

GOSPEL

LUKE 23:35-43

The people stayed before the cross watching Jesus. As for the leaders, they jeered at him. ‘He saved others,’ they said ‘let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.’ The soldiers mocked him too, and when they approached to offer him vinegar they said, ‘If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.’ Above him there was an inscription: ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

One of the criminals hanging there abused him. ‘Are you not the Christ?’ he said. ‘Save yourself and us as well.’ But the other spoke up and rebuked him. ‘Have you no fear of God at all?’ he said, ‘You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus,’ he said ‘remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ ‘Indeed, I promise you,’ he replied ‘today you will be with me in paradise.’

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE BENEDICT

The Gospel according to St Luke presents, as in a great painting, the kingship of Jesus at the moment of his Crucifixion. The leaders of the people and the soldiers taunt “the first-born of all creation” and put him to the test to see whether he has the power to save himself from death.

Yet precisely: “on the Cross, Jesus is exalted to the very ‘height’ of the God who is Love. It is there that he can be ‘known’... Jesus gives us ‘life’ because he gives us God. He can give God because he himself is one with God”.

In fact, while the Lord seems to be mistaken because he is between two wrong-doers, one of them, aware of his sins, opens himself to truth, arrives at faith and prays “the King of the Jews”: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”.

From the One who “is before all things, and in him all things hold together” the so-called “Good Thief” straight away receives forgiveness and the joy

of entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”. With these words, Jesus, from the throne of the Cross welcomes every human being with infinite mercy.

St Ambrose comments that this “is a beautiful example of conversion to which one should aspire: forgiveness is very quickly offered to the thief and grace is more abundant than the request; the Lord in fact”, St Ambrose says, “always gives more than is asked for... Life is being with Christ because where Christ is there is the Kingdom”.

We can also contemplate in Christian art the way of love that the Lord reveals to us and invites us to take. In fact, in the past “in the arrangement of Christian sacred buildings... it became customary to depict the Lord returning as a king — the symbol of hope — at the east end; while the west wall normally portrayed the Last Judgement as a symbol of our responsibility for our lives”: hope in the infinite love of God and commitment to ordering our life in accordance with the love of God.

When we contemplate depictions of Jesus inspired by the New Testament — as an ancient Council teaches — we are led to “understand... the sublimity and the humiliation of the Word of God and... to remember his life in the flesh, his Passion and his salvific death, and the redemption that the world derived from it”.

“Yes, we need it, precisely to... become capable of recognizing in the pierced heart of the Crucified One the mystery of God”.

Today, let us entrust to the Virgin Mary the new members of the College of Cardinals and our earthly pilgrimage toward eternity.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Jesus’ mission is apparently failing – he is nailed to a cross. Yet he remains firm and faithful to the promise of and vision of his Father. Have there been times in your life when you’ve had to face tremendous opposition to what you knew and believed was right? How did it go, where was God in it all?
- Jesus shows the depth of trust and love by dying for the mission of bringing people into the loving relationship with his Father, our Father. He does this because he himself is in love with the Father. Through the cross he and we are transformed. How has this been true in your life?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.