

The Way of the Pilgrim in Holy Week

Journeying with Christ through the foreign lands of his Passion

The First Sunday

Calmly, humbly, you rest a hand on the donkey's muzzle. You look victorious but deeply humble, majestic but lowly.

Standing beside you, I am knotted with anxiety, excitement, fear, joy. I try to set my face like flint. May I be willing to go with you, my Lord, into the lion's den.

I yearn to be your companion, your strength but, instead, feel more in need of your courage, your fidelity, and your trust before what is to come.

Lord, help me to be a loyal, courageous friend to you in all those who stand alone in the face of persecution. Give me a generous, willing, open heart. Amen.

The Monday

Though they have already given us an early breakfast, Mary and Martha press some extra bread into my hand for the journey. Lazarus, still fresh from the grave, raises his hand to us in blessing.

From the safety of our friends' home in Bethany we set out for the Temple forecourt.

Though not yet light, I can make you out, Lord, striding ahead, sure of foot. There is an eagerness about you this morning. You are determined to cleanse the house of your Father from every kind of injustice and oppression. It will not be a den of thieves by evening.

Lord, help me in every situation, great and small, to be eager to fight for you, for your house of justice, equality and compassion. Amen.

The Tuesday

From our base under the colonnades of the Temple, I watch you, Lord, as you teach, heal, and pronounce woes on the religious leaders.

When they try to ambush you, you decide to give your two greatest commandments – love of God and love of neighbour – which you say are really one commandment.

You then draw our attention to a widow approaching the Temple treasury. Whilst admiring the great generosity of her poor offering, you call out the system that has perpetuated her poverty and which places burdens on those least able to carry them.

Are you thinking of your own mother, now a widow herself? She was only able to offer two doves when presenting you as a baby in the Temple.

Lord, help me always to be ready to respond to those who are marginalised, burdened, even “devoured” (*Mark 12:40*) by religious and political ideologies, and to always do what I can to call out unjust systems. Amen.

The Wednesday

After two exhausting and dangerous days we lie low with our friends in Bethany. It is a day for recovery, rest and fellowship, for savouring our blessings and for giving thanks.

I notice that, at some point, Judas makes his way alone toward the city. I think back to his reaction of just a few days ago when Mary anointed your feet, Lord, in this very house... his exaggerated dismay at such a shocking waste of resources. And I think of your response – ‘the poor you will have with you always’.

I savour the way Mary tenderly, lovingly, intimately held your feet that night. She anointed them so generously. Perhaps she is one of only a few who truly knew you... and who truly felt known by you. How else could she have behaved so extravagantly!

Judas, who thought he knew you, is now disconsolate. Full of a seething disappointment he has gone to sell you.

Lord, help me to be big-hearted, open-handed, to ever give generously to the poor who are always with us. Keep me close to you, for whom miserliness and pessimism are unknown. Amen.

The Thursday

I am overcome with the warm closeness of the Upper Room, its smell of freshly cooked food and burning oil lamps. You, Lord, are host to us as you offer us food.

Before I can eat anything, however, you are doing something unexpected. Removing your garments, putting on an apron, and taking a bowl and a towel, you kneel before me. Your rough hands hold my feet, tenderly, lovingly, intimately as you run cool water over them, and then dry them with a towel. Now it is you who are behaving extravagantly!

You are reverencing me, no longer your servant, nor disciple, but friend. And I feel a growing desire to imitate you and do likewise.

Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, Lazarus his grave-cloths. What do I need to remove to serve? Before whom shall I kneel in memory of you?

Lord, in the Last Suppers and the Gethsemanes of my life, help to be attentive, to keep my eyes and ears open, to stay awake. Your compassion will help me to stay beside the dying, to wash the feet of the burdened, to go willingly with those lost in the lonely darkneses of their nighttime. Nourished and encouraged by your grace, I will reverence you in others. Amen.

The Friday

Lord, this is the hour of your abandonment. I watch as you are betrayed and handed over to be disowned, falsely accused, interrogated, tortured, unjustly sentenced.

Again, you are disrobed, ready to serve. In memory of this, the altars of the world are now stripped bare, and tabernacles left open and empty.

Before the Cross I feel torn. I would run from it, but love keeps me close. I lift my eyes to meet your gaze. How hard it is to bear the sufferings of others, especially those we love. To love is to suffer. To be vulnerable is to be wounded.

Between your gasps for breath, I hope you can catch the residue of Mary's perfume, the scent of which rises from your feet and lingers in the air.

Lord, you hang shoulder to shoulder with the victim of every oppressive regime, false policy and inhuman ideology. Whose sufferings are you asking me to bear? Help me to be faithful, to persevere, to trust, to suffer to love. Amen.

The Saturday

The light has faded to grey on this liturgy-less day, this empty day. You asked me to wait, so here I am.

But to be patient also means to suffer and it is especially painful to wait without hope or expectation. In the darkness nothing seems to be happening. I must suffer to wait, to be tested in the in-between times, when nothing is guaranteed, nothing is sure.

The stone of the tomb is cold, and I feel out of balance in this empty space. You are gone and I am bereft.

A great silence hangs over all things, a silence that goes deep. Like a bottomless ocean, I plumb its depths. Is something being revealed to me even here? There are no words, only my breathing in the gloom.

Lord, when I start to lose hope, help me to remember that you are not delaying. What looks like the end might not be the end at all. And though I might want to escape it, it is a great gift to be with someone in their fear and confusion. Lead me to those who need someone to wait with them in the dark. May I be for them a person of hope. Amen.

The Second Sunday

I am still touching the rock of the tomb when you, my Lord, break through the silence with a shout of great joy. The pre-dawn darkness is suddenly shot through with the brightness of your radiant smile. And now I can clearly see, shining through the blackness of your sacrifice, the brilliant light of love.

You are inviting me into that love, to share in your joy: 'will you come with me to bring my resurrection to those still in grief, to those awaiting rebirth in the truth, to those who still cling to the past, buried in resentment or regret, to those imprisoned by biased practices or caught in oppressive systems? Will you be, in all the dark places of the world, a beacon of light?'

How easy it seems to be able to say 'yes!' to all of that before the warmth of your smile.

My Lord, you are the beginning and the end of all things. You fill every space. Fill me, now, with your Resurrection life. May I bear it courageously and joyfully into the world, with hope and with the warmth of your radiant smile. Amen.

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