

## THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

Good Friday – 15 April 2022

### Poem

#### The Cross Speaks (

Years before, I sprouted from the ground  
Spindly, awkward, reaching for the light.  
Rain came. I grew taller, watched the land  
Unfolding below me. My limbs stretched out  
To feel bird- scratch, buds straining into leaf.  
I sucked up earthy juices, dug in deep  
Until hewn, rough-cut to upright and cross-beam.  
The driven nails splitting the grain; nape of neck.  
Then hoisted up. On either side the screams  
Of dying men. Thunder in the bruise-dark sky;  
Beneath me soldiers, clack of dice. One last cry  
Then he was gone, the slung rib-cage hung slack.  
Splintered into kindling, I took flame; became  
Smoke billowing from ash. And rose again.

### Instrumental

#### 1. *Forgive them for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)*

### Song

#### Kyrie (Plainchant)

### Reader 1

**Gordon Wilson** lay in the rubble of the War Memorial in Enniskillen, 25 years ago, beside his daughter **Marie** who was dying. She tightly gripped his hand and told him she loved him very much. She was one of the 12 people killed on that Remembrance Sunday as a result of an IRA bomb. Speaking about those who were responsible for her death, he said - 'I will pray for these men tonight and every night.'

### Reader 2

#### **Edith Stein (Saint Theresa Benedicta of the Cross),**

who died in Auschwitz in 1942, offers us these words:  
'Love is stronger than hatred. In the end there will be  
only the fullness of love.

If we accept the **whole** Christ in faithful self-giving,  
by choosing and walking in the way of the imitation of Christ,  
then he will lead us through his Passion and Cross  
to the glory of the Resurrection.'

### Silent Prayer

### Intercession

#### All say:

#### Let us pray,

God of love and mercy,  
Renew my faith in the forgiveness of sins so that I will:  
Accept your gift of compassion  
Turn away from thoughts of hatred and revenge  
Share the grace of mercy with others  
Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

## 2. *Today you will be with me in Paradise (Luke 23:43)*

**Prelude**                    **in Paradisum (Orlando Gibbons)**  
*(May flights of angels lead you on your way  
To paradise and heaven's eternal day  
May martyrs greet you after death's dark night  
And bid you enter into Zion's light  
May choirs of angels sing you to your rest  
With once poor Lazarus, now forever blest)*

**Reader 1**                    Childhood images of paradise imagine a place of eternal sunshine with rich ripe fruit ready for plucking from lush trees – a place to which we aspire when our journey on earth is over. A self-indulgent view of paradise usually excludes people with whom we don't get on. There is no room for them in our Paradise Inn.

On the Cross, Jesus promised paradise here and now, today not tomorrow. In the Beatitudes Jesus gave us a step by step guide to creating heaven on earth. We can build a 'stairway to paradise' by our actions for justice and peace, for human rights and equality. We can build up people who are burdened with worry, pain or grief by our accompanying presence, gentleness and support. We can walk in the Garden of Eden once again when we let go of our pride, arrogance and self-reliance. This step by step approach is supported by St. Hildegard of Bingen, a visionary 12<sup>th</sup> century Abbess:

**Reader 2**                    'I began my ascent of the steep slope to heaven at its lowest point, unlike Lucifer who raised himself above himself and fell beneath himself. If you attempt to ascend by taking hold of the highest branch of the tree first, more often than not you will just as swiftly fall. But if you begin your climb at the foot of the path and proceed one step at a time, you will not fall so easily, so quickly.'

### **Silent Prayer**

**Intercession**                **Let us pray,**  
**All say:**                    Gracious God of hope and promise,  
fill us with a spirit of generosity and enthusiasm  
so that step by step we will build a stairway to paradise  
by our work for justice, love and peace.  
We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord. Amen.

**Song**                         **The Beatitudes (Glenstal arr.)**  
**All sing:**                    Amen! Truly I say to you, this day you will be with me in paradise

### **3. *'Woman, Behold your Son! ...Behold your mother.'* (John 19:26-27)**

**Reader 1** Two people who Jesus loved dearly, his Mother Mary and his close friend John, were united in their grief and facing an uncertain future as they stood by the cross. For those who believe in the power of Christ in the world today these words are full of promise, comfort and hope because the death of Jesus when seen through the eyes of faith changes everything. We are given a foretaste of both continuity and change in this encounter at the Cross. The community of believers, who formed the first Christian church, were strengthened by these links of continuity.

**Song** **Ave Maria (Caccini)**

**Silent Prayer**

**All say:** Hail Mary, full of grace...

### **4. *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* (Mark 15:34)**

**Song** **He Was Despised (Handel)**

**Reader 1** These heart breaking words of Jesus as he hung on the cross are echoed by many who feel abandoned in their time of need despite their faithfulness to prayer and Christian living. St. John of the Cross reflects this experience of 'the dark night of the soul': 'Spiritual persons suffer great trials from the fear of being lost on the road and that God has abandoned them...Let them trust in God who will bring them into the clear and pure light of love. '

**Poem** **Pilate Explains**

Easy for you all today to blame  
My failure then to take a firmer line.  
The baying crowd that day were just the same;  
Yellow-eyed, and stinking of cheap wine,  
So quick to point the finger.  
And as if All that wasn't enough, there's the wife,  
Who hated living here from the start  
Elbowing my ribs about some dream she's  
Had where he appeared; well, have a heart:  
What would you have done? I'll certainly plead  
Guilty as the next man to being weak, but  
Think while you prepare the noose of history  
In the end it turned out what I did was right:  
Where would you be now if I had set him free?

**Reader 1** What person would allow their son to suffer so much without doing something about it? This short phrase of Jesus on the cross reminds us how our faith can be tested by illness, loss or disillusionment. Why does God allow bad things to happen? Why are we visited so much in life by suffering and pain? Why do we experience sadness and a sense of abandonment in the face of darkness in our lives? The casual act of Pilate makes things worse as we look on. We recognise that human trait of Pontius Pilate when people seem to wash their hands of us and walk away when we need them most. Jesus is at one with us in that feeling of abandonment, of betrayal and disappointment.

**Reader 2** When we are in that lonely place it is important for us to recognise that the cross of suffering became the cross of glory. It is difficult to hold on to that hope when the cloud of despair settles upon us. Sometimes we fail to see the shafts of light that are sent to us – the kind messages of support, the thoughtful cards, the generous offers of practical help. We are never alone.

### **Silent Prayer**

**Intercession** **Let us pray,**  
**All say:** Gracious God,  
We unite our anxieties and our sense of abandonment  
with the lonely pain of Christ on the cross.  
Be with those who feel deserted and alone today.  
We ask this in the spirit, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Song** **My God, My God (Liam Lawton)**  
**All sing:** My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?  
Why have you forsaken me?

### **5. 'I thirst.' (John 19:28)**

**Reader 1** So many people in our society carry bottled water around with them you would think that we lived in a desert. For people living in areas of drought the words 'I thirst' are very real. Climate change has a marginal effect on people in the Western developed world. It is vital for the future of our planet and for all those with whom we share God's creation that we change our ways to preserve limited resources such as water. Jesus thirsts today in so many parts of the world where the provision of clean water is a luxury and people die of thirst.

**Song** **Like the deer that yearns for running streams (Joseph Walshe)**  
**All sing:** Like the deer that yearns for running streams,  
so my soul is yearning for you my God

**Reader 2** There is another thirst at a deep level in all people – a thirst that is not satisfied by the immediate and the quick fix of comfort eating, binge drinking and spending for distraction. There is a saying that someone who is thirsting for God is like a fish looking for water – God is all around us. When we are not in communion with God we are literally like a fish out of water. St Augustine put it so well when he said – 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.'

**Instrumental**      **Schindler's List (John Williams)**

**Silent Prayer**

**Intercession**      **Let us pray,**  
**All say:**      God of nourishment and strength,  
Inspire us to work for justice and peace  
Open our hearts to your grace  
Satisfy our longing for fulfilment  
We pray this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**6.      *'It is finished.'* (John 19:30)**

**Reader 1**      It is finished - mission accomplished? Yet Jesus' work of saving and redeeming goes on. That mission to complete the task for which He was called is now the mission of those who follow Jesus – who call themselves Christian. There are some who say that the communities who follow Jesus today are themselves 'finished'. Let us keep in mind that the throne of the great servant king, Jesus, was the wood of the cross. St. Paul reminds us that 'the language of the cross may be illogical to those who are not on the way to salvation, but those of us who are on the way see it as God's power to save' (I Corinthians 1 :18). What may be finished are structures and ways that do not give witness to the openness of Jesus, who made no distinctions or judgements about them, to all people. The real church community of 'humble' people still exists as millions throughout the world try to follow Christ in an authentic way following the principles of respect and integrity.

**Silent Prayer**

**Intercession**      **Let us pray,**  
**All say:**      God of hope and promise,  
Renew the grace of your Spirit within us  
That we will face the challenge in our times  
To be prophetic, courageous and generous.  
We ask this in the name of Christ, our living Lord. Amen.

**Song**      **St Teresa's Prayer (John Michael Talbot)**

## **7. 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' (Luke 23:46)**

**Prelude**                    **Ebarne Dich(Bach)**

**Reader 1**                    Complete abandonment. It's the only way. How often do we fight to get our own way. Yet giving ourselves over to God's will has consequences that we may not find too pleasant. St. Teresa of Avila keeps us in the real world when she reminds us:

    'There is no danger, my brothers and sisters,  
    That when you say to God, 'thy will be done'  
    You will be showered with riches and pleasures  
    or great honours or any earthly good.

**Reader 2**                    Those who have the grace to give of themselves completely enjoy the blessing of letting go. Christian living is about that daily dying to ourselves and our own needs so that one day we will truly be at peace and 'out of control' because we have let God take over. Julian of Norwich encourages us when we struggle with these words: 'All shall be well, all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well'.

**Silent Prayer**

**Intercession**                **Let us pray,**  
    **All say:**                God of mercy and providence,  
                                  Into your hands I commend my spirit,  
                                  Help me to trust in in your love and care for me,  
                                  Hold me in your peace.  
                                  We ask this in the Spirit, through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

**Song**                         **Jesus Remember Me (Taizé)**  
    **All sing:**                *Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom*