

Noisy Execution

Scripture Reading — Matthew 27:35-44

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying . . . “Save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” — Matthew 27:39-40

For most of my life, I've lived in states and provinces where capital punishment is illegal. Even in those North American jurisdictions where executions still occur, they are carried out in the inner recesses of prisons, with a minimum of witnesses, and in solemn, almost respectful, silence.

In most times and places in human history, this has not been the case—and perhaps it was especially so at the noisy scene of Jesus' execution.

It happened along a busy road leading toward one of the city gates of Jerusalem. For maximum public exposure and shame, the naked, dying bodies of the condemned were displayed on crosses mounted on a roadside hill. Until they passed out from the pain and torture, the crucified ones would hear the jeers of people coming and going from the city. Shame on top of death was the point.

This particular execution scene featured a special squad of jeer-leaders. The chief priests and others from the Sanhedrin mocked Jesus loudly, reciting their trumped-up accusations. They even piously quoted from Scripture (Psalm 22:8) as they made fun of Jesus' helplessness.

Jesus heard, and he cried out the opening verse of that same psalm: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Prayer

Father God, creator of the human voice, too often the loudest voices shout lies and insults. Help us to listen wisely for those who are speaking your Word truthfully. Amen.

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