

GOOD FRIDAY PRAYERS THE SEVEN LAST WORDS



We gather our thoughts in prayer to remember how Jesus suffered and died for us and to thank God for his love and his mercy.

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

He grew up before God like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Merciful God - as we remember how your son Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross, how seven times he spake, seven words of love, we ask you to bless our hearing.. Father, as we recall how all three hours His silence cried for mercy on the souls of all, we ask you to help us to understand the mystery of your love, and make us into a people who are ever more worthy of it. Amen.

THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF JESUS

THE FIRST WORD

Luke 23:33-34 : When they came to the place called "The Skull", they nailed Jesus to the cross there, and the two criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Jesus said "Forgive them, Father! They do not know what they are doing."

** Meditation on the First Word "They do not know what they are doing"*

They do not know? They ...who killed Jesus? Who is "they"?

It is so easy to name others to blame others : the Romans , the crowd , Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas they all played their part and conspired against Jesus or simply followed orders to maintain the peace to keep Jesus' kingdom from infringing on theirs.

And yet where are we when Jesus' kingdom infringes on ours? on our peace and our order? on our prosperity and our security? Where are we when the victims of our peace cry for justice? when those disenfranchised by our order call for compassion? when the hungry and the lonely beg us to share our prosperity , our security , our power?
Where are we when Christ is crucified among us?

Surely he should have raged at the sinners who nailed him to the tree.

Surely he should have raged at us for the evil we do,, the evil we do both knowing and unknowing, Yet compassion is there in the first words that he utters. He intercedes for us before the Father.

Compassion that called him into being in his mother's womb

Compassion that compelled him to the cross

Compassion that brings incredible, unbelievable grace

Compassion that echoes through the centuries to all who participate in the killing of Christ:

Compassion that cries out from the cross:.

"Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing"

Silence

THE SECOND WORD

Luke 23:39-43 : One of the criminals hanging there threw insults at him "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" The other one, however, rebuked him, saying: "Don't you fear God? Here we are all under the same sentence. Ours, however, is only right, for we are getting what we deserve for what we did; but he has done no wrong." And he said to Jesus, "Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!" Jesus said to him, "I tell you this: Today you will be in Paradise with me."

** Meditation on The Second Word*

How much are we like the first thief?
Full of anger - because we are not rescued from our sin?
Full of hate - because we suffer because of the sins of others?

How much do we want God to snap his fingers and make right what we have made wrong?
What we have allowed others to make wrong?

How easy it is to cry "save us" and to rail against God when there is no magic cure, no miraculous recovery, no legions of angels to take away pain and bring wholeness.

How easy it is to scorn the Messiah, to mock the goodness of the world and condemn the light of the world because we are unwilling to face what we we have done?

Yet there is goodness. There is a cure for sin , a cure that does not promise magical solutions but promises that the pain of sin is not the end, that when all this is over when the suffering is finished , that the final word is not torture and defeat, but life -- life springing out of the ashes life transformed and fulfilled in Paradise.

To the compassionate thief
To the one who could still recognize the good in the world
To the one who tried to comfort and protect that good
To the one who sought good -- Comfort was given

"Today, you will be in paradise with me."

Silence

THE THIRD WORD

John 19:25-27 : Standing close to Jesus' cross were his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there; so he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that time the disciple took her to live in his home.

** Meditation on the Third Word*

Who can grasp the grief? the grief of Mary watching her son suffer? the grief of Mary watching him die? And who can grasp the grief of the son? The son who must see his mother mourn?

What gift can a man give his mother? What can he offer when he is gone?
How can he help her? Hold her? Comfort her? Honour her?

"Woman, here is your son"

Here is one I love, to love you, and for you to love., One who knows me, One who is my brother and who can speak of me., One Who can hold you, comfort you, and honour you;
One who shares your grief

"Here is your mother"

Here is one I love, for you to love, and to love you. The one who taught me, the one who fed me, the one who wiped away my tears the one who hugged me, the one who grieves with you.

Women, behold your children; children, behold your mothers.

Silence

THE FOURTH WORD

Mark 15:33-34 : And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Elo-i, elo-i, lama sabach-thani?" which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

** Meditation on the Fourth Word*

Of all the agony of that tortuous day, the lacerations of the scourging the chafing of the thorns around his head the convulsions of his tormented, dehydrated body , as it hung in the heat all the day Nothing reaches the depth of this anguished cry of desolation "My God, my god, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Jesus, who found his purpose and strength in the presence of God , who was sustained by the immediacy of his relationship with God and who endured all by the tangible power of God always at work within him , always a centre of vitality and peace, found himself totally alone on the cross.

Jesus, whose very being was God, found himself utterly, absolutely, despairingly. cut off from all that gives life and breath , cut off from all that gives purpose and hope , cut off from the source of his being cut off, even from himself , plumbing the depths of the human condition to walk in the place of the utter absence of God, in the place of sinners, in the place of those who reject God.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

In these words is the central mystery of the crucifixion which cannot be fully comprehended, that there is no despair so deep or evil so overwhelming or place so far removed from joy, light, and love from the very heart of God, that God has not been before us, and where God cannot meet us and bring us home.

Silence

THE FIFTH WORD

John 19:28 : After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the scripture), "I thirst."

** Meditation on the Fifth Word*

There is a kind of timelessness about hanging on a cross. It is not a quiet death, over in an instant in one glorious moment of martyrdom like being torn apart by lions. A cross is as much an instrument of torture as it is a gallows from which to hang,

And as the day wears on seconds stretch into minutes which stretch into hours until there comes a point when time can no longer be measured except in the gradual weakening of the body and its ever more insistent demands for that substance which is so vital to life , so foundational to all living things , so basic to existence as we know it: -- water.

Water to moisten a parched mouth
Water to free a swollen tongue
Water to open a rasping throat that cannot gasp enough air.
Water to keep hope alive
to keep life alive just a few moments longer.

Water, to a crucified man, is life.

"O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee as in a dry and weary land where no water is."

Who can tell if these words from Psalm 63 went through Jesus mind , but a thirst for water is a thirst for life, and a thirst for life is a thirst for God, who promises streams in the desert mighty rivers in the dry land and living water to wash away every tear.

Here, at the end of it all those promises seem far away, - distant.
And yet Jesus - forsaken by God still clings to the memory and the hope of life.

"I thirst."

Silence

THE SIXTH WORD

John 19:29-30 : A bowl was there, full of cheap wine mixed with vinegar, so a sponge was soaked in it, put on stalk of hyssop and lifted up to his lips. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished";

** Meditation on the Sixth Word*

What a sigh of relief! What a cry of deliverance, that finally, after seemingly endless pain, and gasping torment, it is over at last. The suffering is ended. The ordeal is finished and nothing remains but the blessed peace of the absence of all sensation.

When all there is, is pain, its ceasing is the greatest blessing of all, even when its ceasing comes only with death.

But Jesus' cry is more than just welcoming the ending of pain it is more than joy at the deliverance death brings.

He does not merely say, "it is over" he says, "it is accomplished, fulfilled, achieved"

Jesus's cry isn't a cry of defeat and despair

It is a cry of success and triumph - even at the moment of death - that the race has been run, that he has endured to the end, that the strife is over, and the battle is won.

Jesus' cry is a cry of relief to be sure but it is also a cry of victory:

"The work I came to do is complete", there is nothing more to add, "it is finished"

Silence

THE SEVENTH WORD

Luke 23:46 : Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

** Meditation on the Seventh Word*

It is the end, the very end , the end of the ordeal, the end of the suffering and Jesus alone on the cross tortured, exhausted, abandoned by his friends, forsaken by God, gasps for a last breath and gathers the strength for one final cry.

Why would he choose to speak so close to the end?

Why would he muster the last energy he had to cry out with a loud voice?

Couldn't God have heard his thoughts?

Unless God wasn't the only one intended to hear.

Unless his voice was pitched loud so that we too might hear this final dedication of his soul.

A dedication made despite the pain, despite the mocking, despite the agony, despite the sense of horrible aloneness he felt.

A dedication made to God , before the resurrection, before the victory of the kingdom, before any assurance other than that , which faith could bring.

Jesus entrusts his spirit -- his life -- and all that has given it meaning -- to God in faith, even at the point of his own abandonment, when the good seems so very far away he proclaims his faith in God, the darkness cannot overcome it.

"Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit"

SILENCE

Responsive Reflection based on Isaiah 53-4-6,9

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions and he was bruised for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole.

All we like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, although he had done no violence nor was any deceit in his mouth.

HYMN: "Were You There" (verse 1-2)

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?

Prayer of Dedication:

Lord God, you have given us everything. You have not held anything back.
Help us in like manner to give of ourselves. Sanctify us Christ's name.
Bless us and all that we think, feel, say, and do that we, like Jesus, may be a blessing unto others,
We ask this and all things that we ask of you through him, saying the prayer that he taught us...

Our Father....

HYMN: "Were You There" (verses 3-5)

Were you there when the sun refused to shine?
Were you there when the sun refused to shine?
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when the sun refused to shine?

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?
Were you there when they pierced him in the side?
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Were you there when they laid in the tomb?
Were you there when they laid in the tomb?
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?

BENEDICTION

May the Spirit of Christ be with you, may his faith and trust abide within you, and may the knowledge of his love support you both now and forevermore. Amen.