up for it. It will do us no good to try to forget it. We must take it to the gracious Savior and give it to Him. Then we shall know the joy of His mercy and forgiveness. Then we shall be able to sing with David, Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Then we shall be able to go through life with a song in our heart, Bless the Lor O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; Who crown eth thee with loveingkindness and tender mercies. No one ever went to Christ while He lived on earth penitently to confess, I have sinned, and received an angry look or was denounced for his sin. The response of the Savior was always one of assurance, Thy sins are forgiven thee. Usually He added the admonition, Go and sin no more.

How many and how clear are the promises of God that tell of complete forgiveness! As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. When Christ looked upon the malefactor He forgave him completely, otherwise He would not have said, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.

The story of Christianity is always the story of people who have come back again to God - David crying in the night, Peter stumbling into the dark in tears, Paul on the road to Damascus, the publican pleading in the Temple, God be merciful to me, a miserable sinner, the malefactor calling from the cross: Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And always and forever they dash the tears from their eyes because now they see life and time and sin and death and hate and pain with the eyes of Him who looked at us from the Cross, saw us as we were and are, and loved us nevertheless. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us! In the sight of God we are all malefactors! May God give us the grace to admit it, penitently to take our stand with the dying thief, and turn to Christ with the humble plea, Lord, remember me. Then we too will hear him say in all the tenderness and love there is, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise!

Amen.