

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is Palm/Passion Sunday. At Mass this weekend, we hear about Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and then His rejection, suffering, and death. This is the beginning of Holy Week, the high feast days of our year. I strongly encourage you, if you are able, to come to the Sacred Triduum: **Holy Thursday (7:00pm), Good Friday (3:00pm), Easter Vigil (8:00pm)**. These high holy days are the center of our Faith!

In today's article, I will focus on the last words of Christ that we hear only in Luke's Gospel. The first is

Father, forgive them, they do not know what they do (Luke 23:34).

This word from the Cross reminds me of two things. The first is that God is NOT a rival to us. What do I mean by this? In the Garden of Eden, the serpent gets Eve (and Adam) to eat the forbidden fruit by telling them that God is keeping something from them, and that they will be *like God*. In essence, Satan tells us that God is afraid of us, and sets Himself up as a rival to us. This is the language of power, control and "taking," NOT the language of love, surrender, and "receiving." God's love is such that He wants us to surrender to His overwhelming, head-over-heals love for us. He wants us to receive His love that He freely gives. We, on the other hand, very often don't trust God. We feel that we have to be in control, because if we are not, we will end up ruined. We *take* what we think we need, instead of trusting God to provide for our needs, and fulfill our desires. On the Cross, Jesus puts the lie to the idea that God is our rival. Even as He is being killed, He doesn't call out for vengeance, or even justice, but for *mercy*! He is not against us, but for us.

The second thing I think about is that Jesus forgives! He is the most innocent person *ever*. We speak about innocent people suffering unjustly, but no one was as innocent as Jesus, nor was there anyone ever who suffered so deeply from physical, mental, emotional or spiritual torture as Jesus, nor was there ever such a miscarriage of justice as when *we* judged and killed God! Yet, in that moment, He forgave. This great grace points out that Jesus calls us to forgive even the worst of offenses against us or our loved ones. But He doesn't just *demand* forgiveness, He gives us the *ability* to forgive. May we grab ahold of this grace so that we may experience true freedom in Christ!

The second word from the Cross is

Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise. (Luke 23:43)

This comes at the request of the "good thief" to be remembered by Jesus in His kingdom. We know almost nothing about the "good thief" (traditionally called Dismas), but he may have been like one of those we hear about in the parable of the Good Samaritan – someone who waylaid travelers on their way up to Jerusalem. Often, these thieves brutally mugged people, even killing some. Whatever Dismas' crime, it was enough for the Romans to desire crucifixion for him – a horrible and torturous form of capital punishment. It is at this moment, with an act of trust on the part of Dismas, that Jesus promises him Paradise... not in some distant future when he has atoned for all of his sins in Purgatory, but *today*! This is the power that an act of trust has over Jesus' Heart – it's like He can't resist us, when we place a childlike trust in Him. Trust brings about the infinite *mercy* of God!

The final words from the Cross in Luke is

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. (Luke 23:46)

Here, despite all of the horrible torture – bodily, mentally, emotionally and spiritually – that Jesus has gone through, He makes an act of trust in His Heavenly Father. In the midst of what looks like complete failure from a worldly perspective, Jesus trusts in the Father's success. He teaches us that we can always trust God.

Do you see in these words of Christ on the Cross this deep connection between **trust** and **mercy**? In the 1930s, when Jesus revealed Himself to St. Faustina, He revealed how trust and mercy are linked. The image of Divine Mercy has the signature "Jesus, I trust in You". This is not by accident, but as a sign of how our trust in God opens us to the profound mercy of God, how that by an act of trust in God's mercy, God cannot, as it were, refuse us that mercy!

This Friday, Good Friday, the world is invited to pray the Divine Mercy Novena – nine days of asking for God's mercy to pour out anew on the world, leading up to the great feast of Divine Mercy (this year, April 28th). I invite you to pray this Novena with me. You can come to the parish and pray it as a community or pray at home. Trust in God's love and mercy, and I promise you (because He did) that you will not be disappointed!