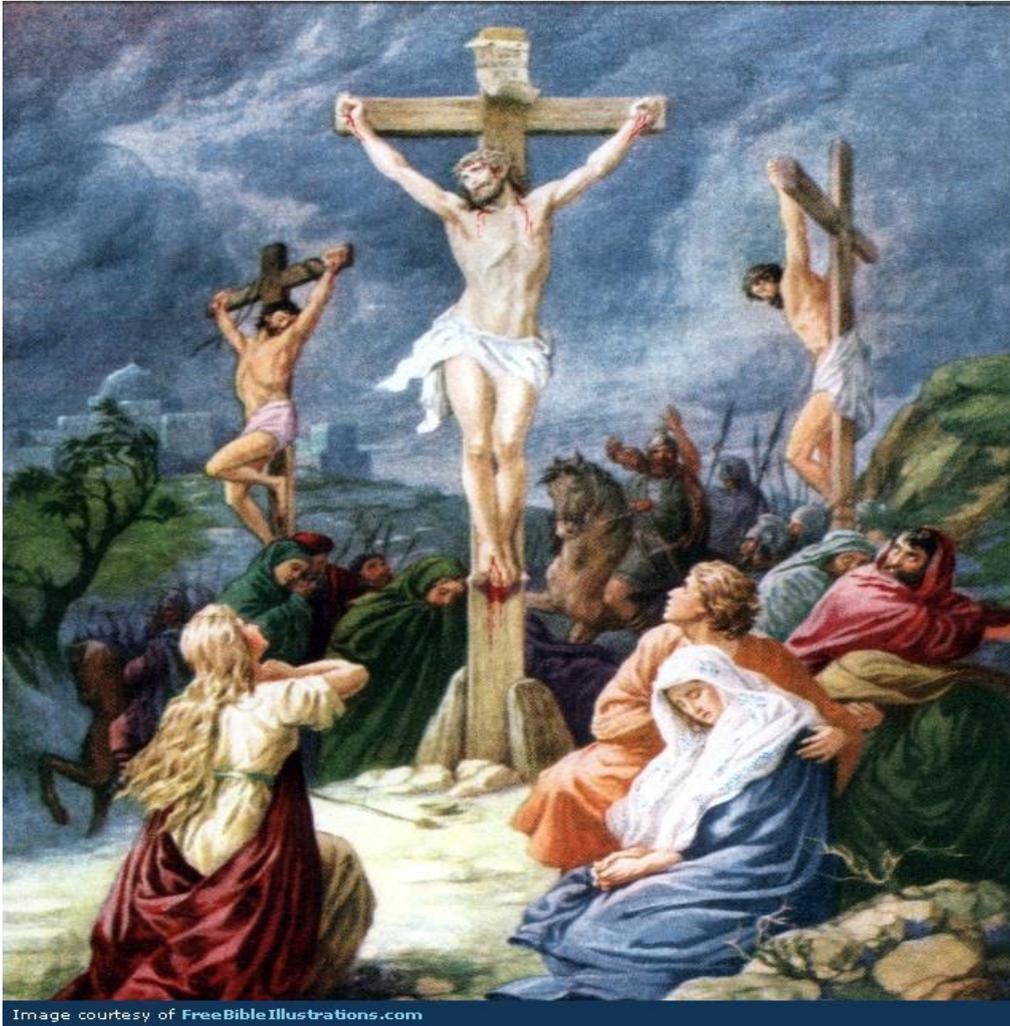
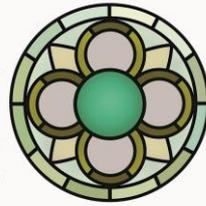


St Mary  
OATLANDS  
*Loving, Serving, Growing*



**Good Friday, 10th April 2020**

**AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS**

A service of readings, reflection, and prayer

## **The First Word**

### **“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.”**

#### **Reading**

**Luke 23:26-34**

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the Cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

#### **Reflection**

Jesus of Nazareth is looking down from the cross just after he was crucified between two criminals. He sees the soldiers who have mocked, scourged, and tortured him, and who have just nailed him to the cross. He probably remembers those who have sentenced him - Caiaphas and the high priests of the Sanhedrin. Pilate realized it was out of envy that they handed him over (Matthew 27:18, Mark 15:10). But is Jesus not also thinking of his Apostles and companions who have deserted him, to Peter who has denied him three times, to the fickle crowd, who only days before praised him on his entrance to Jerusalem, and then days later chose him over Barabbas to be crucified? Is he also thinking of us, who daily forget him in our lives?

Does he react angrily? No! At the height of his physical suffering, his love prevails and He asks His Father to forgive! Could there ever be greater irony? Jesus asks his Father to forgive, but it is by His very Sacrifice on the Cross that mankind is able to be forgiven! Right up to his final hours on earth, Jesus preaches forgiveness. He teaches forgiveness in the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matthew 6:12). When asked by Peter, how many times should we forgive someone, Jesus answers seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22).

At the Last Supper, Jesus explains his crucifixion to his Apostles when he tells them to drink of the cup: "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28). He forgives the paralytic at Capernaum (Mark 2:5), and the adulteress caught in the act and about to be stoned (John 8:1-11). And even following his Resurrection, his first act is to commission his disciples to forgive: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22-23).

### **Questions for Reflection**

Do you really believe God has forgiven your sins? Do you take time on a regular basis to confess your sins so that you might enjoy the freedom of forgiveness? Do you need to experience God's forgiveness in a fresh way today? What about others? Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us? Is this your case? Are there those who have offended you but whom you have not forgiven? Now is the time for you either to seek God's forgiveness afresh or to let go of the burden of anger and bitterness by forgiving others.

### **Prayer**

Father forgive them. They do not know what they are doing. Before you die, Jesus Christ, and the world goes into darkness, take from our lives, from our souls, and from our consciences, all that has offended you, all that has hurt others, and the intransigence, which has made us numb to the plight of those we could help or heal. Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world.

**All: Have mercy on us.**

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world.

**All: Have mercy on us.**

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world.

**All: Grant us your peace**

## **The Second Word**

**“I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

### **Reading**

**Luke 23-34b-43**

And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

### **Reflection**

Now it is not just the religious leaders or the soldiers that mock Jesus, but even one of the criminals, a downward progression of mockery. But the criminal on the right speaks up for Jesus, explaining the two criminals are receiving their just due, whereas "this man has done nothing wrong." Then, turning to Jesus, he asks, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). What wonderful faith this repentant sinner has in Jesus - far more than the doubting Thomas, one of his own Apostles. Ignoring his own suffering, Jesus responds with love and mercy in His second word. The second word again is about forgiveness, this time directed to a sinner. Just as the first word, this Biblical expression is found only in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus shows his Divinity by opening heaven for a repentant sinner - such generosity to a man that only asked to be remembered! This expression offers us hope for salvation, for if we turn our hearts and prayers to Him and accept his forgiveness, we will also be with Jesus Christ at the end of our lives

## Questions for Reflection

Have you staked your life on Jesus? Have you put your ultimate trust in him? Do you know that, when your time comes, you will be with him in paradise? If push comes to shove, will you take a stand for Jesus?

## Prayer

Today, you will be with me in Paradise. Lord Jesus, remember us when you come into your Kingdom. Remember us, not for our CV, nor the things which we hope will appear in our obituaries. Remember us not for the virtues we occasionally display or for any credit we think we have in our moral account. Remember us as one of the criminal community who hung at your side.

**Amen.**

## The Third Word “Dear woman, here is your son.”

### Reading

**John 19:26**

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

### Reflection

Jesus and Mary are together again, at the beginning of his ministry in Cana and now at the end of his public ministry at the foot of the Cross. John is the only Evangelist to record Mary at the Cross. The Lord refers to his mother as *woman* at the Wedding Feast of Cana (John 2:1-11) and in this passage, recalling the *woman* in Genesis 3:15, the first Messianic prophecy of the Redeemer, and anticipating the *woman* clothed with the sun in Revelation 12.

What sorrow must fill Mary's heart, to see her Son mocked, tortured, and crucified. Once again, a sword pierces Mary's soul: we are reminded of the prediction of Simeon at the Temple (Luke 2:35). There are four at the foot of the cross, Mary his Mother, John, the disciple whom he loved, Mary of Cleopas, his mother's sister, and Mary Magdalene. He addresses his third word to Mary and John, the only eye-witness of the Gospel writers.

But again Jesus rises above the occasion, and his concerns are for the ones

that love him. The good son that He is, Jesus is concerned about taking care of his mother. In fact, this passage offers proof that Jesus was the only child of Mary, because if he did have brothers or sisters, they would have provided for her. But Jesus looks to John to care for her.

St. Joseph is noticeably absent. The historic paintings, such as *Tondodoni* by Michelangelo and *The Holy Family* by Raphael, suggest Joseph was a considerably older man. St. Joseph had probably died by the time of the crucifixion, or else he would have been the one to take care of Mary. Early Christian traditions and the second-century apocryphal Protoevangelium of James held that Joseph was a widower, and his children by his former wife were the "brothers and sisters of Jesus."

Another striking phrase indicating Jesus of Nazareth was an only child is Mark 6:3, referring to Jesus: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" Now if James, Joses and Judas and Simon were also natural sons of Mary, Jesus would not have been called the "son of Mary," but rather "one of the sons of Mary."

### **Questions for Reflection**

What does Mary's presence at the Cross evoke in you?

Why do you think it was necessary for Jesus to suffer physical pain as he died? Looking at the image on the screen, assuming you are one of the people at the foot of the Cross, who would Jesus ask you to take care of?

### **Prayer**

For our families, where they are open, loving, supportive, that their joy might be kept safe.

Lord, hear us.

**All: Lord, graciously hear us.**

For our families, where they are tense, troubled, fragmented, seething with suspicion, that they may find a way through pain, and not a path away from it.

Lord, hear us.

**All: Lord, graciously hear us.**

For our churches, where they risk welcoming the stranger, where in language, hospitality, evangelism and service, they employ the imagination rather than the rule book, that they might be encouraged and surprised by joy.

Lord, hear us.

**All: Lord, graciously hear us.**

For ourselves, in this place of worship, surrounded by people whose journey we have not travelled, whose depth of faith we do not know, whose potentials we cannot imagine, that we might somehow know we belong to each other.

Lord, hear us.

**All: Lord, graciously hear us.**

And before we leave the Cross and vacate this building, if there is one of your family for whom we should care more fondly, direct our gaze to them for, as you turned Mary towards John each other.

Lord, hear us.

**All: Lord, graciously hear us. Amen**

### **The Fourth Word**

**“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”**

#### **Reading**

**Mark 15:33-40**

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, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and

provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

## Reflection

This was the only expression of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Both Gospels related that it was in the ninth hour, after three hours of darkness, that Jesus cried out this fourth word. The ninth hour was three o'clock in Judea. After the fourth Word, Mark related with a horrible sense of finality, "And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last" (Mark 15:37).

One is struck by the anguished tone of this expression in contrast to the first three words of Jesus. This cry is from the painful heart of the human Jesus who must feel deserted by His Father and the Holy Spirit, not to mention his earthly companions the Apostles. As if to emphasize his loneliness, Mark even has his loved ones "looking from afar," not close to him as in the Gospel of John. Jesus feels separated from his Father. He is now all alone, and he must face death by himself.

But is not this exactly what happens to all of us when we die? We too are all alone at the time of death! Jesus completely lives the human experience as we do, and by doing so, frees us from the clutches of sin.

His fourth Word is the opening line of Psalm 22, and thus his cry from the Cross recalls the cry of Israel, and of all innocent persons who suffer. Psalm 22 of David makes a striking prophecy of the crucifixion of the Messiah at a time when crucifixion was not known to exist: "They have pierced my hands and my feet, they have numbered all my bones" (22:16-17). The Psalm continues: "They divide my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots" (22:18).

There cannot be a more dreadful moment in the history of man as this moment. Jesus who came to save us is crucified, and He realizes the horror of what is happening and what He now is enduring. He is about to be engulfed in the raging sea of sin. Evil triumphs, as Jesus admits: "But this is your hour" (Luke 22:53). But it is only for a moment. The burden of all the sins of humanity for a moment overwhelm the humanity of our Savior.

But does this not have to happen? Does this not have to occur if Jesus is to save us? It is in defeat of his humanity that the Divine plan of His Father will be completed. It is by His death that we are redeemed. "For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all" (I Timothy 2:5-6).

*"He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."  
(I Peter 2:24)*

## **Questions for Reflection**

Have you taken time to consider that Jesus was abandoned by the Father so that you might not be? What does this “word” from the Cross mean to you? To be abandoned and forsaken is one of the most excruciating emotional tortures a man could endure. Do you know of those who have been abandoned by friends and family? Could you think of people and places that have been abandoned?

Spend a moment praying for them and you may want to write down the names of those people and places and place them at the foot of the Cross.

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, by your cry of desperate honesty, rid us of superficial faith, which is afraid of the dark. Not so that we might be justified pessimists, but so that we might discover profound joy. Give us, when we need it, the courage to doubt, to rage, to question, to rail against heaven until we know we are heard. We do not ask for easy answers to hard times; there are many who can offer these. We ask for a sense of your solidarity; that will be enough to let us know that we do not walk or cry alone; that will enable us to go through the dark and find light again in the morning. **Amen**

## **The Fifth Word**

**“I am thirsty.”**

## **Reading**

**John 19: 28-29**

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” 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.

## **Reflection**

The fifth word of Jesus is His only human expression of His physical suffering. Jesus is now in shock. The wounds inflicted upon him in the scourging, the crowning with thorns, losing blood on the three-hour walk through the city of Jerusalem on the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha, and the nailing upon the cross are now taking their toll.

The Gospel of John first refers to thirst when Jesus meets the Samaritan

woman at the well. After first asking for "a drink," he answers the woman, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14). This passage implies there is more than just physical thirst.

Jesus also thirsts in a spiritual sense. He thirsts for love. He thirsts for the love of his Father, who has left him unaided during this dreadful hour when He must fulfill his mission all alone. And he thirsts for the love and salvation of his people, the human race. Jesus practiced what he preached:

*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."  
(John 15:12-13)*

### **Questions for Reflection**

How do you respond to Jesus' statement "I am thirsty"? What does this statement suggest to you about Jesus? About yourself?

### **Prayer**

You have made us for yourself. We know it, even if we cannot name it. We have these bodies and these minds long enough to learn to live with our limitations. Yet despite this, something in us hankers, yearns, thirsts for something better, something greater which we know is there.

**All: Lord, quench our thirsts with your love.**

Beautiful music ends and we wish it would continue. We embrace and wish that we could be held forever. We think deeply or feel deeply and wish that this sense of being caught up in living would not be interrupted by the mundane things of life and we longingly thirst for you.

**All: Lord, quench our thirsts with your love.**

We sense the disappointment in dashed hopes that deserve to be filled, in missed opportunities which should have led to joy, not frustration, in people whose potential has been buried or denied and deserves to flourish.

**All: Lord, fill us with your love.**

Lord, we thank you for our incompleteness, thank you for our yearning for you. Thank you for this thirst for you. Thank you for giving us just enough of you to want more, and so to sense the fullness of eternity within the limits of time.

**All: Amen**

### **The Sixth Word "It is finished!"**

**Reading**

**John 19:30**

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

**Reflection**

John recalls the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb in Exodus 12 in this passage. Hyssop is a small plant that was used to sprinkle the blood of the Passover Lamb on the doorposts of the Hebrews (Exodus 12:22). John's Gospel related that it was the Day of Preparation, the day *before* the actual Sabbath Passover (*Pesach* in Hebrew, *Pascha* in Greek and Latin), that Jesus was sentenced to death (19:14) and sacrificed on the Cross (19:31). John continues in 19:33-34: "*But when they came to Jesus and saw he was already dead, they did not break his legs,*" recalling the instruction in Exodus 12:46 concerning the Passover Lamb. He died at the ninth hour (three o'clock in the afternoon), about the same time as the Passover lambs were slaughtered in the Temple. Christ became the Paschal or Passover Lamb, as noted by St. Paul: "*For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed*" (I Corinthians 5:7). The innocent Lamb was slain for our sins, so that we might be forgiven. It is now a fait accompli. The sixth word is Jesus' recognition that his suffering is over and his task is completed. Jesus is obedient to the Father and gives his love for mankind by redeeming us with His death on the Cross.

The painting on the front page is meant to capture the moment.

What was the darkest day of mankind became the brightest day for mankind. And the Gospels as a group captured this paradox. The Synoptic Gospels narrated the horror of the event - the agony in the garden, the abandonment by his Apostles, the trial before the Sanhedrin, the intense mockery and torture heaped upon Jesus, his suffering all alone, the darkness over the land, and his death, starkly portrayed by both Matthew (27:47-51) and Mark (15:33-38).

In contrast, the passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John expresses his Kingship and proves to be His triumphant road to glory. John presents Jesus as directing the action the entire way. The phrase "It is finished" carries a sense

of accomplishment. In John, there is no trial before the Sanhedrin, but rather Jesus is introduced at the Roman trial as "Behold your King!" (John 19:14). Jesus is not stumbling or falling as in the Synoptic Gospels, but the way of the Cross is presented with majesty and dignity, for "Jesus went out bearing his own Cross" (John 19:17). And in John, the inscription at the head of the cross is pointedly written "Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews" (John 19:19). The inscription INRI at the top of the cross is the Latin *Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*.

The loved ones of Jesus are with Him. John is the only Gospel writer to have his Mother Mary at the foot of the cross, along with his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, as well as the Beloved Disciple. He decisively gives his Mother Mary to the disciple who loved him.

When Jesus died, He "handed over" the Spirit. Jesus remained in control to the end, and it is He who handed over his Spirit. One should not miss the double entendre here, for this may also be interpreted as His death brought forth the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of John gradually reveals the Holy Spirit. Jesus mentions *living water* in John 4:10 and during the Feast of Tabernacles refers to living water as the Holy Spirit in 7:37-39. At the Last Supper, Christ announces he would ask the Father to send "another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth" (14:16-17). The word Advocate is also translated as Comforter, Helper, Paraclete, or Counselor. "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (14:26). The symbolism of water for the Holy Spirit becomes more evident in John 19:34: "But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water." The piercing of his side fulfills the prophecy in Zechariah 12:10: "They will look on me whom they have pierced." The piercing of Jesus' side prefigures the Sacraments of Eucharist (blood) and Baptism (water), as well as the beginning of **the Church**.

### **Questions for Reflection**

Do you live as if Jesus finished the work of salvation?

Do you have confidence that God will finish that which he has begun in you? There is so much pain and suffering in our world, you could spend a moment reflecting on this and bring them to the foot of the Cross in prayer. On a personal note, what do you want God to put an end to? Take it to God in prayer.

## **Prayer**

Now Jesus, you can let us go. You have convinced us of our sins and you have forgiven us. You have convinced us of your way and have engaged us on it. You have shown us a foretaste of heaven and have made us members of its commonwealth.

You can let us go know. Having overcome the sin of the world, death will be a small obstacle. Just as you foretold that you would be handed over to be crucified and this has come true, also you foretold on the third day you will rise again. And we will be witnesses.

**Amen**

## **The Seventh Word**

**“Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!”**

### **Reading**

**Luke 23:44-49**

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

### **Reflection**

The seventh word of Jesus is from the Gospel of Luke, and is directed to the Father in heaven, just before He dies. Jesus recalls Psalm 31:5 –

"Into thy hands I commend my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God."

Luke repeatedly pleads Jesus' innocence: with Pilate (Luke 23:4, 14-15, 22), through Dismas the criminal (by legend) (Luke 23:41), and immediately after His death with the centurion –

"Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent" (Luke 23:47).

Jesus was obedient to His Father to the end, and his final word before his death on the Cross was a prayer to His Father.

The relationship of Jesus to the Father is revealed in the Gospel of John, for

He remarked, "The Father and I are one" (10:30), and again at the Last Supper: "Do you not believe I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works" (14:10). And He can return: "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father" (16:28). Jesus fulfils His own mission and that of His Father on the Cross:

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, So that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

### **Questions for Reflection**

Have you put your life and, indeed, your life beyond this life, in God's hands? How do you experience God's salvation through Christ in your life today?

### **Prayer**

Go, silent friend, your life has found its ending. To dust return your weary mortal frame. God, who before birth, called you into being, now calls you back.

Lord Jesus, I let you go without letting go of you. Go to heaven, where you will welcome those who die in your faith, whose death, with your death, I remember. Tell them that I love them, that I miss them, and that they are not forgotten.

Cheered by the prospect of a day when there will be no more death or parting, and all shall be well and all shall be one, may they who have died before us be among the first to welcome us to heaven where, with you enthroned in glory, and in the company of all the saints, we will share the everlasting feast of your family.

Until then, keep us in faith, fill us with hope, deepen us through love, to the glory of your name. Amen

## **At the ninth hour**

It is the ninth hour. I have waited, and listened. And have watched you die. I am tired but relieved that suffering is over. Our world has changed. The world has changed.

Beloved Father and Redeemer.  
As once again I face the world,  
with its temptations, its demands,  
its comforts, its ambitions and false values.  
Give me the will and the strength  
to trust you to the point of utter surrender,  
so that wherever you are, I will be too. **Amen**

**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.**

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