



The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

15 Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. 16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? 18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. 19 When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. 20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. 22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. 23 And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. 24 When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. 25 Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. (Matt 27:15-25)

There was a notable criminal arrested in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago for insurrection, murder, and who knows what else. (Mark 15:7) He was unquestionably guilty and had most likely been captured, as the woman taken in adultery, in the very act of his crimes. He lay in bonds as a prisoner of the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate. This evil man, Barabbas, loved no one, and was loved by no one, with the possible exception of a feeble-minded mother. He was without hope of mercy or redemption. There was no one without the prison who would come to his defense. Though yet alive, he was already half-dead due to the soon-to-occur prospects of a cruel crucifixion. Of course, all would admit that this man, of all people, was doomed to that terrible death that awaited all who raise their heel against Rome. His plight was very like the plight of the lost sinner – without hope in this world, and lacking any to show mercy or grace (except that unexpected and undeserved grace that only God can grant). Well, then, miracles do happen by the grace of God, but all bets were against any such miracle for a miserable, reprobate sinner such as Barabbas.

I will remind the Reader against taking any smug pride in your own righteousness for, before the grace of God was granted, you shared the same destiny of Barabbas. You were bound in chains of sin, tried and sentenced by the Prince of the Air,

and doomed to the hottest fires of Hell. There was not a single jot or tittle you could utter in your defense. You were beyond, in the eyes of the world, saving. This is a mystery to be found in God's great mercy and grace: those who seem least likely to find grace in the eyes of the Lord – the least deserving and least likely – often **DO** find that His abundant grace has pervaded their hearts and they are no longer half-dead (or FULLY dead in trespasses and sins –Eph 2:1), but wholly alive in Christ!

We must regard Pontius Pilate with a measure of pity. He would not be considered a bad fellow in today's political circles – in fact, he stands head and shoulders above most that run for public office in America today. He KNEW Christ was innocent! He KNEW the ill motives of those who had brought him to his attention! There was a stirring in his heart when he questioned Jesus, and, as if that was not enough, his wife had suffered many things in a dream regarding the innocence of Jesus.

Well, dear Reader, you may consider that "political correctness" is a new phenomenon of our day, but you would be wrong! Pilate, frankly, saw the innocence of Christ and was prepared to release Him; however, the economy of Heaven could not allow Christ to be set free else the world would be damned. God is never the author of evil, but evil men often fulfill the will of God unwittingly. The Pharisees were wicked beyond all measure. They stood at the ready to force the issue of Christ's crucifixion. If the matter were left to a simple moral judgment of 'right' or 'wrong', Pilate would have surely released Christ. The multitudes, moved by the chief priests and elders, were all the more adamant that Christ should be crucified. Pilate preferred, as was his custom at Passover, to release a prisoner to the multitude, and he undertook to use this opportunity to release Jesus whom he knew to be innocent. The more Pilate tried to release Christ, the greater the opposition from the radical crowd. It is almost as though the multitude realized that their only hope of salvation was in crucifying the Lord of Life! (but they did not know).

Finally, the governor tries one last time to release Jesus. The crowd, instead, demands the release to them of a hardened criminal in the stead of the Lord of Glory and Righteousness. ***17 Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? 20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.*** This must have been quite perplexing to the Roman Procurator. The crowds demanded the release of a hardened criminal instead of a man who was, above all who has ever lived, or will ever live, completely innocent. He was determined, due to his sense of justice, to release Christ. But, sadly, Pilate failed, as do many politicians, of courage to act justly. He fell victim to political correctness. The worldly wise chief priests and rulers laid out the charge of rebellion against Rome. This was enough to cause Pilate to lose all his bearings. ***And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.*** (Luke 23:2) How could Pilate release a man accused of such sedition, especially in view of the fact that Tiberius Caesar would certainly learn of it. His manliness failed of arduous courage, and he sealed his fate with the damned at that moment.

Reader, I want to ask you a question that no man may ever have asked you before – **who was Barabbas?** Without any intention of offending at all, I will tell you, that you, Reader, as well as the writer of this devotion, is typified by the criminal

Barabbas! We most certainly may enjoy even a greater measure of grace than Barabbas. We have no record that Barabbas ever came to know to whom he owed the great gift of mercy he experienced. He may only have known that he was free of a stone prison, but continued a prisoner of the spirit. But you and I, Reader, if we have been granted that grace made available in Christ alone, have been set free because Christ took our place on the cross that long ago day in Jerusalem. Words are inadequate for us to express our gratitude and love toward One who first loved us and died that we might live eternally; but we must ALWAYS be mindful of the debt we owe to Christ for such magnanimous favor and grace. Have you thanked Him today?

".....every man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; ... therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee...." John Donne, 17th Century Anglican Priest