**Luke 23: 26-43 (The Crucifixion)**

**26**  And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. **27** And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. **28** But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. **29** For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ **30**  Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ **31** For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” **32**  Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. **33**  And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. **34** And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. **35** And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” **36** The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine **37** and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” **38**  There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” **39**  One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” **40** But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? **41** And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” **42** And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” **43** And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

**“Journey To The Cross”**

 Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you in the Name that is above all names Jesus Christ our crucified Lord and Savior, Amen. Humanity has always tried to re-build paradise. Unfortunately, only our first parents Adam and Eve truly had a perfect picture. They saw the wonder and glory God created for man. They also saw how the Fall into sin cast them out of the Garden. There is no going back, but humanity does not take “No” for an answer. In many ways, this has been true especially in the past hundred years for our modern world. The Nazis attempted to create paradise only to cause a great tragedy. The Communist tried again only to lose control of their “perfect” system. This sad fate still awaits any who imagine going back to paradise rests in the palm of our hands.

 As we now enter into Holy Week, the Father in heaven opens His hands and offers His heart to a sinful world. All eyes fix upon Jesus Christ as He goes to the cross. Everything the Church is comes from this week and everything the Church will ever do flows back to this week. The supposed street in Jerusalem where Jesus made His way to the cross is known as the Via Dolorosa. It is Latin for “Way of grief,” “Way of suffering” or “Painful way.” This path begins where Pilate gave the final death sentence and goes to Golgotha or the place of the Skull. It is only about a third of a mile or 6 ½ football fields long. Yet, you know, the distance was anything of a “walk in the park.” This new garden God gives for humanity would come at a price far beyond what sinners can pay. To journey with Jesus is to go to the hope and promise built upon His sacrifice.

 Every kind of false paradise wants to avoid suffering. It is the opposite with Jesus the Savior. He taught, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:23-24). Simon of Cyrene got a taste of this when Christ passed by Him. Without any debate or question, he had literally to carry the crossbeam of Jesus! What at an honor, but if you asked him it would have felt like a death sentence. Fear, panic, remorse were no signs of paradise. There was probably only the question, “Oh God, why me?” Yet, the answer rested right there before him as he carried the cross behind a weak and stumbling Jesus. It was a call to repent and believe in Him at all cost. The glory of God was at work, even when paradise hid in pain. St. Paul revealed this wonder, “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

 Suffering has become taboo today. As if every problem needs to be addressed without question. As if every ailment and treatment must have a cure whatever the cost. As if repentance over sin intrudes upon my self-made paradise. Jesus never looked at His own fate even going to the cross. In blood and weakness He called out, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children…” Suffering will always be in this fallen paradise, but without the One who bears the sin of the world it will consume us. Jesus warned, “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me” (Matt 26:11). During WWII, Dietrich Bonheoffer knew the false picture offered by the Nazis stating, “Self-denial means knowing only Christ, and no longer oneself. It means seeing only Christ, who goes ahead of us, and no longer the path that is too difficult for us…” (Meditations on the cross 17). Simon did not know how long and neither does any of us with the cross, but the good news is it all suffering finally falls on Jesus.

 The paradise paid for by the Father in the sacrifice of His Son is a priceless gift. How powerful are those first words at the crucifixion, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” This is more than love for enemies. It is the fact that Jesus’ life laid down at that moment was able to cover a multitude of sins. Of course, this paradise prepared by the hands of Him who loves sinners was a disgrace for all to see. Plenty mocked such a place of glory built on the cross. The ridicule revolved around the same phrase, “Save yourself!” The rulers had no room for a useless messiah that only challenged their perfectly managed paradise. The soldiers saw no victory in such weakness when strength is what gets the job done. The inscription posted by Pilate only boasted in Roman power over the Old Testament promise. Even one thief on the cross saw Jesus merely as a tool for selfish gain and not the Savior given for sinners.

 We still look for a paradise built by our hands as if we can do better than God. The crucified Jesus exposes all the false idols we create for our glory. Luther proclaims, “Therefore the friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are dethroned and the “old Adam,” who is especially edified by works, is crucified.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The paradise that truly lasts has come by the New Adam Jesus Christ. Where plenty of marketing goes on today even with churches, pastors, and programs. St. Paul declares the power of baptism over your life stating, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name…” Rather than something we do, it is what we receive by faith in Jesus. To confuse, undermine, or mock His Word and Sacrament exchanges God’s paradise based on the cross for false-gardens that will go up in smoke. “For the Lord will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free.”

 Only One removes the flashing swords that block the way back into the garden. Strangely enough, it was not the disciples who entered first, but a dying sinner. The mystery of salvation is always at the cross. a man judged by the law confessed what neither the prideful who put Jesus on the cross nor the despairing who saw no hope in His cross could say. This thief was honest about the fallen paradise we fail to build stating, “And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” Yet, where the Law denies every man entrance back into garden. The Gospel was beside him to believe not in glory but in the cross. He said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

 To journey with Jesus is to go to the hope and promise built upon His sacrifice. Holy Week is a parade that opens paradise for all people. This is the prized treasure of the Church. To lose justification as God’s act of grace for sinners is to give up the perfect garden. The cross remains as that door for the risen Savior declares, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations…” (Luke 24:46-47). Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php#21 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)