5th Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows - 1968

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 27: 15-23 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?".... Now the chief priest and the elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let Him be crucified." And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let Him be crucified."

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS WHO IS CALLED CHRIST? This is the question Pilate asked of himself and of everyone around him. And the same question confronts each one of us in a thousand various ways every day. WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS WHO IS CALLED CHRIST?

No doubt, some of those people who gathered around Pilate that fateful day had never seen the inside of a church - others were in church every day. One thing they all had in common: together they rejected this JESUS WHO WAS CALLED CHRIST - this man who claimed to be the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. Consciously they rejected Him - deliberately they sent Him to His death - and deliberately they chose to grant clemency to a confessed and convicted criminal.

It does not appear to have made much difference whether these people were religious or irreligious. One thing is clear - they were all united in a common bond. They all chose to release Barabbas and to crucify Jesus. There is a unanimity of evil here that is inescapable.

On the one side stands Barabbas. Everybody knows that he has been found guilty of causing riots. He is an insurrectionist, but even more than that he is a murderer.

On the other side stands Jesus. He is guilty too - guilty of being interested in people - guilty of showing mercy and kindness and compassion - guilty of living out His life in an effort to help people, to heal them, to forgive where others condemned, to love where others hated, to extend an open hand of friendship where others were ready to use clenched fists on their neighbors.

Only one man in the lot made even a stab at justice. Pilate knew - as did everybody else - that the one was guilty and the other was innocent. Even this pagan governor knew that what was taking place was not justice. But like any of the rest of us, he wanted public approval. He did not want to buck public opinion. Almost in desperation he cried out: WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS WHO IS CALLED CHRIST? And when the pressure was put on, he caved in. When the crowd shouted, CRUCIFY HIM, CRUCIFY HIM, Pilate finally agreed to let them have their way, and he gave Jesus up to their will. WHAT DIFFERENCE IS THERE, FINALLY, BETWEEN THE WICKED AND THOSE WHO CONSENT TO THEIR WICKEDNESS?

Pilate had enough experience as a public official to recognize that king Herod's contemptuous dismissal of Jesus was tantamount to acquittal of the Man. Openly, he declared himself convinced of the Prisoner's innocence. But when the going got tough and decisions had to be made which required backbone, Pilate caved in. WHAT DIFFERENCE IS THERE, FINALLY, BETWEEN THE MAN WHO DELIBERATELY DOES WHAT HE KNOWS TO BE WRONG AND THE MAN WHO HASN'T THE NERVE TO DO WHAT HE KNOWS TO BE RIGHT?

Let's get one thing straight—

The story of these events is told in the Scriptures, not to arouse hatred or contempt for the people who were there that day, but to remind all of us that we, such as we are, belong to that crowd. We understand these people only too well - because we are part and parcel with them. We know what it is to have our security threatened - our position jeopardized - our traditions violated - our ideas of good called into question - our popularity made precarious. We know how utterly selfish we can be, and how violently we react when somebody challenges what we consider to be our own private preserve. We know all about the idiocy that causes individual people, or even whole groups of people, not just to ignore the SON OF GOD, but to reject Him consciously in favor of the violent trouble maker. That scene is being re-enacted all over again in our own country and in every part of the world. WHAT DIFFERENCE IS THERE, FINALLY, BETWEEN THE MAN WHO DOES WHAT IS WRONG, KNOWING IT TO BE WRONG, AND THE MAN WHO FAILS OR REFUSES TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT, EVEN THOUGH HE KNOWS IT TO BE RIGHT?

uninvolved, non-committal attitude - Convict that case!

We are part of that scene. We belong, we do - all of us! There is in us a blindness that keeps us from seeing the truth about ourselves and about God. We walk away from the fact ~~of~~ that our own sins and we turn away from the love of God.

Here is a wife whose husband keeps poking fun at her for going to church, praying, and putting on holy airs. He accuses her of causing all the trouble in their home with all of her holy piety. Soon she stops praying, and worshiping, and coming to Holy Communion. Like Pilate she does it to keep the peace. But one way or another she has to answer the question: WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS WHO IS CALLED CHRIST?

Here is a man who engages in foul talk and dirty language at work just to be one of the boys. The whole business really leaves a sour taste in his mouth to say nothing of the scar it leaves on his soul. But his popularity is at stake. And he has the senseless feeling that somehow such abuse of the Holy Name will help to keep peace with whom he works. Nevertheless, the question keeps cropping up: WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS WHO IS CALLED CHRIST?

Here are indulgent parents who let their children grow up like weeds, refusing to assume the responsibility of discipline for and bringing them up in the nurture and admonishion of the Lord. They are too interested in their own selfish concerns to be bothered. They give in to tantrum keep peace regardless of the outcome. But the question is still there: WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS WHO IS CALLED CHRIST?

Here are teenagers who get mixed up in the wrong kind of company. It is too uncomfortable to swim against the stream. They want to be accepted and part of the gang. But the question is there to stare them squarely in the face: WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS WHO IS CALLED CHRIST?

illicit sex, drinking parties, dope addicts -

Jesus accepts the verdict we give him and He goes to the Cross - the Innocent One for the guilty. He goes as a LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER to redeem us and to bring us back to God. He goes as the LAMB OF GOD TO TAKE AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD. Yet And on that Cross he still remained GOD'S ANOINTED - He still remained THE MAJESTIC SERVANT OF GOD - He still remained JESUS WHO IS CALLED CHRIST! But God took that Cross and turned it into an instrument of REDEMPTION for the whole world. God

took His DEATH and turned it into LIFE for all men everywhere.

To hear that is to hear the GOSPEL. To hear the GOSPEL is not only to hear about the forgiveness of sin, about life and salvation. To hear the GOSPEL is to be let in on Jesus and His way! Certainly that means forgiveness, life, resurrection, eternal salvation. But it also means being let in on Jesus' Cross and crucifixion.

x so you can live as you please

Jesus has left those who would follow Him no illusions. They are following One whom the mass of men rejected. He sent the Twelve out as sheep among wolves - to certain and intense persecution and suffering. It is no easy way - it is the WAY OF THE CROSS. But it is a glorious way. It is the only way that makes the angels in heaven burst forth in hymns of joy. To hold on to Him as Savior, and Redeemer, and Lord, and ~~Savior~~, and King of your life - in spite of all odds and all opposition - that is to give the only possible positive answer to Pilate's question: WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS WHO IS CALLED CHRIST? - I shall praise, honor, and serve Him all the days of my life and through all the years of eternity

It is the way of repentance

Amen.