

## THE BAD THIEF?

*Christ be in all hearts thinking about me,  
Christ be in all tongues telling of me.*

Recently, our Lenten reflection group talked about forgiveness and we meditated on the crucifixion of Jesus and the two criminals who hung on crosses one on either side of him. One seemed to be bitter and resentful; the other was penitent. It was noted that Luke was the only evangelist who had recorded this interaction between Jesus and the two men who had been crucified with him. We noted also that one of them is considered to be the first saint as Jesus promised him "Today, you will be with me in Paradise." We usually refer to the criminals as the bad thief and the good thief but I am not sure we should think that way.

There are good people who find it very hard to forgive those who have in some way hurt them. They may have been hurt and let down many times which has made them afraid, wary and unable to trust. It has caused them to be bitter and suspicious of others. They have become defensive which makes it hard for them to trust those who try to help. And there are those who have had a good life, surrounded by people who have loved them and supported them always, making them more able to make allowances for those who have wronged them. They have not become bitter and are more able to forgive. The good thief may have been like that but, like the prodigal son desired more in his life. Perhaps his desire led him to a life of crime but in the last moments of his life he has realised his mistakes and recognised his guilt. He is truly sorry for his crimes and asks for forgiveness. Jesus will never reject the repentant sinner.

On the other hand, who knows what hardship the "bad" thief has experienced throughout his life. Perhaps he has been rejected and cruelly abused from his childhood. Perhaps he has grown up with little knowledge of God and has turned to crime as the only way he can support himself. Who knows if in those last moments of his life he has not had a realisation that God is and his seeming rejection of Jesus is not actually a desperate cry for mercy, begging Jesus to save him. Only God can know what was in his heart.

We cannot judge or condemn others, even when we feel hurt and offended. We must always try to see things from the other's point of view. Perhaps we have inadvertently offended the other person and caused him to lash out at us. Although we may not forget, we must always be prepared to forgive. In the prayer that Jesus taught us we say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." If we cannot forgive, we are holding in our hearts the pain and resentment that we felt when someone, perhaps inadvertently, may have said or done something to hurt us while that person may not even be aware of how we feel. Forgiving is self-healing and not forgiving is self-harming. I pray that I will always be able to forgive and pray for those who have hurt me.

*Christ be the vision in eyes that see me,  
In ears that hear me, Christ ever be.*