

Second Sunday of Lent – March 11/12, 2017 – “Amen, I say to you, this day you will be with me in Paradise.”

Jesus looked at some of the “holier-than-thou” folk of His day, parading around in their fancy robes, mouthing their pious platitudes, making a show of putting a few coins in some poor beggar’s cup, and He called ‘em as close to a swear as He ever got: “hypocrites”; actors; phonies.

Boy, did He ever get that right! He saw right through ‘em. Wonder if He can see through me??

Every one of us has a secret that’s kept locked up in a cold dark place no one can see, no one can know, no one can find. It’s the worst thing I’ve ever done, the most awful thing about me. It’s the worst thing somebody ever did to me. It shames me. It controls me. It follows me everywhere. It threatens to become known and ruin me. I can’t speak about it. I can’t forget it or forgive it. No one could forgive me.

“What a mess I’ve made of my life,” Dismas thought. As he hung there in front of that crowd of strangers, naked, bleeding, the pain was worse than anything he’d ever felt. It was so hard to breathe. He passed in and out of consciousness, not sure if he was dreaming or it was a real nightmare. He found himself remembering and the memory wasn’t pretty. Even as a kid, he was a thief ... picking pockets, shaking other kids down. As he got older, he just kept on stealing so he could have his wine, so he could buy time with his women. Finally, he got into

a kinda gang o' thieves and the jobs got more brazen, more rewarding, more dangerous. He was livin' on the edge and he knew it ... but there was no way out that he could see. Once you joined that band o' cutthroats, ya didn't get out alive. That last job ... they'd gotten all the stuff they'd come for and then, the owner of the house hadda come home. He panicked. He didn't mean for anybody to get hurt. He was a thief, but not a murderer. Except now, he was one, and he was dying for what he'd become.

The other guy from his gang who got caught was on the far cross and was shouting and swearing, and damning everyone and everything, that is, everyone except himself. But the one on the middle cross, the sign said "The King of The Jews", He was so quiet. He even prayed God's forgiveness for everyone. Dismas thought, "I may not be too bright, I may be a screw-up, but even I can see this man is guilty of nothing. How can He take all this"?

Dismas roused himself, and not knowing what came over him, said to the man in the middle, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

The man turned His head and looked at me as if He could see right through me, like He knew me forever, knew everything about me. But, I didn't feel judged or looked down on or condemned. Then I heard Him say the strangest thing. Though He rasped and spoke barely above a whisper, I heard every word He said as clear as thunder. "Amen, I say to you, this day you will be with me in Paradise".

He didn't live long after that. And now, they've broken my legs. I can't breathe. But all I can think of is what He said. All I can see is the most beautiful light. And one face ... His. My King and my God.

