

Session 2. Promise of Ashes: the Second Sacred Words of Jesus on the Cross



THE SECOND SACRED WORDS (for March 3 Zoom Discussion)

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Luke 23:43

Overview. Jesus spoke 7 times during his agony on the cross. Each weekly reading during Lent will address one or 2 sets of these sacred, final words. In each 3-4 page reading, you'll find a discussion of the relevant Gospel(s) & Lenten insights from featured writers and talented artists.

The 2nd Summoning the Divine Zoom session will be held on Wednesday evening March 3 (6:30-7:30 p.m.). We will discuss the **1st reading sent out via St. Richard's E-News on February 25**. We'll also discuss anything else you'd like to discuss. It would be great if you have time to do the reading, but don't worry if you can't get to it, you can still be an active participant. Dates for the coming Wed. evening Zoom discussions will be Wednesday March 3, 10, 17, 24, & 31.

THE FOUR GOSPELS AND THE GOOD THIEF

Crosses have been raised on Mount Cavalry. All 4 of the Gospels point out that Jesus and two men have been nailed to their respective crosses. For hours, Jesus and these men endure the blasphemies shouted by the multitude.

- Mark 15:27. They *crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left."
- Matthew 27:38. "At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left." Matthew 27:44. "The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words."
- John 19:18. "There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side and Jesus in between." John does not mention that the two criminals are robbers.

Although two thieves are suffering the same gruesome execution and are both in the presence of Christ, their reactions to their Jesus and their situations are quite different. The unrepentant thief (known as Gestas) reviles Jesus: "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us" (Luke 23:39). The repentant thief (known as Dismas) rebukes the other thief and proclaims Christ's innocence: "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong (Luke 40-41).

In one of the most startling and beautiful moments of the Gospel, Dismas does not ask to be taken down from his sure and painful death. He asks, instead, to be taken up by Christ, saying "Jesus, remember me when you come into our kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Jesus replies to him saying, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Saint Dismas, who accepts his cross, places his hope not in this world, but in the promise of the next.

Legend recorded by Saint Anselm (1033-1109), Archbishop of Canterbury.

During the massacre of the Holy Innocents. Joseph, Mary, and two-year old Jesus fled from [Grab your reader's attention with a great quote from the document or use this space to emphasize a key point. To place this text box anywhere on the page, just drag it.] Herod. Leaving Bethlehem, the Holy Family entered the land of Egypt. They found themselves in an area inhabited by robbers. Among them is the thief Dismas.

Hidden from sight and waiting for an unsuspecting victim, Dismas sees the approach of a man and a young woman carrying a child. The three travelers have some baggage, perhaps the gifts of the Magi Kings reserved for this long trip. Dismas decides that this unprotected caravan would offer little resistance. However, when his eyes fell on the child Jesus, he stopped, marveling at the glorious beauty and majesty of the child's countenance. Deeply touched, he protects the travelers instead of harming them and hosts them in his cave. They were not protected by Angel, but by a thief.

Dismas offered everything he had, and the child allowed himself to be caressed by the criminal. Upon seeing the respect of the thief for the child and his caring for the family, Mary assures him that he will be rewarded for his action before his death. Nothing more is known about the life of this thief until he appears along with another thief (Gestas), carrying his cross to be crucified with Christ. [St. Anselm was canonized in 1494 and named a Doctor of the Church in 1720.] [Note: An Arabic Gospel of the Infancy further embellishes the story by identifying the Good Thief with Titus, one of a band of robbers who captured the Holy Family during the flight into Egypt, but later released them.]

THE TWO THIEVES (Luke 23:33-43)

Luke's Gospel, is clear about Jesus' asking God to "forgive the people who do not know what they are do." But Luke completely transforms his Gospel when he presents the two thieves.

Tradition tells us that the thief on Christ's right has become known as St. Dismas, the Good Thief, while the one to his left is referred to as Gestas, the "Unrepentant Thief." While both men are suffering the same gruesome torture Jesus is experiencing, the thieves are dramatically different. The unrepentant thief (Gestas) reviles Christ, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." (Luke. 23:39)

In one of the most startling & beautiful moments of the Gospel, the Good Thief does not ask to be taken down from his sure and painful death. He asks, instead, only to be remembered by Christ: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (Luke 23:42). Jesus replies to him saying, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Meditation on the Good Thief's Plea to Jesus

Consider listening to and then singing this moving chant from Taizé, France.

Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzTo-8pusSQ_2:30 Min.

REFLECTIONS ON "THE GOOD THIEF," ST. AMBROSE (c. 339-397)

Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, Italy, was an outstanding & influential leader, preacher, and author in the Western Christian Church during the 4th century. He was particularly inspired by Luke's Good Thief. Here are excerpts from 2 of Ambrose's sermons: 43 and 50.

"It is the more to his grace and praise that he believed in Christ on the cross; and the suffering which was a scandal to others, availed to him for faith. Rightly then did he purchase paradise who thought the cross of Christ not an offence but a virtue."

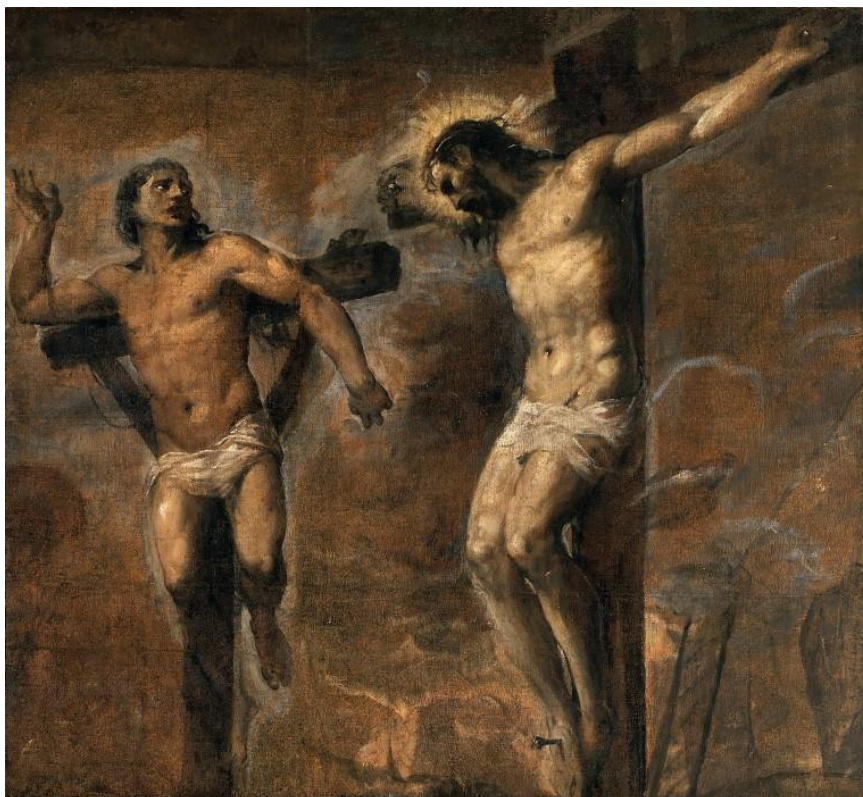
“Let him see His gaping wounds, let him look at His blood gushing out—he still believes Him to be God...he confesses Him to be righteous whom he knew not as a sinner....He understood that for the sins of others Christ bore these wounds. He knew that those wounds on the body of Christ were not the wounds of Christ...he therefore began to love Him more when, on the Body of Christ, he recognized his own wounds...Great and wonderful, indeed, is that faith which believed that Christ crucified was glorified rather than punished. For in this was the form of his whole salvation. The thief then recognized the Lord of Majesty, when he saw Him crucified with the patience of humility. He (the Good Thief) went before in devotion in reward. For the thief came into paradise before the Apostles.”



GREEK ORTHODOX CROSS. On the traditional Orthodox cross, the west crossbar is at an angle, with the right side up (**Dismas went to Heaven**) and the left side down (Gestas went to Hell). The Church has placed the words of St. Dismas at the center of prayers and hymns. Dismas' stares out from numerous Russian & Greek Orthodox icons

St. Dismas continues to be followed. Renewed interest in St. Dismas occurred in 1961 when United Artists released *Hoodlum Priest*, the true story of Father Charles Dismas Clark (played by Don Murray) who served as a prison chaplain and helped convicts turn their lives around. St. Dismas also played a significant role in November 1950, North Koreans had captured 1,200 American troops. Among the prisoners was Chaplain Father Emil Kapuan from Kansas. In the prisoner-of-war camp the N. Koreans kept their American prisoners on starvation rations, Father Kapuan began stealing food from the guards' storeroom. Each night, before he crept out of the barracks on a pilfering expedition, Father Kapuan invoked St. Dismas, the good thief. It kept him safe.

Titian: *Christ & the Good Thief* (c. 1566)



Ten years before he died, Titian created this powerful painting.

Titian immerses us in the somber, raw feelings of Lent. Yet, we still receive a sign of hope and conversion by the Good Thief. Titian's composition and use of color set the mood. The painting is monochromatic, using a range of rust as the color of spilled blood. Both Christ and the Good Thief are off-center, with a gray column of rising smoke.

Jesus' dying body is luminous, but his exhausted head is hanging. We see a juxtaposition of life and death, light and darkness. The Good Thief is

animated by his conversion. His final moments become the most important ones in life. His shaded body dimly reflects Christ's luminousness. The light comes from within Jesus' body a clear white spot piercing the rusty darkness.

The 2 bodies are in conversation with one another. Christ hangs in stillness after hours of agony but, even so, conveys a sense of assurance for the Good Thief. The Good Thief is experiencing sudden conversion, his chest forward and face, mind, and heart turning toward Christ. His arms signal the turn he is taking—from the right hand hanging clenched in the gray smoke to his right and his left hand raised animatedly, reaching for the heavens and offering his faith response to God's loving invitation.

Titian Biography (c. 1488-1576). The Italian painter known in English as Titian was born in a small mountain village. Like most of the people of Europe in those times, Titian was an observant Roman Catholic. He painted many Christian subjects, including *The Good Thief* (c. 1566). He was by far the most important Venetian painter. He was equally adept with portraits, landscape backgrounds, and mythological and religious subjects. His painting methods, particularly his application and use of color, would exercise a profound influence not only future generations on Western art. **Source:** Daniella Zsupan, Loyola University, New Orleans. I've edited this excellent introduction.

The Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 53) and the Suffering Servant. Isaiah's description of the suffering servant helps us understand the conversion of the Good Thief. The man's sins led him to his death sentence, but he now recognizes in Christ the freedom, hope, and promise possible even at his final moments. Looking at Christ, the Good Thief's eyes are opened to see that it is *his* infirmities Christ bears, *his* suffering; the Good Thief understands that the Lord is pierced for *his* offenses and crushed for *his* sins. A sinful person knows that to lift these burdens is an immeasurable gift of freedom, new life, and possibility. The Good Thief rejoices and anticipates true freedom, even while his body is nailed to a cross.

Lord Remember Me, Tom Umbarger (2015)

LORD:

Remember me unworthy as I am.
Remember me although I have fallen
at almost every turn
Remember me, slow unyielding as I
am slow to follow.
Remember me, whose head of clay
lies ready for your touch.

MY CHILD:

I remember you as worthy, for I have
made you see.
I remember you as rising for when you
fell, I lifted you.
I remember you as obedient for I waited
as you followed.
I remember you, your heart of clay is
Familiar to my touch.
I made you on a brutal cross when I
Took your place.

**See. I have engraved you on the
palms of my hands (Isaiah 4:16).**

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you despise nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our brokenness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**