

In Nomine Iesu

Midweek Lent 2, March 12, 2025

Redeemed from Adam's Curse: The Innocent for the Guilty

Genesis 3:8-13 and Luke 23:32-34

“And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’ He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.’ Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’”

“Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ And they cast lots to divide his garments.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the innocent One who became guilty for you. Dear fellow redeemed:

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We are gathered here this evening to continue our journey through Lent, the season when the Church named after her Lord, once again meditates on why she calls Jesus the Christ her Lord – why she humbly kneels before Him who was crucified to receive His forgiveness and blessing.

Perhaps you will remember that twenty-one years ago a movie opened throughout America. It was called “The Passion of the Christ.” It ran throughout the season of Lent. It drew the attention of millions to Jesus Christ and His crucifixion. It started quite a conversation and revealed a great deal of disagreement.

Most of the disagreement seemed to center around a single question. The question was splashed across the cover of the Feb. 16 issue of *Newsweek* magazine before the movie even opened at theaters: “Who killed Jesus?” Another way to phrase it was as the once well-known *60-Minutes* commentator Andy Rooney put it, “The movie by Mel Gibson called ‘The Passion of the Christ’ is the other religious issue in the news. Everyone’s talking about that. The question is whether the Jews killed Jesus Christ - who was Jewish, of course.” To put it succinctly, whose fault was it?

People look for fault all the time. They look to blame someone or something for every problem, ever since Adam blamed Eve and then Eve blamed the serpent. Looking for the cause of trouble is even the work of many professions. Law enforcement and the courts look to assign blame for wrongdoing. Lawyers look to assign fault for whatever doesn’t work perfectly. So do politicians. Doctors and many other health professionals constantly search for the cause of this or that sickness. Auto mechanics look for the failed part. Plumbers and electricians spend much of their time searching for problems in the system, while exterminators and computer

programmers both search for troublesome bugs. People are always looking to assign blame.

This began in the garden of Eden, when the choices were few. In the movie “The Passion of the Christ,” many thought that there were only two choices given, just like the choice in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3 the two were Adam or Eve, in the movie, Romans or Jews. In both cases the choice of who to blame seemed very limited. But the filmmaker provided a third answer to the question himself, right in the movie, if anyone cared to stop, look, and listen. Mel Gibson said in interviews of the time that it was his hand that held the spikes driven into Jesus, not the hand of any cast or crew member. His meaning was clear for anyone to see. The viewer who left the movie theater without realizing whose hand held the spikes will never understand the movie. And he or she will not be able to answer the question, “Who killed Jesus?” Who is to blame?

And yet that is not the greater truth. The greater truth is found in the texts chosen for our meditation this evening. *“And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’”* Dear fellow redeemed in Christ – and redeemed we are! – please take note of how elegantly simple is the answer the true Author of Mr. Gibson’s script gives to the question, “Who killed Jesus?” Who Jesus is talking about? Who is the “they” and the “them”? Listen to the words again: *“And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’”*

Who crucified Jesus? Who is to blame? Or, to put it in Mel Gibson’s terms, whose hand held the spikes that were pounded into Jesus’ flesh? Mr. Gibson spent \$30 million to tell us the answer to that question. But tonight I ask you, how do you answer the question? Who killed Jesus?

The Bible says, “They did.” And you see, God is a far better communicator than Mr. Gibson. With those words He directs you to look at yourself and ask who the “they” is. Dear friends, this is the reason we are gathered here in this place dedicated to the glory of God, to ask and answer that question. Who is “they”? According to God, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, the answer is right there in the text. The “they” is the same as the “them.” *‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’*

On the cross, the righteous One, the innocent One, the one man who was without sin, our Lord Jesus Christ, took upon Himself our sin and died in our place. The One who knew no sin was made sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. That is the paradox that we ponder tonight. The sinless Son of God died the death of crucifixion - a death that He did not deserve – suffered the torments of hell so that we who are sinners might have righteousness and life. The innocent One suffered and died so that the guilty, beginning with our father Adam, our mother Eve, all of their children both Jew and Gentile up to and including the crucifiers of Jesus, and all of us who have come after them, and have, just like the two in the Garden so long ago, continued in all the same sins and many more, might be forgiven. He died

that they – we - might live. In other words, we are holding in our own hands the spikes that were driven into our Lord's hands and feet at Calvary. And still greater than that, we have been forgiven for His sake.

Dear friends, the Christian life is a life lived in the cross of Jesus. It is the path we travel through life. We have been joined to the cross, as St. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) Again, Paul also said, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death."

Life for the Christian is a journey in the cross of Christ, a journey that runs through the valley of the shadow of death. That we have Jesus' cross does not mean that we will have a life free from pain and disappointment, suffering and heartache. In fact, these things are the crosses that God lays upon us, His dear children, to draw them still more deeply into the cross of Jesus. But we do not win salvation by the crosses that we bear. No, that was won once and for all on Good Friday. It was won by the Son, who prayed, "*Father, forgive them.*" And, for the sake of His Son, the Father has forgiven. No, the Father lays crosses on us in order to help us put to death our proud self-reliance. Those crosses kill in us the notion that there is something that we who are but dust and ashes can do to save ourselves. They drive us away from ourselves and our twisted thinking about God ... to Christ and Him crucified. They cause us to despair of self and to look for forgiveness and salvation in Him who prayed, "*Father, forgive them.*"

To journey in the cross of Christ is begin and end with Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Him. He went to His Father by way of the cross for us. He was lifted up on the tree of the cross in shame and humility as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And as the world perceives the cross as a cruel defeat and a horrendous miscarriage of justice, it feverishly looks for someone to blame. And there, just there is why there was so much discord over this movie when it came out and still so much misunderstanding over the question, "Who killed Jesus"? Well, the answer is, I did. I am the "they" who did that. The spike is in my hand. But I am also the "them," the forgiven "them," as our Lord, the innocent One said to the guilty ones, to us.

So, come with us, dear friends, this Lenten season. Come and meditate on Him, the innocent One, who was crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria