

Second Wednesday in Lent, February 25th

The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross.

Today, you will be with me in paradise. Luke 23:43

Luke 23:39-43

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” **40** But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? **41** And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” **42** And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” **43** And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Why didn't Jesus come down from His cross?

The criminals on the cross, hanging there next to Jesus, deserved to die that day. One of them says it himself. We do not know what their offense was exactly, except that it involved robbery as St. Matthew records.¹ We also know that what they did was severe in nature. The Roman Empire had the sole authority in Judea to execute people, and they did not execute petty thieves. Someone who stole a sheep or a piece of jewelry could be fined, beaten, or jailed for a while but they would not be killed for it. So the two criminals there had gone beyond mere theft, engaging in robbery that either threatened Roman interests – like robbing a centurion – or there were casualties. Perhaps they attempted to steal from a merchant or priest and someone got killed. We do not know the specifics, only that by their own admission they *knew* that they deserved capital punishment.

Those two committed offenses worthy of execution. But what did Jesus do? Jesus did not do anything to deserve death on a Cross, not even by the letter of the law. If a missionary goes into a country where Christianity is illegal and evangelizing is punishable by death, then we would weep for him if he is caught and executed but no one will be surprised. But there was *no* law which condemns Jesus to death, neither by Roman writ nor by anything in the Law of Moses. Our Lord Jesus never blasphemed, never advocated for idolatry, never stole nor murdered nor committed adultery. He never bore false witness and never so much as coveted. Christ did not *deserve* to die there.

Yet He was there, submitting actively to death upon a Cross, which is a very painful and torturous death indeed. One of the criminals asks Him to save Himself and them. Truly He had every right to do so and every ability, but He chose not to. Think about that for a moment my friends. Jesus did not have to die, He did not *deserve* to die, and since He is Divine he could have at any moment come down from that cross. We are speaking about the Jesus who calmed the waves of storms, who rearranged the skin of lepers and grew leg muscles on paralytics, who walked on water and who avoided being stoned to death and thrown off a cliff. It would have been easy, all too easy, for Him to pull His hands and feet off of those nails, to float gently down, and with a mere word heal His injuries.

Instead, He submitted to death and injustice for our sakes. Why is this my friends? Well He endured it to do the same thing for us that He did for the robber who believed in Him. Jesus endured the Cross so that He could save the mass of humanity who deserves to die – which is all of us. Every

¹ Matthew 27:38

single one of us was slated for judgment unto damnation, and justly so because of our sins. But for each one that says to Jesus “remember me when you come into your kingdom,” He says to us “you will be with me in paradise.”

The Roman Empire had the authority to execute anyone they wanted in Judea. All governments today enjoy the same duty and privilege, having the gallows ready for any who deserve it. If they should so choose, they can also choose to bestow pardon on criminals and prevent their executions. But none of these human governments can prevent or enforce the eternal matter of salvation or damnation. Only Jesus could win the pardon that we so desperately need if we want to avoid burning in the lake of fire for all eternity. He knew He was the only one that could pull this off, and if He did not go through with the pain and humiliation of suffering like the scum of the earth who were crucified next to Him despite being perfect Himself... then we would have no hope. So He chose to die for us instead. He chose the harder and more painful option than to leave us drowning in our own wickedness. *That* is why He did not come down from that Cross.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.