



*The Trinity with Christ Crucified
about 1410, Austrian*

The Parish of Christ Church
Good Friday Readings & Meditations
2013



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Introduction:

A Reading from the 19th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke (Lk.19. 47-48).

And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people sought to destroy him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people hung upon his words.

Meditation: *“For all the people hung upon his words.”*

“For all the people hung upon his words.” Holy Week offers a great confusion of words that ultimately bring us to the Seven Last Words of Christ, the words of the Crucified. The point of Good Friday is for us to hang upon the words of the One who hangs upon the Cross for us and for our salvation. What does it mean? What possible good can there be for us to contemplate the gruesome spectacle of the Crucifixion? Simply this. To learn the love of God for us, the love which triumphs over sin and death. We can only learn his love by hanging upon his word.

I. **The First Word:** *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”*

A Reading from the 23rd Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke (Lk. 23. 33-34).

And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him; and the criminals, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said, Jesus, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Meditation: *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”*

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” The words of the Crucified begin and end with an address to the Father. The first word is Christ’s prayer for us. He prays forgiveness for us and for a world that has turned against God and his truth. Such is the picture of our willful ignorance. This word convicts us by its gentleness and compassion. It signals the powerful idea of redemption. *“I have come to do the will of him who sent me,”* Jesus says, the will of the Father. Here we see and hear in the figure of the Crucified, God’s will for our humanity. God seeks to reconcile us with himself. Forgiveness is new creation. God’s word and only God’s word can make something out of nothing, even out of human sin. Christ prays for our forgiveness on the Cross. His words compel us to forgive one another even as we have been forgiven.

I. **The Second Word:** *"Today you will be with me in paradise."*

A Reading from the 23rd Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke (Lk.23.39-43).

And one of the criminals, who were hanged railed at him, saying, Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us! But the other rebuked him, saying, Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he said to him, Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

Meditation: *"Today you will be with me in paradise."*

"Today you will be with me in paradise." The second word recalls us to Paradise, to the time and place of the original harmony between God and man, between God and the created world. Redemption is about the restoration of our beginnings. It recalls us to the original goodness of God and his created order. Redemption is paradise restored but only through something more that is required in us, namely, a penitent heart. For that and that alone acknowledges the essential goodness of God, the very goodness we see and hear in this word of the Crucified.

II. **The Third Word:** *“Woman, behold your son. Then he said to the disciple, Behold, your mother.”*

A Reading from the 19th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John (Jn.19.26-27).

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, Woman, behold your son! Then he said to the disciple, behold, your mother! And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Meditation: *“Woman, behold thy son. Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother.”*

“Woman, behold thy son. Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother.” One of the tragedies of any society and certainly of contemporary society is broken relationships. Ours is a culture of broken hearts, of broken families, of broken churches and of broken communities. The marvel of the Third Word from the Cross is the restoration of relationships in the midst of our brokenness. Christ looks down from the Cross upon our broken world. He speaks to Mary, his mother, and to the beloved disciple, John. He commends them to each other. We behold with Mary Christ crucified, broken and wounded upon the Cross. We hear with Mary and John the words that speak to our care and support for one another. Just so Christ provides for us in the midst of the anguish of his passion. His word signals the restoration and the redemption of all human relationships. We find wholeness and healing for all our brokenness in Christ’s being with us. Such is his care for us. His word restores us. Out of his love we learn love.

III. **The Fourth Word:** *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*

A Reading from the 15th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark (Mk.15. 33-39).

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, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* Which means, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, he is calling Elijah. And one ran and filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down. And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

Meditation: *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*

If we have hearts, this word is heart-rending and must leave us with broken hearts, too. Unlike the other words of the Crucified, we hear this word from Mark in Hebrew, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*. We have it from Matthew in Aramaic, the language which Jesus probably spoke and which is closely associated with Hebrew. The phrase is interpreted in both Gospels, translated, first, into the Greek of the New Testament writers and, then, into all the languages of the world. And, unlike the other words of the Crucified, too, this word is a direct quote from the Hebrew psalms, Psalm 22. It is the cry of dereliction spoken from the broken heart of Christ in the intense agony of the Crucifixion. He voices the sense and experience of utter desolation and separation from the Father.

And yet, it is a prayer. The words from the Cross begin and end with an address to the Father but here, at the heart of the Passion, all that belongs to the holy intimacy of his relation to the Father is stripped away. All that remains is the heart-rending cry of Christ

to God. What does it mean? Perhaps we can think of it this way. It expresses as no other word does the full and true meaning of sin. Sin is about our utter separation from God. It is about our denial of ourselves as the children of God, our denial of the Father. It leaves us empty and desolate and in a world of the broken-hearted. Christ bears the full weight and meaning of our sin. But the miracle of this word is that he bears it to God. May our response be like the centurion who said, *"Truly this man was the Son of God."*

IV. **The Fifth Word:** *"I thirst"*

A Reading from the 19th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John (Jn.19. 28-29).

Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), I thirst. A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth.

Meditation: *"I thirst"*

The Gospels and the New Testament itself only came to be written because of the Passion of Christ. It is this story which is the source and occasion of the writing of the Gospels and the birth of Christianity. And yet from the earliest times there were challenges to the story of the Crucifixion by those for whom it was not thinkable that God could have anything remotely to do with the physical and the material world. At best, it was all a kind of play-acting. The Christian claim to the contrary is exactly what the centurion said, that *"truly this man was the son of God,"* a claim that is based upon the fact of the real and physical suffering of Christ on the Cross to which this word bears eloquent testimony. *"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness,"* Christ taught in the Beatitudes. His spiritual thirst for our good, our blessedness, extends to his physical thirst on the Cross. He thirsts for us with the whole of his being. May his thirst awaken in us a thirst for God and for his truth and righteousness in our world and day. God would not have us ignore the sufferings in our

communities and in our world. Christ's word challenges us about human suffering in all of its forms.

V. **The Sixth Word:** *"It is finished."*

A Reading from the 19th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John (Jn.19. 30).

When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Meditation: *"It is finished."*

It is the last word of Jesus on the Cross in John's account of the Passion. It, he says, is finished, ended, concluded, accomplished – all these words help to capture something of the fullness of meaning in this word, the penultimate word from the Cross. What is finished? Simply all that belongs to human redemption. What does that mean? Simply that Christ has borne the whole weight of sin and evil, past, present, and future in himself, in the body of our humanity. He has, literally, been made sin for us. Like us in all respects save sin which undoes us and diminishes and destroys our humanity, Christ wills to take upon himself the whole meaning of sin and in so doing accomplishes and completes the will of the Father whom, he says, has sent him. In other words, sin and death are swallowed up in his love for the Father.

VI. **The Seventh Word:** "Father, into thy hands, I commit my spirit"

A Reading from the 23rd Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke (Lk.23. 44-46).

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 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: *"Father, into thy hands, I commit my spirit"*

The words from the Cross end even as they began with an address to the Father. Everything in a way is embraced in the hands of the Father. Like the old spiritual puts it, 'he's got the whole world in his hands.' But only through the Son who has embraced our world and day, the Son who is no stranger to our griefs and sorrows, the Son who is no stranger to our dying and death, the Son who knows the sins and wickedness of our wayward hearts. What Christ says here is the meaning of prayer and praise. Prayer signals all the service we ever do unto God. Our lives are to be lived to and for the God who so "loved us" that he "sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." What does that mean? It means that God seeks to be reconciled with his sinful creation. God has undertaken the new and great act of restoring us to fellowship with him.

This word speaks about the reality of the divine life of God, the life of God with God and in God, the life of the blessed Trinity. It is about life lived for others. Christ gives everything into the hands of the Father having embraced everything for our sakes. We hang upon his words on this day which we are privileged to call Good Friday. We can only live for one another if he is in us and we in him. His words convict and convince our hearts. His words are the words of his sacrifice. We have heard them and we have beheld him in his love for us. The challenge is for us to be what we have heard and seen. The challenge is for his sacrifice to define us and to live in us.