

Wednesday of Invocabit

The Seven Last Words - "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

Luke 23:32-38

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus has made His way from Stone Pavement to Skull. There, the nails are driven into His hands and feet. The cross is fitted into its post hole, and the Son of God is on display for all to see die. He, along with two criminals, are dying for their crimes.

The two criminals are justly being executed for their crimes. Robbers or insurrectionists, they were considered enemies of Rome, worthy of being crucified and not simply jailed for a time. Jesus is dying for His crimes, too, though He did not originally commit them—in and of Himself, He is innocent. His crimes He assumed into His flesh from all flesh, for He has taken the sins of the world and made them His own in order to die with them as the lambs slain at the temple—"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) Otherwise, Jesus is an innocent man, proclaimed as much by Pilate himself before having him beaten.

If the agony of the nails piercing His skin wasn't enough, Jesus also bears the marks of having been scourged and crowned, skin and flesh ripped from bone, the prick of thorns on His brow, scabs and blood all over the place. Behold the man, the teacher who trained as a carpenter, brought low and frail by the stripes of Roman punishment. Then, as He was nailed to the cross, it is dropped into the post hole. The pain must have been excruciating.

What's a man to do who has been through so much, though undeservedly in and of Himself. Perhaps an ordinary man would cry out from the cross that he's innocent. Perhaps an ordinary man with a short temper would shout insults to those who are executing him. Perhaps this short-tempered man would threaten retribution—futile as it would be for he himself to retaliate, but perhaps his companions and family would see fit to do something. But that's not Jesus. Like a lamb before its shearers is silent, he didn't open His mouth (cf. Isaiah 53:7); at least, not like that. "Father, forgiven them, for they do not know what they do."

"Jesus, in Thy dying woes / Even while Thy life-blood flows, / Craving pardon for Thy foes: / Hear us, holy Jesus."

For whom does Jesus pray? He prays for His executioners. He prays for those who sent Him to the hill called Skull, the Roman authorities including, but not limited to, Pontius Pilate. He prays for those who handed Him over to the Romans, the Jewish priests, scribes, and Pharisees. He prays for those who are blind to their actions. These all thought they were crucifying troublemakers, robbers, and insurrectionists. Did any of them harbor any malice toward those being crucified, specifically Jesus? Yes, those scribes and Pharisees sought false witnesses against Jesus in order that He would be found guilty.

They didn't know what they were doing. There's a bit of irony in there, especially given what Caiaphas had said before Jesus' trial. The Jews who wanted Him crucified—those who pressed for it and sought those false witnesses and riled the crowds up to cry out before Pilate—wanted Him out of the picture. However, Jesus willingly went to be crucified; His passion predictions and the Suffering Servant passages of Isaiah indicate as much. It was Jesus' time to do His thing, and that was die for the sins of the world. These Jews may have wanted Him out of the picture, but it was expedient for them that Jesus die, because He was dying for them.

So, He calls out to His Father to forgive them.

It was also expedient for Pilate and the Roman authorities. Though Pilate would have

preferred not to have anything to do with Him, in order to save His own life and standing before Caesar. In Pilate's mind, he had no other choice; Jesus had to be crucified, or he would have an uprising on his hands. The expediency is that peace and lives would be preserved at the expense of Jesus' life. What Caiaphas said likely ran through Pilate's mind as well, though he likely never heard it being said. So, Jesus gave His life to spare many and keep the peace. Not to be a political pawn, however, Jesus willingly went to the cross and gave His life for the masses, as well as Pilate.

And, He calls out to His Father to forgive them.

These all were blind to what they have done. But Jesus called out for you, too. When you sin, seldom, if ever, do you think at the moment that Jesus went to the cross specifically for you to forgive you of that sin. Oh, you might occasionally think that you can ask for forgiveness later, after all, "It's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission." What a cop-out! Nevertheless, in the moment, you are blind to the consequence of your sin, else you wouldn't commit it. On the one hand, you should die for having committed the sin—that's what the Law of God demands. On the other hand, your sin is what brought Jesus to the cross and put Him on it—it's your fault, among the fault of all, that Jesus was crucified, and you see no greater proclamation of the Law in the regard than the figure of Jesus on a cross, a crucifix.

Even for you, Jesus calls out to His father to forgive.

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Jesus prays for the Jews. Jesus prays for the Romans. Jesus prays for you. Jesus prays for His foes, as even the Apostle writes of mankind that you were once enemies of God. (cf. Romans 5:6-10)

Yes, you are blind to your sin, and in your sin you are an enemy of God. Oh, you have come here and confessed your opposition, your sins and sinfulness. Perhaps you even recall a time or two that you have sinned. But, are you aware of every sin that you have ever committed? How about every sin since the last time you heard the Absolution? Every sin committed this day? The last few hours? If you said yes to any of those questions, I invite you to stand up, if you dare. I would challenge you to enumerate them—not right now, but see me later. And, I would tell you who are standing that you are calling God a liar.

The inspired Psalmist declares, "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults." (Psalm 19:12 ESV) The Psalmist asks a rhetorical question. "Who can discern his errors?" The obvious answer to this question, being rhetorical in nature, is, "No one." The answer is especially obvious given the second half of the verse, "Declare me innocent from hidden faults." In this case, the Psalmist asks for forgiveness, though from the cross, Jesus asks the same thing, not for Himself, but for the Jews, the Romans, and for sinners the world 'round in all times. "Declare them innocent from hidden faults, so hidden from them because they do not know what they do."

Jesus asks this as He sheds His blood on the cross to procure that forgiveness. He gives His blood and life over as a ransom, to redeem you and all mankind, buy you back from death to life, from enemies to friends, to make you a son and heir in His heavenly kingdom. So, when Jesus prays, "Father, forgive them," the Father replies, "I am doing just that for your sake." Even and especially those sins that are hidden from you are covered—they mean to kill you, but Jesus dies in your place. And for His sake, the Father declares you righteous. "Father, forgive them," Jesus prayed; for His sake and the life-blood that He shed, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.