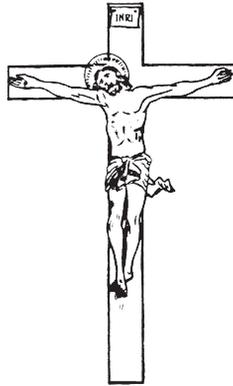


# THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF CHRIST

Father Donald Haggerty

---



## The First Word:

*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*

You wore a crown of thorns, Lord, your Passion's emblem of mockery, as you spoke this quiet prayer to your Father early in your crucifixion while shouts of scorn attempted to drown in loud curses your being heard. But your words carried well to the depth of your Father's heart and they stretch across time to the present day, waiting again to be heard. Let me never forget that you continue to pray these words of exoneration for my own soul, still asking your Father to pardon me despite my failures and my stubborn refusal to forgive as you have forgiven me, and even worse perhaps, despite my unconcern too often for the wound I inflict upon you by hours indifferent to you.

## The Second Word:

*Today you will be with me in Paradise.*

The reprieve of Didymus, the good thief, stolen by mercy at that late hour, continues to astonish me, Lord, and fill me with delight. It puts to rest any fear that we are judged at the end as though standing before a prosecutor intent on proving guilt. No, you are greatly merciful and demand only sincere, honest acknowledgment of sin. We need not tremble before the kindness of your eyes. But there is more to savor. Didymus received his wonderful grace while beside you in suffering, and perhaps the same is true for all of us. Help me to know how present is your mercy in any trial, that I may live with a longing to hear myself one day the same words you spoke to Didymus.

## The Third Word:

*Woman, behold your Son...behold your Mother.*

You ask much, Lord, even of your Mother. When you were close to death, you commanded her to turn her eyes from your face and rest them upon John. This was a terrible sacrifice to ask of a mother, not only to look away from her only

son in his last struggle, but in her heart now to embrace John as her beloved son. Yet your Mother, as always, acquiesced in love to your desire, and indeed shared the offering you were making, the willing deprivation of any last human comfort. I want to do, Jesus, what John surely did and contemplate your courageous Mother in that moment as my own Mother, overwhelmed as she turns her loving eyes from your face to my own.

#### **The Fourth Word:**

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

With all the tortures you suffered in your Passion, Jesus, your soul's interior agony undoubtedly surpassed the pain that could be visibly seen. What you allowed yourself to suffer in soul remains an enormous mystery of the crucifixion. Who can understand what it meant for your human soul to take the weight of all sin upon yourself? It is beyond our grasp. Yet your words of forsakenness, quoting from the psalm, more than hint at the awful loneliness you underwent as your human soul carried sin's experience of separation from intimacy with the Father. I cannot hear these words you spoke to your Father without a desire never to leave you alone and abandoned. May I never forsake the remembrance of your sacrifice for me.

#### **The Fifth Word:**

*I thirst.*

Your cry of thirst near the end of your crucifixion, Jesus, surely expressed more than the physical pain of a man bleeding to death and desperate for water. I hear also in these words a testimony of your immense desire that souls embrace the gift of faith and not be lost. At Calvary you thirsted as well for a recognition of your love, the recognition that moved the saints to tears at the sight of your tortures and your death as a criminal out of love of us. Let this thirst of your love draw in turn a permanent response from my soul. May I long always for the salvation of souls, seeking generously to satiate your thirst on the cross for love and for souls.

#### **The Sixth Word:**

*It is finished.*

These words, Lord, sound almost a note of relief after the long ordeal of suffering. But they were not just the words of a man in pain about to pass beyond the threshold of death. You knew well in speaking them that you had completed your mission in becoming man. Throughout your life you gave yourself to your Father's will, and now at the end, with the prophecies fulfilled, with all accomplished that you were asked to bear, you offered yourself in a final, definitive manner. Yet this completion, and the Resurrection soon to follow, marked also a new beginning—of your Church and the fullness of your love in the Eucharist. May I never stop realizing more deeply your personal love in the Eucharist.

## The Seventh Word:

*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*

Your last words, Lord, praying again a psalm, have great beauty. You suffered a real death, a true separation of body and soul, and every death involves a tearing and rupture from this life. But the words you speak to your Father as you are about to make this crossing anticipate the great joy of returning to your Father. You cast your human soul into your Father's hands as one would place a gift before an honored person. This last act was but a culmination of your life's constant self-offering. These last words make me long for your Father's embrace on my own last day. I realize better after hearing them my own need to cast all things in my life into your hands.

*(Father Donald Haggerty, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, is serving at Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. He is author of Contemplative Provocations, The Contemplative Hunger, and Conversion (Ignatius).*

MAGNIFICAT is now offering complimentary access to its iOS and Android Apps throughout May. To register for free access in English, visit [www.magnificat.com/free](http://www.magnificat.com/free)