

Today you will be with me in Paradise

The gospel for this coming Sunday (The Last Sunday of the Church Year) is Luke 23:27-43. This text takes place at the Crucifixion of Jesus. A large crowd is following as Jesus makes his way to the cross. Some followed from sympathy and others out of curiosity. Whatever the reason, Jesus uses this setting to teach some remarkable lessons.

The lamenting and mourning indicate that these women are in a state of deep sorrow over Jesus' fate. They strike themselves, in a gesture similar to that of the people who will beat their chests after Jesus dies (23:48). Jesus addresses these women who mourn because these women represent those within the congregation of Israel, whose center of worship is Jerusalem, who have already begun to regret their rejection of Jesus. Jesus acknowledges their sympathy but expresses pity for Jerusalem's residents.

The treachery that the Romans will bring will be especially burdensome for children and women. By wishing to have the mountains fall on them, people are seeking to escape through destruction in death rather than endure continuing suffering and judgment.

The second opportunity to teach comes in verse 34. Instead of responding to the villainy tossed at him by the Jewish religious leaders and others who pass by, Jesus responds with *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

It is entirely in keeping with Luke's portrait of Jesus that Jesus should ask the Father to forgive those responsible for his crucifixion: not just the soldiers, but also Pilate, Herod, the Sanhedrin, the chief priests, the rulers, and indeed all people. That would include us because our sins also put him on the cross. We, too, often don't know what we are doing in regard to our relationship with him. It is also comforting that our sins are also covered in this proclamation. (CC)

The last pronouncement in this lesson is made to the thief on the cross. The two criminals being crucified were no choir boys or innocents' who had wrongly been convicted. The Greek word order here emphasizes that these evildoers are "with him [Jesus]." Jesus' quotation of Is 53:12 in Lk 22:37 is being fulfilled: Jesus is being reckoned with transgressors. (CC p. 915)

One of the criminals chimes in with those who are ridiculing Jesus. The other rebukes his fellow criminal, pointing out that the two of them deserved what they were getting. He asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. This is a statement of true faith. He alone sees Jesus' messianic kingship, which welcomes sinners. Jesus statement is of absolution gives the criminal and us the promise of being with Him in paradise. (TLSB)

Prayer: Grant, dear Jesus, that we may see the day when we will be with You in paradise. Amen. (TLSB)