

Hymn of the Month

Lord Jesus, Think on Me (LSB 610)

As you well know, we are now in the penitential season of Lent. The altar is adorned with purple, the crucifix is draped in black, and the sound of rejoicing has gone silent from our lips. Now is the time of repentance, for the hour of our Lord draws nigh.

Fallen and hopeless, doomed to the wretched decay of death, we call to mind those words of the thief on the cross, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). This thief hung limply upon a cross, on the very rack of death; seeing Jesus beside him, he issued his last gasp for hope: “Jesus, remember me.”

No one else will remember me—me, a thief! No one will remember a man of ignominy, willfully deplorable in life and damned in death.

This thief speaks for all mankind in his plea. For what is mankind, but a thief: one who stole of the fruit which he was told not to eat; one who grasped for himself the one thing he could not have. Bequeathed every good thing, given mastery of all creation, we did not count it enough. Instead, we stole from the God who loved us, and so doing, dined upon the fruit of death.

Who will remember us... us, the despicable thief.

“Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” We likewise hang limply upon the cross of our own sin and shame... but next to us, with no sin or shame of His own, Jesus hangs upon the same cross.

From the foundation of the world, Jesus has remembered us. He has not forgotten. For how can a lover forget His beloved, even when she has stolen from Him? How can He forget, when she has been ravaged by an even greater thief, the Evil One himself, and left for dead? Jesus has not forgotten, but comes to visit vengeance upon that Father of Thieves, upon the one who stole His bride from Him. Jesus has remembered you. He remembers with thorns and bloody sweat.

He remembers, piercing His own hands and feet for love of you. And not only does He remember, but He has come to take you back with Him.

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Our hymn this month is a melodic mediation on the prayer of the thief. In every verse, we echo his words: “Lord Jesus, think on me.” A bishop in the Early Church, named Synesius (c. 365-c. 414), originally wrote this ode as an epilogue to a collection of ten hymns. Later, in the 1800’s, a man named Allen William Chatfield paraphrased the ode into a hymn of its own. Each stanza mentions the many throes of this life, from sin and worldly passions, to anxiety and distraction, to pain and misery, to confusion and darkness. This is a woeful existence we have brought upon ourselves, a woeful death we have chosen. And yet, amidst this all, there is the promise of hope.

Just as for the thief on the cross, Christ Himself and Christ alone is the answer to our prayer. Anticipating Jesus’ reply, the last stanza cries out, “Lord Jesus, think on me, / That, when this life is past, / I may the eternal brightness see / And share Your joy at last.”

And truly, we shall; for in our last hour, when death is near, we will cry out to the only One who can remember. The earth will cover us, those who knew us will likewise perish, and slowly, time will forget us.

But in that dark oblivion, the One Who Remembers shall come to you, and out of the silence He will answer your cry: “I have not forgotten you. Come with me, for truly, today you will be with me in paradise.”