

Fifth Wednesday in Lent, March 18th

The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross.

I thirst. John 19:28

John 19:28-29

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” **29** A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

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

When Christ spoke these two simple words, “I thirst,” He was near death. Typically, a crucifixion lasted a long time, even a few days before the victim perished. The strain on the rib cage from having one's body weight pulling downward from their arms slowly made it harder and harder for them to breathe. If someone's feet were nailed down, they would have to push through the pain to straighten their legs and take in fresh air. As the body became weaker, the moment of asphyxiation got closer. Sometimes, to speed up the process, the arms would be positioned directly above the victim's body, going straight up, which results in death in as little as ten minutes. Jesus was crucified in the standard Roman fashion with His arms stretched out to the sides, but the execution only took a few hours.

The reason for His death going more quickly is very simple: He was tortured first. Jesus was flogged and beaten within an inch of His life before He was nailed to the Cross. This was not a normal flogging either, but accomplished with something called a Roman *flagrum*, a kind of whip with shards of rock, broken glass, and metal attached. The purpose of a flagrum is to savagely rend flesh from the person being flogged. In other words, Jesus had already suffered significant blood loss, that blood loss was ongoing, and several of His bones were likely visible from skin and muscle tissue having been ripped off.

When Christ says “I thirst,” at that point it was extremely difficult to say anything. To speak, He had to press His body up from the legs to get air, and in doing so He was scraping His heavily injured back against the crossbar. Needless to say, being *thirsty* was the least of His troubles in the moment. He did not say “I thirst” *just* on account of not having had anything to drink, but because there were two other things He wanted to proclaim in the act of drinking the wine.

First, let us recognize that He was in the midst of taking in the wrath of God. In the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”¹ To drink wine from God is to receive His wrath, as the prophets say.² By beckoning for some of the wine by the cross, Christ proclaims to the Father and to all who have eyes to see that He was almost done receiving our Heavenly Father's wrath against sin. With His dying breath close at hand, the Divine plan of salvation was nearly complete and mankind was almost redeemed.

Second, let us not forget what He said at the Last Supper. After giving the Words of Institution, our Savior said “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”³ From the end of the Last Supper to the moment He said “I thirst,” He did not drink so much as a drop of wine – but *here* He does it, which tells us the Kingdom is being inaugurated as He dies. Everyone in the world from that moment on will be able to receive

1 Matthew 26:39

2 Isaiah 51:17, 51:22, Jeremiah 25:15-16

3 Matthew 26:26-29

salvation, becoming a child of God by faith in Jesus. Though it is not quite time for His Return and judgment of mankind, the “already but not yet” Kingdom is established in that moment.

St. John says that this act, the final time anything went into His mouth before the Resurrection, was to fulfill Scripture – from taking the cup of wrath to inaugurating the Kingdom by His Blood. This is how faithful our Savior is, leaving no prophecy nor word of the Scriptures unfulfilled. Even though His head was spinning, even though He was in immense pain, He *still* went out of His way to proclaim victory over sin and the devil, to show us that He fulfilled it all, and that our souls are safe with Him. He knew that coming up for air was going to hurt, and even more so the act of swallowing the wine, yet He did so anyway to more completely show us that He is the true Savior. Let us therefore look to Him as the One who keeps His promises, and hold tightly to the testimony of our salvation in His Passion.

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