

Wednesday Reflection

Title: A Crucified God

Date: November 23, 20225

ID: Feast of Christ the King

Scripture: Luke 23:35-43

Text: A scale measuring joy and sorrow would place the feast celebrating Christ the King and the Gospel recalling the crucifixion at opposite ends. Crucifixion is not regal, majestic, or imperial.

Sunday's reading makes a hash of Luke's artistry. One verse earlier, Jesus says, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (23:34). One half of a verse earlier has the common people standing by observing. (23:35a). Sunday's Gospel begins with the "rulers" insulting the crucified, forgiving Jesus (23:35b). Luke shocks the reader's heart, setting Jesus and the common people against the powerful. The heckling reveals who Jesus is: "the chosen one," "the Christ of God." The inscription reading "*This is the King of the Jews*" indicates the Lord's crime as insurrection. The reader knows his kingship is also true (see 1:32/33).

The rulers prove they do not understand God's plan, the great reversal of all status, when they demand Jesus save himself. Luke wove the reversal theme throughout his Gospel (see 1:46-55 and 2:33-35). The most dramatic statement appears twice, "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses it will save it" (17:33; 9:24). Jesus demonstrates that he is the "Christ of God" when the Father restores life after Jesus gives life so we might enjoy the fullness of life.

What comes next confirms God's plan. While giving his life, Jesus saves the thief who history calls *the good thief*, "Today, you will be with me in paradise" (23:43). The innocent one has the divine power to forgive and raise up an actual criminal. Jesus, therefore, dies in confidence: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (23:45). Contrast Luke's trustful last words with the cries of desperation in Matthew (Matt 27:46) and Mark (Mark 15:34).

Jesus fulfills God's plan. A Roman centurion takes note (23:47), and the common people feel moved (23:48). Earlier, Luke began a demonstration how an encounter with Jesus transforms status. During the procession to the place of the Skull, Luke portrays women, in those times thought to be inferior, courageously mourning Jesus (23:27-32). Upon his death, Luke completes the exposition. Forsaking fear, the women stayed with Jesus until the end (23:49).

Accepting a crucified God changes this-worldly status. Power over others, domination, and control are not things of God. A God who saves from the cross requires, in return, compassion, empathy, mercy, and a renewed sense of justice. The ancient prophets taught this message, Isaiah (Isa 1:13-17), Amos (Amos 5:21-24), and Micah (Micah 6:6-8). Jesus taught the priority of mercy in the Sermon on the Plain, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (6:36). But here, Jesus does more than teach. On the cross, He lives self-giving love. The question for us is whether we can worship a Crucified God by living the same love.