

The Seven Last Words



The Seven Last Words are the seven last sentences, or phrases, or utterances said by Jesus as he hung on the cross on Good Friday, at least as recorded in the Gospels.

Traditionally, they are ordered as follows:

1. "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)
2. "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)
3. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34 & Matthew 27:46)
4. "Woman, here is your son. . . . Here is your mother." (John 19:26-27)
5. "I am thirsty." (John 19:28)
6. "It is finished." (John 19:30)
7. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

While there can be many different interpretations and translations of these final utterances, each of these final statements brings us closer to an understanding of Jesus' mission. In this aspect of Jesus' earthly mission, we contemplate Jesus whose final moments were filled with suffering. In these seven sentences we see our God who has suffered many of the same things that we suffer.

We trust that God understands our lives because he experienced all aspects of it. Contemplating Jesus' humility, *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* (Philippians 2:7) allows us the opportunity to open our minds and hearts to a relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As a fellow pilgrim, I share these thoughts as we reflect on the meaning of Jesus seven last words for mission in our world today.

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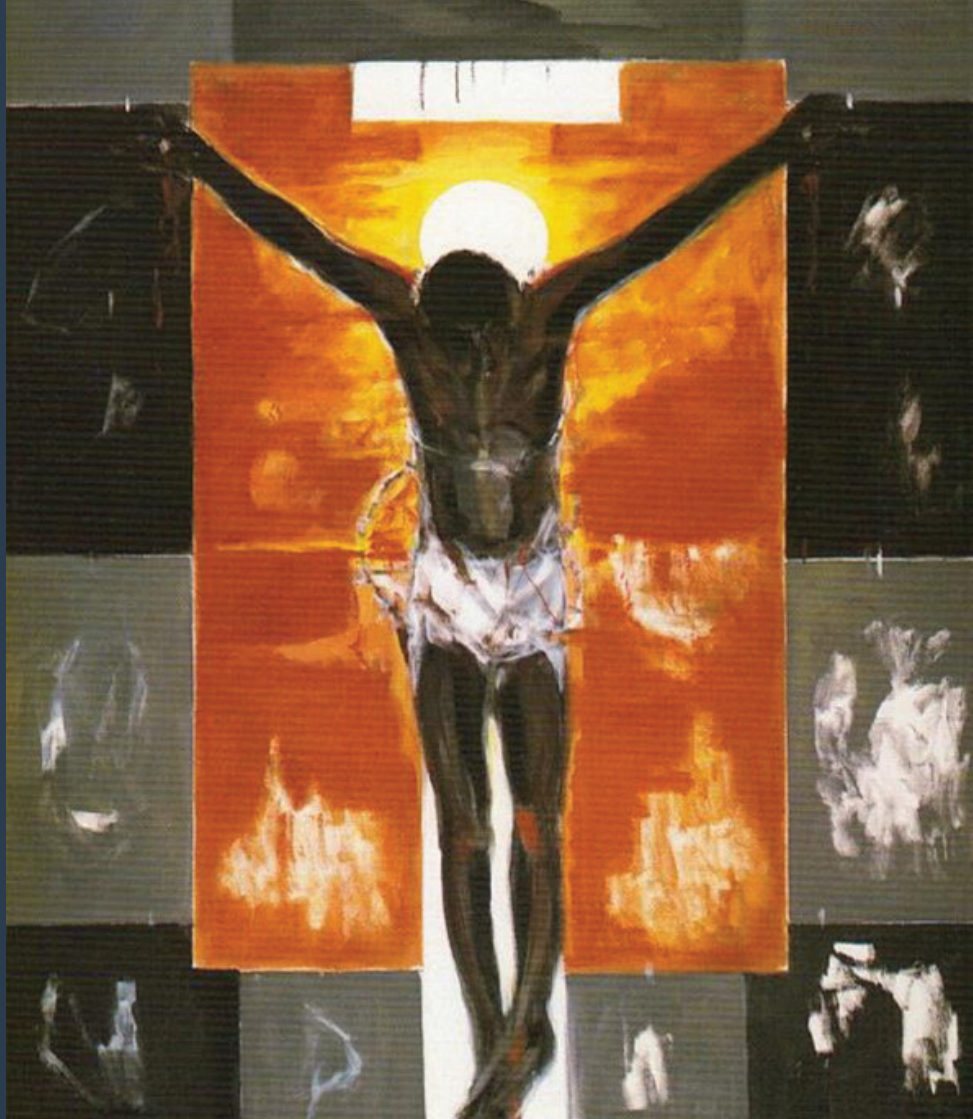
I.

“Father, forgive
them; for they
do not know
what they are
doing.”

(Luke 23:34)

Cristo Negro

Martin Ruiz Anglada,
Saragossa, Spain



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." 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!" (Luke 23:32-37)

As the Nancy Griffith song goes, *from a distance, the world looks blue and green, And the snow-capped mountains white, from a distance, the ocean meets the stream. And the eagle takes to flight From a distance, there is harmony And it echoes through the land. It's the voice of hope It's the voice of peace It's the voice of every man.*

However as most of us know, looking closer at our planet, our common home, is very challenging, sometimes overwhelming. We have many unresolved issues. The list is long, but it includes the war in Ukraine, our treatment of refugees, the ongoing climate crisis and the deepening polarisation of society. In this context the absence of forgiveness and reconciliation is noticeable.

Jesus offers us a visible example of forgiveness in action. He offers forgiveness from the cross. He doesn't see executioners. He sees people making horrible mistakes. He sees their humanity, and so he loves them, and so he can forgive them. Forgiveness is a gift you give the other person but also a gift for yourself.

Soul Time

Where is the Spirit leading me today?

Where is Jesus' gift of forgiveness in my life today?

"Where the Spirit is,
There is creation and new life.
Where the Spirit is,
There is the living Christ.
The Spirit is the breath of God's creative love
so that whoever lives in the Spirit
lives in the ever newness of God." (Ilia Delio)

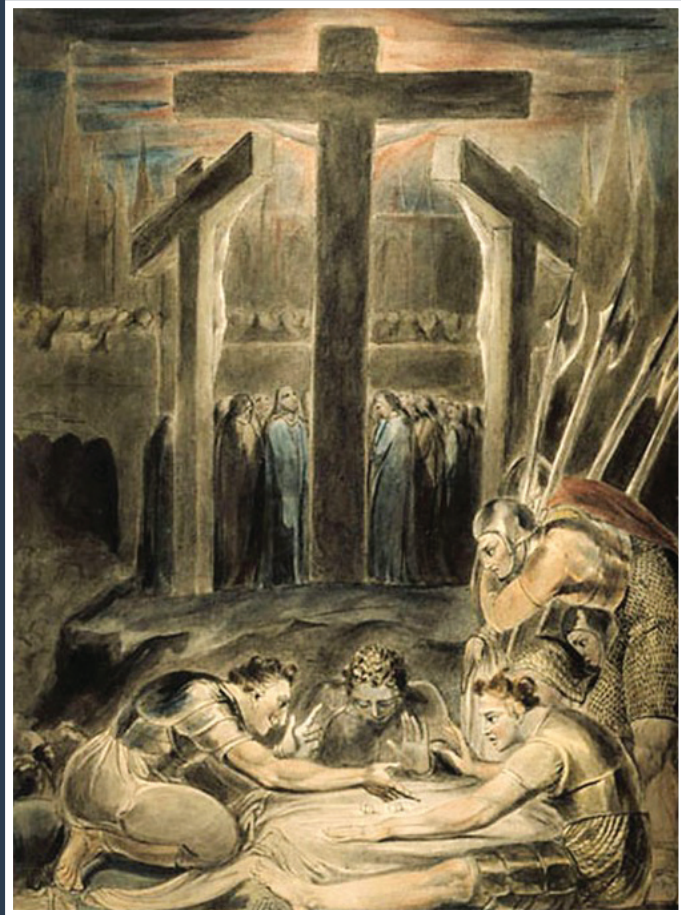
2.

“Truly, I tell you,
today you shall
be with me in
Paradise.”

(Luke 23:43)

Soldiers casting lots for Christ's garments

William Blake,
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England



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."
(Luke 23:39–43)

Throughout the Gospels, I have been always aware of the titles of Jesus. We heard of Jesus as Rabbi, Teacher, the Messiah, the Christ. However, in this Gospel passage we are given an insight into Jesus' personal presence from the *good thief's* experience. In midst of his most difficult time the *good thief* calls out personally to Jesus. The good thief calls out; "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Throughout the Gospels, as the sick encountered Jesus, they were healed of their illnesses. When the deaf encountered him, they were able to hear. When the lame encountered him, they were able to walk. When the poor encountered him, the good news was preached to them. When those on the margins encountered him, they were restored. When sinners encountered him, they were forgiven.

Encountering Jesus means encountering the reign of God in a personal and transforming manner.

Soul Time

Listen to the following Taizé piece – Jesus, Remember Me – YouTube.

Alternatively, pray these words by repeating them as you breathe in and out.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

3.

"My God, my God,
why have you
forsaken me?"

(Mark 15:34 &
Matthew 27:46)

Crucifixion

Parish Church,
Coatepec, Mexico



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!" (Mark 15:33-39)

Throughout his earthly life, Jesus saw the suffering of people. He lived in a time of oppression and corruption and a failure of religion to communicate the real message of God's love for his people. Jesus' life witness to a God who will not abandon his people.

In our world today, there are people who live with suffering every day. This suffering is experienced because of many circumstances, e.g., the effects of war, personal illness, mistreatment by people in trust and many other reasons. The list is endless.

Jesus' experience on the cross, can be seen by many observers as a cry of despair. However, another perspective, is that these words of Jesus, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** are a heartfelt prayer, honestly expressed at this time of agony. It is a prayer that many people cry at times of deep trauma and difficulties.

It is a prayer that we pray in solidarity today for people suffering from the trauma of war, child sex abuse or any injustice that has inflicted pain and suffering.

Soul Time

(Slowly pray the following)

"Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

4.

“Women, here is
your son...
Here is your
mother.”

(John 19:26-27)

Christ on the Cross with Mary and John

Rogier van der Weyden,
El Escorial, Madrid, Spain



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.
(John 19:26-27)

A phrase we hear from many people who have accompanied loved ones through illness and to the time of death is; *It was such a privilege*, e.g. I was privileged to be there when my mother (dad, friend, or loved one) passed on. The statement seems contradictory. To be present at a time of death where the moment can be painful and sad, yet for many people, it is a 'grace-filled' moment.

The scene from the Gospel of John, at the foot of the cross brings a new understanding of God's unconditional love. Even at a time in Jesus' life, that is marked by aloneness, Jesus invites us to be in solidarity with each other. God is constantly proclaiming his kingdom where people gather even at time of great sadness.

The recent pandemic may have introduced us to terms like isolating, social distancing, and lockdown. While the Ukrainian war has meant more experiences of hurt and separation. In this context, these last words of Jesus are a reminder to us all that the Gospel call is to unite people in the service of those most in need.

Soul Time

God in an apron!

Supper was special that night.
There was both a heaviness and a holiness
hanging in the air.
We couldn't explain the mood.
It was sacred, yet sorrowful.
Gathered around that table
eating that solemn, holy meal
seemed to us the most important meal
we had ever sat down to eat.

We were dwelling in the heart of MYSTERY.
Though dark the night,
Hope felt right—
as if something evil
was about to be conquered.

And then suddenly
the One-Who-Loved startled us all.
He got up from the table
and put on an apron.
Can you imagine how we felt?

GOD IN AN APRON!

Tenderness encircled us
as He bowed before us.
He knelt and said,
"I choose to wash your feet
because I love you."

God in an apron, kneeling.
I couldn't believe my eyes.
I was embarrassed
until His eyes met mine.
I sensed my value then.
He touched my feet.
He held them in His strong, brown hands.
He washed them.
I can still feel the water.
I can still feel the touch of His hands.
I can still see the look in His eyes.

Then He handed me the towel and said,
"As I have done, so you must do."
Learn to bow.
Learn to kneel.

Let your tenderness encircle
everyone you meet.
Wash their feet—
not because you have to—
but because you want to.

It seems I've stood two thousand years
holding that towel in my hands.
"As I have done, so must you do,"
keeps echoing in my heart.

"There are so many feet to wash,"
I keep saying.
"No."
I hear God's voice
resounding through the years.
"There are only My feet.
What you do for them, you do for Me."

5.

"I am thirsty."

(John 19:28)

"I Thirst"

Patrick Reyntiens,
Ampleforth Abbey, York, England



After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (to fulfil 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.
(John 19:28–29)

I am thirsty is such a human story. Reflecting on these words from the Son of God is a reflection on the humanity of Jesus. Jesus' humanity and his humility were central to His story. True divinity lives in this true example of humanity.

For many people in the world physical thirst is a daily experience. Clean water is not the lot of everyone. Almost everyone who wishes for a drink, can turn on a tap to quench their thirst, but for nearly eight hundred million people today fresh water is still beyond their regular means. For many, women and children, are the most affected by these situations; often they must walk miles to obtain it and carry it home.

Since we understand that the Body of Christ is all of us, then we know we can declare with conviction that Jesus's Body is going thirsty and is suffering. We often reflect empathetically on the sadness of Jesus' suffering two thousand years ago, but today we look around our world and see members of his Body who are suffering, e.g. people of Ukraine, Turkey, Syria and the many refugees around our world.

Soul Time

Reflections on Compassion

'To feel the pain of another it is our duty to prefer the service of the poor to everything else and to offer such service as quickly as possible' –

Saint Vincent de Paul.

'We consider the following to be especially important tasks for our time: – the youth apostolate because the present situation of young people is crying out more than ever for social and educational works; – works with refugees, with migrants, and with all on the margins of society' –

Spiritual Rule of Life 18: 1

6.

"It is finished."

(John 19:30)

Crucifixion

Frank Wesley



**When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished."
Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
(John 19:30)**

The portrayal of Jesus in the Gospel of John is different to other Gospels. He is presented above all as the one sent by the Father. The deeds of Jesus are not understood as evidence of his power but as symbols that reveals God the Father, the one who sent Him.

Faith is often equated with certainty and assurance, e.g. 'I have faith in you to do this'. However, in the Gospel, faith is part of our journey and not the destination. We journey towards trust in God and come to know that God is trustworthy.

So when Jesus utters the words "It is finished" as he dies on the cross he is referring to the completion of his mission. In this time of war, times of uncertainty and an uncertain future, what does Trust look like? Where do we find trust?

Surely, we would recognise trust, in the kindness of a neighbour, in the service to each other and in the openness to God. God is greater than the darkness, He is the light (1 John 1:5).

Soul Time

Prayer

God of our life,
There are days when the burdens we carry
chafe our shoulders and weigh us down;
when the world seems dry and endless,
the sky is grey and threatening;
When our lives have no music in them,
and our hearts are lonely,
and our souls have lost their courage.

Flood the path with light,
run our eyes to where the skies are full of promise;
tune our hearts to brave music;
give us the sense of comradeship
with heroes and saints of every age;
and so quicken our spirits
that we may be able to encourage the souls
of all who journey with us on the road of life,
to your honour and glory.

A prayer attributed to Saint Augustine

7.

“Father, into your
hands I commend
my spirit.”

(Luke 23:46)



Christ of St. John of the Cross

Salvador Dalí

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."
(Luke 23:44-47)

In these words, to his Father, Jesus brings an end to his worldly mission. Throughout his time on earth Jesus went walking from town to town giving himself to people listening to them, healing them, feeding them, profiling his mission from his Father. Jesus gave entirely to this earthly mission. and under his cross at this time of ending he completely surrenders back to the father, His spirit.

Our baptismal calling invites us to deeply consider the surrendering of our life to God's mission. It is about living our life as Jesus lived his life. It is about having no boundary between God and your spirit and your actions.

We do not know what the future will bring but we trust that God's presence will accompany us as we travel. Jesus placed his faith and trust in God the Father. *Abba Father* (Mark 14:36) was Jesus' compass for living life. it is because of this faith that humanity was freed from sin and opened into the resurrection and the fullness of life. In the depths of despair, we have a great HOPE.

Soul Time

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

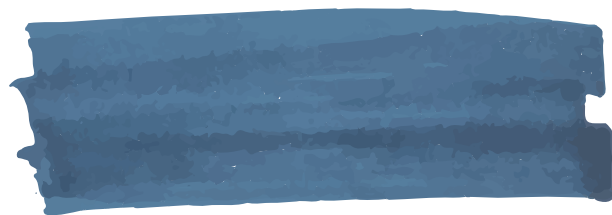
Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

For you have redeemed me, Lord God of truth.

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.





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