

# Good Friday

Luke 23:34

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

Good Friday is the Friday before Easter Sunday, the central festival of the Christian year. Good Friday is usually observed as a day for mourning the death of Jesus. Some churches hold a three-hour worship service. In some churches, Good Friday marks the beginning of the *Paschal Triduum*, the three days of Easter.

The earliest records from the A.D. 100's show that Good Friday had no connection with mourning Jesus's death. It was simply a day of fasting before Easter. By the late 300's, however, Christians observed Good Friday with a long series of readings and prayers that focused on the death of Jesus on the cross. This service was held from noon to 3 p.m.

Holy Week is the period between Palm Sunday and Easter when Christians remember the final events in the life of Jesus. During this week, churches usually hold special services of worship and meditation.

Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week, commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when the people spread palms and garments before Him. Christians in many traditions observe the day with a procession with palm leaves. On Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday, services focus on the Last Supper of Jesus. Worship may include a foot-washing ceremony, in keeping with Jesus' command to His disciples that they wash each other's feet as He had washed theirs.

In Good Friday services, Christians remember the day of Jesus' Crucifixion. On Holy Saturday, many churches hold the *vigil* (watch) of Easter, when worshipers recall Jesus' burial and await His Resurrection. The vigil marks the start of Easter and often includes a service of light, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion.

The observances of Holy Week took their present form in the late 300's. Early Christians linked the final events of Jesus' life with the days on which these events were thought to have occurred. Christians related these events with the places in and around Jerusalem where tradition held they took place. For the many pilgrims who visited Jerusalem, worship services were conducted at the churches and shrines that tradition associated with Jesus' last days. As a result, the observances in Jerusalem produced for the entire church a week of special solemnity and services to commemorate the suffering and death of Jesus.

## Good Friday Meditation

(Note that numbers after each section refer to time to complete each section, the meditation begins at 2pm on Good Friday)

## Meditation for Good Friday: the Final Seven Words of Jesus

### 1. "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) (2:07)

Forgiveness is terribly easy to ask from others, and yet so very hard to give from ourselves. As Our Lord was nailed to the instrument of his passion, he spoke asking the Father's forgiveness, whilst he freely forgave them himself, for as St. John repeatedly notes: *"I am in the Father and the Father is in me"*.

Forgiveness is at the heart of the Gospel: at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, Christ calls for repentance, "metanoia" to herald the Kingdom of God. His whole ministry is to seek to reconcile God and his creation once more, and the route to that reconciliation is forgiveness: The woman accused of adultery was told **"go, and sin no more"** (John 8:11), the paralyzed man lowered through the roof told that **"his sins were forgiven"** (Mark 2:5), and the woman who anointed Our Lord's feet was given the same dispensation (Luke 7:48): **"your sins are forgiven"**: simple words, such power, such authority.

We pray that we too may be forgiven, for our manifold sins. Forgiveness is part of God's grace and is freely given, if we but have the courage to ask for it.

We pray that we may also forgive: **"forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us"**. It is not only those who bear hammer and nails against us whom we need to forgive; but those whose offenses are in comparison, quite small. **"How many times should I forgive my brother, Lord? Seven times?" "Not seven, but seventy times seven"** (Matthew 18:22).

**"They know not what they do"** ... and neither do we.

(Silence)

### 2. "I assure you: this day you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:34) (2:14)

The penitent thief is the only person recorded in the Scriptures who speaks directly to Christ, addressing him by his own name. Not Rabbi, not Master, not Lord, but simply and directly: Jesus.

Such honesty was not borne out of over familiarity, or rudeness, but out of a common bond between them: the bond of the condemned cell. Our Lord and these thieves shared an intimacy, which we can only hope to aspire to: to be alongside Christ, and more importantly, to have Christ alongside us in our hour of need.

When we glance away from our own crucifixion, we may just be able to glimpse Christ crucified alongside us; suffering as we suffer, suffering greater as he

suffers not only our pain and anguish, but the pain, anguish and bitterness of the whole world. And we hope to hear those words, available to all who have the courage to ask of Christ: **“You will be with me in paradise”**

We pray for the faith to spot Christ alongside us, especially when we are so wrapped up in our own crucifixion to notice His; and we pray that we may have the opportunity, no matter how fleeting or transitory, to experience the intimacy of Christ: to feel his love and concern, to allow his Grace to guide us to our heavenly home.

(Silence)

### **3. "Woman, behold your son." (John 19: 26) (2:21)**

Theotokos – “God Bearer”: Mary, “The Virgin Mary” carried such responsibility; in her womb, in her upbringing of the Saviour of the World, in her faithful following of her Son’s ministry from that first sign at Cana in Galilee (**John 2**) to the foot of the Cross and to the Garden early that Sunday. It was a responsibility, which would be almost impossible for any human to carry alone, but for God’s grace. The same Grace which removed the stain of Original Sin from Mary is the same Grace which redeems us all, and all we have to do is to accept that Grace from God: **“be it done unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38)**

We give honor to The Virgin Mary because she is a model for us of humankind’s response to God in faith. So often we find our own faith obstructed by practicalities and earthly considerations: other things to do or say and God’s call to us buried amid the hubbub of daily life and work. The Virgin Mary’s response was to say yes to God without thought or consideration or reference to earthly concerns – a miraculous child born of an unmarried girl far away from home. For this faith, Mary is rewarded with a further task: as the beloved disciple is commended to her, so we are commended to Jesus’ care and his intercession, for we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

We pray just like Mary, the adoptive mother to God, by asking Jesus’ intercession for those things in our lives which need the Grace of God to help us through: the sicknesses, the anxieties, the worldly concerns.

We pray that our response may also be **“be it done unto me according to thy word”**.

This section taken from the (Catholic Encyclopedia, 1962, Pg. 3472, paragraph 15.)

2.(Silence)

### **4. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27: 46) (2:28)**

There is a dark night that the soul must endure, before it reaches it’s goal – to be

with God. On that journey as described by St. John of the Cross, there will be times when one might be forgiven for feeling forsaken by God.

**Psalm 22**, which Our Lord recalls, speaks of desolation and isolation, but if we focus only on the first half of the Psalm, we lose to context of Christ's quotation: Christ spoke in an age when the Scriptures were identified by their opening lines: we begin with "Our Father..." and we know the rest of the prayer, Our Lord said "Eloi, Eloi..." and the faithful would recall the whole Psalm. The second and longer part of the Psalm speaks of faith and redemption, of Grace and fulfillment.

For each dark night, there is a brilliant day, which follows it.

Even with the sins of the world on his back, Our Lord was not deserted by God, for he carried the promise of hope and fulfillment with him.

In our darkest nights, we pray that we too may be able to recall that promise, that redemption, that Grace. We pray that others whom we see ensnared by despair may be able to complete their Psalm, and see the joy which comes in the morning.

We pray for the dawn from on high, to sustain us through our dark night, until at last we achieve our soul's perfection.

(Silence)

##### **5. "I thirst." (John 19: 28) (2:35)**

We are driven by our own concerns and needs, our self-centeredness and our conceit; yet the call of the Christian is to emulate the selfless love of Our Savior as he hung on the tree. Christ's humanity and his divinity are exposed on the cross, and the vulnerability of He who moved over the waters was displayed for all to see.

Christ's thirst was not only physical, but was a thirst for our redemption; a desire so compelling that he would accept the cup ordained for him by his Father.

**"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6)**

What do we thirst for? Our own needs? Our petty desires? Or do we thirst for Christ, as the deer pants for the water (**Psalm 42:1**).

We pray for those who are persecuted for their faith or their convictions. We pray that we may receive the Grace to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

(Silence)

**6. "It is completed." (John 19: 30) (2:42)**

The last words of Christ were not words of resignation or defeat, but a shout of triumph to cut through the pain and desolation. Christ did not whimper "I am finished", but proclaimed to the dark sky and the shaking earth the news that death had been conquered, Adam's had been repaid and humankind would be released: **"it is completed!"**

**"Now Lord, you let your servant depart in peace" (Luke 2:29)** was Simeon's prayer, knowing that what was promised to him had been completed. Too often, we are impatient, and look for the quick fix, the easy way out, the short cut, and thus prevent Our Lord from completing his task within us. We are works in progress, drafts on the potter's wheel; we are shaped and formed by our loving creator and it is only by his act on the cross that we are complete.

We pray for the Grace given freely to Simeon, to accept with faith the promises God makes to us, for the perseverance to see our calling through to its proper conclusion.

(Silence)

**7. "Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit." (Luke 23: 46) (2:49)**

With these words, the divine word returns back to the one who sent him. His redeeming work complete, the atonement fulfilled. By pouring himself out for us (**Philippians 2:5-11**), he shows us the supreme self-sacrificing love for us of the Creator. With these final words he died, and the servant suffered for the last time.

What follows is silence.

(Silence)

At the end of our lives, it will only be by God's Grace that we can commend our souls to him. It is a Grace freely given, fully won, completely atoned.

It is our salvation which calls us from the Cross.