2nd Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows - 1965

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 23: 39-43 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man hath done nothing amiss. 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.

THE WORD OF PARDON

My Word shall not return unto Me void - So God had promised long ago through the prophet Isaiah. The Word of the Living God is a Living Word. Sharper than any two-edged sword it cuts to the core of a man's being - down to the very marrow. Always it is either a savor of life unto life, or death unto death. In no case does it ever return void.

So it was on Calvary between the two malefactors. So it is for us tonight. God, who was so fully involved here on Calvary; God, who here in a special way was keeping promise with His people, was also very much in action with each Word that fell from the lips of the dying Savior. Christ had just prayed, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do. Not only did the Father hear Christ's prayer so that all who see themselves as having anything to do with His hanging on the Cross can be forever sure of their forgiveness - but God also lets this Word of His Son in prayer bring forth immediate fruit for the comfort and encouragement of His people of all time. While these two thieves who were crucified with Jesus were so very much alike in their deeds which brought them to this end, they still were not the same. For one the prayer of Jesus became a Word of Life and Pardon - for the other it became a Word of Death and Condemnation. We are reminded of another Word of our Lord where He tells us that one will be taken and the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left.

Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. We dare never take the grace of God for granted - otherwise it is no longer grace to us. The last place we can ever presume is Calvary. Prayer - intensive prayer - is

called for here - prayer literally that comes out of the depths. Otherwise we fail to hear the judgment pronounced upon us for our not knowing what we do, an we will never seek the forgiveness which the crucified Redeemer holds out for us in His prayers.

We are reminded here also that simple punishment as punishment with pain and disgrace is perhaps a deterrent of a sort, but it never brings a man t God. The same is true of sickness, and tragedy, and tribulation. While Jesus was being mocked and spitefully entreated and spit upon, the two who were crucified with Him joined in the sport. And, mind you, they knew that they were dying, and still they could persist in their cruelty and blasphemy. Or was it that they were doing it in the name of their religion - that religion which was represented there by the priests and scribes and elders of the people? Was it that they were following the lead and pattern of their religious leaders and in this way were attempting to find favor with God - by going through the same motions? It is always dangerous in the name of religion to go through motions only. This was the history of Israel - the people who drew nigh unto God with their lips, honored Him with their mouth, while they kept their hearts far from Him. It is equally dangerous to go through the motions of worship here tonight without having the heart that must be expressed by the motions. Something like this is always mockery - pure and simple - a denial of Christ - an effort to gai favor with God when we are actually hanging in the same condemnation with every other sinner in the world - and we justly, because we have deserved it all and worse forever in hell.

One of the two heard the prayer of Christ from the Cross - Father, for give them - and paid attention to it. It worked faith in his heart - a truly great faith - because he turned to his fellow malefactor, rebuked him, and confessed his own sin as he did so. How many of us would openly and publicly admit what terrible sinners we are? We did it before in the general confession of sins, and this is where we must be careful that we are not merely going through

the motions. Sin seeks to have us alone and in the darkness. It may well be that we no longer realize what is involved, if an involuntary shudder does not pass through us as we confess that we are poor, miserable sinners, who are by nature sinful and unclean. Maybe we do not see ourselves hanging in the same condemnation with Jesus, but we justly because of what our lives have been.

The penitent thief not only rebuked his partner in crime and confessed his sorrow at his sin - he turned to Christ. God help us all to turn to Christ in exactly the same way: Lord, he prayed, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. As Robertson Nicoll has said, this malefactor was the only one in all the world who really believed in Jesus at that moment. Here was the only believer there was at the time, the only one who could look at the horror and the misery of that central Cross and pray, Lord, right into the teeth of the most firghtful other names that were being called out upon Him, right into the midst of the shame and the scorn that were being heaped upon Him. Here was one who saw what only faith can see - that the Cross was really a throne and that the One hanging there had a kingdom and was entering His kingdom in just this way. Only this thief had faith enough in this broken, bleeding, wounded, defeated, thorn-crowned, fly-infested figure to believe that one day he would inherit a kingdom. And the thief does not presume. He doesn't look for all sorts of advanced guarantees, all sorts of assurances as to whether it will be worth his while. He doesn't ask all sorts of questions which must first be answered. He throws himself upon the mercy of Him who prayed for the forgiveness of those who did that to Him, and asks only to be remembered.

This prayer of the dying thief brought forth the second Word from the Cross: Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise. 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 thief there comes the promise: Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise. Christ swears

an oath that what He is promising will actually be the case. This very day - before the sun goes down upon this scene of unspeakable horrow and suffering, with the breaking of the thief's bones - this Lord, to whom he appealed, would take him into Paradise - the hope of every pious Jew - the heaven of God. Nor would the thief have to fear going into the presence of God. He would be there with Christ, who was crucified with him and for him. He was only a thief, but one of whom we are sure where he is because of Christ's own dying oath - because he put himself under the prayer for forgiveness.

Lord, remember me! This is all that I pray. In life and in death I want no higher assurance than this - that my Lord will remember me. Lord, speak it to me again now, and shout it into my heart when I go to die: Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise. Amen.