

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent – March 7/8, 2020 – The Second Last Word of Jesus: “Amen, I Say To You, Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise”

George Friedrich Handel's "Messiah" is by far the most popular of all the works in the choral literature. It's melodies are, at once, filled with hope and rejoicing ... "Comfort Ye, My People"; "Every Valley Shall Be Exalted"; "For Unto Us A Child Is Born" ... and then somber and sad ... "Behold The Lamb Of God"; "Surely He Hath Borne Our Grievs"; "And We Like Sheep" ... and then glorious and triumphant ... "The Hallelujah Chorus"; "The Trumpet Shall Sound"; "Worthy Is The Lamb". But, it is the last word of the oratorio, a word that is sung over seven minutes, that leaves us with a sense of finality, a sense of redemption, a sense of wonder, a sense of God's will be done, God's promise fulfilled ... the word "AMEN." Handel concluded his masterpiece on the life of Christ with the word that ends all prayers, especially the prayer that was the earthly life of Jesus Christ, "AMEN", such a fitting end to the greatest story ever told.

Many of us were privileged to watch another great life unfold before our eyes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the life of the man from Poland, Pope John Paul II. In the spring of 2005, all the world knew that the man who had led the Roman Catholic Church for more than a quarter century lay near death in bed in the Papal Apartment in Vatican City. Each day and night, crowds kept prayerful vigil outside the pope's window in St. Peter's Square below. The few

close friends who were in the room with the dying pope, who spoke so many languages in so many countries to so many people, leaned close to hear whatever words the soon-to-be-saint might utter before he passed to eternity. As he drew one final breath, he let it out in one whispered word, "AMEN", the last word in a life that was one long, great prayer to the Father ... "AMEN."

"Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus, as He was dying on the cross of Calvary, was not alone, was not the only one under the sentence of death. He hung between two convicted felons, thieves. As Jesus had been the night before in Gethsemane's Garden, so these two poor criminals were afraid. One of the men remained unapologetic and bitter to the end, even lashing out at the supposed Messiah next to him, "If you are the Messiah, then save yourself ... and us too!" But the other thief, Dismas, accepted his guilt, yet turned to the bruised, bloody, supposed Christ next to him, a man who looked, for all the world to see, like a common criminal getting his just desserts ... Dismas, with death facing him in the eye, sees something more, something deeper ... a King ... a Savior ... a hope for the future and forever ... a vision of Paradise ... and so, he prayed, "Innocent Jesus, I am a sinner - remember me when you come into your Kingdom." And what did he hear?

Amen ... so be it ... so you believe ... so it shall be this very day ... AMEN.

Jesus second word of His last and greatest sermon reminds us that every life that begins in the womb of the Church in the waters of Baptism is a prayer. Along the way, many of us ... almost all of us ... lose our way and forget the words of our prayer, forget to take up our cross and follow him. But even at this moment, this late, maybe last

moment, turn your head and heart to Jesus, come clean about your failings and sins, confess Him as your King, and dare to hope, to believe in Paradise, and if this be your prayer, your last will and testament, the final word you will hear from Him will be "AMEN."

"Amen, I say to you, this day you shall be with me in Paradise."