**GOOD FRIDAY MEDITATION**

**APRIL 10TH, 2020**

Dear Friends,

This Holy Week is unique in all of our experiences. It is a time of strangeness, with our normal connections with others in some cases taken away from us completely, or transformed into a virtual world, lacking the intimacy that comes from a physical connection with those dear to us – a handshake, a hug, a kiss. For many of us - although clearly not all, and especially those who are on the very frontline of our response to the Coronavirus – it is also a time of new and different rhythms, of slowness; perhaps an opportunity to pause and reflect.

As our Archbishops have noted, it’s therefore a time when we may feel, much more than under ‘normal’ circumstances, something of what Jesus experienced in the final week of his life. For almost all of us, this will be isolation. For some of us, this feeling will be anxiety, even fear. It’s as if our lives have become one prolonged ‘Holy Saturday’.

It’s the tradition of many churches to have a vigil, whether between the hours of twelve and three, or two and three, on the afternoon of Good Friday, in which we enter more deeply into the Passion of Our Lord.

I suggest that you spend an hour or so in total on these six meditations. Read the Scriptures for each. Dwell in the reflection, with the help of the images and - where possible for you - the music I have suggested to accompany each of them (I have given YouTube URLs for each). Enter into the sensations and emotions of the protagonists of Christ’s final hours, and allow these to deepen your relationship with, and love for, him.

In it all, however, may we reflect that, even in these most difficult times, there is always hope. God, whose nature is mercy, sent his Son, who experienced the fullness of our own human suffering. But it is also in him, the risen Christ, that all things are ultimately made new.

May our God of grace bless each one of you deeply this Good Friday,



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**Reflection 1: Pilate.**

**Luke 23:13-25**

We start our Good Friday journey alongside Christ, surrounded by imperial power, in the palace of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Pilate is confronted by an enigma. The man before him, this Jesus, has done nothing wrong. Neither he, nor Herod, can find any basis for the charges the religious authorities have thrown at him. He asks the crowd three times what is the reason that this innocent man should be brutally killed, as they demand.

Pilate does not know this, but we hear the strange echo of the three questions asked only a short time earlier of Peter, Jesus’ most prominent disciple: “Do you know this man?”

And yet to Pilate’s “Why?” directed at the crowd, no meaningful response comes. They give no reason – they *can* give no legitimate reason – why he should be condemned to die. In Mark’s account, Pilate condemns Jesus in order to “satisfy the crowd.” For John, if Pilate lets Jesus go, he is “no friend of Caesar’s”, according to the rabble’s logic. But in both Matthew and Luke, there is no answer – however spurious such an answer may be - just the crowd’s nihilistic braying. Pilate gives in to the logic of the mob – the logic that says that those who shout loudest and most angrily will prevail.

They will prevail when those in authority lack the moral courage to resist. Since Pilate does not want to risk a rebellion, he takes the shortest way out, with the opportunity to pass the buck for the outcome to others; for the decision he fails to make. As we all know, he literally washes his hands of the prisoner before him – this is conscience-paralysing *a*morality. To avoid trouble and to get ahead, Pilate is ready to trample on truth and justice.

But Jesus stands firm before him, despite all that he has already endured; knowing, too, what is to come. His is the quiet resistance in the face of evil that unmasks it for the nothingness that lies at its heart.

Confronted by “Crucify Him”, the apparently all-powerful Pilate chooses to embrace powerlessness. Would we wash our hands, and do the same? Or will we choose quietly to respond with Christ’s love and truth, no matter what the cost to us may be?

*Music: Koiné – My Song Is Love Unknown*

[*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3IfSXlp3m0*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3IfSXlp3m0)

Image on which to reflect:

**Eric Gill – Christ Before Pilate**

**Reflection 2: Simon of Cyrene.**

**Luke 23:26-31**

Luke tells us that they seized Simon and put the cross upon him. Matthew tells us that the soldiers compelled Simon to carry the cross. The gospels tell us nothing of his reaction.

Was he frightened? Was he resentful? Was he in pain? Did he understand what was happening? Was he simply caught up in events? Did he know who Jesus was? Did he stumble under the weight of the crossbeam?

We know little of Simon except that he came from Cyrene - the Roman province of Cyrenaica in North Africa, in what we now know as Libya. He was probably a Jew, despite the Greek form of his name (Simon rather than Simeon), since we know that there was a large Jewish community there. He may have come up for the feast of Passover, or he might have come to live in the land of his ancestors, near Jerusalem, as many did.

So here is a question: how do we know this man’s name was Simon? How do we know where he came from? In his Gospel at this point, Mark tells his readers that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus - known to him, and presumably known to the readers of his gospel in the church at Rome. The obvious answer is that, at some point, Simon came to know exactly who Jesus was. Perhaps he stayed around in Jerusalem after the crucifixion, and then heard of the resurrection. The evidence suggests that Simon himself became a follower of Jesus.

This man, at this time 'comes in from the country’ to Jerusalem, little knowing God’s plans for him. However, he walked, all unsuspecting, into the greatest drama in history - and into a new future. Perhaps Simon felt a special resonance with the words of Jesus, that any who would come after him must take up their own cross and follow him.

People around the world are still ‘coming in from the country’, meeting Christ, & discovering what it means to take up their cross and follow him.

Traditionally, the Angelus is the prayer of such converts.

*Music: The Monks of The Abbey of Notre Dame – The Angelus*

[*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3XbLzoW\_Yo*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3XbLzoW_Yo)

Image on which to reflect:

**Simon of Cyrene Carries The Cross**

**Reflection 3: The Soldiers and the Crowd.**

**Luke 23:33-37**

Jesus, already beaten and humiliated, is now stripped of his ragged clothes, and of what remains of any dignity he has left.

The crowd’s hands snatch and scratch as they tear the clothes from his body, vulture-like. Oblivious to his suffering, the soldiers play dice for Christ’s tunic. Prophecy is again fulfilled.

Jesus does not resist. He lets the hands do their humiliating work, rendering him naked physically and mentally to their taunts: “Save yourself, if you are the King of the Jews.” Rather, he prays for his abusers: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

These hands are ours; the hands that have stripped others of all humanity when we join in with the crowd; that have taunted others instead of building them up; humiliated rather than affirmed.

The rulers’ voices too, belong to us. Too often we fail to trust in God; we make fun of His promises; we challenge Him as to whether He really means it; we doubt His power.

Lord, we repent of the times we have been part of the crowd humiliating you or our fellow brothers and sisters; when we have taken what we did not need, and so deprived others of what should be theirs; when we have doubted your promises. Father, forgive us.

*Music: Hillsong Worship- “Man of Sorrows”*

[*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZjBJuHgXPE*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZjBJuHgXPE)

*Traditional alternative music: George Frideric Handel – The Messiah: “He Was Despised”*

[*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qbCwUU3XD8*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qbCwUU3XD8)

Image on which to reflect:

**William Blake – The Soldiers Casting Lots for Christ’s Garments**

**Reflection 4: The Good Thief**

**Luke 23:39-43**

The conversation on the cross between Jesus and the two criminals, found only in Luke's Gospel, is deservedly well-loved . There is something about the exchange between Jesus and the second criminal that speaks of a depth of encounter and of recognition. But what was it that the second criminal said that was so remarkable?

In order to understand its importance, we need to go back to the beginning of Luke. When Jesus was presented at the Temple and taken into Simeon’s arms, Simeon proclaimed that he would be 'a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed' (Luke 2:34-35). In other words, who Jesus was – in his being, in his teaching and in the whole of his ministry - would lift the veil on who people really were. Their response to him would reveal their true nature.

We see precisely this happening on the cross. The first criminal couldn’t face the reality of what was revealed, and fell back on mocking Jesus instead (of course, the irony of their exchange is that it was precisely by not saving himself that Jesus revealed that he was indeed the Messiah who had come to save us all). The second thief, in contrast, took responsibility for his actions and, in doing so, accepted both whom he really was and whom Jesus was.

This remains true today. Our encounters with Jesus reveal who we really are; the question is whether we can accept what is revealed or not.

*(credit: Dr. Paula Gooder, Canon Chancellor, St. Paul’s Cathedral)*

*Music: Lauren Daigle – Here’s My Heart, Lord*

[*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTDoDA-1lsE*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTDoDA-1lsE)

*Traditional alternative music:*

*J.S. Bach – O Sacred Head Sore Wounded*

[*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3M4uUJibpvw*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3M4uUJibpvw)

Image on which to reflect:

 **Bradi Barth - St. Dismas the Good Thief**

*(in tradition, ‘the good thief’ has become known as St. Dismas)*

**Reflection 5 - Mary and Jesus.**

**John 19:25-27**

*“Stabat mater”* – “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother.”

Watching her son die the most appallingly agonising death, Mary is not slumped to the ground. She stands; faithful beyond imagining in her grief.

She too, and the other female figures, and John, plus any others, unnamed, from Jesus’ circle who were present as they saw their hopes and dreams apparently torn apart on the cross, must – like Christ himself – have been harangued and abused, verbally if not also physically, by the mob and by the Roman soldiers detailed to ensure the crucifixion’s brutal ‘success’. Mary can now see that the prophetic words of Simeon to her, “And a sword will pierce your own side also”, have crystallised in ways that she must have hoped would never have come to pass.

A physical blade pierces her son’s side as he hangs, dying, from the cross before her. An emotional sword thrusts deep into her heart, distraught but dignified beyond measure, as her beloved Jesus dies the death of an outcast. In the words of Saint Bernard, “Love inflicted on the heart of Mary the tortures caused by the nails in the body of Jesus.”

Mary strains to hear Jesus speak to her above the racket of the crowd, struggling for breath as he hangs. But she can just make out his words, addressing her almost as an Everywoman, just as he did at the wedding at Cana: “Woman”, he starts, and then, nodding towards John, “here is your son”. “Here is your mother,” he indicates back to her.

Even almost at the moment of his death, Jesus’ compassion is undimmed. He knows that he has to die, and yet does all that he possibly can for those dearest to him, whom he must leave behind. He sees her sufferings then, as he sees ours now, and meets both Mary and us in the depths of our pain, to bring his healing love and comfort.

 *Music: Giovanni Batista Pergolesi - Stabat Mater Dolorosa*

[*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYsjwKuC-Wg*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYsjwKuC-Wg)

Image on which to reflect:

**Mary and St. John before the Cross**

**Reflection 6: The Cross.**

**Luke 23:44-49**

Jesus ends that mysterious three hours of suffering and darkness with the cries, “It is finished,” recorded by John, and “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” recorded by Luke.
At this point, the curtain of the Temple, surely the enormous and heavy tapestry that cut off the Most Holy Place from the rest of the Temple, was torn in two.

It is finished.

Pilate thought that, with the death of Jesus, this so-called king’s reign would be over, and the rebellion would be extinguished.

For Pilate, it is finished.

The disciples thought that Rome had won, and finally silenced their master. A dead Messiah is no Messiah at all.

For the disciples, it is finished.

And indeed it *is* finished.

Scripture has been fulfilled.

Sin and death have been defeated.

Redemption has been completed.

Reconciliation has been achieved.

His work, that which he came to do, has been completed.

But notice that Jesus did *not* say, “*I* am finished."

God still has more in store for Jesus in 3 days’ time. But on this day, by his death on the cross, Jesus has finished more than just his earthly life. He has finished the work he was called to do.

For Jesus the price has been paid; the ransom given; the victory achieved; sins forgiven; wounds healed. For Jesus - it is finished. But it is not the end.

*Music: J.S. Bach - St. John Passion, "Ruht wohl, ihr heiligen Gebeine"*[*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cMrlPdvpSg*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cMrlPdvpSg)

Image on which to reflect:

**Rembrandt – The Three Crosses**