



#5514

ALL EYES ON THE CROSS
A Lenten devotion based on the Seven Last Words
Of Christ from the Cross

Sing: "Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain" *LW 96, TLH 149*

Reader 1: The holy season of Lent has come again. You and I have an appointment with our Savior at the foot of the cross. We go there to quietly meditate and pray. We want to hear once more from our Savior's lips the last words that He spoke before His death.

Our Lord's ministry on earth came to a quick end. No lawyer ever made a better closing statement! In His seven last words from the cross, our Lord reveals His mission on our behalf and brings the story of His earthly life to an end.

Reader 2: Yes, there is a message for us, a message from the Father's heart to ours, a message of peace and pardon, of courage and strength, of life and hope through the wounds and death, and the last words of Jesus Christ our Savior!

Let us listen with our hearts to these seven last words of Jesus and meditate on their meaning for each of us.

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM

First Word: *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*
Luke 23:34

Reader 1: With the love only God could show, Jesus asks that His murderers be forgiven. Sin nailed Christ to the cross; sin put Him to death - your sin and mine. All sin, from Adam to the last person who walks this earth, nailed Jesus to the cross and put Him to death. The sinless, beautiful Savior, full of grace, love and compassion, with His hands and feet pierced, also had His heart pierced with the sins of the whole world.

Reader 2: What impresses us most deeply as we sit at the foot of the cross is that the cross points the way, the only way to forgiveness and peace. Jesus bore our sins so that we might be forgiven! Unless we fully understand that Jesus also prayed this prayer on our behalf, we forfeit His grace and make void the very act that He performed. The only real way to peace - individual peace, domestic peace, national peace, international peace - is the way of the cross. Christ is our Peace!

Prayer: Oh, sinless Son of God, beautiful Savior, I confess that my sins also sent You to Calvary and my guilt made You suffer. Be merciful to me and preserve me from thinking

lightly of sin. Before this Lenten season is past, guide me to seek to restore at least one broken relationship in my life. In Your Name I pray. Amen.

Sing: "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed" *LW 97, TLH 154*

PARDON FOR THE PENITENT

Second Word: *Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."* Luke 23:43

Reader 1: This remarkable promise from the cross is directed to a common criminal who justly deserved the punishment he was receiving. At the very beginning, he too raises a voice of ridicule against Jesus. But gradually he begins to behold the majestic Savior in a different light. He pleads in his last hour, "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" Luke 23:42

Reader 2: Here at the brink of death, this Man of Sorrows snatches a repentant soul from hell. Here on Mount Calvary, amid the jeering and blaspheming, a penitent sinner sees the power and wisdom of God who hangs on the cross beside Him. Jesus also accepts our true repentance and faith and opens the gates of paradise for us.

Prayer: Oh, crucified Savior, may Your cross be an eloquent reminder of my sins and a constant call to sincere repentance. In these moments before Your cross, give to me a compassionate heart for a coworker, or a neighbor, or a stranger who needs my gentle reverent witness to Your sacrificial love for him or her. By the miracle of Your grace may we enjoy eternity together! Amen.

Sing: "Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound" *LW 509*

FAMILIES BLESSED AT THE CROSS

Third Word: *When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother."* John 19:26-27

Reader 1: In the midst of His anguish, the Savior speaks simple, tender words that cause John to take Mary into his own home from that very hour. In His last testament on earth, Jesus provides for His mother's support and comfort. Mary is to take her place in a new home.

Reader 2: The loving care of Jesus for the family and the home has not ceased. He wants to be in the heart of the home; the home's great unifier, the one who can direct the individual lives of the family, and who also directs and strengthens the family in its group life. What a joyful sight to see families bowing in prayer before the Christ of the cross and receiving His forgiving love!

Prayer: O God of mercy, save our troubled world from the tragedy of weakened homes and broken relationships. May I, a parent, or son or daughter, surrender my life completely to Your crucified Son, Jesus Christ. Through His grace, mercy and power, may the selfishness, jealousies, lack of love and respect which break families apart be banished. Help me make my home a haven of love, respect, forgiveness, comfort and peace! In Your crucified Son's Name. Amen.

Sing: "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" *LW 113, TLH 172*

THE LONELIEST DEATH IN THE WORLD

Fourth Word: *About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" - which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Matthew 27:46

Reader 1: Through six hours of exhaustion, exposure and ridicule, Jesus had hung on the cross, but now we see Him in His greatest agony, more terrifying than all the pain of the crucifixion combined, was the convulsing agony that made Him cry out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" It is said that Martin Luther meditated upon these words as he sat riveted to his chair, motionless as a corpse for hours, and finally exclaimed, "God forsaken by God - who can understand it?"

Reader 2: Do you know what being forsaken by God implies? It means that God turned His face away from His Son; that He withdrew all love from Him, forsaking Him completely. For Jesus it meant the deepest depth of agony, and He cried out in bewilderment, "Why?" God answered, "You must be forsaken, that all people might never be forsaken. You must die, that all might live!"

Sing: "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" *LW 115, TLH 175*

THIRST FOR SOULS

Fifth Word: *Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."* John 19:28

Reader 1: The fifth word of our Savior became at once the most simple and human as well as the most profound and divine of all the seven words from the cross. Thirst is, perhaps, the most common accompaniment to physical suffering. In full possession of His senses, He wants to commend His spirit to His Father and die victoriously. However, as true man, He listens for a moment to His raging thirst and asks for something to drink.

Reader 2: Jesus, willing to suffer every pain and agony, beautifully portrays a far deeper thirst - a thirst for our souls - your soul and mine, for redemption of mankind, for the rescue of the perishing, for the relief of the distressed, for the healing of the broken-hearted, for the eternal companionship of those estranged from Him by sin.

Prayer: Jesus, lover of my soul, I thank and praise You that Your thirst was also for my soul. May I find in You the water of life that quenches my thirst, the divine comfort that eases my aching heart, and the total and complete forgiveness that brings peace to my troubled conscience. During this Lenten season, give me a thirst for at least one or two souls whom I shall name in my heart, who are separated from You, wandering and groping for the truth...(a moment of silence). Help me to show them the open arms of Your cross, which for them can become the open gates of heaven! In Your loving Name. Amen.

Sing: "Jesus, in Your Dying Woes" LW 112, TLH 180

OUR COMPLETED SALVATION

Sixth Word: *When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."* John 19:30

Reader 1: These words mark the greatest sacrifice ever given. The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, has been slain. In this dread ordeal, the heel of the suffering Savior was indeed bruised, but when the Redeemer cried, "It is finished," the head of Satan was crushed! There must have been joy in the Savior's heart and triumph in His voice when He uttered that cry of victory!

Reader 2: Because the Son of God has performed every sacred act required for our eternal salvation by the divine justice of the Heavenly Father, you and I, grasping the cross of Christ with the firm grasp of faith, are raised above the uncertainty which limits us to hoping, yearning and praying for our salvation. We have a finished faith, sealed in the blood of the cross which proclaims, "...*whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*" John 3:16

Prayer: O Lamb of God, Savior of the world, Your willingness to die for me, a lost and condemned creature, is so overwhelming. "I scarce can take it in!" You redeemed me, not with gold or silver, but with Your holy precious blood and with Your innocent suffering and death. I am Yours, and You are mine, my precious Savior King! Stir me to proclaim Your victorious message of salvation to the world, by personal prayer and financial support for our missionaries, especially for the ones I now name in my heart...(a moment of silence). Help me to write a letter of encouragement and comfort to them as they bring the Gospel message to those who have never heard it. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

Sing: "God Loved the World So that He Gave" LW 352, TLH 245

VICTORY AND PEACE

Seventh Word: *Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."* When he had said this, he breathed his last. Luke 23:46

Reader 1: The last word of our Savior from the cross is not a word of despair, helplessness or defeat, but a word of victory, life and peace. His suffering is ended and His final triumph about to begin.

Reader 2: What an example of Christian death our Savior gives us. The One, who on the cross committed His spirit to the Father's hands, is now with the Father in glory. He was lifted up on a cross of suffering, only to be lifted higher still to a throne of glory. As we focus on the cross one more time, it now becomes a seal of our redemption and a crown of glory for us. One day we too will worship before the throne of God and sing a new song!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to keep my eyes fixed on You and Your cross as the only real source of power and hope that can change my life. May You keep me faithful so that, when at death my spirit has been commended to the Father, I may awaken among the throng that crowns Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne! Amen.

Sing: "Crown Him with Many Crowns" *LW 278, TLH 341*

Prayer: *"Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"* Revelation 7:12

All Scripture is from NIV.

ALL EYES UPON THE CROSS - Written by Lorna Winterstein
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League
Revised 2005