



LENT

H O L Y W E E K

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HOLY MONDAY

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, have mercy. Soften our hearts and open our ears to what you intend to speak to our souls today. We give you our attention. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE

John 7:37

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink."

John 19:28

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

MEDITATION

I Thirst for You

by Joseph Langford

I am the vessel.

The drought is God's.

And God is the thirsty one.

— Dag Hammarskjöld

I know you through and through—I know everything about you. The very hairs of your head I have numbered. Nothing in your life is unimportant to me, I have followed you through the years, and I have always loved you—even in your wanderings.

I know every one of your problems. I know your need and your worries. And yes, I know all your sins. But I tell you again that I love you—not for what you have or haven't done—I love you for you, for the beauty and dignity my Father gave you by creating you in his own image.

It is a dignity you have often forgotten, a beauty you have tarnished by sin. But I love you as you are, and I have shed my blood to win you back. If you only ask me with faith, my grace will touch all that needs changing in your life; and I will give you the strength to free yourself from sin and all its destructive power.

I know what is in your heart—I know your loneliness and all your hurts—the rejections, the judgements, the humiliations. I carried it all before you. And I carried it all for you, so you might share my strength and victory. I know especially your need for love—how you are thirsting to be loved and cherished. But how often have you thirsted in vain, by seeking that love selfishly, striving to fill the emptiness inside you with passing

pleasures—with even greater emptiness of sin. Do you thirst for love? “Come to me all you who thirst” (John 7:37) I will satisfy you and fill you. Do you thirst to be cherished? I cherish you more than you can imagine to the point of dying on a cross for you.

I thirst for you. Yes, that is the only way to even begin to describe my love for you: I thirst for you. I thirst to love and to be loved by you—that is how precious you are to me. I thirst for you. Come to me, and fill your heart and heal your wounds.

If you feel unimportant in the eyes of the world, that matters not at all. For me, there is no one any more important in the entire world than you. I thirst for you. Open to me, come to me, thirst for me, give me your life—and I will prove to you how important you are to my heart.

No matter how far you may wander, no matter how often you forget me, no matter how many crosses you may bear in this life, there is one thing I want you to remember always, one thing that will never change: I thirst for you—just as you are. You don’t need to change to believe in my love, for it will be your belief in my love that will change you. You forget me, and yet I am seeking you every moment of the day—standing at the door of your heart, and knocking.

Do you find this hard to believe? Then look at the cross, look at my heart that was pierced for you. Have you not understood my cross? Then listen again to the words I spoke there—for they tell you clearly why I endured all this for you: I thirst (John 19:28). Yes, I thirst for you—as the rest of the Psalm verse which I was praying says of me: “I looked for love, and I found none” (Psalm 69:20) .

All your life I have been looking for your love—I have never stopped seeking to love and be loved by you. You have tried many other things in your search for happiness; why not try opening your heart to me, right now, more than you ever have before.

Whenever you do open the door of your heart, whenever you come close enough, you will hear me say to you again and again, not in the mere human words but in spirit: “No matter what you have done, I love you for your own sake.”

Come to me with your misery and your sins, with your trouble and needs, and with all your longing to be loved. I stand at the door of your heart and knock. Open to me, for I thirst for you.

REFLECTION

Take a moment to turn your attention to the cross.

Read the last paragraph of the meditation once more.

After a moment of silence, respond to Jesus with whatever words come to mind.

HOLY TUESDAY

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, have mercy. Soften our hearts and open our ears to what you intend to speak to our souls today. We give you our attention. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE

1 Timothy 2:5-6

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

MEDITATION

Our Mediator

by Saint Augustine

The Maker of man was made man, that the Ruler of the stars might suck at the breast; that the Bread might be hungered; the Fountain, thirst; the Light, sleep; the Way, be wearied by the journey; the Truth, be accused by false witnesses; the Judge of the living and the dead, be judged by a mortal judge; the Chastener, be chastised with whips; the Vine, be crowned with thorns; the Foundation; be hung upon a tree; Strength, be made weak; Health, be wounded; life, die. To suffer these and suchlike things, undeserved things, that He might free the undeserving, for neither did He deserve any evil, who for our sakes endured so many evils, nor were we deserving of anything good, we who through Him received such good.

— *The Confessions*

Whom would I find to reconcile me to you? Should I go courting the angels? With what prayer or by what rites could I win them to my cause? The angels used magical powers to beguile their clients, who were seeking a mediator to purge them of their impurities, but found none; for there was no one there but the devil, disguised as an angel of light. Being without a fleshly body himself, he strongly appealed to the pride of fleshly humans. They were mortal and sinful, whereas you, Lord, to whom they sought, though proudly, to be reconciled, are immortal and without sin.

What we needed was a mediator to stand between God and men who should be in respect like God, in another kin to human beings, for if he were manlike in both regards he would be far from God, but if Godlike in both, far from us: and then he would be no mediator. By the same token that spurious mediator, by whose means pride was deservedly duped in keeping with your secret decree, does have one thing

in common with human beings, namely sin; and he appears to have something else in common with God because, not being clad in mortal flesh, he is able to flaunt himself as immortal. But in fact since death is the wage sin earns he has this in common with humans, that he lies under sentence of death as surely as they do.

In your unfathomable mercy you first gave the humble certain pointers to the true Mediator, and then sent him, that by his example they might learn even a humility like his. This Mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus, appeared to stand between mortal sinners and the God who is immortal and just: like us he was mortal, but like God he was just. Now the wage due to justice is life and peace; and so through the justice whereby he was one with God he broke the power of death on behalf of malefactors rendered just, using that very death to which he willed to be liable along with them. He was pointed out to holy people under the old dispensation that he might be saved through faith in his future passion, as we are in virtue of his humanity is he the Mediator; in his nature as the Word he does not stand between us and God, for he is God's equal, God with God, and with him only one God.

How you loved us, O good Father, who spared not even your only Son, but gave him up for us evildoers! How you loved us, for whose sake he who deemed it no robbery to be your equal was made subservient, even to the point of dying on the cross! Alone of all he was free among the dead, for he had power to lay down his life and power to retrieve it. For our sake he stood to you as both victor and victim, and victor because victim; for us he stood to you as priest and sacrifice, and priest because sacrifice, making us sons and daughters to you instead of servants by being born of you to serve us. With good reason is there solid hope for me in him, because you will heal all my infirmities through him who sits at your right hand and intercedes for us. Were it not so, I would despair. Many and grave are those infirmities, many and grave; but wider-reaching is your healing power. We might have despaired, thinking your Word remote from any conjunction with humankind, had he not become flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Filled with terror by my sins and my load of misery I had been turning over in my mind a plan to flee into solitude, but you forbade me, and strengthened me by your words. *To this end Christ died for all, you remained me, that they who are alive may live not for themselves, but for him who died for them.* See, then, Lord: I cast my care upon you that I may live, and I will contemplate the wonders you have revealed. You know how stupid and weak I am: teach me and heal me. Your only Son, in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, had redeemed me with his blood. Let not the proud disparage me, for I am mindful of my ransom. I eat it, I drink it, I dispense it to others, and as a poor man I long to be filled with it among those who are fed and feasted. And then do those who seek him praise the Lord.

REFLECTION

Take a moment to turn your attention towards the cross.

After a moment of silence, respond to God with a prayer of gratitude for reconciliation.

HOLY WEDNESDAY

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, have mercy. Soften our hearts and open our ears to what you intend to speak to our souls today. We give you our attention. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE

Mark 15:40-43

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

MEDITATION

The Cross and the Cellar (Part One)

by Morton T. Kelsey

Each of us has underneath our ordinary personality, which we show to the public, a cellar in which we hide the refuse and rubbish which we would rather not see ourselves or let others see. And below that is a deeper hold in which there are dragons and demons, a truly hellish place, full of violence and hatred and viciousness. Sometimes these lower levels break out, and it is to this lowest level of humans that public executions appeal.

In the cross this level of our being has thrust itself up out of its deepest underground cellar so that we humans may see what is in all of us and take heed. The cross is crucial because it shows what possibilities for evil lie hidden in human beings. It is the concretion of human evil in one time and place. Whenever we look upon the cross, which was simply a more fiendish kind of gibbet, we see what humankind can do, has done, and still does to some human beings. It can make us face the worst in ourselves and in others, part of us which can sanction a cross or go to watch a crucifixion. The cross is the symbol, alive and vivid, of the evil that is in us, of evil itself.

Scratch the surface of a person and below you find a beast or worse than a beast. (For animals seldom play with their victims.) This is what the cross says. We don't like to believe this, but let's look at the facts. Who were the ones who ran the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, kept the gas ovens fed, made lamp shades out of tattooed human skin, who performed the mass murders and executions? It is important to remember that Germany was the most literate and educated nation in the world. We think that the people who did these things must have been perverted

monsters. Actually most of them, until they stepped into these roles, had been peaceful German burghers who had never hurt a person, living quietly and peacefully in their comfortable homes, and then the devils in them were let loose.

Were all the Mongol hordes which followed Genghis Khan just wild brutes? No, at home they were kind and loving to their wives and families, and yet as they swept through Persia they killed a hundred thousand in a single city. Once Attila died, the Huns became as gentle and peaceful as any people in Europe. And yet Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, Attila were novices, much less efficient and adroit at disposing of human life, compared without educated moderns.

We don't want to face our own darkness; it is too painful. The atrocity stories which follow in the wake of every war, every one, involve both sides and are as incredible as the cross, and are usually performed by men and women who never before had done such things. Scratch the surface of a human being and the demons of hate and revenge, avarice and bestiality and sheer destructiveness break forth. The cross stands before us to remind us of this depth of ourselves so that we can never forget. These forces continue to break forth in many parts of the world now, and many of us would like to forget how in some places in the United States we treat a person whose skin is black. We like to forget Mai Lai and the napalm bombs and the tiger cages in Vietnam.

Again and again we read the stories of violence in our daily papers, of the mass murders and ethnic wars still occurring in numerous parts of our world. But how often do we say to ourselves: "What seizes people like that, even young people, to make them forget family and friends, and suddenly kill other human beings?" We don't always ask the question in that manner. Sometimes we are likely to think, almost smugly: "How different those horrible creatures are from the rest of us. How fortunate I am that I could never kill or hurt other people like they did."

I do not like to stop and, in the silence, look within, but when I do I hear a pounding on the floor of my soul. When I open the trap door into the deep darkness I see the monsters emerge for me to deal with. There emerges the sheer mindless destructive brutality of the Frankenstein monster, and next the deft and skilled Aztec priest sacrificing his victim. Then I see the image of the slave trader with his whips and chains and then Torquemada fresh from having burned his witch and then the accuser crying at me with a condemning voice. How painful it is to bear all this, but it is there to bear in all of us. Freud called it the death wish, Jung the demonic darkness. If I do not deal with it, it deals with me. The cross reminds me of all this.

This inhumanity of human to human is tamed most of the time by law and order in most of our communities, but there are not laws strong enough to make men and women simply cease their cruelty and bitterness. The cross symbolizes what ordinary people do when they fail to see the monsters dwelling deep within their lives. The person who talks viciously or plays the power is stepping into the path of those who invented and practiced crucifixion. It is not a pretty way...

REFLECTION

Choose one line or phrase from the meditation that the Spirit brings to mind. Set a timer for five minutes and sit in stillness, using this stillness as an opportunity to reflect on the cross and on this particular line or phrase.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, have mercy. Soften our hearts and open our ears to what you intend to speak to our souls today. We give you our attention. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE

Mark 15:44-45

Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.

MEDITATION

The Cross and the Cellar (Part Two)

by Morton T. Kelsey

Let us look at some of the people who brought Jesus of Nazareth to crucifixion. They were not monsters, but ordinary men and women like you and me.

Pilate receives most of the blame for Jesus' death, and yet Pilate didn't want to crucify the man. Why did Pilate condemn Jesus? Because Pilate was a coward. He cared more about his comfortable position than he did about justice. He didn't have the courage to stand for what he knew was right. It was because of this relatively small flaw in Pilate's character that Jesus died on a cross. Whenever you and I are willing to sacrifice someone else for our own benefit, whenever we don't have the courage to stand up for what we see is right, we step into the same course that Pilate took.

And Caiaphas, was he such a monster? Far from it. He was the admired and revered religious leader of the most religious people in that ancient world. He was the High Priest. His personal habits were impeccable. He was a devout and sincerely religious man. Why did he seek to have Jesus condemned? He did it for the simple reason that he was too rigid. He thought he had to protect God from this man, thought he had to protect the Jewish faith, and so he said: "It is good for one man to die instead of a nation being destroyed." Caiaphas's essential flaw was that he thought he had the whole truth. People who have fought religious wars, those who have persecuted in the name of religion, have followed in his footsteps. Those who put their creeds above mercy and kindness and love, walk there even now.

Why did Judas betray his master? He wasn't interested in the thirty pieces of silver, at least not primarily. Judas had wanted Jesus to call upon heavenly powers, to take control of the situation and throw the Romans out of Palestine. When he failed to do this, Judas no longer wanted anything to do with him. Judas' fault was that he couldn't wait. When we can't wait and want to push things through, when we think we can accomplish a noble end by human means, we are just like Judas.

Then there was the nameless carpenter who made the cross. He was a skilled workman. He knew full well what the purpose of that cross was. If you questioned him he probably would have said: "But I am a poor man who must make a living. If other men use it for ill, is it my fault?" So say all of us who pursue jobs which add nothing to human welfare or which hurt some people. Does the work I do aid or hinder human beings? Are we crossmakers for our modern world? There are many, many of them.

These were the things that crucified Jesus on Friday in Passover week A.D. 29. They were not wild viciousness or sadistic brutality or naked hate, but the civilized vices of cowardice, bigotry, impatience, timidity, falsehood, indifference-vices all of us share, the very vices which crucify human beings today.

This destructiveness within us can seldom be transformed until we squarely face it ourselves. This confrontation often leads us into the pit. The empty cross is planted there to remind us that suffering is real but not the end, that victory still is possible if we strive on.

REFLECTION

Take a moment to turn your attention towards the cross.

In a posture of humility before the throne of grace, meditate on the final paragraph of the meditation. If you feel led, take a moment to confess the "destructiveness within" and allow the spirit to be at work in this space.

GOOD FRIDAY

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, have mercy. Soften our hearts and open our ears to what you intend to speak to our souls today. We give you our attention. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Romans 6:6, 11

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

MEDITATION

It Is Done

by Watchman Nee

Good Friday is the day when you can do nothing. Bewailing and lamenting your manifold sins does not in itself make us for them. Scouring your souls in a frenzy of spring cleaning only sterilizes it; it does not give it life. On Good Friday, finally, we are all, mourners and mockers alike, reduced to the same impotence. Someone else is doing the terrible work that gives life to the world.

— Virginia Stem Owens

Christianity begins not with a big do, but with a big done. We begin our Christian life by depending not upon our own doing but upon what Christ has done. Until you realize this you are no Christian; for to say: "I can do nothing to save myself; but by his grace God has done everything for me in Christ," is to take the first step of faith.

If I put a dollar bill between the pages of a magazine, and then burn the magazine, where is the dollar bill? It has gone the same way as the magazine—to ashes. Where the one goes the other goes too. Their history has become one. But, just as effectively, God has put us in Christ. What happened to him happened also to us. All the experiences he met, we too have met *in him*. "Our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, so that we should no longer be in bondage to sin" (Romans 6:6). That is not an exhortation to struggle. That is history: our history, written in Christ before we were born. Do you believe this?

It is true! Our crucifixion with Christ is a glorious historic fact. Our deliverance from sin is based, not on what we can do, nor even on what God is going to do for us, but on what he has already done in Christ. When that fact dawns upon us and we rest back upon it (Romans 6:11), then we have found the secret of a holy life.

But it is true that we know all too little of this in experience. Consider an example. If someone makes a very unkind remark about you in your presence, how do you meet the situation? You compress your lips, clench your teeth, swallow hard, and take a firm grip upon yourself; and if with a great effort you manage to suppress all sign of resentment and be reasonably polite in return, you feel you have gained a great victory. But the resentment is still there; it has merely been covered up. And at times you do not even succeed in covering it. What is the trouble? The trouble is that you are trying to walk before you have learned to sit, and that way lies sure defeat. Let me repeat: no Christian experience begins with walking, but always with a definite sitting down: "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). The secret of deliverance from sin is not to do something but to rest on what God has done.

An engineer living in a large city in the West left his homeland for the Far East. He was away for two or three years, and during his absence his wife was unfaithful to him and went off with one of his best friends. On his return home he found he had lost his wife, his two children and his best friend.

At the close of a meeting that I was addressing, this grief-stricken man unburdened himself to me. "Day and night for two solid years my heart has been full of hatred," he said. "I am a Christian, and I know I ought to forgive my wife and my friend, but though I try and try to forgive them, I simply cannot. Every day I resolve to love them, and every day I fail. What can I do about it?" "Do nothing at all," I replied. "What do you mean?" he asked, startled. "Am I to continue to hate them?"

So I explained: "The solution of your problem lies here, that when the Lord Jesus died on the cross he not only bore your sins away but he bore you away too. When he was crucified, your old man was crucified in him, so that that unforgiving 'you,' who simply cannot love those who have wronged you, has been taken right out of the way in his death. God has felt with the whole situation in the cross. Just say to him, 'Lord, I cannot love and I give up trying, but I count on Thy perfect love. I cannot forgive, but I trust Thee to forgive instead of me, and to do so henceforth in me.'"

The man sat there amazed and said, "That's all so new, I feel I must do something about it." Then a moment later he added again, "But what can I do?" "God is waiting till you cease to do," I said. "When you cease doing, then God will begin. Have you ever tried to save a drowning man? The trouble is that his fear prevents him from entrusting himself to you. When that is so, there are just two ways of going about it. Either you must knock him unconscious and then drag him to the shore, or else you must leave him to struggle and shout until his strength gives way before you go to his rescue. If you try to save him while he has any strength left, he will clutch at you in his terror and drag you under, and both he and you will be lost. God is waiting for your store of strength to be utterly exhausted before he can deliver you. Once you have ceased to struggle so hard, he will do everything. God is waiting for you to despair. He has done it all!"

And with radiant face he went off rejoicing.

REFLECTION

Take a moment to turn your attention towards the cross. After reading the last paragraph of the meditation, what do you sense the spirit is inviting you to? Reflect.

HOLY SATURDAY

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, have mercy. Soften our hearts and open our ears to what you intend to speak to our souls today. We give you our attention. Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 24:1-11

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

MEDITATION

Awkward Saturday

by A.J. Swoboda

Christians defend certain days of the Holy Weekend. For instance, we'll defend the idea that on Friday Jesus actually died on a cross to save the world from its sin. Then we'll turn around and defend Easter Sunday as the day that Jesus actually rose from the grave, defeating the powers of evil running loose in the world. But nobody defends Saturday. Nobody writes apologetics defending the belief that Jesus actually lay dead for one long, endless day two thousand years ago. What's the defense for that? If you've got the power to rise from the grave, why would you wait one whole long day to do it? Why not just rise from the grave, like, just a little later Friday night? Even if it seems puzzling, something profound happened in the lives of Jesus's followers on Saturday. Martin Luther said Saturday was the day that God himself lay cold in the grave. Friday was death, Sunday was hope, but Saturday was that seemingly ignored middle day between them when God occupied a dirty grave in a little garden outside Jerusalem. Saturday is about waiting, about uncertainty, about not knowing what'll happen. Saturday is ambiguity. It's about, as one theologian put it, "muddling through" when the future isn't clear. So much of Christian faith is Saturday faith. I call it

“awkward Saturday”: that holy day to sit, wait, hope—unsure of what’s to come tomorrow. Saturday is the day that Jesus, and all understanding, lay dead. A medieval theologian, Anselm, once described the kind of faith that comes with Saturday—*fides quaerens intellectum*: “faith seeking understanding.” By that, he meant that faith isn’t something that arises after moments of understanding. Rather, faith is something that you cling to when understanding and reason lay dead. We don’t believe once we understand it—we believe in order to understand it. Saturday’s like that: offering a day of waiting, a day of ambiguity, a day when God is sovereign even if our ideas and theologies and expectations about him are not. It is the day that our ignorance is our witness and our proclamation. Truth is, our intellect will always be one step behind in our love of God. We don’t love God once we understand him; we love God in order to understand him.

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So when we think about Saturday, we must do so rejecting our knowledge that Jesus will rise. Those on the first Saturday didn’t know that. They were unaware. The theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar brings a penetrating point to the table on this. He says that we prematurely move from Friday to Saturday and from Saturday to Sunday. We shouldn’t. He writes, “We must . . . guard against that theological busyness and religious impatience which insist on anticipating the moment of fruiting the eternal redemption through the temporal passion—on dragging forward that moment from Easter to Holy Saturday.” When we experience Good Friday and Holy Saturday, Balthasar is saying, we shouldn’t be too quick to move to Sunday. We must sit in Saturday, not too “theologically busy” and “religiously impatient” to squat in the tomb for a day. Of course, to a certain degree that is true; the only problem with such a statement is that those original disciples—disappointed after watching from the front row their best friend hang helplessly on the cross of a criminal—didn’t know what Sunday would bring. Their Saturday didn’t know Sunday was coming. Their Saturday was final. And even when we get to Sunday, we must remember that this isn’t the end of the journey. Saturday will come again. It always does.

REFLECTION

Take a moment to turn your attention towards the cross.

CLOSING PRAYER

from the Book of Common Prayer

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Saturday, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

