

REFLECTIONS

April 16, 2006

**"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in
paradise ."**

Luke 23:43

Celebration in Paradise

He was the centerpiece, but not alone in his suffering. Two others joined him. One nailed to a cross on his left, the other crucified on his right. They were both thieves who sinned against man and God.

Beneath them the crowd stood laughing and mocking all three of them, but the one in the center was the main attraction. As soldiers gambled for his clothing, others laughed and taunted him saying such things as, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." (*Luke 23:37*)

Even one of the thieves goaded him saying, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (*Luke 23:39*) As this thief faced death by suffering on the cross, he chose to mirror the mind-set of the mob. His cynical words expressed rejection and disbelief, disrespect and denial. I can't help but wonder what he must have been thinking as he taunted his fellow sufferer. Maybe he thought if he goaded the main attraction into coming down from the cross he would escape also. Or maybe he thought that if he joined the side of the crowd that they would have mercy on him. Neither would be.

But the other thief saw matters differently. While his fellow thief appealed to the crowd, this one appealed to Jesus saying "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (*Luke 23:42*) He recognized Jesus as the Christ and humbled himself in confession, dependence and submission. He asked to be remembered. He received God's grace. And there was to be a celebration in Paradise.

In our lives we have two choices. We can seek approval of the crowd. Or we can humble ourselves before Jesus and seek his forgiveness. Forgiveness is the reason He came.

Let us always remember Christ's sacrifice for us. It is an open invitation.

And when we receive it, there will be a great celebration in Paradise.

"You are the light of the world,"

Richard 