

After so many solemn, pensive Passion Sunday and Good Friday services, it can be easy for us to forget just how obnoxiously loud and raucous the scene was at the foot of Jesus' cross. Women wailed and whimpered; men shouted insults and bellowed laughter amid the din of a gathering crowd full of human and animal traffic on the main thoroughfare into the city. Bawdy, macho warriors rolled dice for the estate sale treasures of the dying while two criminals on crosses, who had to deepen ribs in their flesh just to breathe, carried on an argument. Traffic slowed to a crawl as travelers stopped to rubberneck the roadside carnage, inspiring the bellicose critics to foul the air further with their petty, blogosphere commentary. Teachers of Torah, the voices who spoke for God, also chimed in with their own verbal haymakers of bitter sarcasm and sour judgment. In all this vicious and vitriolic confusion, we hear Jesus only twice.

We hear two statements from Jesus, a prayer and a pronouncement:

*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.*

*Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.*

In two short sentences, Jesus asks God to do so much more than forget and then promises to do so much more than remember.

Jesus lets go, and lets in.

In Greek, the word "forgive" literally means to let go.

As God's eyes burn with the atrocities of crucifixion, the innocent victim prays that God would overlook them, understand the ignorance, show compassion for the brutal, let it go.

Later, as Jesus' own flesh burns with unspeakable pain, he welcomes a dying convict into Paradise.

The man has made a simple if presumptuous, or maybe just desperate, request: *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*

It is the same deathbed request Jesus has just asked of his disciples the night before: *Do this in remembrance of me.*

Indeed, the criminal and the Christ look almost indistinguishable...both men asking for a morsel of mercy, two convicts at the end of Death Row, identical public spectacles, bloody, disfigured disgraces grasping for air and a table scrap of decency.

One is common, the other a king.

One is guilty, the other innocent.

Yet both hang together in agony, and Jesus says that both will hang together in Paradise.

*In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

The blood of the cross blurs the lines between humanity and divinity, between secular and sacred, between king and commoner, between guilty and innocent, between torture and Paradise, between death and life.

Clear, unmistakable borders are erased in royal red; God is reconciling all things here.

The sinner and the sinless one are together in anguish and in Paradise, in hell and in

heaven, which overlap one another in the same scene.

A cacophony of condemnation and mockery is muted in a whispered plea for compassion and forgiveness.

The sarcastic taunts of the soldiers and the scholars and the sign that *This [hot mess] is the King of the Jews* prove to be pure truth.

This is the king, unifying the kingdom of God, reconciling all things, making peace in a perfect storm of violence in a way few could stomach and no one could expect.

Mason Milliken Sobocienski, today we will trace the blurry lines of Christ's cross on your forehead, and you will be with him in Paradise and everywhere else.

We will welcome you, and worry for you, and pray for you, much as the author of Colossians prays for all of us who wear this sign of shame and beauty both too intense to describe.

*May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power...*

the One who hangs so limp and lifeless on a cross...

*and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.*

*He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Mason, in this new kingdom with this strange king, sins are forgiven and sinners are saved.

In this bizarre and beautiful realm into which you are being transferred, mistakes are forgotten and people are remembered.

God endures disasters and embraces daughters; God lets go of sins and holds onto sons.

Christ the King redraws the kingdom map without any borders so that nothing can separate us from his presence which itself is Paradise even when it's in the center of hell.

He is with you, as he is with us, king with the common folk, in common and reachable ways: in the common cup of Communion, in the tap water in which you are baptized, in the ordinary, everyday air you breathe and the pedestrian faces you see and the chaos you endure and the life you live and the death you die.

There is nothing so twisted or so horrible but that God in Christ is somehow, somewhere hidden in the midst of it, even if it is as the corpse, the criminal, the commoner, the peasant, the powerless one.

*May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power...*