

LENTEN DEVOTION #3

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS, AN EXAMPLE OF A PENITENT SINNER

MARCH 26-27, 2019

Morning Devotion

OPENING RESPONSE

L: God, our Father, each day is a gift of Your grace.

G: Your mercies are new every morning.

L: Guide our steps by the light of Your Word.

G: Shield us from harm and keep us from evil.

L: Better than life is Your love.

**G: Put joy in our hearts and praise on our lips.
Amen.**

PRAYER FOR GRACE

L: O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, You have brought us safely to this new day. Defend us with Your mighty power, and grant that this day we neither fall into sin nor run into any kind of danger; and in all we do, direct us to what is right in Your sight, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

G: Amen.

Evening Devotion

OPENING RESPONSE

L: Lord Jesus, You are the light of the world,

G: The light no darkness can overcome.

L: Stay with us, for it is evening,

G: And the day is almost over.

L: Let Your light scatter the darkness.

G: Let it shine in our hearts and lives. Amen.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

L: Lord God, all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works come from You. Give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments. Defend us also from the fear of our enemies, that we may live in peace and quietness, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

G: Amen.



1 Up - on the cross ex - tend - ed, See, world, your Lord sus -
 2 How God at our trans - gres - sion To an - ger gives ex -
 3 'Tis I who should be smit - ten, My doom should here be
 4 A crown of thorns you're wear - ing, My shame and scorn you're
 5 Your cords of love, my Sav - ior, Bind me to you for -



pend - ed; Your Sav - ior yields his breath. The Prince of
 pres - sion, How loud his thun - ders roll, How fear - ful -
 writ - ten; Bound hand and foot in hell. The fet - ters
 bear - ing That I might ran - somed be. My bonds - man,
 ev - er; I am no long - er mine. To you I



life from heav - en Him - self has free - ly giv - en
 ly he smites him, How sore - ly he re - quites him—
 and the scourg - ing, The floods a - round you surg - ing,
 ev - er will - ing, My place with pa - tience fill - ing,
 glad - ly ten - der All that my life can ren - der



To shame and blows and bit - ter death.
 All this your suf - f'rings teach my soul.
 'Tis I who have de - served them well.
 From sin and guilt has made me free.
 And all I have to you re - sign.

Text: Paul Gerhardt, 1607–76, abr.; tr. John Kelly, 1833–90, alt.
 Tune: O WELT, ICH MUSS DICH LASSEN (776 778) Heinrich Isaac, c. 1450–1517, alt.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 23:39-43 (NIV)

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?" ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³ Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

DEVOTION – THE THIEF ON THE CROSS, AN EXAMPLE OF A PENITENT SINNER

The prophet Isaiah had foretold that the Messiah would be counted an evildoer. **Therefore I will give Him a portion among the great, and He will divide the spoils with the strong, because He poured out His life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors** (Is 53:12). In fulfillment of this prophecy, Jesus was crucified at the place where the common criminals were executed and with two such men crucified along side of Him. Indeed, in the eyes of God the Father, Jesus was accountable as the transgressor of all transgressors, the One who held responsibility for every sin ever committed on earth, just as the Scriptures say: **The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all** (Is 53:6). And also, as St. Paul tells us: **God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us** (2 Cor 5:21).

Thanks and praise to God that Jesus humbled Himself to be counted among sinners and transgressors. For through Him the door of Paradise is open to all who come to Him, to all who repent of their sins and are numbered with the children of God. In the text we just read, one of the thieves who was crucified with Jesus turned to Him in sincere repentance. Tonight, then, we consider **The thief on the cross, an example of a penitent sinner.**

St Luke calls the two men who were crucified with Jesus *evildoers* or *criminals* without indicating what their specific crime was. Matthew and Mark both point to them as being thieves or robbers. In any event they had been found guilty of specific crimes warranting the punishment which they were now suffering.

One of the thieves, hearing the multitude mocking Jesus, joined in with them and railed on Him saying, **Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!** What a wicked man! He was not crying out in despair, nor was he pleading for deliverance. Rather, the words he spoke were uttered in mockery. Even in the face of death he still had the strength to scoff. He was a hardened sinner, like those about whom Jeremiah prophesied, **You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent** (Jer 5:3).

The other criminal, while joining in with his own jeers at first (Mt 27:44), came eventually to his senses and rebuked his companion: **"Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"** His reminder to his associate was that the time for mockery had passed; now had come the time for both of them to think of God and His judgment. What an altogether different sentiment. While the first was stubborn and hardened in his wickedness, the latter appears penitent. With deep sorrow and remorse for his evil deeds and with terror at the coming judgment he asked, **Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong!** Then, to reveal a sincere and genuine

repentance and a truly believing heart, he turned to the man in the middle and said, **Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.**

What was it that led the first man to ridicule Jesus as they hung side by side at the hour of their death?

What was it that led the second man to turn to Jesus in repentance?

The thief who spoke to Jesus revealed the two necessary parts of true repentance: sorrow over sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He freely confessed his guilt and admitted that he certainly deserved his punishment of death. He did not try to do what Adam did—or what so many others have done since—shifting the blame and throwing the fault onto others. He in no way sought to excuse himself or hide his guilt.

Take a moment to ponder it. This thief could gain very little by rebuking the other as he did, nor would this alleviate any of his own physical suffering. Whether he confessed his guilt or not, he was hanging on a cross; he was going to die and soon. His confession, then, must have been prompted by a recognition of his sin and deep sorrow over what he had done. Now he realized that he had sinned against God. He was willing to suffer the consequences of his sins, because he knew he deserved them. His only desire now was that his sins could be forgiven before God in heaven. He was pleading, together with the hymn writer, *Come not in terror, as the King of kings, but kind and good with healing in Thy wings.*

Having confessed his own guilt, this sinner also defended the innocence of Jesus saying, **this man has done nothing wrong**. Search the history of the Lord's passion, nowhere will you find any other such testimony on behalf of Jesus. Pilate, it's true, declared that he had found nothing worthy of death in Jesus, but moved by selfish motives he handed Him over to be killed regardless of his findings.

What was the situation here? Jesus was nailed to the cross; His disciples had fled; the Roman soldiers were watching Him, ridiculing and scoffing. In the whole crowd up to this point we learn of only one man who lifted up his voice in the defense of Jesus. It was this thief saying, **this man has done nothing wrong**. It was God's will that in the midst of His suffering in the frenzy of the raging multitude who had come to see Him die, Jesus was to receive a glorious testimony that He was but an innocent Lamb, dying for sins which He Himself had not committed. The one to do this was not Peter or one of the other disciples, but this criminal who realized his own sinfulness and the seriousness of sin.

That he had true saving faith in his heart is evident from his petition: **Lord remember me when You come into Your Kingdom**. The high priests and scribes, who should have known better, pronounced Jesus a blasphemer. Pilate condemned Him to death. The passers-by wagged their heads at Him and ridiculed Him in His seeming helplessness. Jesus was hanging on the cross and about to die.

Yet this evildoer recognized him as the King of kings and humbly asked to be remembered by the Lord in His Kingdom. It is certainly evident at this point that he was not speaking of an earthly kingdom, but He saw in Jesus a heavenly King having a spiritual and everlasting Kingdom. This criminal had a far better and greater understanding of the Messiah and His Kingdom than all the scribes and Pharisees put together.

When we look at this thief on the cross in his hour of most desperate need, what lessons can we appropriate for our own lives?

What answer did this sinful man receive from his Lord? **Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”** The scribes and Pharisees had called Jesus the “friend of tax collectors and sinners.” Though they spoke with malice and hatred in their hearts, they nevertheless spoke the truth. Throughout His whole life, Jesus proved Himself the friend of penitent sinners and truly came with “healing in His wings.”

This sinner did not have to wait long for an answer to his prayer. As soon as he turned to the Lord in true repentance, he received the assurance that he would have a part in the Lord’s Kingdom. Jesus told him that on that very day he would be with Him in paradise. Here again we learn of the real purpose of Christ’s coming—to save sinners and graciously receive them to Himself!

What a comfort for us. We are all evildoers and criminals, perhaps not in the same sense as this man, but we are all sinful people. Again and again we have thought and done evil in the sight of the Lord transgressing His holy commandments and committing crimes against His holy will. As a result, we deserve eternal death as our just reward. But as this sinful criminal man received mercy, we may also be assured of God’s rich grace. Never should we think, my sins are too great and too many. If you are tempted to think that way, think of this sinner, of what he had done and of the pardon he received, when he penitently came to the Lord Jesus.

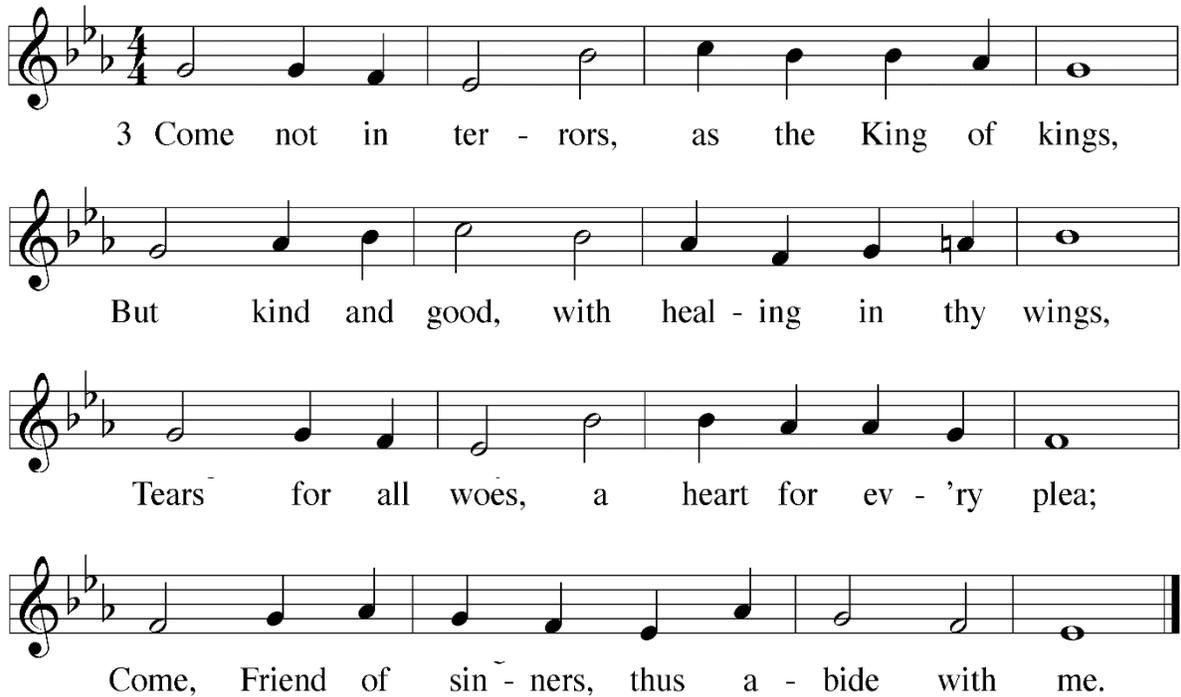
As this sinful man never laid claim to any special merit, but only acknowledged himself worthy of death, let us cast aside any and all thoughts or feelings of our own righteousness for which we think we deserve God’s grace. May we humbly confess our many shortcomings and weaknesses, recognizing that because of our sins, we deserve only the just wrath of God. But may our sorrow over sin also be coupled with the joy and gladness of true and abiding faith that Jesus has come **to seek and to save that which was lost** (Lk 19:10). He came to save you and me from sin and everlasting condemnation.

When we are faced with the guilt of our sins, what comfort do we find in today’s lesson?

When we are faced with the hour of our death, what comfort do we find in today’s lesson?

Closing Prayer:

Lord, in Your rich grace and mercy abide with us and look upon us with Your love, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. May that look sustain us through all the trials and temptations of life. Lord Jesus, abide with Your grace and mercy now and forever.



3 Come not in ter - rors, as the King of kings,
But kind and good, with heal - ing in thy wings,
Tears for all woës, a heart for ev - 'ry plea;
Come, Friend of sin - ners, thus a - bide with me.

CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION

G: O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy, and in Your faithfulness, come to my relief. Do not bring Your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you. Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide Your face from me, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God.

Almighty God, merciful Father, I, a troubled and repentant sinner, confess that I have sinned against You in my thoughts, my words, and my actions. I have not loved You with my whole heart; I have not loved others as I should. I am distressed by the sins that trouble me and am deeply sorry for them.

Silence for private meditation and confession.

L: Jesus says to His people: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.” His death paid for the guilt of your sins and the sins of the whole world. Do you believe this?

G: Yes, I believe.

L: Because of the promise of our Savior Jesus, I forgive you all your sins. Be assured that you are a dear child of God and an heir of eternal life.

LUTHER’S MORNING PRAYER

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. Into Your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

BLESSING

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to Himself. May the power of the Lord Jesus make us strong to do His will. May the peace of the Lord Jesus fill our lives.

Amen.

LUTHER’S EVENING PRAYER

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into Your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

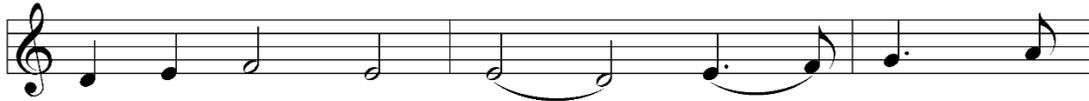
BLESSING

May the blessing of the eternal God be upon us:
His light to guide us,
His presence to shelter us,
His peace to unite us.

Amen.



1 There is a foun - tain filled with blood— Im -
 2 The dy - ing thief re - joiced to see That
 3 Dear dy - ing Lamb, your pre - cious blood Shall
 4 E'er since by faith I saw the stream Your
 5 When this poor lisp - ing, stam - m'ring tongue Lies



man - u - el was slain— And sin - ners
 foun - tain in his day; And there have
 nev - er lose its pow'r Till all the
 flow - ing wounds sup - ply, Re - deem - ing
 si - lent in the grave, Then in a



who are washed there - in Lose ev - 'ry
 I, as vile as he, Washed all my
 ran - somed Church of God Be saved and
 love has been my theme And shall be
 no - bler, sweet - er song I'll sing your



guilt - y stain, Lose ev - 'ry guilt - y stain.
 sins a - way, Washed all my sins a - way.
 sin no more, Be saved and sin no more.
 till I die, And shall be till I die.
 pow'r to save, I'll sing your pow'r to save.

Text: William Cowper, 1731–1800. abr., alt.
 Tune: COWPER (CM) Lowell Mason, 1792–1872.