

In the Name of ✠ Jesus.

Armed military troops accompanied the betrayer to Gethsemane. To protect those with Him, the Lord steps toward the soldiers and asks who they seek. When they answer, “Jesus of Nazareth”, the Lord says “I AM He”. They came for Him. But at that they did not seize Him. They drew back and fell to the ground. They understood what He said. He is the I AM that spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He is the I AM in whom Abraham believed. He uses the personal Name of God as His own Name. And they have come to do Him violence.

Standing in the breach between His disciples and the armed mob, He offers Himself, that his disciples be set free. That is why He came. He came to offer Himself that you be set free. He came to stand in the breach between you and the wrath of God. When He said to the trembling soldiers “...if you seek Me, let these go their way”, He spoke not only of the Eleven. He offered Himself. He willingly went in the Way of Suffering, that you go in the Way of Righteousness.

**“Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him.”** The all-night trial ended at nine in the morning, when He who committed no transgression began to serve His death sentence. When He spoke the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard to His disciples, He taught them that at the third hour the landowner hired laborers and told them “You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give to you.” Now, at the third hour, to do the labor of your salvation in the vineyard of Golgotha, what is given to Him is death on the cross.”

**“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”** Now enduring the agony of crucifixion, His scourged Body now hung on the tree of curse and shame and death, He does not call down legions of heavenly angels to protect Him. He does not dispatch celestial hosts to visit wrath upon His enemies. He prays for those who crucify Him. While it transcends their understanding, He is crucified for them. He bears their transgressions. He dies that they be forgiven the very murder they commit by crucifying Him.

And so too does He die for you. So too does He pray your forgiveness, for blinded by your fleshly lusts you have sinned grievously against God. For you too does the Crucified Lord pray “Father, forgive them.” But more than praying, He is crucified for you. He suffers for you. He gives His life for you. What your transgressions have earned He endures, that you be forgiven.

It is not holy angels or mysterious living creatures that flank Him now, rather His company is that of insurrectionists and thieves and criminals. He has made Himself the greatest of sinners by covering Himself in the sins of the world, by covering Himself in your sins.

One of the criminals reviles and mocks Him. Not so the other. Perhaps he had heard the reports of the healings and miracles, the casting out of demons and the raising of the dead. Perhaps it was simply seeing the faithful silence in which He suffered.

The thief is quick to confess his own sins. He confesses even that he is deserving of death. And so must you confess the same. Yet while the Christ goes silently, making no defense for Himself, this criminal bears public witness of the Lord’s innocence: “...this Man has done nothing wrong.” Then the faith worked in that thief finds voice. He calls Him “Lord”. He prays “...remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”

Faith always receives its reward. In His suffering, condemned by the laws of the Jews and the Romans, bearing the sins of the world and enduring the crushing condemnation of the Holy Law of God, the epithet of Pilate marking Him as King, the Lord whose Kingdom is not of this world speaks words of comfort and hope to the man who dies next to Him: **“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”**

And so it is for you, O Sinner. He dies for you, that believing, you too will be with Him in Paradise. But the joy and brightness of Paradise is far from this dark place of suffering and death. The faithful, even His disciples, have fled the horror of Calvary. But the disciple whom the Lord loved, and the mother whose Flesh He took on, remain.

**“Woman, behold your son! Behold your mother!”** She had treasured all these things up in her heart. And now, as the sword pierces her own soul too, He has mercy on her. To fulfill the ancient prophesy, the Son now leaves His mother. But in love, He does not leave her alone. The Son gives his mother a new son. The disciple whom He loved He gives a new mother. It is in His great love for you that He does the same. He makes the Holy Church your Mother, and by the womb of the font He makes you a child of God.

Job knew suffering, but no man had ever suffered what He now suffers. The words of Job’s accuser find their fulfillment in Christ: “His roots are dried out below, And his branch withers above. The memory of him perishes from the earth, And he has no name among the renowned. He is driven from light into darkness, And chased out of the world.”

**“Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.”** Even the creation hides its face, the sun and moon and stars veiled in horror, as the One through whom all things were made tastes of death. In Him was life, and that life was the Light of men. The Light shined in the darkness, but the darkness did not comprehend it. The True Light came into the world, but the darkness crucified Him.

**“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”**

Sin cannot stand before a just God. The Crucified One now hangs between God and men, between heaven and earth, the most sinful Man ever to stand before God. The sins are not His. But He willingly takes them to Himself. He who is uncreated now hangs as the most despised of all creatures, the Highest now made lowest of all, the God of Moses now lifted up as a serpent on a pole.

The flaming sword and cherubim that blocked the gate to Eden are for all the sons of Adam. Your sin has separated you from God. Now in a Trinitarian Mystery, the God the Son is forsaken of God the Father, He enduring the separation that you be reconciled to God.

Having left His mother, now forsaken of His Father, of one flesh with His Holy Bride the Church, the Bridegroom pays the bride price with His life.

Again the words of Job’s accuser find their fulfillment in the Suffering Servant: “He has neither son nor posterity among his people, Nor any remaining in his dwellings. Those in the west are astonished at his day, As those in the east are frightened. Surely such are the dwellings of the

wicked, And this is the place of him who does not know God." Forsaken of men, faithful to the last, now He is forsaken of God.

**"I Thirst!"** He wept, He sweat, He bled, fatigued He stumbled and fell. These are attributes of a Man. God took on flesh and was made Man. He knew the weaknesses that afflict you. Now the Almighty God is made weak. He who breathed life into the first man now struggles to draw breath. He who placed the four rivers that watered Eden is now deprived of water in this garden of death. He suffers thirst that you may drink Living Waters, and never thirst again. His strength is dried up like a potsherd, His tongue cleaves to His jaws, He is brought to the dust of death.

**"It is finished!"** It began with the ancient Promise that the Seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. But the serpent would bruise His heel. That heel is affixed by spikes to the cruciform tool of suffering and death. His brow is pierced, nails penetrate His hands, His flesh bears the marks of the scourge. Of those whom the Father gave Him he has lost not one, except the son of perdition, that the Scripture be fulfilled.

It began in the manger, the bright glory of God filling the skies. It ends at Calvary, the glory of God veiled in suffering and humility, overcome by darkness and death. It began in the Jordan River, the Father's praise and the Holy Spirit lighting and remaining on the Son. Now He is forsaken of His Father, and His Spirit will not be with Him long. He has paid the price for your transgressions. Your debt is settled in full. It is finished.

**"Father, into Your hands I commit my Spirit."** In abandonment and death He is still perfectly faithful. He gave up His life for you. Now He gives up His Spirit. Faithful till the end, He bows His head and breathes His last. "If you eat of it, you shall surely die" said the Lord. The required death is rendered. He who walked in the garden in the cool of the day gives His life.

The Scriptures foretell that not one of His bones will be broken. And as promised of old, they looked upon Him whom they pierced. But in His death, life issues forth. His water and Blood fill font and Chalice, that you, dear Christian, are forgiven all your sins. What He has done He has done for you, that you never die.

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