

HOLY WEEK

Journeying with the
King

After a long journey through Lent, we finally arrive at Holy Week. Many have observed that the four Evangelists who wrote the Gospels spend the overwhelming majority of their time on the events of this one week.

Through these devotionals, we will enter Jerusalem with Christ and see Mary anointing Him for His death; we'll hear Him submit Himself to His Father's will, and witness Judas preparing to betray his Lord; we'll sit in the Upper Room and gather at the foot of the cross and stand outside the tomb.

And then we'll join with the universal hymn of worship as we proclaim with joy, 'He is risen!'

So through this journey may we be amazed in a more wondrous way than ever before at the Love that lived and died and rose again for us and for our salvation.

PALM SUNDAY

The King enters
Jerusalem

"Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, 'Hosanna!'"

Their cry was lifted from Psalm 118, where it's translated, 'LORD, save us!' And that day in Jerusalem it became both a song of praise, and a cry of need.


The people were living in exile in their own home, dominated by the crippling and irresistible power of Rome. They were hungry for freedom, desperate for a liberator- and they thought Christ was the one! Hosanna! Lord, save us!

We still cry the same prayer today. Lord, save us! Rescue us from the burdens we're carrying and the enemies we're facing, in all the different shapes and forms they take.

SCRIPTURES

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Mark 11:1-11



Lord, set us free from the chains of addiction, the chains of guilt, the chains of anxiety. Lord, we're in a pit, and we don't know the way out- so hosanna! Save us!

But it's not just an expression of need. In itself, our hosanna cry contains our thanks to the God who hears, and who responds. This prayer for help became an expression of worship for the rescue the people couldn't yet see, but were certain was on the way.

And, although that rescue may not take the form we hope it will or think it should- after all, it didn't for the Jerusalem crowd- nevertheless, God still hears; His heart is still moved; and He will intervene to help in all the ways we need the most.

So today, bring God your hosanna- your desperate cry for help and rescue. But allow your prayer to be one of expectant praise, knowing that the King has come, and His help is always sufficient.

ACTION

Make a Palm Cross and display it in a window.



'The Donkey'
by Peter Brook

True and humble King,
Hailed by the crowd as Messiah:
Grant us the faith to know you and
love you,
That we may be found beside you
on the way of the cross,
Which is the path of glory.

Amen.

[Book of Common Worship]

HOLY MONDAY

The King is anointed
for burial

"A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out."

Mary was such a reed. Her act of lavish, extravagant worship was scorned and derided by Judas. With false piety and shallow devotion, he ruthlessly attacked Mary's 'wasteful' use of this expensive perfume.

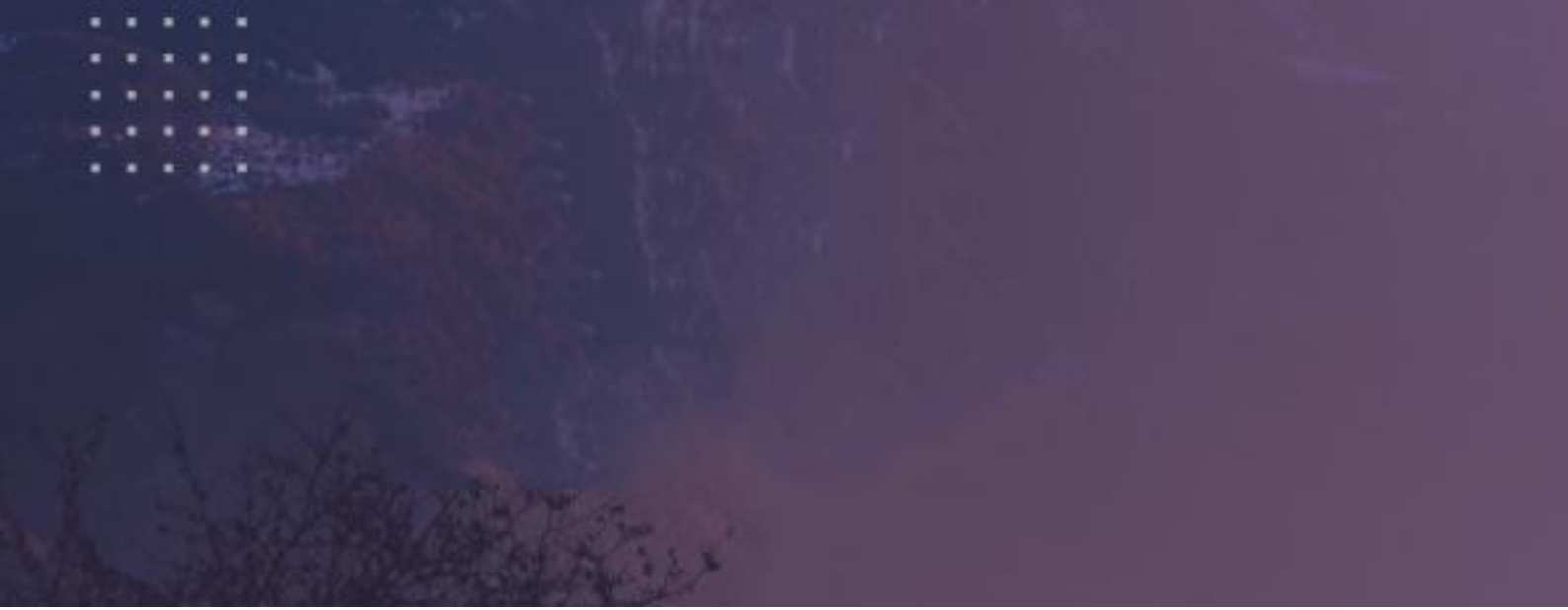
Cloaked in such religious sentiment, we can imagine the others in the room sharing Judas' disgust. Their reaction would have broken Mary; they would have snuffed out her candle.

But Christ interceded for her with such tenderness, with such mercy, with such grace. He affirmed that her worship was not only acceptable to God, it was deeply pleasing to Him, because it placed Christ in His rightful place.

SCRIPTURES

John 12:1-11

Isaiah 42:1-9



Not as one priority amongst many; not as an addition to life or even as an enhancer to life; not as Someone in competition with all of the other gods and lords in a crowded marketplace of values.

But as the One worthy of extravagant, scandalous devotion. One worthy of the praise of not just our lips, but our lives. One who claims not only our resources- the expensive perfume of our time, our money, our Church attendance and Bible study- but who claims as His own our very selves.

Because Mary's worship doesn't end with the perfume- she gives herself. She stoops down to the feet of the Master and wipes His feet with her hair, throwing aside her rights, her dignity, her standing, all so that she could show without any doubt the love she had for her Lord.

May our worship not just be with what we give and what we do, but with all that we are. May we worship with our very selves.

ACTION

As you pray, find some perfume or a scented candle and allow it to remind you of Mary's act of worship.

Gracious God, the Hope of all in need,
Pour your Spirit upon us,
That we may be instruments of your justice and compassion,
A light to the nations,
And a living promise of your new heaven and new earth.

Amen.

[Revised Common Lectionary Prayers]

'Anointing His
Feet'
by Wayne Forte



HOLY TUESDAY

The King predicts His
death

"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say?...Father, glorify your Name!"

My former Pastor once preached on this passage from John 12 with the title, 'What to pray when you don't know what to pray.'

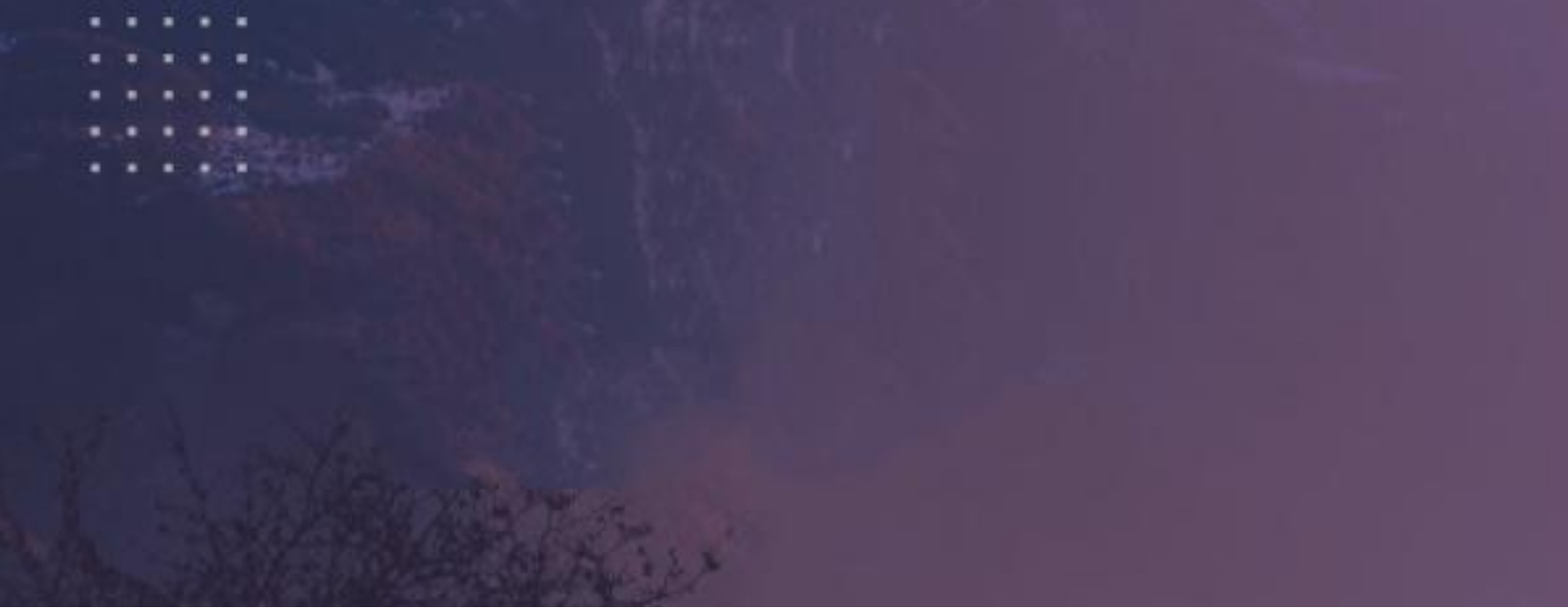
John's Gospel doesn't record Christ's prayers in Gethsemane for the cup of suffering to pass from Him, but this raw prayer in chapter 12 shares the same struggle. Can His Father save Him from this hour? Is there another way?

We often find ourselves in situations and circumstances that threaten to break us, that threaten to weigh us down with burdens so heavy that we just can't imagine a way out or a way through. And we can often reach a point where we just don't know what to say or how to pray- like Christ we testify, 'My soul is troubled, and what shall I say?'

SCRIPTURES

John 12:20-36

1 Corinthians 1:18-31



As Saint Paul tells the Corinthians, we can be so tempted to look for a miraculous rescue; we can look for easy solutions or great wisdom that will pluck us from our suffering.

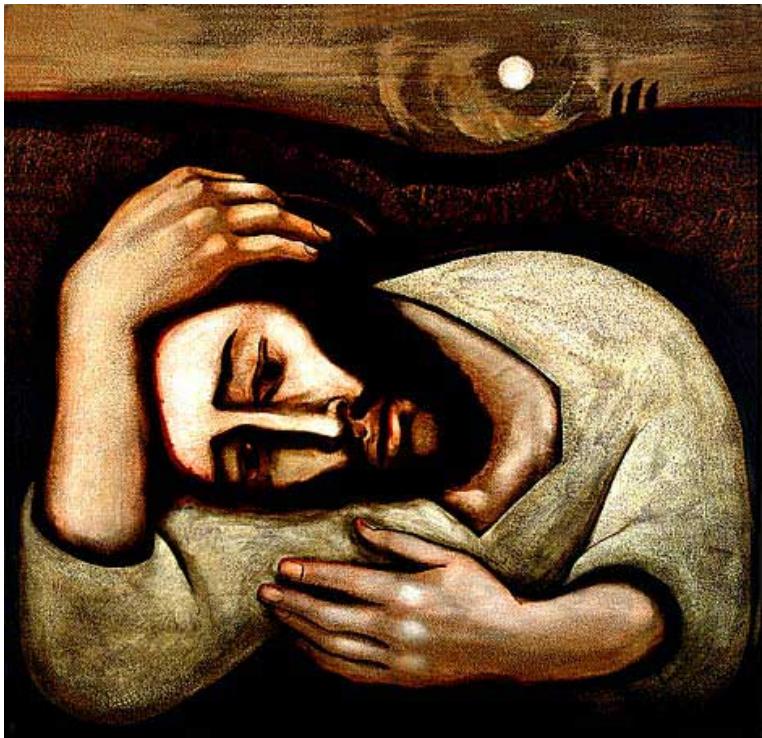
But that's not how Christ responds. In the face of the cross, knowing that He would bear the weight of all the brokenness of this old world, all the poison at the heart of a fallen Creation; knowing that He would cry out, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' Knowing all of this, and more than we could ever understand, nevertheless He prayed, 'Father, glorify your Name.'

Father, do what you know to be best. Father, work as you know to be for the ultimate and highest good. Whatever it means, whatever it takes, wherever it leads- even if leads to Hell itself- Father, glorify your Name.

And so in all that we face and all that we carry; right where we are and in all the places we go; today, tomorrow, and all of our tomorrows, may His prayer be ours- Father, glorify your Name.

ACTION

List as many spheres and activities in your life as you can, and pray over each and every one, 'Father, glorify your Name there.'



"Christ in Gethsemane"
by Michael D. O'Brien

Naked we came from our mother's womb,
And naked we shall return.
The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away.
Blessed be the Name of the Lord.
O God, come to our assistance;
O Lord, make haste to help us.

Amen.

[Adapted from the Book of Common Prayer]

SPY WEDNESDAY

The King is betrayed

"Leaning back against Jesus, [the beloved disciple] asked Him, 'Lord, who is it?'"

Lord, who's going to betray you? Who's going to turn against you? The unspoken assumption is that it's one of them, because it certainly couldn't be me! It has to be someone else, because I love you too much, I'm too close to you, I'm too committed to you.

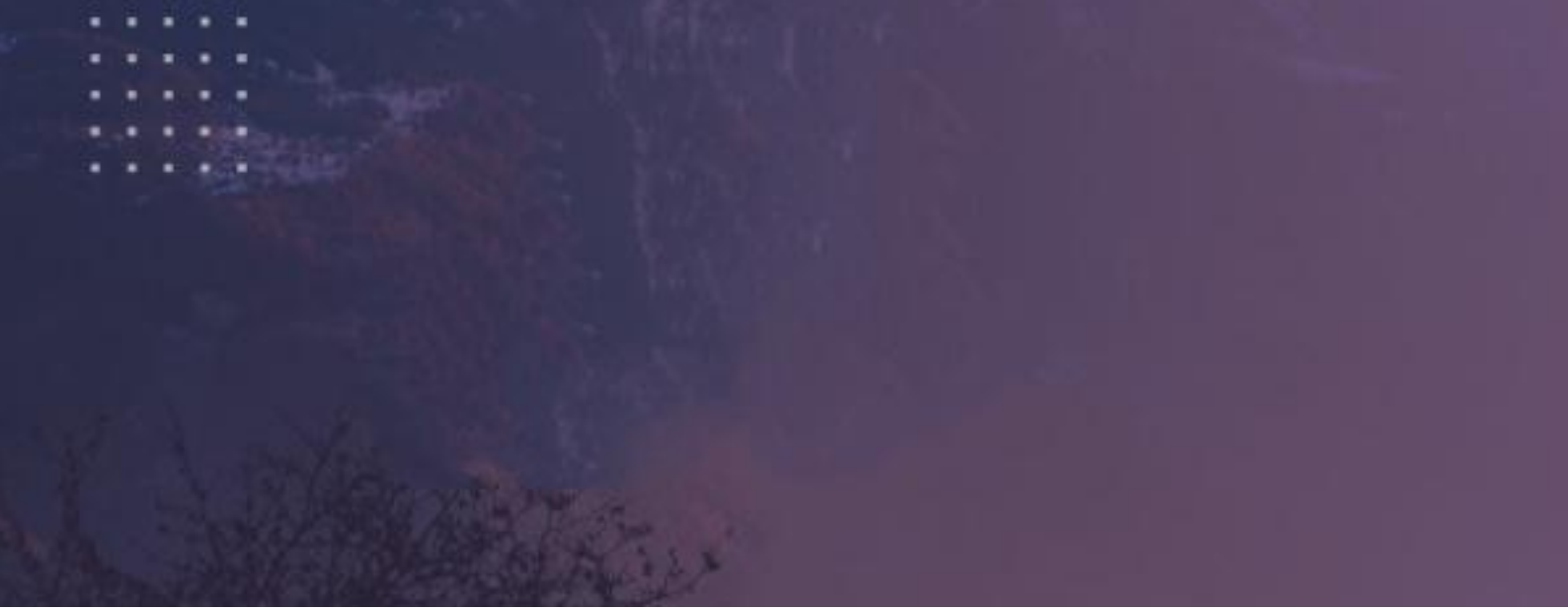
We can all be so quick to speak up like Peter- "Even if all fall away, I will not...Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." [Mark 14:29, 31]

This day in Holy Week is named 'Spy Wednesday,' because traditionally it's today that the Church remembers the bargain Judas made with the religious leaders to betray Jesus.

SCRIPTURES

John 13:21-32

Isaiah 50:4-9a



And it should serve as a humbling day for us all. Because Judas had been as much a part of the 12 as anyone. He had seen the signs and wonders; he'd witnessed the multitudes being fed; he'd been in the boat when Christ calmed the storm with a word.

Judas had sat at the Master's feet as He spoke of the Kingdom of His Father; he had seen lepers cleansed and the lame leaping for joy. He had even been a part of the work of this coming Kingdom- Judas was one of those given the authority to drive out demons and heal the sick and preach the Gospel. [Matthew 10]

And yet after all of this, he betrayed his Lord. And lest we become too complacent, we're reminded that when the soldiers took Him away, "everyone deserted Him and fled." [Mark 14:50]

May God give us the grace to rely utterly and completely upon His faithfulness to us, even when we're unfaithful; and day by day, even breath by breath, may we accept His enabling to choose Him, no matter how many silver coins are offered to us.

ACTION

Gather some coins and hold them in your hand; as you pray, lay them down to represent the fact that Jesus is more worthy.

O Lord, you have mercy on all.
Take away my sins,
And mercifully kindle in me the fire of your Holy Spirit.
Take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh,
A heart to love and adore you,
A heart to delight in you,
To follow and to enjoy you,
For Christ's sake.
Amen.

[Saint Ambrose]



"Judas" by
Edward Okun

MAUNDY THURSDAY

The King washes the
feet of His friends

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

It's been said of John Wesley that, if we were to imagine each different thing he understood about God and what it means to live for Him as being tunnels, every single passage would lead to the same central chamber- Love.

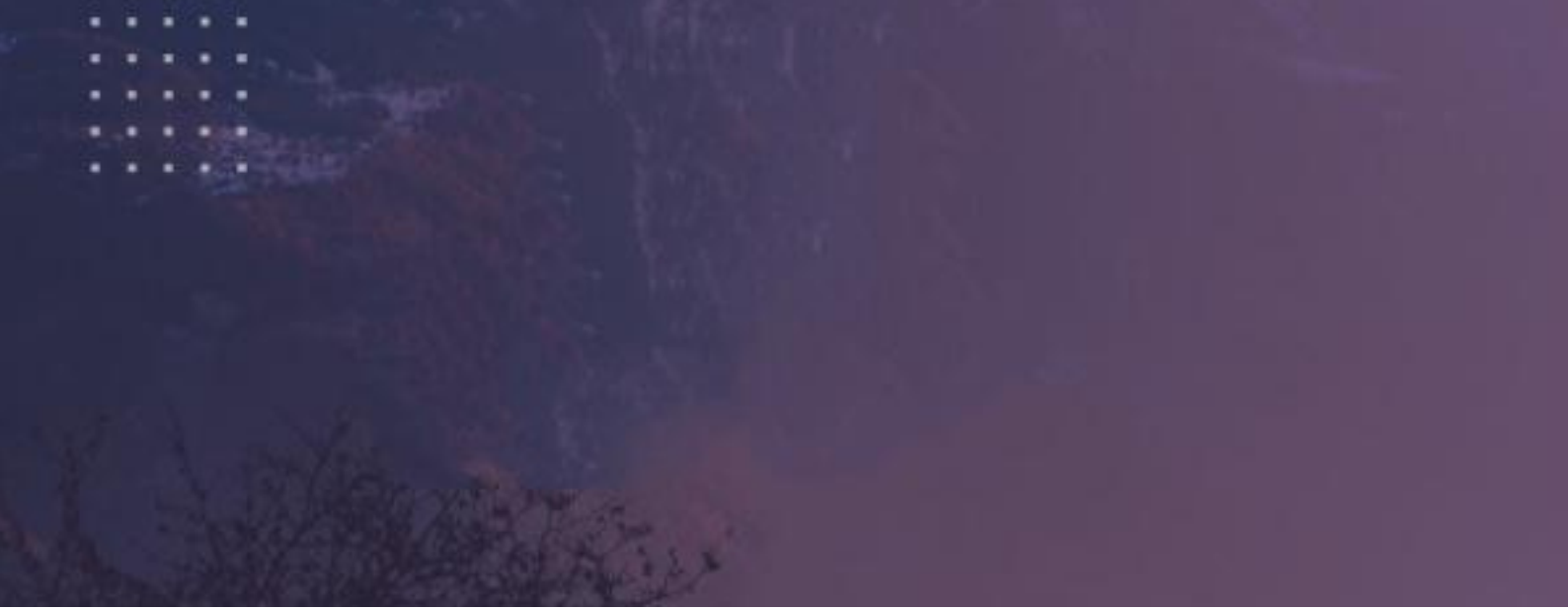
The Scriptures show us so much about God- He is holy, holy, holy; He's timeless and eternal; He's Almighty and unlimited; He's the Creator and Sustainer of all things; He's perfectly wise and perfectly good.

But over and above it all, before and after it all, the central truth we need to grasp about Him, the ultimate truth we can hope to understand about Him, is that He is Love. [1 John 4:8] That is the heart of this Holy Week- everything that happens in it and results from it is rooted and grounded in this foundational truth.

SCRIPTURES

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

1 Corinthians 11:23-26



Jesus is the Divine Love made flesh and blood, undeniable and eternal proof of how far Love will go to make its point- even all the way to a cross, all the way to a tomb, all the way to Hell itself.

This Love is so extravagant that it will even strip naked and do the work of the lowest, most despised slave- washing the filth encrusted feet of Judean peasants.

This Love reaches us; it washes us; it makes us clean and transforms us in such a way as to make us capable of loving as we have been loved- loving those who don't deserve it and aren't worthy of it. Loving the unlovely and unloving and unlovable.

Loving those who don't understand it and don't appreciate it and don't reciprocate it. Loving not because of who they are, or even because of who we are- but because of who He is. Loving, because that's what He does.

As He has loved, so may we love- lavishly, scandalously, freely.

ACTION

Fill a jug with water. As you pray, pour it over each hand. Allow yourself to remember the cleansing of your heart by faith.



"The Washing of the Feet"
by Ghislaine Howard

Eternal God, in the sharing of a meal your Son established a
new covenant for all people,
And in the washing of feet He showed us the dignity of service.
Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit
These signs of our life in faith may speak again to our hearts,
feed our spirits, and refresh our bodies.
Amen.

[Revised Common Lectionary Prayers]

GOOD FRIDAY

The King is crucified

"There they crucified Him."

Out of the four Evangelists, John is the poet. From the first breath of his Gospel, he pulls back the curtains of eternity and shows us incredible depths and riches of truth and beauty.

But here, at the darkest moment of human history, his words fail him, and all he can do is list the horror in stark simplicity.

There they crucified Him.

We may never truly grasp the fullness of what those words contain. There the awful weight of sin was laid upon Him; there the poison of rebellion was drunk by Him; there the darkness of evil was endured by Him; there all of the brokenness, all of the fallenness, all of the cancer eating away at the heart of Creation was taken and suffered and borne by the Author of Life.

SCRIPTURES

John 19:16-37

Psalms 22

Isaiah 52:13-53:12



And it was for us. It was for me. It was for you.

We often sing, 'It was my sins that held Him there.' But it wasn't- no sin could ever be strong enough to hold the King of Glory on a cross. It wasn't sin that held Him- it was the immensity of a divine Love that couldn't even be contained by Heaven itself.

As someone has said, "I asked Jesus how much He loved me. He said 'This much,' then stretched out His hands and died."

Of all days, today we should be humbled by the love of a Saviour who lived and died for us; a love so great that it was unwilling to remain at a distance, but stepped down into brokenness and suffered the ultimate symptom of that brokenness- death itself.

O Love divine, what has thou done!

The immortal God hath died for me!

The Father's co-eternal Son bore all my sins upon the tree.

The immortal God hath died for me!

My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

ACTION

As you pray, press a finger into the centre of your palm- He bore the nails for you.



"Jesus Dies"
by Jen Norton

O dear Lord, what can I say to you?

You died for me, you gave all for my sins; you not only became man for me but also suffered the most cruel death for me.

Is there any response?

I can only confess humbly to you that the immensity of your divine Love makes any response seem totally inadequate.

Let me just stand and look at you.

Your body is broken, your head wounded, your hands and feet are split open by nails, your side is pierced.

Your dead body now rests in the arms of your Mother.

Sweet Lord, gracious Lord, generous Lord, forgiving Lord,

I adore you, I praise you, I thank you.

You have made all things new through your Passion and death.

Your cross has been planted in this world as the new sign of hope.

Let me always live under your cross, O Lord, and proclaim the hope of your cross unceasingly.

Amen.

[Henri Nouwen]

BLACK SATURDAY

The King is in His
tomb

"They laid Jesus there."

Today has many names: Easter Eve, the Great Sabbath, Holy and Great Saturday. But of them all, I choose to call it Black Saturday, for it reminds us painfully that Jesus Christ our Lord, the eternal Son of the Father, really and truly died.


It wasn't an illusion or a trick. The Lord of Life truly, painfully, brutally died. And Black Saturday helps us dwell in Jerusalem with the disciples, who were convinced it was all over. The story was finished. The dream was dead.

On Black Saturday we are forced to sit outside the tomb, and wait. But Peter reminds us that Christ was anything but inactive. The Creed reminds us that He was crucified, died, and was buried- then He descended into Hell.

SCRIPTURES

John 19:38-42

1 Peter 4:1-8



The early Church called this 'The Harrowing of Hell-' the time when Christ, whom the Enemy believed had been utterly defeated, proved that not even the darkness of Hell was beyond the reach of God's light.

Not even the walls of Hell were strong enough to resist the power of God's triumph- as Keith Green sang, 'they're crumbling from the inside out!'

And if Christ really and truly endured death; if He really and truly descended into Hell; then we can know without a shadow of a doubt that we will never go anywhere and we will never face anything that is beyond His reach.

Nowhere, not even death, not even Hell, can ever truly be called God-forsaken.

So hold on. Though you wait in the doubt and fear that the tomb brings, hold on. Because just around the corner is a new day.

ACTION

Take time today to stop- set your phone aside, turn the TV off, get on your own and simply stop.

"Jesus is Laid in the Tomb"
by
Gwyneth Leech



Christ our God, your love is poured out in death for our sakes.
Hold us in your embrace as we wait for Easter's dawn.
Comfort us with the promise that no power on earth,
not even death itself, can separate us from your love;
And strengthen us to wait until you are revealed to us in all
your risen glory. Amen.

[Revised Common Lectionary Prayers]

EASTER DAY

The King is risen!

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'"

Today is the Day of all days. Resurrection Day is the crux of salvation history. The Church Fathers called it 'the eighth day of Creation,' because a new day had dawned, a new reality had been birthed, the New Creation had been loosed upon the old.


Death itself has been laid in the grave. Everything that ruined and spoiled and twisted and distorted has been proven to be fragile, weak, and flawed, and it has all been trampled underfoot by our risen, conquering King!

The chains of sin that have held us down for so long have been eternally shattered; the prisons of sin that have held us back for so long have been irreparably torn down. The darkness that has dominated since the Fall has been driven out by the blazing light of Resurrection!

SCRIPTURES

John 20:1-18

Isaiah 25:6-9



And we are caught up and carried along in this new reality. We are woven into this new chapter in the Great Story. In the midst of our brokenness and in the midst of our grief; as we're so heavily laden by the burdens and baggage of a world that just doesn't work right, the resurrected Lord calls our name, even as He called Mary's.


Because He sees us and knows us and loves us just as intimately and dearly as He did her. In some beautiful and miraculous way, we have just as wonderful a place in the salvation story as did this woman who is called, 'The Apostle to the Apostles.'

This same glorious King, who has emerged victorious from the fight, who has slain death through His death, knows our name. He sees where we are and what we face and all we carry. He sees our tears, just as He saw Mary's. He sees our struggles and doubts, our fears and disappointments, just as He saw hers.

And He calls our name. Because the Resurrection proves that darkness never gets the last word, light does; death never gets the last word, life does; and sin never gets the last word- love does.

ACTION

Sing 'Thine be the Glory' in celebration of our risen, conquering King!



Thine be the glory,
Risen conquering Son,
Endless is the victory
Thou o'er death hast won!
Angels in bright raiment
Rolled the stone away
Kept the folded grave
clothes
Where Thy body lay

Lo! Jesus meets us
Risen from the tomb
Lovingly, He greets us
Scatters fear and gloom
Let the Church with gladness
Hymns of triumph sing
For her Lord now liveth
Death hath lost its sting!

No more we doubt Thee,
Glorious Prince of Life
Life is naught without Thee
Aid us in our strife
Make us more than conquerors
Through Thy deathless love
Bring us safe through Jordan
To Thy home above

"An Idle Tale"
by
Michael Cooke



Christ is risen: the world below lies desolate.

Christ is risen: the spirits of evil are fallen.

Christ is risen: the angels of God are rejoicing.

Christ is risen: the tombs of the dead are empty.

Christ is risen indeed from the dead, the firstfruits of those who
have fallen asleep.

Glory and power are His forever and ever.

Amen

[Saint Hippolytus of Rome]