

Holy (Good) Friday (4/2/10 – *Deliverance from Evil and the Cross of Christ*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

The cross was an evil instrument – designed by the Romans and mercilessly used to inflict great pain and suffering ... and to cause an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation. The victim was often flogged first – as was our Lord – with a whip imbedded with pieces of metal and bone to cut and rip the flesh. He would be laid out – the skin on his back still bleeding and tender and open – on the rough cross; then great spikes would be cruelly hammered at the wrists and feet. Finally, the cross would be raised until it came slamming down into the deep hole made to hold it upright – jarring every joint and causing the sore wounds to slide across the splintery surface. At that point the victim had to try to hold himself up by his pierced hands and feet in order to catch a breath. As the day would wear on, the muscles and joints would burn with the torturous stress – until finally he could hold himself up no longer ... and the only breath he could take would be a shallow gasp.

But that was not the only evil designed in this slow, excruciating death. There was the mental torture as well – the knowledge that with each painful attempt to raise the body to catch your breath, you would rip open your back a bit more ... and that sooner or later you would be too weak to lift yourself ... and would finally breathe your last. All that time the soldiers and those who passed by would mock and deride you. And if you had family and friends looking on, you would see their sad, helpless, hopeless faces before you – unable to give any comfort ... unable to change the inevitable end ... unable to thwart death.

It is no wonder that the centurion who looked on and saw how our Lord died came to the conclusion the Jesus was indeed the Son of God. For behold how our Savior behaves on His Cross. He does not curse the soldiers and His Own Jewish leaders – but prays for them, saying: *Father, forgive*

them, for they know not what they do. [LK 23.34] He does not revile in return when He is reviled, nor threaten in His suffering [1PT 2.23], but rather prays to Our Father in heaven on behalf of His persecutors ... on behalf of **all** sinners ... including you and me! Behold the Son of Man praying on the Cross! He prays for our forgiveness ... He prays for the repentant thief at His side ... He prays for the well-being of His mother through John's care ... He prays to the Father in the midst of His forsakenness ... He prays for His Own physical need ... He prays to the Father to receive His perfect work of salvation on behalf of us sinners ... He prays to the Father to receive His Spirit into His loving hands when He has accomplished our salvation.

This brings us, once again, to the theme of our midweek Lenten services ... which is carried over into this ***Holy Week*** and even into the celebration of the ***Resurrection of Our Lord*** – namely, ***The Lord's Prayer and the Cross of Christ***. In the *Seventh & Last Petition* of the *Lord's Prayer*, our Savior has taught us to pray: ***But deliver us from evil.*** Luther sees this as a summarizing petition, requesting *that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrows to Himself in heaven* [SC III.8]. Temporally – in our day to day lives – this is a very good and necessary prayer. We are surrounded by so much evil – perpetrated by the evil one ... and propagated by the world and our own sinful flesh – that this petition could easily occupy our entire prayer life. And as if it weren't enough that the devil and the sinful world are a constant threat, the corruption of our flesh by the Fall is so great that we have evil lurking within us. Just consider your hateful thoughts against those who aggravate you ... your hateful words spoken in a moment of uncontrolled anger ... your hateful deeds against those who have done you no harm ... even against those you profess to love.

Sometimes evil is so great in our world and in our lives, that it seems as

if it must surely have the last say ... win the final day – causing us to despair and lose hope. But consider, dear saints, just what it is that your Savior has done on His Cross. It is precisely in the Cross – in the great evil of the Cross – that Christ the Lord has delivered you from evil ... **already**.

From the Cross of Christ you are delivered from the evil of your sin – delivered from the eternal condemnation you have earned by your sin. Your Savior prays, ***Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*** – and the Father does indeed forgive you ... for Jesus' sake. From the Cross of Christ you are delivered from the evil perpetrated by the serpent in the Garden, which caused mankind to be cast out of Paradise. For your Savior says to the repentant thief, ***Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise*** [LK 23.43]. From the Cross of Christ you are delivered from the evil of broken and death-severed relationships ... as the Savior provides for His mother's care, ***Woman, behold your son ... behold, your mother*** [JN 19.26,27]. Most importantly, by His Cross the Son has reconciled you to your heavenly Father – that you might be a beloved son or daughter in His house ... and ***with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear father to deliver us from evil.***

Do you feel forsaken at times – by friends ... family ... even God? Know that by His Own forsakenness on the Cross, Christ your Lord has delivered you from being forsaken eternally. Because Christ cried out, ***My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*** [MK 15.34], you know that God ***will never leave you nor forsake you*** [DEU 31.6, 8; HEB 13.5]. And because of that – because God will never leave you nor forsake you – you ***can confidently say, “The Lord is my Helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”***, as the writer of Hebrews says. Indeed, you may confidently believe, “The Lord is my Helper ... what can evil or the evil one do to me?” For Christ your Lord has taken your place – suffered the punishment you deserve. God the Father turned His back on Him and poured out His

righteous wrath against sin upon the Son – that He might turn to you a Father’s tender heart ... and embrace you as His prodigal yet beloved child.

And as you observe the work of the evil one in the world and experience the evil of sin – even your own sin – in your life, you are often driven to hunger and thirst for that which is good and holy and righteous. Whenever you pray, *deliver us from evil*, remember that Christ hungered and thirsted to procure for you that deliverance. When the evil one works against you, consider how in the moment of your Savior’s thirst on the Cross, the evil one had his servants at hand to deride and cruelly mock Him. Instead of good wine, they gave Him sour wine – vinegar – to drink [JN 19.29]. So full of diabolical hatred and spite was everything that Christ suffers on the Cross for us and for our eternal salvation. Above all, recall that Christ spoke that word, *I thirst*, when He knew *that all was now finished* [JN 19.28]. And after He received that final, evil cruelty from the evil one on our behalf, He cried out, *It is finished!* [JN 19.30] – it is accomplished ... the goal has been attained ... salvation is complete. By His Holy Cross Christ had redeemed the world! By His Holy Cross Christ has delivered us from evil!

We know it is complete – that we have been delivered from the evil of the evil one ... from sin and devil and death. The curtain of the Temple is torn in two from top to bottom. Christ our Lord has removed what separated us from our Most Holy Father – our sin. And having taken our flesh and our humanity into Himself, He delivers us all at last – freed ... forgiven – into the Father’s mercy. *Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!* The Savior cries out and breathes His last [LK 23.46]. We know what that means ultimately – on the third day. It means that we shall live before the Father in heaven eternally – having been made innocent and righteous like the Son.

Our Father Who art in heaven ... deliver us from evil. And in the Cross of Christ, He has – already now ... and for eternity.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]