

## THE WAY OF THE CROSS

### I. In the Garden

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." (Matthew 26:36-46)

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The time had come. Jesus had just celebrated His last Passover with His disciples in the upper room. They had eaten the Passover lamb, but the real Passover Lamb was about to be sacrificed - on the cross. The Old Testament was being fulfilled and coming to an end and the New Testament was now beginning. So even as they ate the old meal, Jesus gave them the new one - the Supper of His Body and Blood. Now the time had come for Him to give His life for the life of the world.

It would not be easy. For though He was God, yet Jesus was also a true man, and faced all the trials and troubles, the temptations and fears that we go through. And He was about the drink a cup that none of us could drink - the cup that contained the entire world's sin, the entire world's shame and disgrace, he entire world's rebellion and curse - from the greatest evils to our petty everyday sins. He would drink the cup of God's wrath and judgment against them all, all the way down to the dregs. Think of the fear we have of even *one* of our sins being found out. Jesus took them *all*.

And so what does He do? What does He do in the face of such an enormous sacrifice? He prays to His Father. He prays the prayer He taught us to pray, saying *Thy will be done*. He could have escaped; but He will not. His Father's will was His will. His love for His Father and for you is too great. For this He was born. For this He was baptized. To the cross He would go.

And we too, when faced with trials and temptations, struggles, doubts, and fears, can pray as Jesus prayed. Because joined to Him, His Father is *Our Father*. Because of Jesus, the sin that separated us from God separates us no more. But what is even greater, just as Jesus prayed then, so He is praying now - for you. For you in your trials and temptations, your struggles, doubts, and fears. He prayed alone, but you never do.

## **II. Faithful and Faithless**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:57-75)

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There were two trials going on here . . . at the same time. One official, the other unofficial. One where the only testimony was false testimony, the other where people spoke the truth. One where the truth is told, the other where it is denied. One in the council, the other in a courtyard. One where the innocent is declared guilty, the other where the guilty runs away. Jesus will not save Himself. Peter, gripped with fear, thinks of nothing else.

But did Peter save Himself? Had not Jesus said, "**For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it**" (Mark 8:35). So what have you done Peter? Have you really saved your life, or lost it?

Then the rooster crowed. It preached to Peter. He realized what he had done and wept bitterly. Jesus had, in compassion, arranged it that way, to call Peter to repentance. For to forgive Peter is why Jesus would not save Himself. And also to forgive you and me. For the times we deny, when we run away, when we think only of our own lives and reputations, when we are afraid of the truth.

Think of Peter - one moment, he was drawing his sword in the face of Roman soldiers coming to arrest Jesus, and the next moment he is cowering in fear before a servant girl. Isn't that a description of us? Bold one moment and afraid the next? Faithful one moment and doubting the next? So let us also be like Peter in weeping and repentance for our sin. And not rely on ourselves, but on Jesus. For just as Jesus looked upon Peter in compassion, so He looks upon us. For He would not have any sinner perish, but all turn to Him and live. So that not when the rooster crows, but when the final trumpet shall sound, we will rejoice to **see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven**. And be saved by Him who would not save Himself.

Hymn #435 "Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain"

### **III. Condemnation**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. (Matthew 27:1-2, 11-26) < SIT >

The Son of God is traded for a murderer. The Son of God is condemned to die, while the murderer is set free. It doesn't seem right. And it's not. For sin has turned everything upside-down.

And yet, this *is* right. For here is a picture of exactly what Jesus has come to do - take our place as a criminal on the cross. He came to trade places with the worst murderers, the worst thieves, the worst abortionists, the worst liars, the worst hypocrites, the worst adulterers, idolaters, and cheats - to trade places with you. To die in your place, that you may be set free and live. And this He has done. Barabbas represents you and me.

And so He takes our place; the cross is what we deserve. And by faith, we take His place. By faith, we are forgiven and made sons of God. By faith, we receive a throne, not a cross, and life, not death.

But there is something else that is said here. The people call out: "***His blood be on us and on our children!***" They meant that they would take the guilt for this. But Jesus turns this upside-down as well! For in laying down His life, He takes all guilt. His blood on us will be for us not a condemning, but a cleansing flood. His blood sprinkled on us in Baptism and Absolution, and given to us in His Supper now washes away our sin and guilt. And this forgiveness is for all - even those who shouted crucify that day, and who called for Barabbas. Jesus sheds His blood for all. Let His blood be on us and on our children, yes! Let us receive the forgiveness of the one who took our place, and shout His praises.

#### **IV. Bearing the Cross**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him. As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. (Matthew 27:27-32)

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What did Jesus think? What did He think when they throw an old scarlet military cloak over his shoulders and back, so raw from flogging? What did He think when they twisted a crown of thorns and pressed it down over His head? What did He think they gave Him a mock scepter, spit in His face, and kneel down in fun before Him? *If they only knew to whom they were doing this!* What did He think? He loved them. He desired to lead them to God. He wanted them to be forgiven. And perhaps some were. Perhaps some of these same soldiers were the ones who, when Jesus died, confessed: "***Truly, this was the Son of God!***"

What love Jesus has, even in the face of hate. That is His love for you, O sinner, as well. For when we sin, are we any better, any different, than these soldiers?

Then when the soldiers were finished and tired of their game, they ***lead Him away to crucify Him.*** And they force a man named Simon to carry His cross. Was Simon just in the right place at the right time? Or was it the wrong place at the wrong time? After this, we are not told anything more about this Simon, or what effect this day had on his life. But perhaps this is no accident. Perhaps here we are to think of ourselves. For, the Scriptures tell us the cross will come into our lives as well - God laying it upon each of us, not as punishment, but to teach us and train us in the faith. To compel us to bear the burdens of others in love. To kill the old, sinful men in us, and conform us to the image of Christ. In this way, the cross is not a burden, but a gift. A loving God working good *in* us, just as with that first cross there was a loving God working good *for* us. That we too confess Him as the Son of God, our Saviour of love.

Hymn #426 "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"

## **V. Weeping and Mocking**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way. (Matthew 27:33-44)

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*They took His clothes and divided them.* This loving God, who clothed His naked and shamed children in the Garden of Eden, and who clothes us now with His righteousness, would hang in naked shame upon the cross.

Then they hang the charge above His head: ***Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.*** Quite right. And this was not the first time Israel had rejected her King. After God had given them the Promised Land, they pleaded through the prophet Samuel for God to give them a king just like all the other nations. God was their true king, but with Him they were not satisfied. Yet though they reject Him, God does not reject them. Though they are faithless, He is faithful. Now, when Jesus comes as their King, they reject Him again. *We have no king but Caesar!* they said. But let us not look down on them; we too are guilty of this. For all sin is rejecting God as our King, and putting ourselves on the throne instead. *The Shepherd dies for sheep who love to wander.*

And so He hangs, a naked, rejected King, His throne a cross, His attendants two criminals. *And He would not come down.* For this was necessary. It was necessary for this Temple of God in human flesh to be destroyed, so that it could be raised three days later! He would not come down. He could; He won't. He remains faithful, even unto death. He would trust God to deliver Him. For if He had come down, the door to glory and life would be shut to us forever. But Jesus had come to open the door of the grave. To open the door of Paradise. For you.

## **VI. Dying Prayer**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." (Matthew 27:45-49)

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The pain grew worse as time went on. The nails sending piercing waves of pain through His body. As He hangs, bones strain against tendons and ligaments, and each breath is harder and harder to gain. But greater than any physical pain is the sin of the world, now bearing heavy upon Him. Your sin and mine.

Now the darkness descends, and Jesus cries out to His Father, "***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?***" It is not a cry of desperation, but a prayer of faith. In the midst of His pain, Jesus turns to the Word of God that has been on His lips and in His heart all His life - the psalms. So that even as He is forsaken, with the sin of the world upon Him, yet He knows God is His Father and is faithful and hears His prayer.

We cannot comprehend this moment of the cross; what Jesus was going through. We cannot comprehend it because He endures it so that we never will. And we never do. Though it may seem at times as if we are forsaken of God, stricken, smitten, and afflicted by Him, we are not. Though it may seem at times as if God doesn't see our need, or care about our hurt, or hear our prayer - He does. Though God sometimes tests us, He never forsakes us. There is no reason for Him to. Jesus endured this for us, so now, for us, is only the love and mercy of our heavenly Father.

This we *believe*. Not what we see, not what we feel, not what seems to be happening in our world or lives. *This we believe* - the Word of our Lord from the cross. For His Word is truth.

Hymn #420 (vs. 1-3) "Christ, the Life of All the Living"

## **VII. Death and Burial**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (Matthew 27:50-61)

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The prophet Isaiah says an interesting thing. He says that Jesus' *resting place will be glorious* (Is 11:10). Which sounds quite strange, for graves aren't glorious.

Graves are terrible. They are monuments of sin and separation. They are places of sadness and grief, not glory.

That is how Joseph and the women felt, as Joseph did one last loving deed for Jesus. How heavy their hearts must have been as they took Jesus' lifeless body down from the cross, wrapped Him, and laid Him in the tomb. That's always the hardest part - the last part, the laying our loved one in the ground. It is so final and there is nothing after that.

Except for Jesus! For Jesus' tomb *will* be glorious, for it is truly only His resting place, and soon it will be empty. His body will rest on the Sabbath Day, fulfilling it once and for all. A day of rest after the violent struggle against sin He did in our place. But then He will rise to life again, victorious over sin, satan, death, and the grave! He will burst the bonds so powerful over us, and leave them tattered and destroyed in His resurrection. Just as He said He would.

And just as He promised, we, too, will rise from the dust of death. We, too, will rise victorious on the last day. For as Jesus went through death to life again, so will He take with Him all who belong to Him through death to life again. And that day *will* be a glorious day, when all sorrow and sadness flees, replaced by joy and praise.

***It is finished,*** Jesus said when He died (John 19:30). Truly, it is finished. All that is needed for our forgiveness, our life, our salvation has been done. Our Saviour has redeemed us and there is now nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:??). On this Good Friday, we remember that. On this Good Friday, we celebrate that. That this is not a day of defeat, but of victory. Sin, death, and hell have done their worst, but have lost - and we have won.

And so to our Saviour Jesus Christ, our Great Redeemer, be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. AMEN.