

Erlo Stegen:

Faith of Soldiers (Lk 23: 47)

"Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, certainly this was a righteous man."

We find a number of references in the Bible, and in the New Testament in particular, to soldiers who came to the Lord.

This centurion (in charge of about 100 men) was commissioned to oversee the Crucifixion of Christ. After observing all that happened until our Lord breathed His last breath, he declared that the dead man was "righteous". This pagan Roman officer had insight into the divine righteousness of our Lord. Matthew records that he had also said: "Surely this was the son of God". Here we have a soldier who saw Christ as God.

One thinks back on the rich young man who came to Christ (Lk 18: 18-30) who asked, "righteous (or good) Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?". Jesus answered, "why do you call me righteous (good), there is none righteous, save one, that is, God." By this, Christ was pointing out His own divinity. He wanted the rich young ruler to understand what he was saying in declaring Jesus to be "righteous" or "good". Only God is righteous and good and Jesus is God.

There is a historical record by an Egyptian historian, Diogenes, who noted the unique darkness with these words: "Either the Deity Himself suffers at this moment, or sympathizes with one who does."

Gentiles often grasp the mystery of faith better than believers. Jesus warned that "they will come from the East and the West, but the children of the Kingdom will be cast out." We will be surprised by who is in heaven one day.

In Matt 8:5 we read of another centurion who pleaded for help from Jesus. When the Lord offered to go with him he said that he was "not worthy" of having Jesus under his roof and it was not necessary because: "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, go, and he goes, and to another, come, and he comes, and to my servant, do this, and he does it." Jesus marvelled at his faith and declared: "Truly I say to you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel".

Another soldier who had great faith was Cornelius, also a centurion (see Acts 10). Peter didn't want to go to him because of his prejudice. God had to reveal to him (in a vision) that he must not be discriminatory and that "what God has cleansed, he must not call common (unclean)". Cornelius, despite being a Gentile soldier, feared the Lord, he and his whole household. Soon this God-fearing man was to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Another centurion, Julius, was commissioned to go with Paul to Rome. He helped protect Paul and, towards the end, Paul protected him.

We learn from these various soldiers, besides others mentioned in the Bible, that true faith is not exclusive to a religious group. "God is no discriminator of persons ..." Acts 10:34, and He will honour true faith.