

Good Friday, 3 April 2105 Anno Domini



### The Old Rugged Cross

*32 And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. 33 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. 34 Then said Jesus, **Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.** And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. 35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. 36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, 37 And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. 38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. (Luke 23:32-38)*

Many of us awakened on this beautiful spring morning to the sound of birds chirping in the lush foliage of the season, and streams of radiant light bursting forth from the sun rise of Good Friday. We face the observance of the day with mixed emotions. It is a day when the greatest good of all time and eternity was done for those who would know Christ as Lord and Savior; and it is the day when the greatest sorrow imaginable was suffered by God the Father as His only Begotten Son suffered indignation, humiliation, and excruciating pain as He hung on an old rugged cross without the gates of Jerusalem – and in the very sight of the Temple.

With tired and blood-stained vision, the Lord Jesus Christ looked out across the rural hills and gardens which He had once traveled in His ministry of healing, teaching, and miracles. He had loved those who followed to hear His every Word but who now had deserted Him completely, or worse, joined in the hecklers beneath that instrument of torture called a cross. He saw the brute soldiers casting lots for the only garments that had covered His nakedness. His virtue and modesty were as painful as the nails as He hung naked, in open view of all, on that cross. He saw the priests and Pharisees exulting in His demise – the same religious hypocrites whom He had so labeled and called a **“generation of vipers.”** He saw, as well, the masses of residents of Jerusalem who had, less than a week earlier, welcomed Him into Jerusalem with shouts of *“Hosanna to the Son of David!”*

Despite the most unimaginable and excruciating pain He felt in every muscle, joint, and breath He took, there was at least one advantage to the cross – His view of distant objects and people was enhanced by the higher vantage point of the cross compared to those on the ground. He perhaps saw Peter, James, Andrew and other of the disciples standing afar off. They were now fully awake and fearfully watching with Him – though at a distance. But He saw far more than just these – He saw you and me,

our children, and our children's children from the vantage point of that cruel cross. The nails themselves had etched our names into the palms of His hands. *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. **Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.*** (Isaiah 49:15-16) Though transcribed by the prophet, Isaiah, more than 700 years earlier, these were nonetheless the Words of Jesus! Graven does not mean to WRITE. It means to CUT into.

Centuries and Millennia of the human race, both past and future, passed before the knowing eyes of Christ as He suffered there, alone. No others saw what His Divine Eyes saw that day, else all would have bent the knee and bowed their heads in utter shame and despair of their actions. It is for this reason that our dear Lord uttered those amazing Words from the cross at the beginning of His crucifixion: "**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.**" Truly, they did not know, and part of the reason was that they did not WANT to know. Jesus was an open threat to the cozy and economically rewarding religious establishment of the day – just as He is in our own time. He represented a threat to the secular power of Rome as well. As the unregenerate High Priest, Caiaphas said, *And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, **that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.** And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And **not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.*** (John 11:49-52) Let your hearts burst with gratitude, for those "*children of God scattered abroad*" are you and I.

Why did Jesus word His prayer in such a way? I mean, why did He ask the Father to forgive them instead of frankly forgiving them Himself? I believe it is because the greater offense was done to God the Father than even to Jesus who experienced the travesty firsthand. There is no way that we can understand the infinite love God feels for His Son. But He is a God of Righteousness and Justice. If we are to be saved, that righteousness and justice must be satisfied. It was satisfied in the sacrifice of God's only Begotten Son. We had some indication of the pain of that sacrifice in the command to Abraham to sacrifice his own begotten son on this same mountain (Moriah) where Christ suffered and died. But God would require no such sacrifice from any man. He would pay the penalty of sin Himself. Moreover, no man was worthy to die in our stead but Jesus. *And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, **God will provide himself a lamb** for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.* (Gen 22:7-8) The Lamb God would provide would be His only Begotten Son. You will not find this testimony of Christ in the newer versions of the Bible such as the NIV.

Even a heart racked with pain and over-stressed with congestive failure (as the cross inflicted) found premise to love deeply. Jesus also saw His dear mother, Mary, at the base of the cross. A mother's love cannot be dampened by fear. She stayed there at the cross out of an immeasurable love for her Son. John, often referred to as the Apostle of Love, was also there – the only disciple not to hide away at a distance. Though the day was darkened from noon time until now, Jesus recognized these two. It must have given Him a rare comfort that they were there watching at His feet. *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, **Woman, behold thy son!** Then saith he to the disciple, **Behold thy mother!** And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.* (John 19:26-27)

You will also observe that there were two thieves crucified on either side of our Lord. He, though near death in the moments to follow, yet found the strength to add

one last soul to Heaven before His death: *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, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*** (Luke 23:39-43) How happy I am to read this, since that forgiven thief was surely the author of this devotion! Unable to lift a finger to save myself, the Lord saw fit to do so! He has done so for you as well if you are the called and elected in Christ!

Jesus has suffered on the cross from the third hour (9 A.M.) until the ninth hour (3 P.M.). Darkness covered all of the land from noon until He gave up the ghost at 3 PM – the precise moment of the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb in the Temple. *<sup>45</sup>Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. <sup>46</sup>And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?** that is to say, **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*** (Matt 27:45-46) During those hours of thick darkness, Jesus suffered alone. Even His Father turned away His face from beholding the sin of the cross. Do you remember the very words Christ uttered from any other recent study? How about the opening lines of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Messianic Psalm? *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* (Psalms 22:1)

The moment Christ uttered these words was the moment of ultimate pain and suffering for Him but, alas, the ordeal has been suffered, and the moment that dissects all time and eternity forever has arrived! *When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, **It is finished:** and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.* (John 19:30) Those three words are the most important and significant to each of us of all words in the dictionary. ***Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:** and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.* (Luke 23:46) *And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.* (Matt 27:51-54) This once unbelieving centurion and his cohort became the Faithful Centurion, and fellowship, from that hour.

That Temple Veil that was foreshadowed in the old Tabernacle in the Wilderness was torn from top to bottom in the Temple of Jerusalem. It was not torn from bottom to top because the world has no access to God except it be granted them by a precious Savior. Our Lord and Savior was typified in that Tabernacle by the Bread of Presence, the altar of Incense, the Temple Veil, the Altar of Burnt Offerings, and the Mercy Seat! But those types are now done away for the real and genuine article has arrived as prophesied from Ancient of Days.

These few days of Holy Week have not been so easy to read about. But it is important that we mingle the wine of suffering with the joy of the coming Sunrise. Tomorrow is Saturday of Holy Week. Since Easter follows hard on at sunset tomorrow, I shall expedite to the resurrection and bid a reluctant good-bye to this mournful subject, and take up that glorious resurrection of our Lord on the morrow!