

April 9, 2020
Lucan Words 2

The first two words from the cross in Luke are words of forgiveness. You might say that they are words of universal forgiveness and then personal forgiveness. They are words of pardon from the condemned and they fit the mold of Luke's gospel very well. Luke is a gospel of forgiveness. Again we see this as a dying Jesus living out in his last minutes the way in which he had lived his life. The consistency of doing what he was called to do is very clear. We have the examples of the various people forgiven by Jesus in this gospel, as well as the parables that speak to searching out and returning the lost to their relationship with God. In Luke we have the parables of The Lost Coin, The Lost Sheep, and the Prodigal Son. Each addresses the idea of forgiveness and mercy. What he offers and what he teaches are present throughout his life

In Luke, it should not surprise us that the first word Jesus speaks from the cross is a universal word of forgiveness. And yet historically there are some early manuscripts of Luke's gospel that do not contain this first word of Jesus, "Father, forgive them..." Why might these words be missing in these manuscripts? There have been times and people in our history who wish to blame the Jewish people for the death of Jesus. The term Christ Killers has been used down through the ages. Prejudice and persecution of them on this basis has marked our history for many centuries. Christians could somehow find their own justification for their actions if these words of Jesus are removed and Jesus does not forgive those who did this to him. But these words and this attitude is essential to the life and mission of Jesus.

He asks his Father to forgive them because they did not know what they were doing. The irony of those words on that day, when many of those who did this knew exactly what they were doing. Even with the offering of these words, they continue to assault him verbally with mocking and jeering. The only ones who don't join in are his followers who watch from a distance. Was that distance at such a place that they could even hear him?

One other seems to have come to an appreciation of who Jesus is and what he has to offer. He will be the only person who will, in any manner, come to the defense of Jesus. He is one who is crucified with him. He is the one who will receive that personal word of forgiveness.

He begins by telling the other man crucified to shut up and accept the punishment that is his due because they are guilty and deserve what they are getting, but Jesus is innocent. His words reflect both a confession of the things he has done as well as a confession of faith in Jesus. He does not delineate his sins, but he does acknowledge his guilt. He addresses Jesus by name. In that, he is the only one to do so. Jesus is addressed by titles, Rabbi, Teacher, and Master. Even Mary addresses him as Son. They would seem to have only one thing in common, by the end of the day, they will both be dead.

Here again, Luke has a theological purpose. This is the name by which salvation is attained. So this man called Dismas, is by the promise of Jesus, forgiven and saved. It was more than he might ever have hoped for. This man is given a title, "The Good Thief." Depending on your politics he was probably more of a Freedom Fighter or a Terrorist. But if the title of thief works for you, then one thing that is always said about this is that after a significantly sinful life, in the end he stole heaven.

Fr. Marty