

## SOMETHING WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE

In Luke 14:25 - 34 Jesus explains the high cost of becoming His disciple. He expects to be the primary focus and first love of all who follow him. He demands that His disciples love Him more than father or mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, or even their own life. In Lk 12:34 He makes clear: **“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple”**. Since the cost of following Christ is so high, Jesus warns everyone to “count the cost” before making such a revolutionary commitment.

Using the thief on the cross as a patron saint, however, many conclude that following Christ really doesn't cost anything. They would insist that Jesus paid it all! They promise a one way street where salvation is guaranteed by merely reciting the sinner's prayer. Consequently, the late Micky Cohen repeated this prayer without making any commitment to Christ. As he was the number one gangster in Los Angeles, he never planned to change anything in his life. He assumed that since there are Christian athletes, and Christian musicians, he would become a “Christian Gangster”.

There is obviously something wrong with this picture!

The Sicilian Mafia is a famous group of gangsters known as “Cosa Nostra” which means “Our Thing”. This criminal enterprise is divided into families and clans and these mafiosi consider themselves “men of honor”. A prospective member is expected to unquestionably obey instructions and often must demonstrate his desire to be a member of the Mafia by committing a murder. Common street criminals are drawn to the Mafia by the “respect” they have earned in the underworld. To offend a Mafiosi is to risk lethal retribution. Members of the Mafia are so committed to their cause that they show up at meetings even when no refreshments are being served.

The Mafia, of course, is no longer confined to Sicily. It has spread through the world and spawned many similar criminal enterprises. Regardless of where these “gangs” are, however, a high standard of commitment is required to become a member.

Please do not conclude from this comparison that Jesus expects us to become like the Mafia. On the night before Calvary He emphasized the difference between His followers and the Gentiles. The kings and rulers of the Gentiles lord it over others but this was not to happen in the Kingdom of Christ. Jesus set the example as a servant and promised that in His Kingdom greatness would be achieved by service (See Lk. 21:24 - 27).

Yet, this does not negate the fact that God is a Jealous God and will not tolerate being second on our list of priorities.

With this in mind let us take another look at the thief on the cross. Remember! Jesus has the uncanny ability to see into our hearts and know what we are thinking. Nobody had to tell him what was in man, He already knew it (Jn. 2:25). He knew Nathaniel when he was under a fig tree (Jn. 1:48). He knew Zachaeus when he was in a sycamore tree (Lk. 19:1 - 10). He knew precisely what the Rich Young Ruler had to give up in order to be saved (Matt. 19:21). He knew that when a poor widow cast two small coins into the treasury that she had not only given everything, but that she had also given more than anyone else (Mk. 12:42, 43).

When Jesus therefore told the thief on the cross : “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43), that wonderful promise was based upon our Lord's analysis of his heart. Like the poor widow with only two coins, he didn't have much life left, but he gave it all. Based upon the promise of the All Knowing Christ, his commitment of everything he had was not a sham.

Now the picture comes more sharply into focus. God, our Righteous Judge, does not give promises based on shreds of evidence and partial knowledge. God is Omniscient! He knows everything! As He looks into our hearts, therefore, what impediment does He see to our salvation?