

Christian perspectives: 'Father forgive them', Luke 23: 32-38

Picture the scene on Golgotha; the large crowd following and surrounding Jesus, their voices hoarse from yelling and howling Crucify, Crucify, Crucify him!! They hit Jesus when they get close enough, spit on him, taunt him all the way to the place of crucifixion and even then it does not stop, They taunt and jeer while hanging in agony from the cross, reveling in the spectacle.

Look at the Elders and teachers of the law? just look at them: trying to stay dignified but it is hard to hide their gleeful satisfaction at their triumph over this despised rabble rouser, he has bested them for the last time: who looks like the fool now! And so they walk proudly along noting with satisfaction that the common people still follow them rather than this Jesus? and they smile.

The roman soldiers laugh and try to keep this event moving along. It has been an interesting diversion from the everyday drudgery of soldiering. They had some good sport with this Jesus? but he is a strange one: not crying out or trying to fight back just taking it all, it almost spoiled the fun they had with him. They shrug their shoulders so what if he is or is not deserving of death, orders are to be obeyed. And so they arrive at Golgotha: the place of the skull. How appropriate because this is where death reigns! Hammer strokes ring out, cries of agony, curses and perhaps pleas for mercy from the murders but never a word from Jesus. Cheers from the crowds when the crosses get raised?. Cat calls, laughter and jeers... all directed at Jesus?..? Father forgive them, for they know not what they do??

This is the season of Lent, the time when many Christians prepare themselves for the time of Easter. They reflect on their lives and think about the things they have done wrong. Some people give something up for Lent (eg coffee, chocolate or pop) a kind of fasting if you want. It helps them to focus on Jesus' suffering and death to make up for our shortcomings (sin).

The great bible teacher Huston Smith once gave a number of lectures in which he taught the most outstanding characteristics of the world religions. For Christianity he concluded that the most outstanding characteristic was 'Forgiveness'. It was what Jesus taught and in the end exemplified on the cross. The first word off the cross is Father forgive?.. Doesn't this strike you as different or odd?

In matters where we have been offended or wronged we are more likely to wait for an apology, an admission of wrong doing before we will even consider to forgive the person that has hurt us. To forgive the offender who has deeply hurt us is not easy even though he/she has apologized, how much harder, near impossible would it be if the offender was cold and hard without a shred of remorse? Augustine one of the early church leaders noted that members of his congregation omitted the phrase 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors' when they prayed the Lord's Prayer. They did not dare to pray the first since they could not do the latter; forgiveness can be a hard and difficult thing. And yet this is what Jesus models on the cross for us: 'Father forgives them'. Jesus just doesn't forgive he 'preemptively' forgives. ?? He doesn't wait for an apology: here forgiveness comes before repentance. Picture for a moment a young child who put a huge deep scratch on the new family car with his bike? Now he stands before his angry and strict father?.. Fearing the worst too scared to open his mouth. But the father picks up his child and hugs him and says you are forgiven, and only after that does the child stammering and crying say I am so sorry daddy?. That is where we find ourselves standing before almighty God knowing full well our guilt and afraid of the consequences. Then the words from the cross: 'Father forgive them?..?

The prophet Isaiah prophesies about the day when: 'the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Is.11:9) we long for that day but that day is not here yet. But today we remember Jesus beaten and bloody hanging from the cross and remember it is our wrongdoing, our ignorance that put Him there. Then as Jesus speaks the first word from the cross and we are astounded by His incomprehensible Grace and Mercy: Father Forgive them!

May this season of Lent be a time of genuine reflection, where once again you contemplate on what Jesus did for you. Why don't accept Him as your Saviour and Lord and experience His Grace for yourself.