

**Of the Seven Last Words that Jesus spoke from the cross, tonight's Gospel focuses on the Second Last Word of Jesus: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."**

**Now it is not just the religious leaders or the soldiers that mock Jesus, but even one of the criminals, a downward progression of mockery. But the criminal on the right speaks up for Jesus, explaining the two criminals are receiving their just due, whereas "this man has done nothing wrong." Then, turning to Jesus, he asks, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). What wonderful faith this repentant sinner has in Jesus! Ignoring his own suffering, Jesus responds with mercy in His second Word, living out his own Beatitude - "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*"**

**As the first Word of Jesus was: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,"so this second Word of Jesus from the cross, again is about forgiveness, this time directed to a sinner. Both the First and the Second Words of Jesus from the cross are Biblical expressions found only in the Gospel of Luke.**

**Jesus shows his Divinity by opening heaven for a repentant sinner - such generosity to a man that only asked to be remembered! This expression offers**

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**us hope for salvation, for if we turn our hearts and prayers to Him and accept his forgiveness, we too will also be with Jesus Christ at the end of our lives.**

**Perhaps this moment recalls deathbed conversions we have heard or read about. There is something about the reality of death that calls us to repentance. In this case, these impulses elicit a change of heart and the surpassing gift of promised salvation.**

**The name “good thief” should actually be an oxy-moron, which are two contradictory words to describe the man. But numerous churches are named after Saint Dismas. Only in God could this contradiction be reconciled. If Christ could wed heaven to earth, turn Peter the denier into a rock, and make the seeing blind and the blind seeing, surely he could transform a common thief into a saint.**

**This paradox exists in each one of us who are at once saint and sinner, bold and afraid, generous and self-serving. Dismas is the patron saint of all humans in their ongoing struggle for holiness.**

**This dialogue between Jesus and Dismas reminds us that the true impediment to salvation is not sin, but self-righteousness. The Lord’s guarantee of redemption to a sinner stands in stark contrast to Christ’s angry condemnations of the Pharisees. It is in our very denial of being “good**

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**thieves” that we imperil our salvation. For example, Jesus tells the Pharisees, “If you were blind, you have no sin. But now that you say, “we see,” your sin remains.**

**Tonight, then it is in our humble confession of sins that we receive the grace of Divine Mercy.**

**Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we are a living contradiction as we seek to find your way. As we confess being, “good thieves,” welcome us into your kingdom where sinners form a communion of saints. AMEN.**

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