

To Pay the Debt  
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There are many stories and parables in scripture that do not have names for the participants. Often I have wondered who the two robbers were who were crucified beside Jesus on the hill of Calvary (Golgotha). There were three crosses prepared for the crucifixion. The cross upon which Jesus died was in the middle. We can call that cross the Cross of Divinity. The Cross of Divinity paid the debt humanity owed God for its sinfulness. Only the Son of God could accomplish this. Jesus as both God and man is the only one to be both the giver and the receiver of the debt; both at the same time.

The other two crosses are the Crosses of Humanity. We can name them the Cross of Repentance and the Cross of Audacity. On the Cross of Audacity was a sinner who only wanted to save his life in this world and avoid the justice for his crimes. "If you are the Son of God, then save yourself and us." He was to perish for lack of remorse. He lost both his life for his sins, and his soul for lack of sorrow. On the Cross of Repentance was hung another sinner who also didn't want to die, but who recognized his sinfulness and his just punishment; but he also recognized the true innocence of Jesus. "This man has done nothing wrong, but we have received a just sentence." Turning to Jesus, he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." This was a sign that he recognized Jesus as the Son of God. It implied he wanted to be recognized as part of God's kingdom. This was a baptism of desire. This was an act of faith. The reward for faith is acceptance, because true faith implies repentance. "This day you will be with me in Paradise," Jesus responded. It appears that this sinner was the first to receive the sacrament of reconciliation. He acknowledged his sinfulness, and received absolution. "This day you will be with me in paradise." His penance was his death on the cross which he fulfilled. In the midst of His suffering, Jesus identified the purpose of his mission: to reconcile a contrite humanity. (Luke 23:39) While we live we still have the hope of reconciliation; the payment of the debt.

How do you think God perceives us? Are we repentant or audacious? As imperfect humans, how do we accept the challenges of life - as a curse or a blessing? We all suffer in one way or another, either physically, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, from abandonment, loneliness, loss of dignity and respect, from hunger and disease, and so much more. Why me, Lord? Why me? Why not me, Lord, if this is my path to the Kingdom! The way to the Kingdom is through the sufferings of our own cross of faith. Jesus said, "Come follow me. I am the truth, the light and the way." How else can we have a share in the repayment of the debt? We are all debtors for our sins and the act of divine redemption is through His cross. It was through the divine cross that Jesus paid our debt. When we acknowledge the debt that Jesus paid for us, we become free. We become free when we submit to the will of God. Only then are we no

longer slaves to sin but servants of God's love. Crosses are meant to be a trial of worthiness and proof of commitment. You either welcome them or curse them. It is only through a trial or temptation that we can prove or disprove our sincerity. Redemption is possible even at the last minute through true remorse as the thief on the Cross of Repentance found out.

Humans have no way to repay a divine debt. Since we are unable to pay the debt, God forgave it through His suffering on the cross. We become debt-free because of God's great act of love for us. We remain debt-free when we return our love to God for His goodness by keeping His commandments. All a lover ever wants is to be freely loved in return. The freedom to love is a choice; love God or love self. There is no salvation in loving self. To love self above all else is to go deeper into debt. Sorrow and repentance can become a great joy. Choose your cross!

When we view the outstretched arms of Christ on the Cross of Divinity, they can be perceived as a welcoming gesture; welcome to my world. But what is your world, Lord? You were rejected, abused, reviled, ridiculed, scorned, and killed because you loved us so much. Can I love that much? Do I really want to suffer the same thing? Which cross of humanity will I embrace?