

Palm Sunday (C)
April 1, 2007
By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 50:4-7
Psalms 22:8-9, 17-18, 12-20, 23-24
Philippians 2:6-11
Luke 22:14-23:56

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

These are the words attributed to the so-called "good thief."

Tradition alone gives us his name: Dismas. Years ago, when I served as a jail chaplain, I happened to share the story of St. Dismas and gave a medal struck in his image to one of the Catholic prisoners I visited. Lo and behold, the story circulated like wildfire, and within a matter of days, prisoners of all faiths and of no faith were asking for that medal to such an extent that chaplains of other denominations were asking me to supply them for their parishioners. I asked one of the inmates what so captivated the jail community. "Father, he was a capital offender and he was good. It means there's hope for all of us," the prisoner said.

It is a scene found only in Saint Luke's Gospel: As Jesus hangs in agony on the cross, the bystanders taunt him. Even one of the criminals crucified with him joins in the jeering. But the other criminal will have none of it. Luke doesn't explain how or why, but something opens up within the heart of the "good thief." Despite his impending death, he realizes the injustice of Jesus' execution and senses God both with and within this rabbi hanging next to him. He rebukes the other criminal, admitting that both he and the other criminal are guilty but that Jesus is innocent. And then, in a plea that resounds through the centuries, he turns to Jesus and asks, "Jesus, remember me when you come

into your Kingdom."

The dying Jesus responds out of compassion and mercy: "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Enduring excruciating pain and facing imminent death, Jesus holds to a greater certainty: Paradise is real. The Kingdom of God he preached, a Kingdom built on love, justice and reconciliation, has come. His place in the house of God is secure. Paradise is his destiny, source and home...and ours, as well.

Jesus' promise to the good thief is made to every one of us: "From now on we're in this together. I won't leave you behind. My place is your place. Welcome to Paradise, the Kingdom of my Father. Today you will be with me in Paradise." Every act of generosity and mercy resonates with this promise and springs from the same source. In imitating Christ's mercy, in taking up his work of reconciliation, in struggling to be salt for the earth and light for the world, we profess our belief that Paradise not only exists in the future but exists now, hidden in the present - and Jesus promises to be with us in Paradise, not just after our own deaths, but today, in this very moment, in the Paradise we open up in our households and communities.

Our prayer this Palm Sunday:
"Jesus, remember me when you come
into your Kingdom."