

HOLY WEEK MEDITATION 2022 - Journey to the Cross

Opening Song **Vexilla Regis (Venantius Fortunatus)/In Crucem (Taizé)**

Abroad the Regal Banners fly,
Now shines the Cross's mystery;
Upon it Life did death endure,
And yet by death did life procure.

That which the Prophet-King of old
Hath in mysterious verse foretold,
Is now accomplished, whilst we see
God ruling nations from a Tree.

Blest Tree, whose happy branches bore
The wealth that did the world restore;
The beam that did that Body weigh
Which raised up hell's expected prey.

Hail, Cross, our hope; on thee we call,
Who keep this mournful festival;
Grant to the just increase of grace
And every sinner's crimes efface.

Blest Trinity, we praises sing
To Thee, from whom all graces spring;
Celestial crowns on those bestow
Who conquer by the Cross below.

Introduction

Holy Week 2022 will be remembered for many reasons. This Great Week, when we commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus is rooted in the real world of pain and suffering as a result of war throughout the world which Pope Francis has described 'as a piecemeal Third World War'. The pandemic continues to take its toll. It is good for us to take time to find our place on the journey to the Cross, on our way to Easter.

It is good for us to acknowledge the pain of Christ today in those who continue to suffer as a result of bereavement, long Covid, stress, unemployment, loneliness or loss of business.

It is good for us to face up to our own betrayal of others and of our Christian values.

It is good for us to recognize the speed of our denial of the Christian principles when it becomes uncomfortable for us as we recall betrayal and accusation, of power and position.

It is good to bring ourselves back to the simplicity and humility of Jesus Christ who though he was divine did not cling to his equality with God – 'he was humbler yet even to accepting death on a cross'.

Opening Prayer

All say:

God of mercy and compassion,
Be with us as we reflect and pray on the stories and music of Holy Week. May we be open to the power of your Spirit working at so many levels in us, inviting us to see the suffering presence of Christ in the world today.

Let us bring to the Cross of Christ, in particular, those who suffered as a result of the pandemic, by bereavement, prolonged sickness or exhaustion. We pray all who are victims of war, tyranny and oppression. We are conscious too of people throughout the world who are affected by climate change which stems from the reckless use of limited resources. We hold in our hearts once again all those in our society who were betrayed, abused and not believed. Mo náire sinn. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Our story begins at the Last Supper.

Reading

Luke 22:14-20

‘When the hour came Jesus took his place at table and the apostles with him. And he said to them’ I have longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; because I tell you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’

Then, taking a cup, he gave thanks and said, ‘Take this and share it among you, because from now on, I tell you, I shall not drink wine until the kingdom of God comes.’

Then he took some bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying ‘This is my body which will be given up for you; do this as a memorial of me’. He did the same with the cup after supper, and said ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for me.’

Song

Ave Verum (Mozart/Saint-Saëns)/The Last Supper (Bernard Sexton)

*(Hail, true body born of the Virgin Mary,
Who truly suffered, sacrificed on the Cross for man,
Whose pierced side overflowed with water and blood,
Be for us a foretaste In the test of death)*

Reading

Luke 22:21-23

‘And yet, here with me on the table is the hand of the man who betrays me. The Son of Man does indeed go to his fate even as it has been decreed, but alas for that man by whom he is betrayed!’ And they began to ask one another which of them it could be who was to do this thing.

Song**Unus ex Discipulis (Victoria)/Irish Slow Air**

Unus ex discipulis meis tradit me hodie. Vae illi per quem tradar ego. Melius illi erat si natus non fuisset. Qui intigit mecum manum in paropside, hic me traditurus est in manus peccatorum.

(One of my disciples will this day betray me: woe to him by whom I am betrayed. It had been better for him if he had not been born. He that dipped his hand with me into the dish, it is he that will deliver me into the hands of sinners)

Reflection

We ask God's pardon for those priests who betrayed the trust of the most vulnerable. They celebrated the Eucharist, the sacrament of love, while at the same time they abused the grace of leadership and robbed young people of their innocence.

Reading**Luke 22: 39-43**

He then left the upper room to make his way as usual to the Mount of Olives with the disciples following. When they reached the place he said to them, 'Pray not to be put to the test.' Then he withdrew from them, about a stone's throw away and knelt down and prayed saying, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done not mine.'

Song**In Monte Oliveti (Ingegneri)/I Put my Life in your Hands (Haugen)**

In monte Oliveti ad patrem oravit: Pater si fieri potest transeat a me calix iste. Spiritus quidem promptus est caro autem infirma. Fiat voluntas tua.

(On the Mount of Olives he prayed to his Father: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Let your will be done)

Reading**Luke 22: 45-46**

When he rose from prayer he went to the disciples and found them sleeping from sheer grief. 'Why are you asleep' he said. 'Get up and pray not to be put to the test.'

Responsory**Una Hora (Victoria)/Stay With Me (Taizé)**

Una hora non potuistis vigilare mecum, qui exhortabamini mori pro me? Vel Judam non videtis quomodo non dormit, sed festinat tradere me? Quid dormitis? Surgite et orate, ne intretis in tentationem.

(Could you not watch one hour with me, you that were eager to die for me? Why do you sleep? Arise and pray, lest ye fall into temptation)

Reflection

St. Teresa of Avila (16thc)

When we watch Jesus on his way into the garden we have to wonder how great his dread must have been to cause him, who was patience itself, not only to show it, but to speak it. Listen to him as he says: 'My soul is sorrowful unto death.' Then ask yourself: If he admitted that his flesh was weak, how can we expect more of our flesh? So let us not trouble ourselves about our fears, nor lose heart at the sight of our frailty, but humbly remind ourselves that without the grace of God we are nothing. And then, distrusting our own strength, let us commit ourselves to his mercy.

Psalm 68(69)

This is my prayer to you,
My prayer for your favour.
In your great love, answer me, O God,
With your help that never fails:

**All: Rescue me from sinking in the mud;
Save me from my foes.**

Save me from the waters of the deep
Lest the waves overwhelm me.

**All: Do not let the deep engulf me
Nor death close its mouth on me.**

Lord, answer, for our love is kind;
In your compassion, turn towards me.

**All: Do not hide your face from your servant;
Answer quickly for I am in distress.**

Come close to my soul and redeem me;
Ransom me pressed by my foes.

**All: You know how they taunt and deride me;
My oppressors are all before you.**

Taunts have broken my heart;
I have reached the end of my strength.

**All: I looked in vain for compassion,
For consolers; not one could I find.**

Reading

Luke 23:20-25

Pilate was anxious to set Jesus free and addressed them again but they shouted back. 'Crucify him! Crucify him! And for the third time he spoke to them. 'Why? What harm has this man done? I have found no case against him that deserves death, so I shall have him punished and then let him go.' But they kept on shouting at the top of their voices, demanding that he should be crucified. And their shouts were growing louder. Pilate then gave his verdict: their demand was to be granted.

He released the man they asked for, who had been imprisoned for rioting and murder, and handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they pleased.

Responsory: Eram quasi agnus (Victoria)/Lamb of God (Various)

Eram quasi agnus innocens, ductussum ad immolandum et nesciebam.
Concilium fecerunt inimici mei, adversum me cogitabant mala mihi
Verbum iniquum mandaverunt adversum me dicentes: venite,
mittamus lignum in panem eius, et eradamus eum de terra viventium.

(I was like an innocent lamb; I was led to be sacrificed and I knew it not: my enemies conspired against me, saying: come, let us put wood in his bread, and root him out of the land of the living)

Reflection St Catherine of Siena (14th c)

When one is in charge, one often fails in true justice. And this is the reason: one is afraid of losing one's status, so in order not to displease others, one keeps covering and hiding their wrong-doing, smearing ointment on a wound which at the time needs to be cauterized. Alas, how sad I feel when those who should use the flame of divine charity to burn out crime by holy punishment and correction, administered in true justice, flatter others and pretend not to see their wrong-doing. They behave in this way toward those whom they think may harm their position. But toward the poor who seem insignificant and whom they do not fear, they display tremendous enthusiasm for 'justice' and, showing neither mercy nor compassion, they exact harsh punishments for small faults.

Psalm 72(71) O God, give your judgement to your king,
to a king's son your justice,
that he may judge your people in justice
and your poor with right judgement.

**All: May the mountains bring forth peace to the people
and the hills justice.**

May he defend the poor of the people
and save the children of the needy
and crush the oppressor.

**All: He shall endure like the sun and the moon
from age to age.**

He shall descend like rain on the meadow,
like raindrops on the earth.

**All: In his days justice shall flourish
and peace till the moon fails.**

He shall rule from sea to sea,
from the Great River to earth's bounds.

Reflection

Saint Teresa of Avila (16thc)

As for me, given a choice, I would always choose the way of suffering, not just because it allows me to imitate the way of Jesus, but because it brings many other blessings with it.

We cannot understand how suffering can be a grace, and how great a blessing it is, until we have left all things. For if we are attached to any one thing it is because we set a value on it.

It may be painful to surrender what we value, but what greater loss, what greater blindness, what greater calamity could there be than to make much of what is nothing, to cling to what has no value?

Responsory

O Vos Omnes (Casals)/Behold and See (Handel)/Instrumental

O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte: Si est dolor similis sicut dolor meus. Attendite, universi populi, et videte dolorem meum. Si est dolor similis sicut dolor meus.

(O all you that pass by the way, attend and see: If there be any sorrow like my sorrow. Attend, all you people, and see my sorrow: If there be any sorrow like my sorrow.)

Reading

Luke 23:44-46, 55

It was now about the sixth hour and with the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. When Jesus cried out in a loud voice, he said 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' With these words he breathed his last. Meanwhile the women who had come from Galilee with Jesus were following behind. They took note of the tomb and of the position of the body.

Song

Christus Factus Est (Bruckner)/You Gave Up Your Life (Walker)

Christus factus est pro nobis obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis. Propter quod et Deus exaltavit illum et dedit illi nomen, quod est super omne nomen.

(Christ became obedient for us unto death, even to the death, death on the cross. Therefore, God exalted Him and gave Him a name which is above all names.)

Reflection

'They took note of the tomb and of the position of the body.' These words point to Easter day, to the empty tomb and to the Risen Lord. These days as we reflect on the death of Jesus let us not forget that the cross of pain and suffering became the tree of victory. That's why we take this journey to the cross with hope in our hearts, full of the possibility that the season of renewal may bring. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Closing Prayer

All say:

Let us pray,

God of wisdom and love,

Give us the humility to walk with you.

Give us courage to face our cross like you.

Give us the grace to live like you.

We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

Song

Miserere mei (Allegrì)/Bless the Lord, My Soul (Taizé)

