

Luke 23:32-43

Good Friday + 2020

*We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You,
for by Your holy cross
You have redeemed the world.
Amen.*

In July 2011 by imperial custom and with much regal fanfare (you can watch it on YouTube), the bearers brought his lifeless body to the door of a Capuchin monastery in Vienna. A herald knocked on the door with a cane, and a monk inside answered. “Who wants to enter?” The herald then began a loud proclamation of imperial accolades: “Otto of Austria, former crown prince of Austria-Hungary, Grand Duke of Tuscany, Margrave of Moravia, etc. etc.”.

When the list of titles was exhausted, the monk inside replied, “We don’t know him.”

The herald knocked again and again the monk answered, “Who wants to enter?” This time the herald offered a more modest proclamation. “Dr. Otto of Habsburg, member of parliament, honorary doctor of many universities, member of many academies and institutes, and on-and-on”.

When this list of honors ended, the monk again replied, “We don’t know him.”

Finally, the herald knocked a third time. And again the monk answered, “Who wants to enter?” This time the herald replied, “Otto, a mortal and a sinner”. The doors were immediately opened, and the monk inside said, “Thus let him enter.”

In the end, your end, what is it you’ve got to say to the Lord? “Who wants to enter?” Death catches up with us all, and when it does, what is it we have to say?

Although certainly not the regal, impressive accolades of Otto von Habsburg laid to rest in 2011 in the family crypt of a Capuchin monastery in Vienna, the first thief’s rants at Jesus were nonetheless on the same order as those first couple of futile attempts from Otto’s herald to gain entry to his final resting place.

“Not fair!”—He was telling Jesus — what a wimpy sort of “Messiah”/King are You if You can’t save Yourself & us: **“Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”** Run with that and you end up with a Messiah only on your terms—terms that never see the light of day. Truth is: you never get Jesus on your terms...always/only on His.

“Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” There are plenty who go down to their grave that way, voices and hearts going on and on about the

unfairness of life, the unfairness of God, or ticking off all the hot-shot things they've done for God/others, surely God ought to be overwhelmed by their goodness and smarts and generosity or whatever...and let them in.

Who wants to enter?

There is, though, something else to say—and another way to die. It doesn't make dying any easier, but there is a peace about it that is unmistakable. The world can't deliver it.

The other thief rebuked the first one, and said to him remarkable words: ***“Do you not fear God since you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are getting what we deserve for what we have done, but this Man has done nothing wrong.”***

Ponder those words. Sit still with them for awhile. Seeing Jesus suffering along with him, the second thief is amazed, and his amazement is but the gift of God so there is not even to be any boasting or accolade-listing. No yammering on and on about the unfairness of it all—no, “I-deserve-better-than-this!”

There is, though, spoken—confessed—the fundamental truth about what was happening: WE ARE GETTING WHAT WE DESERVE, BUT THIS MAN HAS DONE NOTHING WRONG...AND YET, HE IS SUFFERING...AND HE IS DYING.

When the suffering...and the dying...come to you—as they will—that's where you have to go, too. Not to yourself and your own perceived goodness or ranting on about how you've gotten the raw deal and deserve a whole lot better. No. When the suffering and dying come to you, go to Jesus and confess the truth. That means nothing of you and everything of Jesus.

How does that sound? Well, like the thief said, ***“we are justly receiving what we deserve for what we have done, but this Man has done nothing wrong.”*** Or, perhaps it sounds like this: *“O almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins & iniquities with which I have ever offended You, and justly deserve Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray you of Your boundless mercy...”*

Ponder those words. Sit still with them for awhile.

Who wants to enter?

“Jesus,” said the thief who had just come to saving faith by the grace of God. “Jesus.” He had the name right and could just as well have stopped right there. That name says it all. That is the name whereby you are saved, the name put upon you in your Holy Baptism, the name given you by the Spirit to confess as Lord—your Lord.

Who wants to enter?

“Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” This broken, dying criminal, getting what he deserved because of what he had done, confesses his faith in the King, seeing in/with/and under the crown of thorns that Jesus IS the King ruling in His kingdom.

“Remember me.” Out of all things he could have asked for from his newly-given faith, he asks to be remembered by Jesus in His kingdom. Granite inscribed stones and grave markers may identify you to the world for awhile, but truth be told, in a mere 50-75 years, who really will remember you? Only One. The One whose name you bear. His memory will never fail. He remembers you... forever.

“Truly (amen) today you will be with Me in paradise.” Those words from Jesus come quickly across parched and bloodied lips. They cut to the chase, giving to one receiving what his sins deserve that which he didn't by a long shot deserve: **PARADISE.**

“Truly, today you will be with Me in paradise.” Ponder those words. Sit still with them for awhile.

The home we lost on that fateful day when our parents, Adam/Eve, clutched death to their bosom (instead of God) is now given, doors flung wide open by the outstretched, bloodied arms of Jesus....”**WHO WANTS TO ENTER?”**

Yes...look at who wants to enter...indeed, who does enter...it is a criminal. A broken, destitute sinner. No excuses...no back-patting accolades...someone with NOTHING. **“Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.”**

Nothing...but the name: JESUS.

Jesus, remember me—a poor mortal and sinner—when you come into Your kingdom.

Hoc est verum. Wir sind alle Bettler.

Those are the final seven words found scribbled on a scrap of paper in his pocket when Martin Luther died on February 18, 1546. This mix of Latin and German said this: *Hoc est verum. Wir sind alle Bettler—“This is true: we are all beggars.”*

That is, indeed, the way it is before God. We are all beggars. We are empty. We come before God with nothing of our own to offer. We are broken, mortal, sinners. Everything we have is a gift from Him, ladled out in lavish abundance upon us for the sake of the greatest Beggar of all time, the one who for us emptied Himself, becoming obedient unto death—even death on a cross—that He might recognize us as His own when He comes into His kingdom.

Jesus goes with you into your suffering, your trials, your brokenness—He goes with you into your death. He goes ahead of you that He might come again and raise your lowly body on the last day, transforming it to be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him to subdue all things unto Himself. After all, He is the King...with the name above every name. In fact, at His name, every knee bends.

WHO WANTS TO ENTER?

Jesus, remember me, a poor mortal and sinner.

Today you will be with Me in paradise. That is enough for you to hear/believe. It is everything. Ponder these words. Sit still with them for awhile.

For behold,
By the wood of the cross
Joy has come into the world.