



Prayers

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, graciously behold this Your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and delivered into the hands of sinful men to suffer death upon the cross; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 22 (antiphon v. 1)

or

Psalm 31 (antiphon v. 1)

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

John 18:1-19:42

or

John 19:17-30

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 454

Other Hymns – 434 (OT), 429 (G),

440 (G), 449/450 (G), 451 (G), 453

(G), 436, 456

Let us pray for the whole Christian Church, that our Lord God would defend her against all the assaults and temptations of the adversary and keep her perpetually on the true foundation, Jesus Christ:

Almighty and everlasting God, since You have revealed Your glory to all nations in Jesus Christ and in the Word of His truth, keep, we ask You, in safety the works of Your mercy so that Your Church, spread throughout all the nations, may be defended against the adversary and may serve You in true faith and persevere in the confession of Your name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for all the ministers of the Word, for all vocations in the Church, and for all the people of God:

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified, receive the supplications and prayers which we offer before You for all Your servants in Your holy Church that every member of the same may truly serve You according to Your calling; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for our catechumens, that our Lord God would open their hearts and the door of His mercy that, having received the remission of all their sins by the washing of regeneration, they may be mindful of their Baptism and evermore be found in Christ Jesus, our Lord:

Almighty God and Father, because You always grant growth to Your Church, increase the faith and understanding of our catechumens that, rejoicing in their new birth by the water of Holy Baptism, they may forever continue in the family of those whom You adopt as Your sons and daughters; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

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Let us pray for all in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty:

O merciful Father in heaven, because You hold in Your hand all the might of man and because You have ordained, for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do well, all the powers that exist in all the nations of the world, we humbly pray You graciously to regard Your servants, especially Elizabeth, our Queen; the Governor General; the Prime Minister; the Parliament; the governments of our province; and all who have authority over us; that all those who receive the sword as Your ministers may bear it according to Your Word; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray our Lord God Almighty that He would deliver the world from all error, take away disease, ward off famine, set free those in bondage, and grant health to the sick and a safe journey to all who travel:

Almighty and everlasting God, the consolation of the sorrowful and the strength of the weak, may the prayers of those who in any tribulation or distress cry to You graciously come before You, so that in all their necessities they may rejoice in Your manifold help and comfort; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for all who are outside the Church, that our Lord God would be pleased to deliver them from their error, call them to faith in the true and living God and His only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and gather them into His family, the Church:

Almighty and everlasting God, because You seek not the death but the life of all, hear our prayers for all who have no right knowledge of You, free them from their error, and for the glory of Your name bring them into the fellowship of Your holy Church; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for peace, that we may come to the knowledge of God's holy Word and walk before Him as is fitting for Christians:

Almighty and everlasting God, King of Glory, and Lord of heaven and earth, by whose Spirit all things are governed, by whose providence all things are ordered, the God of peace and the author of all concord, grant us, we implore You, Your heavenly peace and concord that we may serve You in true fear, to the praise and glory of Your name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for our enemies, that God would remember them in mercy and graciously grant them such things as are both needful for them and profitable for their salvation:

O Almighty, everlasting God, through Your only Son, our blessed Lord, You have commanded us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, and to pray for those who persecute us. We therefore earnestly implore You that by Your gracious visitation all our enemies may be led to true repentance and may have the same love and be of one accord and one mind and heart with us and with Your whole Christian Church; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for the fruits of the earth, that God would send down His blessing upon them and graciously dispose our hearts to enjoy them according to His own good will:

O Lord, Father Almighty, by Your Word You created and You continue to bless and uphold all things. We pray You so to reveal to us Your Word, our Lord Jesus Christ that, through His dwelling in our hearts, we may by Your grace be made ready to receive Your blessing on all the fruits of the earth and whatsoever pertains to our bodily need; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Finally, let us pray for all those things for which our Lord would have us ask, saying: [**The Lord's Prayer**].



HOLY WEEK SERMON

GOOD FRIDAY
(Series B)
MARCH 29, 2024

Sermon Text: John 19:17-18

“The Message Of The Three Crosses”

This Good Friday morning we climb in spirit a rocky hill outside the city of Jerusalem. And what greets our eyes is not a very pleasant sight. The odour of death hangs in the air. Soul-piercing cries of agony and pain pierce the eerie silence. Three crosses stand silhouetted against the dark sky. We are, of course, at Calvary . . . Golgotha . . . the Place of the Skull.

Our attention, naturally and fittingly, is directed to the One who is nailed to that middle cross. After all, His agony seems the greatest of the three; His pain and suffering the deepest. He alone bears the insults and taunts of the crowd of on-lookers who have gathered here with us. But just who is this One suspended from this middle cross on Golgotha?

Well, an inscription nailed to the top of His cross identifies Him. He is “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” But a king? A king being crucified? Yes, indeed! But not just any ordinary, earthly king. Rather, as He Himself had told the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, just a few hours previous, “My kingdom is not of this world.” No, He is the King of heaven, the Lord of all, the Ruler of the universe. And He is the One who now hangs on Calvary’s hill.

The sign above His cross identifies Him further; for He is “the King of the Jews” – that is, the Promised One, the long-awaited Messiah, the Descendant of Abraham who would bring a blessing to all people, the Descendant of David who would reign forever. “Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?” the wise men from the East thus ask when He was born, “for we have come to worship Him.” Where is He? Why, He – the King of the Jews – is hanging on a cross.

Who is this One nailed to that middle cross on Calvary’s hill? He is also, as the inscription above Him says, “Jesus of Nazareth.” But not just any ordinary man from the village of Nazareth; not just some man who is unjustly sentenced to death and cruelly executed; not even some great religious teacher or social reformer who is now dying a martyr’s death. No, for as the angel said to Joseph when He was born, “You shall call His name ‘Jesus’, for He will save His people from their sins.” Yes, He is Jesus – the Saviour of sinners, the Redeemer of the world.

But why, then, is He nailed to that hideous cross? Why, if He indeed is “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”, does He undergo such an agonising, cruel death? What message is this middle cross of Golgotha proclaiming to us? The prophet Isaiah answers that so simply, and yet so profoundly, when centuries before that Good Friday morning he writes these words: “He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace; and with His stripes we are healed.”

Yes, here on this middle cross of Calvary “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” now suffers the anguish and torment and punishment that you and I and all people deserve because of our sins and violations of God’s holy Law – this punishment: “The soul that sins shall die . . . The wages of sin is death.” Here on this middle cross the sins of the entire world – your sins and my sins – are now paid for in full by the holy, precious blood and the innocent sufferings and death of “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

In a Good Friday sermon, the Reformer, Martin Luther, puts it this way: “The eyes are offended at a death so shameful, so accursed by God. But for us it is a blessed death, taking the curse from us and bringing God’s blessing upon us. The wood, in itself an accursed wood, is a blessed wood for us, a noble and precious altar upon which the Son of God sacrificed Himself for our sin. For there hangs the Son of God with outstretched arms, in order to testify that He rejects no one, but as He says, draws all people unto Himself.” And such is the Good News, the Gospel, the awesome and amazing message of that middle cross of Golgotha.

Now, there are, however, two other crosses here on Calvary’s hill. And what about them? What message do these two crosses proclaim to us this morning?

The Bible doesn’t tell us the names of these two men who are crucified along with Jesus. And that, perhaps, is as it should be . . . and of far more significance than we might think. For these two crosses next to Jesus, while containing the dying bodies of two men who actually lived there in Palestine nearly 2,000 years ago, represent, as it were, the entire human race. It is as though the cross of Jesus there in the centre divides them in much the same way that all people will be divided when He comes again on the Last Day as Judge of all. And as we look up at these two crosses, we are reminded of our Lord’s own words spoken just a few days earlier when He said, “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left.”

Now, while we are not told the names of these two men who are crucified along with Jesus, we are told that they were robbers, criminals. And they are now paying the penalty for their crimes. Unlike Jesus, who not only was innocent of the charges brought against Him, but who is sinless and holy and who obeyed perfectly the will of His heavenly Father; these two men had violated not only God’s Law, but also the law of the state, of God’s earthly authorities to whom has been given, as St. Paul says, “the power of the sword to punish evildoers.”

And they, too, as such, were forced to carry their crosses through the winding streets of Jerusalem out to Golgotha. They, too, have been nailed to a cross. They, too, are now crucified next to Jesus – one on His left and the other on His right.

The one on Jesus' left speaks first. And in words filled with sarcasm and ridicule, he turns to Jesus and says, "Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" Now, this man had heard of Jesus. He sees all the commotion regarding this One who hangs on a cross next to his own. But he does not believe what he hears and sees. The eternal drama taking place upon a cross right next to his own does not make any impression upon him.

And, oh, how sad! How tragic! For Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, is pouring out His life-blood right next to him in order to wash his sins away, but will not be washed clean of them. Jesus, the Savior of the world, is dying right next to him to remove the guilt of his many sins, but he will not have that guilt removed. The Promised Messiah hangs next to him in order to bring him the blessing of forgiveness and eternal life, but he will not be blessed. The King of the universe is nailed to a cross right next to his own cross in order to reign in his heart and life, but he still insists on being his own king.

And because he rejects this only means and way of salvation, he is not saved. Because he refuses to acknowledge the kingship of Jesus, he excludes himself from God's kingdom. And so, he dies – dies not only a most horrible and agonising death on a cross, but dies eternally, suffering forever the most horrible and agonising punishment of hell.

And his is the deepest tragedy there on Calvary. And yet, is it really any different from what countless men and women down through the centuries have and will experience? And his cross is a most vivid illustration of all who do not believe in Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews; who pass from life to death with their sins still lying heavy upon them; who spurn and reject the only Saviour from sin and His holy blood that alone cleanses from all sin; who presume to stand before their Creator and Judge on the basis of their own so-called good life rather than in the perfect life of Jesus.

And the end result for such people will be no different than it was for this man who hangs on a cross to Jesus' left. For all who hang on this cross will one day hear Jesus say to them these words: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Now, there is still another cross here on Calvary's hill. And on this third cross, the one to Jesus' right, hangs another man, another robber and criminal. His crimes are the same as the one on Jesus' left. He suffers the same horrors and agonies of being crucified. And, initially, he, too, joins in on the insults and mockery that is being hurled at Jesus.

But, then, something happens. For there on the cross he is moved to repentance over his many sins and to faith in the One being crucified right next to him. Turning to his former partner in crime, he says, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."

And then, confronted by the immediate prospect of his own death and of an eternal reckoning with his Creator, he turns to the One who hangs there on that middle cross as the only One who could save him. "Jesus," he pleads, "remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Yes, with empty hands, relying solely on the grace and mercy of God, trusting only in the precious blood of Jesus that alone cleanses from all sin; he then hears those

comforting, joyful, hopeful words of divine pardon and eternal life, as Jesus turns to him and says, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

And oh, what a beautiful, wonderful message this third cross of Calvary proclaims to us; for there is no sin that the blood of Jesus cannot wash away. There is no one whose sins are so many or so horrible that have not paid for by the blood of Him who hangs on that middle cross. And whoever you are, whatever you have been or have done, hear again – and again and again – Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, saying also to you from His cross: “My son, my daughter, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. For truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

And so, there you have it: the message of the three crosses. And only one of those crosses merits and earns forgiveness of your sins. Only because of what happened on one of those crosses will you receive Paradise, eternal life. The cross in the middle of Calvary’s mournful mountain on which hangs the bleeding, battered body of Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. And on those other two crosses? Why, on these crosses to Jesus’ left and to His right hang, in effect, the rest of the world – you and I and all people.

And the important question that Good Friday thus poses to each and every single one of us is this: On which of these two crosses of Golgotha are you . . . do you . . . will you hang? For either you will hang on Jesus’ left and thus scorn and mock Him; or you will hang on His right and acknowledge and confess Him to be your Saviour and the Lord of your life. Either you will hang on Jesus’ left and so consider your sins of no account and try to excuse them away; or you will hang on His right and so humbly confess, “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Either you will hang on Jesus’ left and die eternally in your sin and unbelief; or you will hang on His right, turn to Him in faith, and so hear Him also say to you: “Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” Amen.