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THE SECOND WORD FROM THE CROSS

Among the crowd around the cross there were two thieves, crucified with Jesus. One of them, in the blindness of cynical despair, "railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:39-43). The thievery condemned at the cross, is that which cast us out of paradise, the theft of Adam at the tree, his proud grasping after the prerogatives of God, which brought us into spiritual death. In wonderful exchange, Jesus, the one "who hath done nothing amiss", took our condemnation upon himself, and to all penitent thieves he opened the way to the peace of paradise, the peace of the soul, restored by forgiveness to right relation with God. He who "died for our sins, has risen again for our justification" (collect). It is this peace which he declares to his apostles when he appears to them in his Resurrection, displaying to them the wounded hands and side where he took into his own body the sword of judgment (Gospel lesson St. John 20:19-31). It is this peace which he sends his apostles to communicate to the world, by declaring the remission of sins. In repentance and faith like that of the thief on the cross, we too "have the witness in ourselves" (epistle lesson): dying to the old life of thievery and guile that we may reborn "without guile", to serve God "in sincerity and truth" (collect): "As new-born babes, alleluia: desire without guile the spiritual milk [of the word], alleluia, alleluia" (Introit: 1 Peter 2:2; Psalm 33. Quasimodo.)

GGD

The Rev'd Gavin G. Dunbar

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