

# THE SEVEN LAST WORDS

## GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE (2021)

*The sanctuary should be free of all decorations except a large cross, which should be placed in the middle. Lighting in the sanctuary should be low or off. The service calls for Seven Candles to be extinguished during the service. A free standing candelabrum is ideal for this, or seven candlesticks – three on either side of the cross and one in front; otherwise, seven candles on the altar will suffice.*

*A single lector and a single narrator - one, who is able to be expressive in his or her reading, should be utilized. NO WORSHIP AID SINCE IT WILL BE LIVE-STREAMED (A worship aid can be easily prepared for the congregation - using this outline - and omitting the text of the reflections. The actual scripture readings should be in the worship aid to help the congregation in it reflection at home over the period of vigil.)*

**GATHERING MUSIC:** *Appropriate reflective music is to be played as the Lectors gather.*

**CALL TO WORSHIP:** *(Isaiah 53:1-3)*

*The Celebrant or Leader Enters the sanctuary reverences the altar as usual and addresses the Lectors.*

**CELEBRANT:** The Lord be with you.

**LECTORS:** **And also with you.**

**CELEBRANT:** We gather here to worship God.

**LECTORS:** **We gather to remember how Jesus suffered and died for us and to thank God for his love and his mercy**

**CELEBRANT:** Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

**LECTORS:** **He grew up before God like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.**

**CELEBRANT:** He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

**LECTORS:** **Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

**HYMN:** *The Cry of the Poor*

### OPENING PRAYER:

**CELEBRANT:** Let us pray.

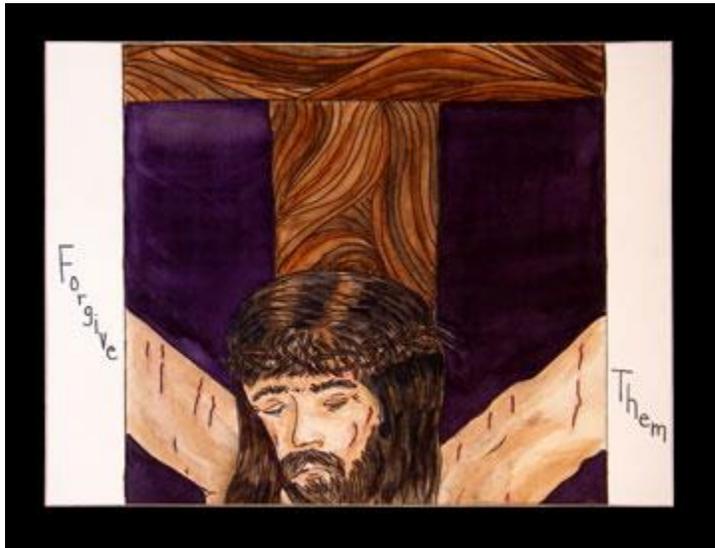
**LECTORS:** **Merciful God - as we remember how your son Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross, how seven times he spoke seven words of love, we ask you to bless our hearing.**

**CELEBRANT:** Father, as we recall how all three hours His silence cried for mercy on the souls of all, we ask you to help us to understand the mystery of your love, and make us into a Lectors who are ever more worthy of it.

**LECTORS:** **Amen.**

# THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF JESUS

## THE FIRST WORD *(Luke 23:33-34)*



When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, *"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."*

## MEDITATION ON THE FIRST WORD

"They do not know what they are doing"  
They do not know? They who killed Jesus?  
Who is "they"?

It is so easy to name others, to blame others...

- the Romans
- the crowd
- Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas...

They all played their part,  
and conspired against Jesus  
or simply followed orders to maintain the peace  
to keep Jesus' kingdom from infringing on theirs.

And yet, where are we when Jesus' kingdom infringes on ours?  
On our peace and our order?  
On our prosperity and our security?

Where are we when the victims of our peace cry for justice?  
When those disenfranchised by our order call for compassion?  
When the hungry and the lonely beg us to share

- our prosperity
- our security
- our power?

Where are we when Christ is crucified among us?

Surely he should have raged  
at the sinners who nailed him to the tree.  
Surely he should have raged at us  
for the evil we do,  
the evil we do both knowing and unknowing,  
Yet, compassion is there in the first words that he utters.  
He intercedes for us before the Father.

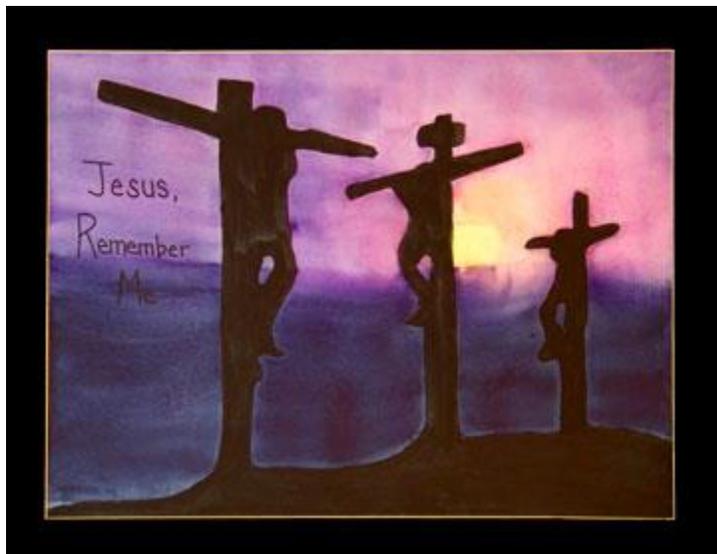
Compassion that called him into being in his mother's womb;  
Compassion that compelled him to the cross;  
Compassion that brings incredible, unbelievable grace;  
Compassion that echoes through the centuries  
to all who participate in the killing of Christ;  
Compassion that cries out from the cross:  
"Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing"

### EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLE

**CELEBRANT:** Lord Jesus - you gave your life for us.  
**LECTORS:** You suffered and died that we might be made whole.  
**ANTHEM:** *Ubi Caritas*, (Verses 1 & 5)



### THE SECOND WORD (Luke 23:39-43)



Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he

said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "*Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.*"

## MEDITATION ON THE SECOND WORD

How much are we like the first thief?

- Full of anger - because we are not rescued from our sin?
- Full of hate - because we suffer because of the sins of others?

How much do we want God to snap his fingers  
and make right what we have made wrong?  
what we have allowed others to make wrong?

How easy it is to cry "save us" and to rail against God

- when there is no magic cure
- no miraculous recovery
- no legions of angels

to take away pain and bring wholeness.

How easy it is to scorn the Messiah,  
to mock the goodness of the world  
and condemn the light of the world  
because we are unwilling to face what we have done?

Yet there is goodness...

There is a cure for sin

a cure that does not promise magical solutions  
but promises that the pain of sin is not the end,

- that when all this is over
- when the suffering is finished

that the final word is not torture and defeat

- but life – life springing out of the ashes
- life transformed and fulfilled in Paradise.

To the compassionate thief

To the one who could still recognize the good in the world

To the one who tried to comfort and protect that good

To the one who sought the good -- Comfort was given

"Today, you will be in paradise with me."

## EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLE

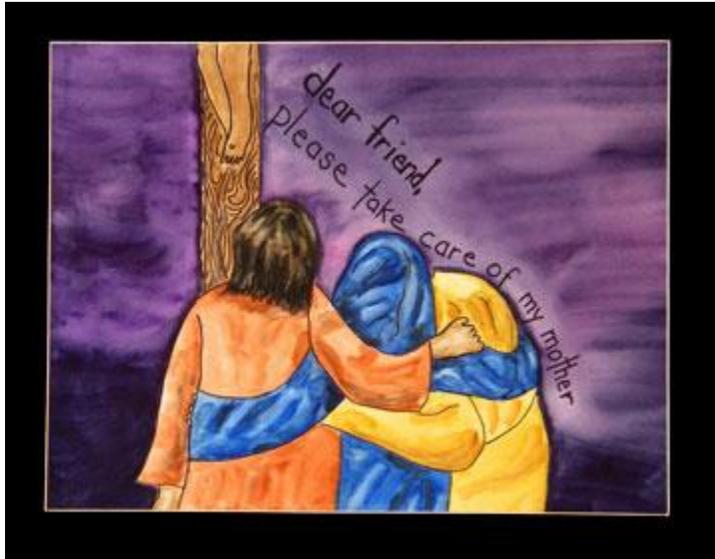
**CELEBRANT:** Lord Jesus - you gave your life for us.

**LECTORS:** You suffered and died that we might be made whole.

**ANTHEM:** *Jesus Remember Me*, (2X)

*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom  
Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*

## THE THIRD WORD (John 19:25-27)



Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, 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 into his home.

### MEDITATION ON THE THIRD WORD

Who can grasp the grief?

- the grief of Mary watching her son suffer?
- the grief of Mary watching him die?

And who can grasp the grief of the son?

- The son who must see his mother mourn?

What gift can a man give his mother?

What can he offer when he is gone?

How can he help her?

Hold her?

Comfort her?

Honor her?

*"Woman, here is your son"*

Here is one I love, to love you, and for you to love.

One who knows me

One who is my brother and who can speak of me.

One who can hold you,

- comfort you,
- and honor you;

One who shares your grief.

*"Here is your mother"*

Here is one I love, for you to love, and to love you.

- The one who taught me,
- the one who fed me,
- the one who wiped away my tears,
- the one who hugged me,
- The one who grieves with you.

Mother, behold your children; children, behold your mother.

### EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLE

**CELEBRANT:** Lord Jesus - you gave your life for us.

**LECTORS:** You suffered and died that we might be made whole.

**ANTHEM:** *Were You There*, (Verses 1-2)

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble...  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

*Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?  
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?  
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble...  
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?*



### THE FOURTH WORD (Mark 15:33-34)

At noon darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" which is translated, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

### MEDITATION ON THE FOURTH WORD

Of all the agony of that tortuous day

- the lacerations of the scourging
- the chafing of the thorns around his head
- the convulsions of his tormented, dehydrated body
- as it hung in the heat all the day



Nothing reaches the depth of this anguished cry of desolation:

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

Jesus, who found his purpose and strength in the presence of God

- who was sustained by the immediacy of his relationship with God
- and who endured all by the tangible power of God always at work within him ,
- always a center of vitality and peace,

found himself totally alone on the cross.

Jesus, whose very being was God, found himself

- utterly,
- absolutely,
- despairingly,

Cut off from all that gives life and breath;

Cut off from all that gives purpose and hope;

Cut off from the source of his being;

Cut off, even from himself;

Plumbing the depths of the human condition

- to walk in the place of the utter absence of God,
- in the place of sinners,
- in the place of those who reject God.

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

In these words is the central mystery of the crucifixion  
which cannot be fully comprehended,

- that there is no despair so deep
- or evil so overwhelming
- or place so far removed from joy, light, and love
- from the very heart of God

that God has not been before us;

and where God cannot meet us

and bring us home.

**EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLE**

**CELEBRANT:** Lord Jesus - you gave your life for us.

**LECTORS:** You suffered and died that we might be made whole.

**HYMN:** ***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me,*** (M. Manning's)



## THE FIFTH WORD *(John 19:28)*



After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "*I thirst.*"

### MEDITATION ON THE FIFTH WORD

There is a kind of timelessness about hanging on a cross.  
It is not a quiet death,

- over in an instant in one glorious moment of martyrdom
- like being torn apart by lions.

A cross is as much an instrument of torture  
as it is a gallows from which to hang,

And as the day wears on

- seconds stretch into minutes which stretch into hours  
Until there comes a point when time can no longer be measured  
except in the gradual weakening of the body  
and its ever more insistent demands.  
for that substance which is so vital to life  
so foundational to all living things  
so basic to existence as we know it: *Water.*

Water to moisten a parched mouth;  
Water to free a swollen tongue ;  
Water to open a rasping throat that cannot gasp enough air;  
Water to keep hope alive  
to keep life alive just a few moments longer.

Water, to a crucified man, is life.

*"O God, you are my God – for you I long!  
For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts,  
Like a land parched, lifeless, and without water."*

Who can tell if these words from Psalm 63 went through Jesus mind.  
But a thirst for water is a thirst for life;  
and a thirst for life is a thirst for God,  
who promises streams in the desert  
mighty rivers in the dry land  
and living water to wash away every tear.

Here, at the end of it all those promises seem far away – distant.  
And yet Jesus – forsaken by God – still clings to the memory and the hope of life.

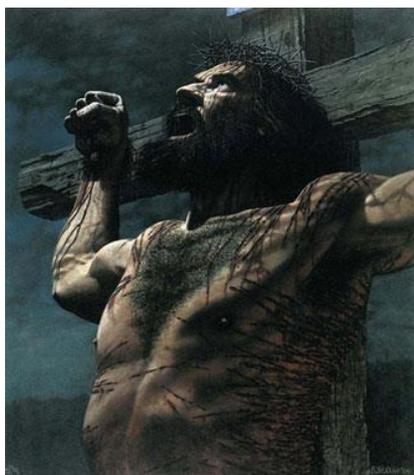
*"I thirst."*

### **EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLE**

**CELEBRANT:** Lord Jesus - you gave your life for us.  
**LECTORS:** You suffered and died that we might be made whole.  
**ANTHEM:** *Behold the Wood*, (Verses 1-3)



### **THE SIXTH WORD** (*John 19:29-30*)



There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, *"It is finished."* And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

### **MEDITATION ON THE SIXTH WORD**

What a sigh of relief!  
What a cry of deliverance, that finally,  
• after seemingly endless pain  
• and gasping torment,

It is over at last...

The suffering is ended. The ordeal is finished; and nothing remains,  
but the blessed peace of the absence of all sensation.

When all there is, is pain,

- its ceasing is the greatest blessing of all
- Even when its ceasing comes only with death.

But Jesus' cry is more than just welcoming the ending of pain  
it is more than joy at the deliverance death brings.

He does not merely say, "it is over".

He says, "*it is accomplished,*"

- fulfilled,
- achieved"

Jesus' cry isn't a cry of defeat and despair

It is a cry of success and triumph

– even at the moment of death –

- that the race has been run
- that he has endured to the end
- that the strife is over
- and the battle is won.

Jesus' cry is a cry of relief to be sure;  
but it is also a cry of victory:

"The work I came to do is complete"

there is nothing more to add

"it is finished"

## **EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLE**

**CELEBRANT:** Lord Jesus - you gave your life for us.

**LECTORS:** You suffered and died that we might be made whole.

**ANTHEM:** *Behold the Wood*, (Verses 4-6)



## THE SEVENTH WORD *(Luke 23:46)*



Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!*" And having said this he breathed his last.

### MEDITATION ON THE SEVENTH WORD

It is the end, the very end

- the end of the ordeal
- the end of the suffering.

And Jesus,

- alone on the cross,
- tortured,
- exhausted,
- abandoned by his friends,
- forsaken by God,

Gasps for a last breath

and gathers the strength for one final cry.

Why would he choose to speak so close to the end?

Why would he muster the last energy he had to cry out with a loud voice?

Couldn't God have heard his thoughts?

Unless God wasn't the only one intended to hear.

- Unless his voice was pitched loud
- so that we too might hear this final dedication of his soul.

A dedication made despite the pain,

- despite the mocking,
- despite the agony,
- despite the sense of horrible isolation that he felt.

A dedication made to God

- before the resurrection,
- before the victory of the kingdom,
- before any assurance other than that
- which faith could bring.

Jesus entrusts his spirit -- his life --

- and all that has given it meaning --
- to God in faith.

Even at the point of his own abandonment – when the good seems so very far away – he proclaims his faith in God... The darkness cannot overcome it.

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

### **EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLE**

**CELEBRANT:** Lord Jesus - you gave your life for us.

**LECTORS:** You suffered and died that we might be made whole.

### **SILENT MEDITATION**

**ANTHEM:** *Father, Father, I put my life in your hands*, (M. Manning's)

**RESPONSIVE READING:** (*Isaiah 53-4-6, 9*)

**LECTOR:** Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured; while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted.

**LECTORS:** **But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed.**

**LECTOR:** We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way; but the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all.

**LECTORS:** **A grave was assigned him among the wicked and a burial place with evildoers; though he had done no wrong nor spoken any falsehood.**

**HYMN:** *Were You There?* (Verse 3)

*Were you there when the sun refused to shine?  
Were you there when the sun refused to shine?  
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble...  
Were you there when the sun refused to shine?*

## **PRAYER OF CONSECRATION:**

**CELEBRANT:** Lord God, you have given us everything.  
**LECTORS:** **You have not held anything back.**  
**CELEBRANT:** Help us in like manner to give of ourselves  
**LECTORS:** **Sanctify us Christ's name.**  
**Bless us and all that we think, feel, say, and do that we, like Jesus, may be a blessing unto others.**  
**CELEBRANT:** We ask this and all things that we ask of you through him, saying the prayer that he taught us...  
**LECTORS:** ***Our Father...***

**HYMN:** *Jesus the Lord*

## **CLOSING PRAYER:**

**CELEBRANT:** Let us pray...

May the Spirit of Christ, go with you;  
may his faith and trust abide within  
you; may the knowledge of his love  
support you both now and forever; and,  
may Almighty God bless you, Father, †  
Son and Holy Spirit.

**LECTORS:** **Amen.**

**CELEBRANT:** Let us go in peace.

**LECTORS:** **Thanks be to God.**

