**THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS**

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

**Prelude Behold and See (Handel)**

**Song God is forgiveness (Taizé)**

***(****God is forgiveness.*

*Dare to forgive and God will be with you.*

*God is forgiveness. Love and do not fear.)*

**Reader 1 Gordon Wilson** lay in the rubble of the War Memorial in Enniskillen on 8 November 1987 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 John McAreavey** whose wife of 12 days, Michaela, was murdered in Mauritius while on their honeymoon in 2011 was asked if he forgave her killers. He said – ‘Nothing is impossible. Being Catholic and trying to follow the example we’re set …forgiveness is a big part of it’.

**Reader 3 St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross** (Edith Stein) 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.

As a forgiven people we are called to be a forgiving people. That is the challenge before us as we reflect on the words of Jesus on the Cross – ‘**Forgive them for** **they know not what they do’** andas weproclaim in faith **‘I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins’.**

**Silent Prayer**

**Intercession Let us pray,**

**All say:** 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

We ask this in the Spirit of peace and through your gentle Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Song Make me a channel of your Peace (Sebastian Temple)**

Make me a channel of your peace.   
Where there is hatred let me bring your love.   
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord   
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.  
  
Oh, Master grant that I may never seek  
So much to be consoled as to console   
To be understood as to understand   
To be loved as to love with all my soul.   
  
Make me a channel of your peace  
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope   
Where there is darkness, only light   
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

Oh, Master grant that I may never seek  
So much to be consoled as to console   
To be understood as to understand   
To be loved as to love with all my soul.   
  
Make me a channel of your peace  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned   
In giving to all men that we receive   
And in dying that we're born to eternal life.

1. ***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)*

**Song Jesus Remember Me (Taizé)**

**All sing:** *Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom*

**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 Paradise Inn.

On the Cross, Jesus promised paradise today not tomorrow - here and now. 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 make life heaven when our openness prevails over intolerance and forgiveness conquers resentment. We can build up people burdened with worry, pain or grief by our 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 12th 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.’

**Reader 3** The process of building up the kingdom of God here and now which is begun in faith will be completed **at the resurrection of the dead** when we are embraced fully into the peace of eternal life. Our Credo - **I believe in the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting** goes hand in hand with these words of Jesus on the cross ‘**Today you will be with me in Paradise.’**

**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

1. ***‘Woman, Behold your Son! ...Behold your mother.’ (John 19:26-27)***

**Prelude Ave Maria (Caccini)**

**Song Holy Mary, Full of Grace (Paul Décha)**

**All sing:** When creation was begun  
 God had chosen you to be  
 Mother of his blessed son  
 Holy Mary full of grace  
 Ave, Ave, Ave Maria.  
  
 When creation was restored  
 You were there beside the Lord  
 Whom you cherished and adored  
 Holy Mary full of grace

Ave, Ave, Ave Maria.

**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. In the Funeral Liturgy we pray that ‘life is changed not ended’. 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. They believed that Jesus, **born of the Virgin Mary,** did not abandon his people. He gave them his mother to be theirs as an example of his faithfulness, love and compassion.

**Reader 2** There is a miniature picture of the Ascension in the 6th century Rabbula Gospel Book from Syria. In this image we see the apostles in confusion as Jesus is taken up to heaven while Mary stands calmly in prayer amid the chaos. That is the precious gift that Jesus gave to us and to the Christian community at Calvary, a woman of prayer and understanding. We cannot turn to Mary, our Mother, without acknowledging her Son to whom she gave birth. At Cana, Mary saw the embarrassment of the hosts at the wedding and immediately acted because she knew that her son would not let the people down. By changing the water into wine Jesus offered more than a miracle of physical transformation but the symbol of a baptism that was more than some superficial washing. This baptism into the family of Christ, the Church, in blood and water makes us ‘blood’ brothers and sisters of each other with all that goes with such a relationship. As we reflect on the words of Jesus on the cross - **‘Woman, Behold your Son! ...Behold your mother’** weopen our hearts to one who understands suffering and loss but one who wants to lead us to her Son the ultimate source of comfort and hope.

**Silent Prayer**

**Intercession**

**All All say:** Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

**Song Bogoroditsye Dievo (Rachmaninov)**

1. ***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mark 15:34)***

**Prelude He Was Despised (Handel)**

**Song My God, My God (Liam Lawton)**

**All sing:** My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Why have you forsaken me?

**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 leading a good life. St. John of the Cross reflects on 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. ‘

**Reader 2** 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? These are questions that can only be answered from a place of faith. In the creed we profess that Jesus **‘suffered under Pontius Pilate’.** 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 3** 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. – God is by our sideeven though we want to say this verse of Psalm 22 at times **with Jesus ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’**

**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 The Clouds’ Veil (Liam Lawton)**

**All sing:** Even though the rain hides the stars,

Even though the mist swirls the hills,

Even when dark clouds veil the sky, God is by my side.

Even when the sun shall fall in sleep,

Even when at dawn the sky shall weep,

Even in the night when storms shall rise,

God is by my side, you are by my side.

1. ***‘I thirst.’ (John 19:28)***

**Prelude Schindler’s List (John Williams)**

**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 1** So many people in our society carry bottled water around with them you would think 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 all those with whom we share God’s creation that we improve our awareness of the need to preserve limited resources such as water and of the environmental consequences of our industries. Jesus thirsts today in so many parts of the world where the provision of clean water is a luxury and people die of thirst. Thank God there are so many charitable people who give authentic witness to the Gospel by their commitment to people in many developing and often dangerous parts of the world. The Holy Faith Sisters joined with the Kiltegan Fathers in a new mission to the people of Southern Sudan during the Year of Faith.

**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 puts is 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.’ When we acknowledge in the Creed that we believe in ‘**God, creator of heaven and earth’** we might also recognize that we are part of God’s creation and that our thirst for satisfaction in life can only be quenched by living in communion with God and with one another. When Jesus said **‘I thirst’** he was physically suffering as do many of our brothers and sisters around the world today. Jesus also opens up the question for us about what will really satisfy our thirst at this time.

**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.

**Song Song Let all who are thirsty come (Taizé)**

Let all who are thirsty come.  
Let all who wish receive the water of life freely.  
Amen, come Lord Jesus.  
Amen, come Lord Jesus.

1. ***‘It is finished.’ (John 19:30)***

**Prelude Caoineadh na dTrí Muire (The Lament of the three Marys)**

**Song Within our darkest night (Taizé)**

**All sing:** Within our darkest night,

You kindle the fire that never dies away,

That never dies away

**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 to all people who made no distinctions or judgements about them. 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.

**Reader 2** It’s not over yet in fact it’s only beginning if we take seriously the challenge of St. Teresa of Avila:

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
no hands but yours,  
no feet but yours,  
Yours are the eyes through which to look out  
Christ's compassion to the world  
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about  
doing good;  
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless people now.”

**Reader 3** What Jesus is saying to us today is ‘it is finished’ in terms of His witness on earth and that ‘it’s over to you now’. He is telling us that he has given everything and now it’s our turn. We are not alone in our mission because God sent the Holy Spirit to live within us and our Church. As we reflect on the words of Jesus on the cross **‘it is finished’** we also think of our profession of faith in the **‘Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church’.** Each day is a new day of hope and promise when we can give authentic witness to the Risen Christ alive in our world today with help of God’s Spirit and the Christian community throughout the world.

**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)**

1. ***‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’(Luke 23:46)***

**Prelude Ebarme Dich(Bach)**

**Song Father, I put my life in your hands (John Michael Talbot)**

**All sing:** Father, I put my life in your hands

**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 themselves completely enjoy the blessing of letting go though at times they can be cursed by uncertainty and insecurity. 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’.

**Reader 3** In the Creed we profess that ‘**Jesus Christ, was crucified, died and was** **buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead’**. We are called to live our faith every day and that journey involves both death and resurrection until we reach our eternal home where struggle and suffering will be no more. As we pray with Jesus **‘Father, I put my life in our hands’** let us trust in God’s providence and mercy and let go of what holds us back from authentic Christian living and dying. Our commitment to this kind of eternal living is captured in Mark Strand’s poem based on the Seven Last Words which gives us this final thought: ‘To that place, to the keeper of that place, I commit myself.’

**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 Into your hands, O Father (Taizé)**

**All sing:** Into your hand, O Father, I commend my spirit