

The 7 Last Words of Christ.

Each reading and short reflection should be followed by music and/or silence. Images and symbols can also be used. It can be very effective to extinguish a candle at the end of each meditation.

Reading 1: Father forgive them ... - Luke 23: 33-34

Meditation.

They could not have known,
surely they could not have known.
Surely it was ignorance that drove each piercing nail through his sacred flesh
and into that rough, splintering wood.
Surely if they had known, if they had known who he really was,
surely if they had known that in their brutal hands they held, held, him.
But they didn't, they didn't know,
and so they treated him as they had treated so many others,
like dirt, like refuse.
They took him, and beat him, and broke him,
and squeezed every last drop of life blood from him,
they played their brutal game, and played it well.
But surely if they had known, they
and as they turned to cast their lots,
did they hear his words?
Did they hear his pain filled murmur?
Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing.
Surely they could not have known.
But we know, we know he is,
and yet we so often would nail him again to the tree with our foolish pride,
with our ignorant selfishness.
We know, and yet we so often join them
as we drive again the nails of our sin through his sacred flesh,
and then we too turn our backs,
leave him to suffer, leave him to die, and leave him to say his words:
Father, forgive them.

*Dear Lord,
forgive me,
when in foolishness or stupidity,
out of ignorance or malice,
because of laziness or indifference,
I weald mallet and nails and pierce your flesh once again.
Lord forgive me,
even though I know what I am doing.
Amen.*

Reading 2: Today you will be with me ... - Luke 23: 39-43

Meditation.

He was a criminal, a criminal,
a thief, a robber, a criminal,
he was a criminal, and he was receiving his just punishment.
What mercy should he deserve?
What respect should he command?
No longer a name, but a number,
no longer a person, but a condemned man,
no longer alive, but dead,
even as he carries his cross bar to that fateful place.
and so his bone crushing, gut wrenching agony begins,
fair payment for the pain he has caused others,
fair exchange for the suffering he has brought into others' lives.
All well deserved
all as it should be, all as ...
And yet words are spoken that seem to pierce this facade of correctness,
words that seem to tear through the man made fabric of apparent justice,
words that tip the scales that seem to have been so finely balanced.
"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."
Him? Him? In paradise? The criminal?
The Thief? The Robber? In Paradise?
Today?
In paradise with? With him?
And yet from these words springs an eternal truth
that flows from the cross through space and time,
that the gates of paradise are open to all,
to all criminals,
to all who act unjustly,
to all criminals, including me,
to all the criminals who cry:
"Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."

*Dear Lord,
remember me,
the criminal that I am,
having taken for myself,
having seen others deprived,
having put justice to one side if it was not in my own interest.
Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.
Amen.*

Reading 3: Here is your son, here is your mother - John 19: 25-27

Meditation.

Out of the jeering, the shouting, the spitting,
the taunting, the insults,
out of the noise of the mob, flows a whisper,
a whisper that cuts through the din,
that cuts through the darkness,
that cuts through the pain.
A whisper that pierces mind and body and soul,
reaching in, touching deep within,
through the roar of hatred, flows the whisper of love.
The love of a mother for the son she bore,
for the child she held,
for the man she set free,
the whisper of love that connects flesh with flesh,
spirit with spirit,
heart with heart,
the whisper of a mother's love.
and here, on the boundaries of consciousness,
the whisper finds its way, and pours out its soothing and healing balm.
A mother weeps,
for pasts remembered, for present pain, and for futures lost.
But just as through the pain of labour is born the joy of a new relationship,
so here this child gives that gift again.
"Dear woman, here is your son,
Here is your mother."
and, as through the pain of birth is sown the seed of love,
so here, through the pain of death, is sown the seed of love again.

*Dear Lord,
open my eyes to those you call me to love,
to my mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters
to my sons and daughters,
that the whisper of love may cut through the noise of the world,
and your family may be made complete.
Amen.*

Reading 4: Why have you forsaken me? - Matthew 27:45-47

Meditation.

Looking, but not seeing,
straining, but not hearing,
stretching, but not feeling,
calling, but receiving no reply.
Could he really be deserted?
Forsaken? Left alone? Abandoned?
Sucked into the depths of raging water,
sinking under shifting sand,
falling, falling, into the dark abyss.
Crushed by the weight laid upon him,
blood drained to the point of death,
and alone? Forsaken? Deserted by ...
even by ... even by his Father?
And yet as heaven watches,
in tear flowing, motionless silence,
as each angel bows his head,
to cast his eye away from this awful sight,
as the Father, white knuckled, stomach knotted,
holds his breath with the weight of his burden of grief,
He enters alone into the deepest darkness,
the mill stone tightly tied,
he is cast out, out into the outer darkness,
where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.
He carries what I should carry,
He goes where I should go,
He suffers the pain that I should suffer,
He stands in my place,
and all I can do is stand with bowed head,
to cast my eye away from this awful sight.
to know that as he calls, he calls in my place,
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me."

*Dear Lord,
Mine was the guilt,
mine was the punishment,
mine was the pain,
the millstone you carried was my millstone,
the abyss you entered was my abyss,
all this you did for me,
and all I can do is watch.
Amen.*

Reading 5: I am thirsty - John 19: 28-29

Meditation.

Thirst? Thirst? Him?

He who offered living water that would quench all thirst?

Can he thirst?

Can he be so drained of spirit and life,

so drained of living water that he, yes he could thirst?

Yes, he has his physical thirst,

but his thirst is not for water or wine,

not for the drink that satisfies human need,

but his thirst is for the water of life,

for that spiritual water that has refreshed him,

renewed him, strengthened him so many times before.

And yet as blood and sweat drain from his tortured body,

so does this water,

so does his water,

the water that he has offered to so many

in healing and forgiveness and renewal.

Even his soul is drained,

even his spirit thirsts,

and so he cries from deep within: "I thirst, I thirst."

His is the thirst of all thirsts,

his is the suffering of all sufferings,

his is the death of all deaths.

for his is the thirst of the whole world,

his is the suffering of the whole world,

his is the death of the whole world.

Dear Lord,

you suffer to end suffering,

you thirst to quench all thirst,

you die to bring me life.

Amen.

Reading 6: It is finished - John 19: 30

Meditation.

It is finished, completed,
the end has come, and it is finished,
a job done, a task complete,
a calling fulfilled,
a burden carried to the very end,
and as his last drop of strength is wasted,
so the finishing tape is reached,
and like a marathon runner who has spent himself
in the labour of the race,
it is right now to rest,
to relax tortured muscles,
to ease tense sinews,
to let the tide of weakness rise,
and flood the hollows where strength once made its home.
It is finished,
and now as drifting consciousness slips away,
there is nothing left,
save the peace of labour's contentment,
the satisfaction of a task complete,
and the motionless, silent peace of sleep.
And as the tide of love's Endeavour
carries him in gentle hands,
and the beat of his heart and gasping breath
give way to gentle stillness,
we can only watch and wait,
for love's Endeavour is love's expense,
and all is now spent,
all is ready.

*Dear Lord,
your task complete,
your race run,
now rest, now sleep,
and grant us your peace.
Amen.*

Reading 7: Into your hands - Luke 23: 45b-48

Meditation.

And now all is silent,
all is still,
all is empty.
Where the light of life once burned with such divine radiance,
there are now only cold ashes, lifeless and exhausted,
blackened and charred,
and it seems that there is nothing, nothing but darkness,
a thick, impenetrable darkness,
closing in, clinging, surrounding,
squeezing and extinguishing the light that once burned so brightly.
In the hands of his Father lies his spirit,
emptied, drained, fragile,
small, so small,
and yet, as the Father takes this speck of life so gently,
so lovingly in his hand,
the seed of hope is sown.
The tears are shed,
the silent grief continues,
but wonder like a fragrant incense
drifts across the silent heavens,
touching each one who watches
as the Father cups this life drained speck in his out stretched hand.
and as that tear filled wonder roots its self in every heavenly soul,
so the Father turns,
and carrying all that he has lost,
enters his solitary place to weep his own tears.

Dear Lord,
you gave up all you had,
that I might gain all you lost,
you emptied yourself,
that I might be full,
you entered into darkness,
that I could be surrounded by light,
you became weak,
that I could become strong,
You entered into death,
that I might enter into life.
Lord, into your hands I commend my spirit, today, and every day.
Amen.