

*S. Silas the Martyr and the Most Holy Trinity,
Kentish Town*



**HOLY WEEK &
EASTER
AT HOME**

The period of Holy Week and Easter is the most significant time of the Church Year as we celebrate the events that are at the heart of our faith, and draw near first to the Cross and thence to the empty tomb.

At the beginning of Holy Week, we stand with Jesus before the gates of a city. We know that once we have entered we shall be swept up in events that we cannot control and that will bring us to the very edge of what we can bear, as we walk with him to Calvary and the tomb. This week tells us that God is able to change everything about us - our fear, our sin, our guilt, our untruthfulness. It takes us on a journey, and as it unfolds invites us to become participants in the drama of our salvation. If we allow him, Jesus will take us with him from death to new life, from darkness to the glorious new light of the resurrection.

Yet this is a Holy Week and Easter like no other. The restrictions surrounding COVID-19 means that we are unable to gather in our Church for the dramatic and moving liturgies that mark this week. Instead we have to dig deep into our own spiritual resources to mark these days with prayer at home, and I hope this booklet will help you to do that.

You will find the appropriate Bible Reading, a reflection and a prayer for each day, as well as links and ideas to other resources. With this booklet you've also received some other aids to personal prayer including a palm cross, blessed at Mass on Tuesday in Holy Week, for you to use on Palm Sunday.

If you are not prevented by the guidelines or by your health, and if you live nearby, you may care to walk past S. Silas during your daily exercise on Good Friday and on Easter Day. There will be a lamp for you to light and leave at the foot of the Crucifix. Fr Graeme will be there to join you in prayer 2.00 – 3.30 pm on Good Friday and 10.30 am – 12 noon on Easter Day. We cannot gather or stop there, nor can we go into Church, but we can leave behind a sign of our prayers for those we love and for ourselves. Also, with this booklet, you will receive a poster to display in your window, as a sign of God's care and of your prayers for all who live around you. Circumstances may keep us apart physically, but we can

draw together spiritually and unite as we strive to keep this week as best we can. So think of your armchair as the lectern from which you hear Scripture proclaimed, and the table at which you sit and eat as a reminder of the altar table at which you are fed with the Body and Blood of Christ.

Jesus, where'er thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy-seat:
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground.

William Comper 1731-1800

PALM SUNDAY

5 April 2020

As you prepare for this time of worship you might like to hold the palm cross you have received with this booklet as you say the words of praise that traditionally begin Mass today:

Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel. Hosanna in the highest.

God our Saviour, whose Son Jesus Christ
entered Jerusalem as Messiah to suffer and to die;
let these palms be for us signs of his victory
and grant that we who bear them in his name
may ever hail him as our King,
and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 21.1-11

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them', and he will send

them at once.” This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

“Say to the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Reflection

Just after Christmas last year there was a superb production of the C.S. Lewis story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* at The Bridge Theatre. It’s the story of four children who, whilst evacuated to the country home of a strange professor, discover a new world called *Narnia* entered through a wardrobe, and who become participants in re-establishing the reign of the great lion *Aslan*.

C.S. Lewis, a man of deep Christian faith, wrote the story as a way of communicating the truths of the gospel in an imaginative way. When he describes *Aslan* he uses his creativity to tell us something about what the experience of God is like. ‘Is he – quite safe?’ one of the children asks a talking beaver about *Aslan* at one point. The beaver replies ‘Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe, but he’s good’.

As the story unfolds the unsafeness of *Aslan* is referred to again and again. *Aslan* returns to a self-contained world that has been frozen in winter to turn over the tyranny that has held it captive with his uncontainable freedom. He turns things upside down with a disturbing

power. He is, as is said of him in another of the *Narnia* books ‘no tame lion’.

This image of disturbing, un-tameable power is one to hold in our minds as we read Matthew’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. “The whole city was *stirred up*” as Jesus enters on the donkey he says. “The whole city *quaked*” is another way of translating it. The point is clear: this is not the arrival of someone tame, someone safe. It is the arrival of someone who has come to turn the self-contained world upside down with uncontrollable freedom: The King riding the donkey, redefining what power looks like; the Messiah who accomplishes God’s providential plan in self-giving love.

“Who is this?” the crowds ask, and we are given a picture of a city that is in turmoil at his procession, *quaking* indeed, with their expectations heightened that the Messiah was at hand.

“Who is this?” The answer to the question of the crowd on the first Palm Sunday is shattering in its power. Jerusalem quaked when Jesus entered it, the earth would quake as Jesus died, and there was a strong earthquake as the angel descended onto the empty tomb. The impact of Christ’s life, death and resurrection is without precedent.

As we make our way through the events of this week as all around us seems to quake and be in turmoil, we discover that the good news of salvation is not to be tamed. It makes all the difference to everyone and everything.

Prayers

If the following intercessions are said with others you may wish to conclude each one with the response:

Lord, hear us. *Lord, graciously hear us.*

Let us pray to the Lord, who is our refuge and stronghold.

That the King of glory may enter into our lives, and that we may give all that we are in homage to him:

For Christian people, that through the suffering of disunity there may grow a rich union in Christ.

For those who in the darkness and agony of isolation feel that God is far from them, that they may find support and encouragement.

For a blessing on our local community, that our neighbourhoods may be places of trust and friendship, where all are known and cared for:

Our Father...

An Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Holy Sacrament of the altar.

I love you above all things and I passionately desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come spiritually into my soul so that I may unite myself wholly to you now and forever. Amen.

Conclusion

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Palm Sunday Liturgy has two main readings, one of which is the Palm Gospel as above, the second of which is the Passion. This has been divided up for you to read over Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

MONDAY

Gospel Reading

Matthew 27.11-26

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. Besides, while he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.” Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” And he said, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.” And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

Reflection

We noted yesterday the turmoil that Jesus causes. The ground, physically and metaphorically, quakes in his presence. This section of the passion narrative in Matthew's Gospel continues that theme. Christ is on trial before the High Priest and the religious authorities, and is then brought before Pilate. They are the ones who *think* they have power and who *think* that they know the mind of God. But the ground shifts beneath them. The wisdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ reorganises what they think they know in unpredictable ways.

In the trial of Jesus the language of faith is used as a defence and a weapon by the authorities, and so we see they are blind to the truth that stands before them. Their exclusion of Jesus is the refusal of their own life and wholeness, and the fantasy of power has drawn them away from the path of truth and sincerity.

One of the striking things about Matthew's telling of the passion and death of Christ is how he draws out the way that Jesus dies in order to *fulfil* the Scriptures. Jesus is not killed as the result of a series of unfortunate circumstances, but his death is a self-gift that displays the redemptive, unstoppable love of God. The disturbing truth that Jesus is showing us in his trial is that this is where the world is turned on its head. God chose to be in the condemned and isolated Christ. God is not where the religious authorities thought he was. God is in this mortal man who is helpless and about to suffer a terrible death.

Pray for the condemned in our time: those unjustly condemned, and others whose sentence we may think deserved – but would we if we knew their whole story? Pray too for those who administer justice, that they may have the wisdom for their task.

TUESDAY

Gospel Reading

Matthew 27. 26-32

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.

Reflection

There seems to be a deeply ingrained trait in the human condition of mocking what we don't understand. The soldiers are merely dealing with yet another difficult prisoner who has been handed over for execution; in their minds Jesus is inconvenient, making an already volatile situation more complicated through the claims he makes about himself, and so, confident of the status of the unshakable power of the Roman Empire they dress Jesus up as a king and mock and abuse him.

Unwittingly they highlight an eternal truth that the whole sweep of Matthew's gospel has been leading us to: This is the coronation of Christ as King, and all that has gone before has been telling us of how God in Jesus has been establishing his kingdom. The coronation is not the offering of those who honour him, but the sport of those who will murder him, and yet here the eternal God is subverting and unsettling human power. Mockery seeks to undermine faith and truth, but faith and trust is precisely what Matthew's Gospel has been kindling in our hearts. In the face of the lies and the taunts and the opposition we are invited to see the Son of God and believe. *'The universal Lord is he,'* says the sixth century hymn writer Venantius Fortunatus *'who reigns and triumphs from the*

tree.' The irony is that those who mock make it clear that Jesus is King for ever, for the death that they prepare him for is the gateway to the resurrection.

Intriguingly, perhaps Simon from Cyrene grasps something of that. He comes from an outpost on the trading routes in North Africa, and he is in Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. Mark's Gospel gives us the detail that he is "the father of Alexander and Rufus", the inference being these two are known to the readers of his gospel. Perhaps they were members of the Church for which Mark wrote? (But that Matthew is writing for a different Christian community so omits that detail.)

Perhaps Simon was a passer-by, drawn by accident of time and place to an encounter with Jesus, in which he came to faith, and so his sons also became believers? The point is, some passers-by get it. They are drawn in to see and believe, and they pass on the message so that others believe through their word. There is a contrast that chimes in our own experience: maybe in the face of the present appalling suffering the COVID – 19 virus has brought to so many you have had people say to you "where is your God now?"

This passage shows us that those with a mistaken notion of God and power always mock, but the suffering of Christ places God with the victim, and that makes faith possible even in the teeth of suffering and ridicule.

Pray for all who are victims of the mockery and humiliation of others, and those who find themselves stripped of their human dignity as part of their position in life.

Remember all who have helped you to bear burdens, and pray for all those whose work brings them alongside people who are carrying a heavy load.

WEDNESDAY

Gospel Reading

Matthew 27. 33-54

And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake

and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

Reflection

“And when they had crucified him”. One of the striking things in all four Gospels is how simply they deal with the actual moment of the crucifixion of Jesus. There’s an almost disconcerting brevity in the narration. Matthew wants to draw our attention not so much to the agony of how Jesus died, but to the way his death fulfils the prophecies of the Old Testament.

This section of the passion narrative begins with Jesus being offered wine mixed with gall, an echo of a verse from Psalm 69: “For my food you gave me gall, and in my thirst sour wine to drink.” The mockery that Jesus is subjected to draws our minds to Psalm 22: “All who see me scoff at me; they deride me... He trusted in the Lord; let him deliver him.” Even Jesus’s cry “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani*” is to be found in Psalm 22, and we see him in the utter agony of feeling forsaken as he faces a terrible death.

For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, Matthew is telling us, this self-giving death of the Son of God was always going to be how draws a humanity that is distracted and turned to falsehood back to himself. When Jesus entered Jerusalem the city quake in turmoil; now the very earth itself quakes and the sky is darkened (reminding us of the Old Testament prophet Amos who foretells of a darkened sky at noon on the Day of the Lord, when God would visit the earth to establish his kingship; or of the darkness at noon of the ninth plague in Egypt when God led his people to freedom).

Christ is “no tame lion” who has things done unto him. This is the earth shattering event by which God has visited his people and changed things for ever, the definitive moment of the conquest of evil.

Pray for those suffering at this time, especially for those driven to despair, that they may see God’s love.

Pray for those approaching death, especially those approaching it with fear. Pray that your own approach to dying may be nourished and informed by Christ's having died for us.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

9 April 2020

As the Mass on this day is offered in the evening in remembrance of the Last Supper you might like to offer this act of worship towards the end of the day. The Mass will be offered at S. Silas at 7.30 pm. This is a night that is rich in meaning: we recall Jesus giving himself to us through his Body and Blood – even as we yearn to share that gift together in church once more; we recall his invitation to follow his pattern of service of others as he washes the feet of his Apostles – even as we pray for those putting themselves at risk through their ministry to those suffering with COVID – 19; and we recall Jesus giving himself into the hands of his enemies to die on the cross – even as we hold in our hearts the suffering of others tonight.

You might like carefully to prepare a candle and a crucifix as a focus for prayer.

Sign of the Cross

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Hymn

This is the night, dear friends, the night for weeping
When darkness' power overcomes the Day,
The night the faithful mourn the weight of evil
Whereby our sins the Son of Man betray.

This night the traitor, wolf within the sheepfold,
Betrays himself into his Victim's will;
The Lamb of God for sacrifice preparing,
Sin brings about the cure for sin's own ill.

This night Christ institutes His holy supper
Blest food and drink for heart and soul and mind;

This night injustice joins its hand to treason's
And buys for death the Ransom of mankind.

This night the Lord by slaves shall be arrested.
He who destroys our slavery to sin;
Accused of crime, to criminals be given,
That judgement on the righteous Judge begin.

O make us sharers, Saviour, of your Passion,
That we may share your Glory that shall be;
Let us pass through these three dark nights of Sorrow
To Easter's laughter and its liberty.

Peter Abelard (1079-1142)

trans. Richard Sturch (b. 1936)

Penitence

Before listening to the Word of God take a moment to reflect. For what am I grateful to God for today? Where did I stray from God: through words, actions or things I did not do. How might I do better tomorrow? What grace do I ask from God in order to live more closely in his love? You may wish to use the confession as at Mass or simply to conclude by saying:

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Reading

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for[e] you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Gospel Reading

John 13.1-15

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it round his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped round him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterwards you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."

Reflection

'Jesus knew *his hour* had come'. That's how St John opens his account of the Last Supper. This is the beginning of Jesus' hour, 'his time had come' we might say, and the *goal* that the whole of his ministry had been building towards was finally nigh. What's striking in both John's telling of the events of the Last Supper, as well as in the other gospels, is that

this is something Jesus has been looking towards with eager anticipation. St Luke says that Jesus spoke of his “earnest desire” to “eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” That puts it even stronger still. Jesus approaches this hour with earnest desire. In his heart he looks forward to the moment when he will give himself to his own through bread and wine, and with those gifts inaugurate the transformation of the world that his body broken and blood poured out will accomplish on the morrow.

Jesus at the Last Supper is the mirror of the earnest desire of God for us. ‘Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end’ John tells us of the Lord. This is a love that wants to draw all of creation to itself, that draws us out of the limits of this world to the Divine. Jesus desires us, he awaits us.

One of the great saints of the sixteenth century is S. Teresa of Avila, who wrote of her own experiences of God in a very straight-forward and down to earth way. In one of her reflections she’s thinking about that phrase of the Lord’s Prayer ‘Give us this day our daily bread’. She says that in an obvious way its praying that our needs be met; but more than that, she recalls that Jesus speaks of himself as ‘living bread come down from heaven’, and that he gives himself away in bread at the Last Supper. Praying for ‘daily bread’ she says is a prayer to receive Jesus himself; and more than that, she says it tells us that Jesus *wants us* to *want him*, he wants us to go on praying that he be sent for our good.

On this night when we recall how Jesus left the means by which he would go on ‘being sent for our good’ our hearts are filled with earnest desire too. We would expect to be together tonight sharing in Holy Communion, but instead the circumstances necessitated by the terrible coronavirus means we are apart and that we are unable to receive the Sacrament. Might we allow this time to grow desire within us? To cultivate an eagerness to encounter him, to become one with him, to receive the gifts he offers us in the Holy Eucharist?

The eager desire of the hour of Jesus is to offer a gift – his body broken, his blood shed, forgiveness, reconciliation, life. At the same time as the

gift is made a task is set – service. The one who calls us to himself is the one who calls us to service, and whose total self-giving is set before us as the pattern to follow. Jesus washes the feet of his disciples not just not just in order to be humble, but to be loving. His washing is the sign of the unity, of the bond, between him and his disciples. They are seen not to be servants but friends. The earnest love of the Lord makes us one with him, and that love working in us, should overflow in our love for one another.

Tonight we thank Jesus who earnest seeks our company, we yearn for that spiritual nourishment once more, and we pray for the grace to be better imitators of him in our daily lives.

Prayers

If the following intercessions are said with others you may wish to conclude each one with the response:

Lord, hear us. *Lord, graciously hear us.*

Father, on this, the night he was betrayed, your Son Jesus Christ washed his disciples' feet. Strengthen us to walk in his way of love and service:

On this night, he prayed for those who were to believe through his disciples' message. Guide your Church in her mission, and make her one:

On this night, he commanded his disciples to love. Be with those who at this time risk their lives to care for others. Keep them strong yet loving, and when their work is done, be with them in their weariness and in their tears.

On this night, he accepted the cup of death and looked forward to the new wine of the kingdom. We pray for those who have died in the peace of Christ.

Our Father...

An Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Holy Sacrament of the altar.

I love you above all things and I passionately desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come spiritually into my soul so that I may unite myself wholly to you now and for ever.



In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

GOOD FRIDAY

10 April 2020

The Celebration of the Lord's Passion traditionally takes place in church at 3pm, when we recall the hours of Christ's death, so you may like to use the following devotion at that hour. There is a stark simplicity about the worship in church that day: Scripture is read, intercession made, the cross is proclaimed and Holy Communion is received. What follows has a similar simplicity, and you should take your time to pause for quiet reflection as you pray in your home.

You might like to carefully prepare a candle and a crucifix as a focus for prayer.

Opening Prayer

Remember your mercies, O Lord,
and with your eternal protection sanctify your servants,
for whom Christ your Son,
by the shedding of his Blood,
established the Paschal Mystery.
Who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading

John 19.1-42

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God."

When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgement seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews', but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfil the Scripture which says,
"They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, 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.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished", and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Reflection

In the space of one month, March 1865, Archibald Tait the Dean of Carlisle, who was to later become Archbishop of Canterbury, watched as five of his daughters died in an epidemic of scarlet fever. The poet David Scott describes Tait and his wife as ‘at their prayers each day in a borrowed house, ... testing the Bible texts against a silent nursery.’ There are times when the blunt cruelty of a situation is so overwhelming that our faith in the goodness of God is tested beyond any casual speculation, ‘they tested the Bible texts against a silent nursery.’

As we stand in spirit with Mary and John today on Calvary’s lonely hill we discover that God has taken upon himself all the pain that bedevils the human condition. We sometimes we are faced with suffering that appears to be pointless, absurd, meaningless. We might have faced such moments in our lives already: someone we love might be taken from us, family life might fall apart, or we might have to watch the suffering of one who is dear. Across the world the devastating effects of Covid – 19 are all too apparent in huge loss of life, and anxiety stalks us as we watch the disease gripping our own country.

In the face of this pain some will ask us “Why? Why? Where is your God now?” We might be terrified we have nothing to say that won’t sound platitudinous. Rationalists (Christians amongst them) will look for an explanation of why this is happening to us. Romantics (Christians amongst them) want to be given a sigh of relief. Good Friday calls us to set aside dodgy speculations and false piety and go to Calvary, and trust that because of the cross, God shares in the suffering of his world. That he is with us in what we suffer too.

If that was all today told us we might feel warmly disposed to the God who shares our pain, but it wouldn’t take us much further than that. John’s gospel, though, presents his passion as something that Jesus *does*, rather than as something *done to* him. He cries ‘It is finished’ as he dies, not ‘I am finished’, and the cross is but part of that journey in which Jesus has been showing us the indestructibility of God’s love.

On Good Friday two things are inseparable: Jesus is lifted up in the pain of the cross, displaying God's solidarity with a suffering world; and at the same time he is lifted up in triumph to show pain does not have the last word and that sin and death are ultimately dealt with.

So, of all days this is one on which we dare to hope: God hasn't come with a glib, easy answer to the question of suffering, but on the cross he has entered into the question himself to show that he is with us. So doing the horizon has opened beyond our imagining – our lives have become places where his healing love can dwell.

Intercessions

If the following intercessions are said with others you may wish to conclude each bidding with the response:

Through the death of your Son, *Lord hear us.*

As we recall Christ's saving death, let us pray to God the Father.

Lord, guard and unite your Church throughout the world:

Keep Francis our Pope and Jonathan our Bishop in your loving care:

Sanctify by your Spirit the entire people of God:

Deepen the faith and understanding of those preparing for baptism:

Gather all Christians into unity:

Bless the children of your covenant, both Jew and Christian:

Shed your light on those who do not believe in Christ:

Show the signs of your love to those who deny your existence:

Guide the minds and hearts of governments and rulers:

Grant healing to the sick, and comfort those who live in sorrow:

Our Father ...

Adoration of the Holy Cross

We adore your Cross, O Lord, we praise and glorify your holy Resurrection, for behold, because of the wood of a tree joy has come into the whole world.

An Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Holy Sacrament of the altar. I love you above all things and I passionately desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come spiritually into my soul so that I may unite myself wholly to you now for ever. Amen.



Conclusion

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.



HOLY SATURDAY

11 April 2020

The Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday evening is the highpoint of the Church Year. It is the Christian Passover, as we recall the journey that we make from death to life in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Vigil has four movements: the blessing and lighting of the Paschal Candle; reading from Scripture the story of our creation and redemption; the renewal of baptismal commitment; the celebration of the Eucharist.

This simple devotion to use in our homes on Holy Saturday evening reflects those four elements, and begins the celebration of Easter for us.

Lighting an Easter Candle

If you have a candle or lamp at home, use it to reflect the light of the Paschal Candle, blessed and lit this evening in church. As you set it in place say:

Christ yesterday and today
the Beginning and the End the Alpha and the Omega.
All time belongs to him and all the ages.
To him be glory and power through every age and for ever. Amen.

As you light it say:

May the light of Christ rising in glory
dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.

Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven,
exult, let Angel ministers of God exult,
let the trumpet of salvation
sound aloud our mighty King's triumph!
Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her,
ablaze with light from her eternal King,
let all corners of the earth be glad,
knowing an end to gloom and darkness.

Readings

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

Genesis 1. 26-27

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Genesis 22. 9-13

The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying,
“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

Exodus 14.28 – 15.1

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.”

Isaiah 55.1-3

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Ezekiel 36.24-28

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Romans 6.3-5

The Easter Alleluia

Having read the story of creation and redemption we acclaim the resurrection with the return of the Alleluia, which we have refrained from using during Lent.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed;
let us celebrate the feast then, in the Lord.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Gospel Reading

Matthew 28.1-10

Now after the Sabbath, towards the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

Reflection

“The Light of Christ rising in glory.” Those words begin the great Easter Vigil tonight as the Paschal Candle is lit in the darkness, and in many ways the readings and prayers that we use tonight speak of the triumph of light over darkness.

In the full Vigil that we are used to in church the first of the Scripture Readings is always the story of creation from Genesis. We hear about God saying “let there be light” as the story tells us that light makes life possible. When we arrive at the account of the resurrection it is as if we hear God saying “let there be light” again. The ‘night’ of the grave has passed as Jesus rises from the dead. Life is stronger than death. Good is stronger than evil. Earlier this week in St Matthew’s account of the death of Jesus we heard about the darkness that covered the land at his

crucifixion; this is now driven away as Jesus rises from the grave and becomes God's pure light.

The discovery of Holy Saturday night is that we are drawn into that new light of Christ, for the risen Jesus is God's new day, new for all of us. When we were baptised God's new day, the day of indestructible life, came to us. Christ took us by the hand to walk with him into the light, into real life. For the Early Church tonight was *the* night for baptising, which they called illumination. Remember your baptism into Christ tonight, your becoming part of his community of light.

"May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds." It feels that at the moment we are in a time of particular darkness: the darkness that has come to the world through sickness, anxiety, grief. The light of the risen Christ, of which your candle is a symbol, still shines. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1.5) It calls us to join with him in allowing his light to break into our world, and to open our eyes to the true light.

So let us pray to the Lord at this time that he may grant us to experience something of the joy of his light even in the midst of anguish; let us pray that we may become bearers of that light, that through us Christ's radiant face may enter our world.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Renewal of Baptismal Commitment

The Apostles Creed is the basis for the profession of faith at Baptism. On this night when we renew that covenant with God we use that Creed to affirm the faith we share with the whole Church:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell;

on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers

If the following intercessions are said with others you may wish to conclude each one with the response: Lord, hear us. Lord, graciously hear us.

In joy and hope let us pray to the Father.

That our risen Saviour may fill us with the joy of his glorious and life-giving resurrection:

That those who lead the nations may be granted the gifts of wisdom and discernment:

That he may reveal the light of his presence to the sick, the weak and the dying, to comfort and strengthen them:

That, according to his promises, all who have died in the faith of the resurrection may be raised on the last day:

Let us commend the world, in which Christ rose from the dead,
to the mercy and protection of God.

Our Father...

An Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Holy Sacrament of the altar.

I love you above all things and I passionately desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come spiritually

into my soul so that I may unite myself wholly to you now and forever.
Amen.

Conclusion

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.



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