

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” As Jesus hung dying upon the cross, he spoke these words.

How are we to understand these words? What did Jesus mean to say by them? What was He asking God the Father? And what was He doing as He spoke them?

In the midsts of all of these questions, it is often missed that *while Jesus spoke these words, Hewas quoting the Psalter*. These words, spoken by Christ, are the first words of Psalm 22. When Jesus was asking God the Father why He had forsaken Him, He was not doing so in His own words. Jesus was praying the words of Psalm 22. In fact, He was probably chanting them, just as He would have done all of the other times that He had prayed them.

Jesus knew that Psalm 22 was a prophecy about himself, written hundreds of years before his death. He also knew that Psalm 22 was a prayer, and not just any prayer, but the last prayer that He would ever pray before He died. As he memorized it as a young, Jewish child, He memorized it as the words that He would speak just before His final breath.

Psalm 22 gives us eyes to see that there was nothing random or coincidental about Jesus’ death upon the cross. Jesus’ crucifixion was a liturgical sacrifice, where Jesus acted as both (1) the priest performing the liturgy and (2) the sacrifice being offered up to God by the priest. Upon the cross, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, was both Priest and Victim, and *he willfully accomplished the work of our salvation as both*. Jesus willed to be (1) the priest to offer the sacrifice and (2) to be the sacrifice to be offered.

From the Scriptures, we know that there was nothing surprising about Jesus’ death, at least for Jesus himself. Many times, Jesus explained, either directly or indirectly, exactly how he would die and for what purpose He must die. But as we know from the response of the disciples, every time that Jesus explained his own death, it was hard for people to understand what He was saying. This was true even for those who spent all of their time with Jesus.

In fact, the only person who ever came close to understanding exactly what Jesus was saying about His own death, was Saint Peter. One day, as Jesus was teaching His disciples, Saint Peter realized that Jesus was teaching that He, the Jewish Messiah, was going to be put to death and rejected by His very own people, the Jews. Even then, however, in this moment of clarity, Saint Peter completely missed the mark. *He rebuke Jesus for being willing to die* and in return, was rebuked himself. Jesus rebuked Peter as if he were Satan. Peter failed to understand that God the Son was sent by God the Father to be “lifted up upon the cross, so that He might draw all men unto Himself.” Peter failed to understand that Jesus would die, and not only that He would die, but that *He would go to his death willingly*.

In his Gospel account, Saint John records Jesus making it perfectly clear that there was nothing accidental or coincidental about the sacrificial death that He would soon participate in. Jesus’ death upon the cross was not something that was merely going to happen to Jesus; no, Jesus’ death was a liturgical, religious sacrifice that He performed as a priest forever after the Order of Melchizedek.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus says, “No man taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” Saint John makes it clear to us, that *Jesus willfully took up His cross and died*. If this is true, if Jesus knew all along *how it was* that he must die *and for what purpose* he must die,

why then would He feel forsaken by God the Father as He died? If Jesus knew that the sacrificial offering of His life was something that He was commanded to perform by God the Father, and it was a sacrifice that *He willed to offer Himself*, why would He feel forsaken?

The answer to this question is simple, and yet incomprehensible. God has revealed the answer to this question to the Church, yet she must accept it by faith, since it is divine truth too splendid for finite man to comprehend.

The reason Jesus felt forsaken on the cross was because *Jesus was not only fully God, but fully human as well*. Jesus had two wills, a human will, which belongs only to God the Son, and a divine will, shared by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, ever one God.

As Jesus died upon the cross, He felt, as any man would, who requested to be spared from death and was denied; Jesus felt forsaken by God the Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane, just before He was betrayed by the kiss of Judas Iscariot, Jesus asked His Father to spare Him from the cup that He knew He must drink. Jesus asked God the Father to save Him from the agonizing death of the cross. And what was the Father’s response to His Son’s prayer? Well, we know from Jesus’ own words, “not my will but thine be done.”

As a man, Jesus did not want to die. He did not want to be brutally beaten, mocked, and crucified. As a man, Jesus did not want to be stripped of his clothes and exposed for all to see upon the shameful cross of the Roman Empire. He did not want to be put to death as a criminal, when he had never committed a crime in His entire life.

As a man, Jesus felt as a man; He felt forsaken by God, forsaken by His disciples, forsaken by the people He came down from Heaven to save. But even though all of this was true, even though, as a man, Jesus did not want to die, *he still submitted His human will to His divine will*. Whereas the First Adam placed his human will in opposition the divine will of God, the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, placed His human will in submission to the divine will of God.

As Jesus prayed the words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?,” even though he felt forsaken, he would have had the rest of the prayer in his heart. Even though Jesus felt forsaken, He would have also felt what the rest of Psalm 22 expresses: *trust in the faithfulness of God, even in times of despair*.

Towards the end of the prayer, Psalm 22 reads, “O praise the LORD, ye that fear him: magnify him, all ye of the seed of Jacob; and fear him, all ye seed of Israel. *For he hath not despised nor abhorred the low estate of the poor; he hath not hid his face from him; but when he called unto him he heard him.*”

Even though Jesus felt forsaken as He prepared for His soul to descend into the depths of Hell, He knew that He could trust His Father to deliver Him. He knew, as the prayer of Psalm 22 concludes, that “All they that go down into the dust shall kneel before Him; and no man hath quickened His own soul.”

Jesus knew that the Father who had sent Him to give up His life for the life of the whole world would also raise Him from the dead. He knew that the Father, who He felt had forsaken Him, would be the Father who would raise Him from the dead. Jesus knew that His resurrection from the dead would confirm what has been true since before the foundation of the world: *that His Father would never despise Him and that His Father would never turn his face away from Him*.

When God the Father looked upon God the Son during the crucifixion, He did not look upon him in disgust, but in love. The same Father who looked upon Jesus at His baptism and at His transfiguration is the same Father who looked upon Him at His crucifixion. He is the same Father who looks upon His Son and says, "This is my beloved Son, hear Him."

Therefore, as we begin the march of Holy Week, as we press onward towards Calvary, where in a few days the shouts of Hosanna will have become demands for the execution of the innocent Christ, let us give thanks to the blessed and undivided Trinity for the cross of Christ, for by it salvation is made possible for sinners. May we trust that the Father has not forsaken the Son and may we trust that He has not forsaken us either.

Amen.