

Is 52:13—53:12
Ps 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25
Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9
Jn 18:1—19:42

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Death of a King

The king was dying. The people stood watching. They were his people, or had been, and some of them would be his again. But just now he was dying, destroyed by he peer group, the human race.

Those who had been his followers could only watch his fate. They were the first of a new race, the Christian Observers, --- those who would be at the bedside of dying god, of an ideal gone sour, of a principle presently unpopular,... standing and just watching.

Those who had been hurt by him, those whom he had called fools, those whom he had called hypocrites, those whom he had called to follow but were too weak to accept, those who had been hurt by his revelation that they were not gods, all these had their day now. They mocked him, crying out:

He claimed to save others. He said that we needed saving. Let him now save himself!

They had, of course, missed the point. God does not need to be saved. The fullness of man is less complete than the emptiness of God. The life of man is less vital than the death of God. Once again men made the mistake of treating God as a human, infuriated that he would not say that men are gods.

The soldiers seemed to agree, and they added the final touch. They laughed and jeered with the rest, not because a human was dying for he was less than human to their Roman eyes. He was just a dirty Jew. For them the inscription on the cross was the final insult:

This is the King of the Jews

Thus, to the prejudice of man against God was added the prejudice of man against man.

Even the dying lacked respect for his death. One of the criminals writing on his own cross, cried out:

If you are king save yourself and us!

Human pride surfaced even in death. In some way we *must* be better than others. The thief expressed his superiority by not claiming special deathbed honors. The thief knew that he was dying, and he prided himself on dying without pretense. At the same time, he felt cheated that the man in the middle should be the center of attention. His jeers were a way of identifying with the crowd. Perhaps they would watch *him* die with some degree of sympathy. It is terrible to die alone, especially in the middle of a crowd.

Only one voice of understanding was heard, that of Dismas, the other dying criminal. He cried out to the crowd:

Have you no respect for death? Why can't you let him die in peace? Is it because he said that it was good to be man? Is it because he said the God loved you? Is it because he said that he was God?

Turning to Jesus, the good thief said:

Die in peace, Jesus, and may I be with you hereafter.

Jesus answered:

I promise you: today you will be with me in my kingdom!

And then he died:

"The king is dead; long live the king"

Jesus entered his kingdom with
an entourage of one