

The Liturgy for Good Friday (The 'Three Hours' Service)

This Liturgy is offered for use at home. It follows the order which would have been used in a 'Three Hours' Service in church, between 12:00 and 3:00 ('When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice. Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.' (Mark 15:33-34, 37).)

Though physically distant from each other we can still gather 'in spirit' at the foot of the Cross – a sense aided by the thought that we will be saying together the words in bold type.

As you follow the service you might wish to have with you a cross, perhaps a holding cross.

The service is split into six thirty-minute sections, each separated by a hymn. The hymns form a natural break point for anyone wishing to have a pause. Please feel free to use or omit any sections in your devotions.

The words of the hymns are printed for you to reflect upon. Links are also shown to enable you to hear them sung.

Each section includes a part of St John's Passion narrative with a Reflection which can be accessed via a link.

Silence is a significant part of the observance of Good Friday, and silence at the points indicated is an integral part of the service. There is no rush!

The Collect

Almighty Father,
look with mercy on this your family
for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed
and given up into the hands of sinners
and to suffer death upon the cross;
who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Hymn

https://youtu.be/Ib_Fd_QozNU

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy wounded side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure;
save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labours of my hands
can fulfil thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Saviour, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyes shall close in death,
when I soar to worlds unknown,
see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.

A Toplady (1776)

The Liturgy of the Word

Old Testament Reading (Isaiah 52.13–53.12)

- ¹³ See, my servant shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high.
- ¹⁴ Just as there were many who were astonished at him
—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of mortals—
- ¹⁵ so he shall startle many nations;
kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
for that which had not been told them they shall see,
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.
- ¹ Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
- ² For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
- ³ He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.
- ⁴ Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
- ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
- ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
- ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
- ⁸ By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.

⁹ They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.
When you make his life an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.

¹¹ Out of his anguish he shall see light;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Thanks be to God.

Silence is kept.

Passion Reading (First part: John 18:1-14)

¹ After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' ⁵ They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' ⁸ Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' ⁹ This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹ Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

¹² So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Thanks be to God.

Silence is kept.

First Reflection <https://anchor.fm/st-marys-church-richmond/episodes/Good-Friday---First-Reflection-ecjgc2/a-a1s79mp>

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that on the first Good Friday darkness fell between noon and three in the afternoon. Today, as we mark those last three hours of Jesus' earthly life, we enter that 'dark place' embraced by Jesus out of love for the world.

In the first part of the Passion Reading from John we are reminded of the details of Jesus' arrest. It was from this that the sequence of events in his trial and crucifixion quickly unfolded. But it was in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the events leading to his arrest, that Jesus' all-embracing love for the world truly came to the fore. We see that the Son of God abandoned himself into the hands of his Father; he made himself powerless, thereby identifying himself with the powerless. And as we recall today, the outcome of Jesus' loving self-sacrifice was his being put to death by those around him in the most humiliating and cruel way.

The theologian Jurgen Moltmann made this observation: 'When God became man in Jesus of Nazareth he not only entered the limited, finite situation of [humanity] but in his death on the cross he also entered the situation of human godforsakenness.'

And yet as the Franciscan Father Andrew wrote, 'There always have been and always will be many different conceptions of God. But the only one that has real weight is his who really knew God. Our Lord's sense of God was that of his Father, and he knew his Father in the experience of his own human nature. It was not as the second person of the Trinity but as the Son of Man that his experience of his Father and ours was realised.'

In our first reading from Isaiah we hear a little of the person scholars identify as the 'Suffering Servant'. We may see the Son of Man in the description rendered by Isaiah, in particular in the words, 'He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, ...he did not open his mouth.'

The writer Mark Oakley picks up on this theme, suggesting, 'It is said that the majority of human communication is [non-verbal]. It is the same with sacred revelation. Christ on the cross displays a God, ...and his suffering love, against all our better judgments and understandings. This is God's body language, non-verbal, expressive, *communicating*.

As we enter the darkness of these three hours I offer this exploration of abandonment by Sheila Cassidy in her book 'Light from the Dark Valley'. '[Jesus says,] "Father, I abandon myself into your hands..." What does it mean to abandon oneself to God? What is an abandonment experience? Is it leaving oneself on God's doorstep; walking into the rest of life, not allowing anxiety, fear, frustration to [prevail]? Is it expecting God to keep one warm, secure, safe and unharmed? Is *that* abandonment?

'Abandonment is not 'just hanging loose'. It is 'letting go'. It is a severing of the strings by which one manipulates, controls, administrates the forces in one's life. Abandonment is managing nothing, blocking or blotting out nothing, expecting nothing. Abandonment is receiving all things the way one receives a gift – with opened hands, and opened heart. 'Abandonment to God' is the climactic point in any person's life. There is nothing left to do, no place to go. Death has occurred.'

So as we are confronted afresh with the overwhelming nature of God's unconditional love for us, we also acknowledge our own part in testing, even rejecting, him. Our own wickedness blinds us at times, too. But by the light of Christ we can begin to see the blindness and thoughtlessness which may be causing us to let him down. Our natural response must surely be to seek God's forgiveness and to repent; to say with the psalmist, 'Have mercy on me, O God, in your great goodness; according to the abundance of your compassion, blot out my offences'.

And then, as unworthy recipients of the abundance of God's compassion, how can we not have compassion on those who sin against us? No one –

not even Christ Jesus – can forgive others for us: we have to do it ourselves. Perhaps this is the day, to start and to follow Christ on that hard path of 'forbearance'. This is the day, and this is the place, to see in the light of Christ the cost of God's unending love of and forgiveness of us all.

In the silence that follows and gathered as we are at the foot of the Cross, let us ask that God's love and forgiveness may shine within us as lights to the world – and let us pray for 'those who sin against us'.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Silence is kept.

Hymn <https://youtu.be/d0ybUpuLn8M>

There is a green hill far away,
without a city wall,
where the dear Lord was crucified,
who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot tell,
what pains he had to bear;
but we believe it was for us
he hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be forgiv'n,
he died to make us good,
that we might go at last to heav'n,
saved by his precious blood.

There was no other good enough
to pay the price of sin;
he only could unlock the gate
of heav'n, and let us in.

O dearly, dearly has he loved,
and we must love him too,
and trust in his redeeming blood,
and try his works to do.

C F Alexander (1848)

Psalm 22.1-21

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
- ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
- ³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- ⁴ In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- ⁵ To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
- ⁶ But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
- ⁷ All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
- ⁸ 'Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!'
- ⁹ Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
- ¹⁰ On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
- ¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.
- ¹² Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- ¹³ they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
- ¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
- ¹⁵ my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
- ¹⁶ For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shrivelled;
- ¹⁷ I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
- ¹⁸ they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
- ¹⁹ But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!

²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!
²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion,
from the horns of the wild oxen.
You have answered me!

Silence is kept.

Passion Reading (Second part: John 18:15-27)

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' ¹⁸ Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

¹⁹ Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' ²² When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' ²³ Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' ²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Thanks be to God.

Silence is kept.

Second Reflection <https://anchor.fm/st-marys-church-richmond/episodes/Good-Friday---Second-Reflection-ecjgb7/a-a1rqm18>

John's account of Peter's denial serves to contrast Peter's faithlessness with the faithfulness of Jesus. As Jesus is sent to Caiaphas the high priest, we see the resolve of Jesus highlighted against the failure of Peter. Remember that at his arrest in the Garden, when they had come searching for 'Jesus of Nazareth', he had said: 'I am he' – or more simply and profoundly 'I am'. By contrast, Peter now says 'I am not'.

Peter, Jesus' most solid disciple, denies him – three times. And how typical it is of human nature that we should remember Peter primarily for this, rather than for the many good things he did.

Later on, as we already know, the risen Jesus will reach out tenderly to his disciple, redeeming those three denials. And so, in fact, Peter's example should give us hope. At first sight, his denial is nothing but a complete failure. But as the writer William Barclay reminds us: 'We should remember that all the other disciples, with one exception, had forsaken Jesus and fled. It had been the real, loyal Peter who had drawn his sword in the garden and who had followed Jesus to the courtyard. But it was not the real Peter who had cracked under the tension and denied his Lord. That was what Jesus could see'.

Beneath our own failures Jesus sees the real you and me. The forgiving love of Jesus is so great that he sees our real personality not in our defeat by sin, but in our reaching out for goodness – even when we are defeated. So as we embrace all that God wants us to be and to do, we can – with confidence – lay at the foot of the cross our failures.

Jesus in his faithfulness is able to say to Annas, a former high priest, that he has always taught openly in synagogues and in the temple, never secretly. His challenge is this: 'If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong'. Tellingly, Annas without reply then sends Jesus bound to the current high priest, his son-in-law Caiaphas.

By contrast, the faithlessness in extremis of Peter should help us see that if we strive to do our best then Jesus understands that we may still fail and assures us that even then – and before we fail – we are forgiven and invited to try again.

In Matthew's gospel Jesus says: 'I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners'. And just as he called Peter so he calls you and me. He calls us to repentance, to achieve a closer alignment of our will with that of his Father. He calls us each day into loving service of others according to their needs. And by trusting in God's grace rather than our own strength we grow in our knowledge of God's desire to bless all his children.

So as we seek to align our will with his, to undertake by his grace the loving service of others, Jesus knows full well that we will not always be ready to respond to his call. He knows we will fail. But by his loving mercy we are offered the chance to try again, and again, and again.

Today of all days we need to hear this message: that when we fail we can be assured we are already forgiven.

For me, this point is underlined by an interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son by the Catholic writer, David Beresford:

'The crux of the story of the Prodigal Son lies in the unfathomable grace of the father. He runs to his [returning] son before any words are spoken... effectively saying 'You are still my son; I am still your father.'

So does the son say sorry? Perhaps, during the meal, or maybe in the weeks or months to follow. The profound truth in this parable is that God forgives us before we say we are sorry. His mercy is not conditional on an apology, or even an acceptance of our own failures. His mercy is unconditional, and we simply have to be in enough of a relationship with him to receive it.'

In the silence that follows and gathered as we are at the foot of the Cross, let us remember that 'our Father in heaven' is always more ready to 'forgive us our sins' than we are to ask.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Silence is kept.

Hymn

<https://youtu.be/nt69WDtYNLo>

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;

I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.

O Light that follow'st all my way,
I yield my flick'ring torch to thee;
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow thro' the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain
that morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red,
life that shall endless be.

George Matheson (1882)

New Testament Reading (Hebrews 4.14-16; 5.7-9)

¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹ and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Thanks be to God.

Silence is kept.

Passion Reading (Third part: John 18:28-40)

²⁸ Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' ³⁰ They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' ³¹ Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' ³² (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' ³⁴ Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' ³⁵ Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' ³⁶ Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' ³⁷ Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' ³⁸ Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. ³⁹ But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' ⁴⁰ They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Thanks be to God.

Silence is kept.

Third Reflection <https://anchor.fm/st-marys-church-richmond/episodes/Good-Friday---Third-Reflection-ecjgad/a-a1rqury>

We now consider 'Christ before Pilate'. It was the Jewish leaders themselves who took Jesus from their High Priest, Caiaphas, to the Roman Governor, Pilate. They wanted Jesus to be sentenced to death, but legally they had no right to impose the death penalty. And yet in seeking the Roman death sentence – crucifixion – they were careful not to enter Pilate's headquarters.

Let us remember that these events took place at the time of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Here, the Jewish leaders were being doubly careful not to allow themselves to become ritually unclean. The Law says, 'The dwelling-places of Gentiles are unclean'. And at Passover, every trace of yeast had to be removed from a Jewish house. So to enter Pilate's house would have run the risk of coming into contact with leaven. They were observing ceremonial law with meticulous care, and yet they were hounding Jesus to his death.

But to achieve their goal they were willing to change the nature of their charge against him. Earlier, they had found him guilty of blasphemy but they realised that Pilate would not recognise such a charge. So they brought an accusation that Jesus claimed to be a king. They knew this would make Pilate listen: he would surely respond to any threat of rebellion or insurrection; after all, it was his job to maintain the peace.

And Jesus could not deny who he knew himself to be. Had he done so he would have been publicly presented as a cheat, a 'false prophet'. And yet, to affirm that he knew himself to be 'the King of the Jews' would have made his position before Pilate indefensible. Eventually Pilate acquits him of the charges laid against him by the chief priests: 'I find no case against him', he says.

Now Pilate has the honour of being the only human being to be named in our Creed, his place in our record of 'salvation history' preserved for all time. It is abundantly clear that he knew that the charges made against Jesus were false, and indeed, that he was impressed by Jesus. But in spite of not wanting to condemn him to death, that is exactly what he went on to do. On top of that, he releases a known criminal, Barabbas, whom the crowds ask for in preference to 'their King'.

We need to see that this politically astute, but ultimately cowardly human being was manipulated into sentencing Jesus to death. The Jewish people were well aware that in his four years as Governor Pilate had made some big mistakes. For example, he had taken money from the Temple Treasury for investment in the city water supply, and he had moved in to Herod's palace. In effect, the Jewish leaders were saying to Pilate 'We know that you have been reported to the Emperor; if you don't let us have our way we will report you again - and then you will be dismissed'.

He wanted to do the right thing, but he did not have the courage to defy the people. In the end, Pilate crucified Jesus in order to keep his job!

But he did at least initially try to do the right thing. He began by attempting to pass the responsibility back to the people. He said, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law'. He then tried to free Jesus by using the Jewish custom of release for a prisoner at Passover time. But his understanding of Jewish culture was only superficial. He was too proud to involve himself in what he saw as mere squabbles, an attitude betrayed by his question to Jesus, 'Your own nation... have handed you over to me. What have you done?'

And then comes his infamous question, 'What is truth?'. There are many ways in which that question might be asked. In Pilate's case, we can be confident that it was not with cynicism – but rather wearily and with despair.

Meanwhile, we who look on cannot fail but see the sheer majesty of Jesus. He speaks of his Kingdom with complete directness. It is his Kingdom, and it is not of this earth. He knew that Pilate had only a few hundred troops stationed in Jerusalem, even at Passover time. If Jesus had wanted to raise a rebellion he could easily have done so. In claiming his Kingship Jesus is not basing his kingdom on force of arms, but on the conquest of love. He came to bring peace, as his serene presence before Pilate shows. Think of that dignity portrayed by our painting, 'Christ before Pilate', the subject of Wednesday's Holy Week Reflection.

Christ before Pilate states why he came into the world: to witness to the truth: to tell us the truth about God, about ourselves, and about life. In his light we can see ourselves in the Jewish leaders, and in Pilate. We see our own contradictions, our observance of the letter of the law but not its spirit. And we see that we are confronted with a choice, between accepting the way of the world or the way of the Cross. We cannot ask someone else to make our judgment of Christ's love for us; it is we ourselves who either accept him or reject him.

In the silence that follows, gathered as we are at the foot of the Cross, by the power of the Cross let us pray that we may be delivered from evil.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Silence is kept.

Hymn <https://youtu.be/mDkuxEIcpdI>

When I survey the wondrous cross

on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Isaac Watts (1707)

The Proclamation of the Cross

Anthem 1

*My people, what wrong have I done to you?
What good have I not done for you?
Listen to me.*

I am your Creator, Lord of the universe;
I have entrusted this world to you,
but you have created the means to destroy it.

*My people, what wrong have I done to you?
What good have I not done for you?
Listen to me.*

I made you in my image,
but you have degraded body and spirit
and marred the image of your God.
You have deserted me and turned your backs on me.

*My people, what wrong have I done to you?
What good have I not done for you?
Listen to me.*

I filled the earth with all that you need,
so that you might serve and care for one another,
as I have cared for you;
but you have cared only to serve your own wealth and power.

**Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal,
have mercy upon us.**

*My people, what wrong have I done to you?
What good have I not done for you?
Listen to me.*

I made my children of one blood
to live in families rejoicing in one another;
but you have embittered the races and divided the nations.

*My people, what wrong have I done to you?
What good have I not done for you?
Listen to me.*

I commanded you to love your neighbour as yourself,
to love and forgive even your enemies;
but you have made vengeance your rule and hate your guide.

*My people, what wrong have I done to you?
What good have I not done for you?
Listen to me.*

In the fullness of time I sent you my Son,
that in him you might know me,
and through him find life and peace;
but you put him to death on the cross.

Holy God,

**holy and strong,
holy and immortal,
have mercy upon us.**

*My people, what wrong have I done to you?
What good have I not done for you?
Listen to me.*

Through the living Christ, I called you into my Church
to be my servants to the world,
but you have grasped at privilege and forgotten my will.

*My people, what wrong have I done to you?
What good have I not done for you?
Listen to me.*

I have given you a heavenly gift and a share in the Holy Spirit;
I have given you the spiritual energies of the age to come;
but you have turned away
and crucified the Son of God afresh.

*My people, what wrong have I done to you?
What good have I not done for you?
Listen to me.*

I have consecrated you in the truth;
I have made you to be one
in the unity of the Father and the Son,
by the power of the Spirit;
but you have divided my Church and shrouded my truth.

**Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal,
have mercy upon us.**

Turn again, my people, listen to me.

Let your bearing to one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus.
He humbled himself
and in obedience accepted the death of the cross.
But I have bestowed on him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Turn again, my people, listen to me.

**Father, hear our prayer and forgive us.
Unstop our ears,
that we may receive the gospel of the cross.
Lighten our eyes,
that we may see your glory in the face of your Son.
Penetrate our minds,
that your truth may make us whole.
Irradiate our hearts with your love,
that we may love one another for Christ's sake.
Father, forgive us.**

Silence is kept.

Passion Reading (Fourth part: John 19:1-16a)

¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ² And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³ They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. ⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' ⁶ When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' ⁷ The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

⁸ Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. ⁹ He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' ¹¹ Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' ¹² From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

¹³ When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' ¹⁵ They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them,

'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' ¹⁶ Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

Thanks be to God.

Silence is kept.

Fourth Reflection <https://anchor.fm/st-marys-church-richmond/episodes/Good-Friday---Fourth-Reflection-ecjg9b/a-a1rv62u>

So having acquitted Jesus of the charge laid against him by the chief priests, Pilate perversely has him flogged. Jesus' 'time of trial' as *King of the Jews* then intensifies until eventually Pilate hands him over to the worst fate of all: crucifixion.

As Jesus is flogged, the Roman soldiers place a crown of thorns on his head and dress him in a purple robe. Probably in ignorance of the background, these detached jobbing soldiers mock their latest charge: 'Hail, King of the Jews', they say. In obvious bewilderment, Pilate then presents Jesus to the baying crowd: 'Behold, the man'. The irony of that statement resonates down the ages to this very time. John underlines that irony as he goes on to portray Pilate as being truly afraid on hearing the chief priests give voice to the claim that Jesus is the Son of God. 'Where are you from?' he asks. But now Jesus gives no answer.

Here we see the full embodiment of John's 'the Word made flesh'. When we think back to the source of that expression, the Prologue of John's gospel, we recall that it includes the statement: '...the world came into being through him; yet the world knew him not. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him'. Now we 'behold' in this man the true image of the true God, the one who made visible the invisible God, placed in territory belonging to God but bearing the full force of rebellion from 'his' people. 'Behold the man': the innocent king, the true man; the one who told the truth only to be accused of blasphemy.

Pilate addresses the Jewish crowds, 'Here is your King.' In response they cry, 'Crucify him!' Pilate asks, 'Shall I crucify your King?' – to which the chief priests give this perverse reply: 'we have no king but Caesar'. Luke in his account underlines this perversity. He makes clear that the initial charge brought by the chief priests to Pilate was that Jesus, in implying

he was the Son of Man, was 'perverting our nation'. Having questioned Jesus, Pilate responds to the chief priests by saying he can find no case against him in 'perverting the *people*'. By switching the word 'nation' with 'people', Pilate seems to imply that he is denying the chief priests the right to speak for their nation – or worse, that occupied as they are by Roman rule they are no longer a nation at all. 'We have no king but Caesar', they cry. Pilate then hands Jesus over to be crucified.

In the previous Reflections, we saw how our understanding of various phrases of the Lord's Prayer may be deepened in the light of our Lord's Passion. As we think of Jesus as *our* King we recall the phrase 'your Kingdom come, your will be done'. The latter part of that phrase brings us full circle to Jesus' own words in the Garden of Gethsemane, at the very beginning of this whole chain of events. 'Yet not my will but yours be done'.

As we pray 'Your Kingdom come' we express our desire to see the fulfilment of God's sovereign rule here on earth. The theologian Tom Wright puts it like this,

'As we look up into the face of our Father in Heaven, and commit ourselves to the hallowing of his name, we look immediately out upon the world that he made, and see it as he sees it. 'Your Kingdom come': to pray this means seeing the world, as it were, on a split screen. We see it with the love of the Creator for his beautiful work; we see it also with the deep grief of the Creator for the battered and battle-scarred state in which the world now finds itself. Putting these two views together, the love and grief join into the Jesus-shape; the shape of the Cross.

'Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven'. We are praying as Jesus was praying – and acting – for the redemption of the world; for the defeat of all that is evil, for earth and heaven to come together at last; for God to be all in all. And if we pray this way we must, of course, be prepared to live this way.

'Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven'. We who pray this prayer are ourselves bits of earth, lumps of clay. If we really want God's Kingdom to come on earth we should expect the earth in question to include this earth, this clay, this physical body.'

'Behold the man', Pilate said. Before we have even reached the point of Jesus' crucifixion we have seen that Jesus – God with us – came to redeem the very depths of human desolation. There is no extreme of physical, mental, or spiritual pain that our Redeemer has not himself experienced. And as we contend with our own pain, placing it along with the pain of the world around us at the foot of the Cross, we recall the wonder of the Incarnation we celebrate at Christmas-time. In Christ God became like us in order that we might become like him.

To paraphrase St Paul: may Christ, who has opened the kingdom of heaven, bring us to reign with him in glory. To that it seems only fitting to say in praise, 'For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.'

In the silence that follows, gathered as we are at the foot of the Cross, by the power and glory of the Cross let us pray 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven'.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Silence is kept.

Hymn https://youtu.be/XppXi_jZKWk

O sacred head, surrounded,
by crown of piercing thorn!
O bleeding head, so wounded,
so shamed and put to scorn!
Death's pallid hue comes o'er thee,
the glow of life decays;
yet angel-hosts adore thee,
and tremble as they gaze.

Thy comeliness and vigour
is withered up and gone,
and in thy wasted figure
I see death drawing on.
O agony and dying!
O love to sinners free!
Jesu, all grace supplying,
turn thou thy face on me.

In this thy bitter passion,
good Shepherd, think of me
with thy most sweet compassion,
unworthy though I be:
beneath thy cross abiding
for ever would I rest,
in thy dear love confiding,
and with thy presence blest.

Paul Gerhardt (1676); tr. H W Baker (1877)

Anthem 2

You are worthy, O Lamb, for you were slain,
and by your blood you ransomed for God
saints from every tribe and language and nation;
you have made them to be a kingdom and priests
serving our God.

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

To him who loves us
and has freed us from our sins by his blood,
and made us a kingdom of priests
to stand and serve before our God;
**to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honour, glory and might,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Anthem 3

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Christ was manifested in the body,
vindicated in the spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed in throughout the world,
glorified in high heaven.

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Anthem 4

**We glory in your cross, O Lord,
and praise you for your mighty resurrection;
for by virtue of your cross
joy has come into our world.**

God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.

*Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.*

O let the nations rejoice and be glad,
for you will judge the peoples righteously
and govern the nations upon earth.

*Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.*

Then shall the earth bring forth her increase,
and God, our own God, will bless us.
God will bless us,
and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

**We glory in your cross, O Lord,
and praise you for your mighty resurrection;
for by virtue of your cross
joy has come into our world.**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

This is the wood of the cross,
on which hung the Saviour of the world.

Come, let us worship.

O Saviour of the world,
who by your cross and precious blood have redeemed us,
save us and help us, we humbly pray.

Silence is kept.

Passion Reading (Fifth part: John 19:16b-27)

So they took Jesus; ¹⁷ and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' ²² Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' ²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴ So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says,

'They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.'

²⁵ And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Thanks be to God.

Silence is kept.

Fifth Reflection <https://anchor.fm/st-marys-church-richmond/episodes/Good-Friday---Fifth-Reflection-ecjq8i/a-a1rvadq>

'So... they crucified him'. Crucifixion is the most cruel and painful of death sentences. Even the Romans regarded it with horror. It was originally a Persian method of execution – to whom the earth was sacred. In not wishing to defile the earth with the body of an evildoer they would nail the person to a cross and leave them to die, and be taken by the vultures.

The routine of crucifixion followed a standard form. As soon as the verdict was given it would be carried out immediately. The criminal was accompanied by four Roman soldiers, and he would carry his own cross. Before him would walk an officer with a placard bearing the charge made. The criminal would be made to take a circuitous route to the place of execution in order for as many people as possible to see the procession. This was both as a means of deterrence, but also to enable anyone able to bear witness in the criminal's favour to come forward and do so. In such cases the procession would be halted and the case retried.

In Jerusalem the place of execution was called in Hebrew 'Golgotha' or in Latin 'Calvary', which means 'place of the skull'. It would have been outside the city walls, for it was not lawful to crucify someone within the city. It is thought that the formation of the rocks there gave the place its name.

So Jesus was taken to the Place of the Skull, battered, bruised and bleeding, his flesh torn by the scourging. He carried his own cross to the place where he knew he was to die.

The inscription on the Cross was in Hebrew, in Latin and in Greek, the three great languages of the ancient world. Greece taught the world beauty of form and beauty of thought. Rome taught the world law and good governance. The Hebrew nation taught the world religion, and the worship of the true God...

And there can be no doubt that Pilate put his inscription on the Cross to irritate the people of the Hebrew nation. They had just said they had no king but Caesar, refusing to have Jesus as their king. But Pilate deliberately wrote, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'. The Jewish leaders asked him to remove it, but he refused: 'what I have written I have written'. Now this is the same man who with Jesus before him had wavered. He had allowed himself to be manipulated into giving the Jewish leaders their will. Here he does not move an inch.

With Jesus on the Cross the Roman soldiers took his property and divided it. There were four soldiers, but five items: his sandals, his turban, his outer robe, his girdle and his tunic. In fulfilment of the prophecy given in verse 18 of Psalm 22, which we read earlier, they cast lots for the fifth

item, Jesus' tunic. It would have been a single piece of cloth with no seams and thus not easily divided.

It is thought that Mary had woven the seamless tunic for her son, given to him as he set out to begin his ministry. How poignant that this mother's priceless gift should have been the subject of such thoughtlessness. But there is a deeper symbolism here. The description of Jesus' tunic matches exactly that worn by the Jewish High Priest. A priest is meant to be a bridge-builder between God and the people – hence the Latin name 'Pontifex'. In that sense Jesus was truly our great high priest. There can be no doubt that John in describing the tunic so precisely intended us to see this link.

Mercifully, with Jesus now hanging from the Cross, he was not completely alone. John tells us that standing near the Cross were four women, including his mother, people who loved Jesus. For Mary his mother she could be nowhere else: he may be a criminal in the eyes of the Law, but he was also her son. Mary was there with her sister, who is not named but who we know from the accounts of Mark and Matthew to be Salome, the mother of James and of John ('the disciple whom Jesus loved'). We know nothing of the third woman, Mary the mother of Clopas, but Mary Magdalene we do know very well.

It seems that with them was John, and our passage ends with the moving account of Jesus from the Cross asking him to look after Mary as his own mother, and Mary to care for John as her son. As has been said many times before, we are truly humbled by this act of kindness. In the very moment when the salvation of the world hung in the balance Jesus was thinking more about the sorrows of others than his own.

In the silence that follows and gathered as we are at the foot of the Cross, let us seek to rise above any tendency towards hypocrisy, indifference, or self-seeking, and to hallow God's name.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Silence is kept.

Hymn

<https://youtu.be/HMart4wXsI0>

My song is love unknown,
my Saviour's love to me,
love to the loveless shown,
that they might lovely be.
O who am I, that for my sake
my Lord should take frail flesh and die?

He came from his blest throne,
salvation to bestow;
but men cared not, and none
the longed-for Christ would know.
But O, my Friend, my Friend indeed,
who at my need his life did spend!

Sometimes they strew his way,
and his sweet praises sing;
resounding all the day
hosannas to their King.
Then "Crucify!" is all their breath,
and for his death they thirst and cry.

They rise, and needs will have
my dear Lord sent away;
a murderer they save,
the Prince of Life they slay.
Yet willing he to suff'ring goes,
that he his foes from thence might free.

Here might I stay and sing,
no story so divine;
never was love, dear King,
never was grief like thine.
This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise
I all my days could gladly spend.

Samuel Crossman (1664)

The Prayers of Intercession

God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.
Therefore we pray to our heavenly Father
for people everywhere according to their needs.

Let us pray for the Church of God throughout the world:
for unity in faith, in witness and in service,
for bishops and other ministers, and those whom they serve,
for Nick and Helen-Ann, our bishops, and the people of this diocese,
for all Christians in this place,
for those to be baptized,
for those who are mocked and persecuted for their faith,
that God will confirm his Church in faith,
increase it in love, and preserve it in peace.

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Almighty and everlasting God,
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church
is governed and sanctified:
hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people,
that in their vocation and ministry
they may serve you in holiness and truth
to the glory of your name;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Let us pray for the nations of the world and their leaders:
for Elizabeth our Queen and the Parliaments of this land,
for those who administer the law and all who serve in public office,
for all who strive for justice and reconciliation,
that by God's help the world may live in peace and freedom.

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Most gracious God and Father,
in whose will is our peace,
turn our hearts and the hearts of all to yourself,
that by the power of your Spirit
the peace which is founded on justice
may be established throughout the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Let us pray for God's ancient people, the Jews,
the first to hear his word:
for greater understanding between Christian and Jew,
for the removal of our blindness and bitterness of heart,
that God will grant us grace to be faithful to his covenant
and to grow in the love of his name.

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord God of Abraham,
bless the children of your covenant, both Jew and Christian;
take from us all blindness and bitterness of heart,
and hasten the coming of your kingdom,
when the Gentiles shall be gathered in,
all Israel shall be saved,
and we shall dwell together in mutual love and peace
under the one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Let us pray for those who do not believe the gospel of Christ:
for those who have not heard the message of salvation,
for all who have lost faith,
for the contemptuous and scornful,
for those who are enemies of Christ and persecute those who follow him,
for all who deny the faith of Christ crucified,
that God will open their hearts to the truth
and lead them to faith and obedience.

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Merciful God,
creator of all the people of the earth,
have compassion on all who do not know you,
and by the preaching of your gospel with grace and power,
gather them into the one fold of the one Shepherd; Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Let us pray for all those who suffer:
for those who are deprived and oppressed,

for all who are sick,
for those in darkness, in doubt and in despair, in loneliness and in fear,
for prisoners, captives and refugees,
for the victims of false accusations and violence,
for all at the point of death and those who watch beside them,
that God in his mercy will sustain them
with the knowledge of his love.

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Almighty and everlasting God,
the comfort of the sad, the strength of those who suffer:
hear the prayers of your children who cry out of any trouble,
and to every distressed soul grant mercy, relief and refreshment,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Let us commend ourselves and all God's children to his unfailing love,
and pray for the grace of a holy life,
that, with all who have died in the peace of Christ,
we may come to the fullness of eternal life
and the joy of the resurrection.

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light,
look favourably on your whole Church,
that wonderful and sacred mystery,
and by the tranquil operation of your perpetual providence
carry out the work of our salvation:
and let the whole world feel and see
that things which were cast down are being raised up
and things which had grown old are being made new
and that all things are returning to perfection
through him from whom they took their origin,
even Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Silence is kept.

Passion Reading (Sixth part: John 19:28-42)

²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. ³² Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵ (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) ³⁶ These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' ³⁷ And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

³⁸ After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰ They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Thanks be to God.

Silence is kept.

Sixth Reflection <https://anchor.fm/st-marys-church-richmond/episodes/Good-Friday---Sixth-Reflection-ecjq7a/a-a1rvhj4>

A couple of years ago, I had the privilege of visiting Coventry Cathedral, both the splendid new building and the ruins of the medieval building destroyed in the last war. Having previously visited Dresden in Germany, this was for me a profound experience: the cathedrals in both cities are linked by the common symbol of the Cross of Nails.

The Cross of Nails is a symbol, derived simply from nails found in the charred roof timbers of the old Coventry Cathedral. One cross of nails stands on the magnificent high altar of the new cathedral, and another features on the altar of the extraordinary baroque 'Frauenkirche' in Dresden, a Lutheran church.

A cross of nails is also worn by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, who continues to be a leading light in the ministry of reconciliation. Today, Coventry Cathedral is the centre of the Community of the Cross of Nails, its membership extending to 200 churches in 35 countries, each committed to a shared ministry of reconciliation. And the ruins of the old Cathedral serve as a reminder of the human capacity both to destroy and to reach out to our enemies in friendship and reconciliation.

So Good Friday is a day especially to think of the humble nail as a powerful symbol of the evil inflicted on the Son of God, Christ crucified, and then to recall that 'love is stronger than death' and cannot be destroyed.

Today is not yet the time to be celebrating the resurrection: we leave that for Sunday, and beyond. Today is the time to think about the ultimate sacrifice made by the Son of God out of love for us: 'for God so loved the world'. It is that love which makes Good Friday *good*.

And just as God's love redeemed the evil inflicted by human beings upon his Son on the first Good Friday, so it redeems your sinfulness and mine. For none of us is beyond the collective as well as the individual guilt which spans distance and time.

Every Friday at Coventry, at Dresden, and at each of the 200 member churches of the Community of the Cross of Nails, a Litany of Reconciliation is said. The plea for forgiveness – not only for others, who

could easily be proclaimed as guilty, but also for ourselves – is at the heart of this prayer. In the Litany the response is simply 'Father forgive' – taken from Luke's account of Jesus being nailed to the cross; words used by Jesus himself, and words inscribed in the wall behind the altar in Coventry's old cathedral.

In solidarity with the members of the Community of the Cross of Nails, who will have used the Litany of Reconciliation earlier today, I will now say that same Litany. The response is: Father, forgive.

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,

Father, forgive.

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,

Father, forgive.

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,

Father, forgive.

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,

Father, forgive.

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,

Father, forgive.

The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children,

Father, forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,

Father, forgive.

The Litany concludes with these words:

Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

As we read earlier, Jesus' last words before he died were 'It is finished'. He was referring to the work he came to do: to redeem the world. Christ's passion, his 'redemptive suffering', changed the world for ever. Having completed his work, Jesus makes it our task to carry it forward.

For me, a striking example of this is the cathedral in Dresden. Based in the city centre, it lay in ruins for decades after the war. After many years of campaigning and planning reconstruction began in 1994, where possible piecing together fragments of the stonework from the rubble that had lain there so long. In 2005 the cathedral was able to open its doors again, sixty years after the end of the war. And the great pronouncement at the end of the reconstruction project was 'It is finished'!

The reconstruction of the cathedral in Dresden was another kind of redemption, another beginning of a new chapter in which forgiveness and reconciliation are proclaimed in people's lives.

May today be for us a new start as we think afresh of the freedom Christ Jesus won for us on the Cross – true freedom, even in these present straitened times.

In the silence that follows and gathered as we are at the foot of the Cross, let us ask God to 'forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us'.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Silence is kept.

The Conclusion

The Lord's Prayer

Standing at the foot of the cross,
let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

**but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Hymn <https://youtu.be/5UJFw3p76d8>

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on your side;
bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
leave to your God to order and provide;
in ev'ry change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: your best, your heav'nly Friend
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul: your God will undertake
to guide the future as he has the past.
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.

Be still, my soul: when dearest friends depart,
and all is darkened in the vale of tears,
then shall you better know his love, his heart,
who comes to soothe your sorrow and your fears.
Be still, my soul: your Jesus can repay
from his own fullness all he takes away.

Be still, my soul: the hour is hast'ning on
when we shall be forever with the Lord,
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,
all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

Kathrina von Schlegel (1697); tr. Jane Borthwick (1885)

Concluding Prayer

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of his victory;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

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