

*“The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you...”* These beautiful words of benediction are for us. They are not for Jesus. Not here at the Place of a Skull. Golgotha in Aramaic. In Latin: Calvary – “a barren place.”

Truly, there is no place more barren than the cross upon which Jesus hangs. Beneath Him are the soldiers gambling for His clothing; the chief priests and scribes mocking Him. Next to Him are two robbers, violent men. There are women who care for Him. But they are at a distance looking on from afar. All of these faces are turned toward Jesus. Their eyes upon Him. Their words directed at Him.

But there is one face that is not turned toward Jesus. His own beloved Heavenly Father. His face is not shining upon Jesus. He is turned away from Him. This is why, for Jesus, Golgotha is Calvary – a barren, desolate place in which to die.

He projects, in a loud voice, words which pierce the darkness: *“My God, why have You forsaken Me! Why do You leave Me? Why have You abandoned Me?”* These are words of anguish. The searing pain that comes to Jesus just for speaking with such force cannot match the agony of what these words mean – the horror of His Father being turned away from Him.

And yet, the word here in the Greek makes it clear that His cry is not one of defeat. Rather, it is a cry that anticipates victory. This is how it must be. All things are as they should be. His Father turns His face away from Him because Jesus has become sin itself. The sin of the world is on Jesus. And thus, His Father must turn away from Him.

And then He dies. Yet not as others die. Jesus cries out and He expires. He gives up His spirit, breathing it out. And the centurion standing there, facing Jesus we’re told, exclaims: *“Truly, this was the Son of God!”*

How do we explain his words? The soldier in charge of the crucifixion declares Jesus to be the Son of God. This centurion is facing Jesus. But really it is Jesus who is facing the centurion. And with His final cry and His dying breath, Jesus breathes out upon this centurion His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and thus, this man proclaims the truth that Jesus is, in fact, the very Son of God.

And for you, my friend, what else can explain your presence here tonight, your confession of Jesus as God and Lord, other than this – that Jesus’ face is also turned toward you. Is not this a wonder? Because so often your face, and mine, have been turned away from Jesus. We have turned ourselves toward everything but Jesus. Toward things that keep us too occupied to even notice Jesus. And sometimes toward worthless things and sinful things.

This is reason for us to repent, but not to despair. Jesus dies bearing your sin, my friend. Your sin belongs to Him now. God does not charge it to your account. You are forgiven of it. All sin that you have done, it is all forgiven.

Day by day, turn toward your baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection. In those precious waters you see Jesus' face, and it is turned toward you. His face shines upon you with grace and favor because He hung on the cross bearing your sin.

Next week is Holy Week. Let us not walk by Jesus' cross without stopping. His Father turned away from Him on the cross. Let this not be us. The gifts of His cross are too many to count. How blessed we are, like the centurion, to stand beneath the cross facing Jesus, and receive from Him, His dying breath which gives life. Amen.