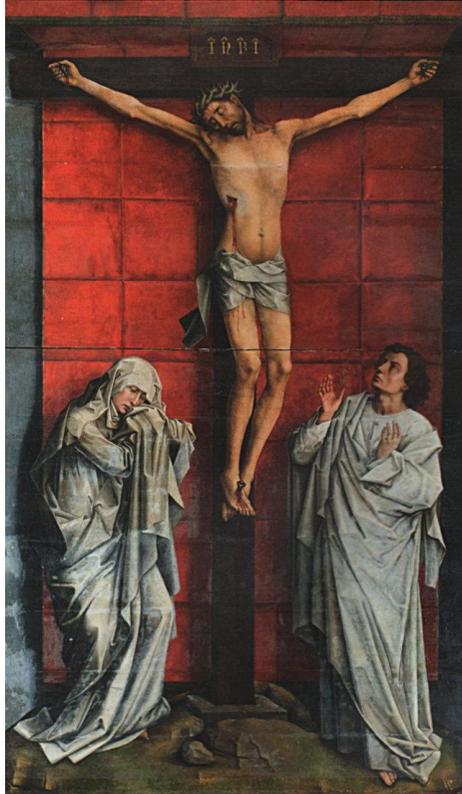


St Matthew's Westminster



Spiritual Resources *for Holy Week*

*Sunday 2nd April -
Saturday 8th April 2023*

An Introduction to Holy Week

Holy Week observances began in Jerusalem in the earliest days of the Church, when devout people travelled to Jerusalem at Passover to re-enact the events of the week leading up to the Resurrection.

Egeria was a Christian who travelled widely during the period of 381-385 and wrote about Christian customs and observances in Egypt, Palestine, and Asia Minor. She described how religious tourists to Jerusalem re-enacted the events of Holy Week. On Palm Sunday afternoon, the crowds waved palm fronds as they made a procession from the Mount of Olives into the city. Of course, the observances must have begun quite a number of years before Egeria witnessed them, or they wouldn't have been so elaborate.

Holy Week observances spread to Spain by the fifth century, to Gaul and England by the early seventh century, and eventually to Rome in the twelfth century. Egeria's description is important as it is the earliest we still have. The tourists took the customs home with them.

Holy Week is the same in the eastern and western Church, but because eastern Christians use the Julian Calendar to calculate Easter, the celebrations occur at different times. However, the following events in the week before Easter are the same, East and West, relative to the date of Easter:

- Palm Sunday, *the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem.*
- Maundy Thursday, *the institution of the Holy Eucharist and the betrayal by Judas.*
- Good Friday, *the arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus Christ.*
- Holy Saturday, *the Sabbath on which Jesus rested in the grave.*

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Sunday April 2nd

Palm Sunday

Reading

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately."' "

They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

St Mark 11. 1-11

Prayer

O Lord, who on this day entered the rebellious city that later rejected you:
we confess that our wills are as rebellious as Jerusalem's,
that our faith is often more show than substance,
that our hearts are in need of cleansing.
Have mercy on us, son of David, Saviour of our lives.
Help us to lay at your feet
all that we have and all that we are, trusting you
to forgive what is sinful,
to heal what is broken,
to welcome our praises,
and to receive us as your own. Amen.

Fig Monday April 3rd

The second day of Holy Week is properly known as "Holy Monday," but in the Middle Ages, it came to be nicknamed "Fig Monday," because the Bible tells of how Jesus preached on the power of prayer under a barren fig tree on the day after his entry into Jerusalem.

Reading

In the morning, when Jesus returned to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, 'May no fruit ever come from you again!' And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither at once?' Jesus answered them, 'Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, "Be lifted up and thrown into the sea", it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.'

St John 14. 1-7

Reflection

The Cross is the word through which God has responded to evil in the world. Sometimes it may seem as though God does not react to evil, as if he is silent. And yet, God has spoken, he has replied, and his answer is the Cross of Christ: a word which is love, mercy, forgiveness. It also reveals a judgment, namely that God, in judging us, loves us. Remember this: God, in judging us, loves us. If I embrace his love then I am saved, if I refuse it, then I am condemned, not by him, but my own self, because God never condemns, he only loves and saves.

Pope Francis

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love
on the hard wood of the Cross that everyone might come
within the reach of your saving embrace.
So clothe your Church with the Holy Spirit,
that we, reaching forth our hands in love,
may bring those who do not know you to faith in your saving love,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Temple Tuesday April 4th

The significance of Holy Tuesday is not easily grasped. In a single day, Jesus would simultaneously condemn the religious authorities while confirming his deity. The cleansing of the Temple caused the Pharisees to question Jesus' right to do "these things." Jesus had not received his authority from the religious leaders . . . so they wanted answers.

Reading

In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

Psalm 71. 1-3

Reflection

Come to your Temple here with liberation
And overturn these tables of exchange
Restore in me my lost imagination
Begin in me for good, the pure change.
Come as you came, an infant with your mother,
That innocence may cleanse and claim this ground
Come as you came, a boy who sought his father
With questions asked and certain answers found,
Come as you came this day, a man in anger
Unleash the lash that drives a pathway through
Face down for me the fear the shame the danger
Teach me again to whom my love is due.
Break down in me the barricades of death
And tear the veil in two with your last breath.

Malcolm Guite (b 1957)

Prayer

We give glory to you, Lord,
who raised up your cross to span the jaws of death
like a bridge by which souls might pass
from the region of the dead to the land of the living.
We give glory to you who put on the body of a single mortal human
and made it the source of life for every other mortal human.

St Ephrem of Edessa (306-373)

Spy Wednesday April 5th

Spy Wednesday gets its name because this is the day on which Judas betrayed Jesus to the Sanhedrin. Because Judas is thought to be duplicitous, his actions conjured up the image of a spy. The synoptic gospels all include an account of the betrayal.

Reading

As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to the disciples, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised.' And they were greatly distressed.

St Matthew 17. 22-23

Reflection

Judas, the archetypal traitor, is the subject of our meditation on Spy Wednesday. What led him to betray Jesus, and why did he choose thirty pieces of silver over his relationship with the Son of God? These are questions that have plagued theologians and scholars for centuries. But ultimately, Judas' betrayal serves as a reminder that even those closest to us can be capable of great treachery. As W. H. Auden wrote, 'We would rather be ruined than changed. We would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the moment and let our illusions die.'

But let us not lose hope. The story of Judas is also a story of redemption. Just as Jesus forgave Judas, so too can we find forgiveness and grace in our own lives. As the poet T. S. Eliot wrote, 'The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.' Let us use Spy Wednesday as an opportunity to reflect on our own capacity for betrayal, and to seek the path of love and forgiveness.

Prayer

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.
May your body and blood be my food and drink.
May your passion and death be my strength and life.
Jesus, with you by my side enough has been given.
May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your Cross.
Let me not run from the love which you offer,
But hold me safe from the forces of evil.
On each of my dyings shed your light and your love.
Keep calling to me until that day comes,
When, with your saints, I may praise you for ever. Amen.

David Fleming SJ

Maundy Thursday April 6th

Maundy is derived from the Latin word for 'command,' and refers to Jesus' commandment to the disciples to 'Love one another as I have loved you.' On this day we commemorate the Last Supper of Our Lord, which instituted the Holy Eucharist.

Reading

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11. 23-26

Reflection

Here is the source of every sacrament,
The all-transforming presence of the Lord,
Replenishing our every element
Remaking us in his creative Word.
For here the earth herself gives bread and wine,
The air delights to bear his Spirit's speech,
The fire dances where the candles shine,
The waters cleanse us with His gentle touch.
And here He shows the full extent of love
To us whose love is always incomplete,
In vain we search the heavens high above,
The God of love is kneeling at our feet.
Though we betray Him, though it is the night.
He meets us here and loves us into light.

Malcolm Guite (b 1957)

Prayer

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Good Friday April 7th

The term 'Good Friday' does not actually mean that the Friday in question was good, positive or nice. Used in this context, the word 'Good' carries the same meaning as the original Old English word, in that it means holy. Thus, this day is also referred to as Holy Friday. However, we argue that the day of Christ's crucifixion was good in its way, because it was the day that Christ died on the cross for the redemption of the world.

Reading

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shrivelled; I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots. But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!

Psalm 22. 14-19

Reflection

No, it was not the Jews who crucified,
Nor who betrayed you in judgment place,
Nor who, Lord Jesus, spat into your face,
Nor who with buffets struck you as You died.
No, it was not the soldiers fistled bold
Who lifted up the hammer and nail,
Or raised the cursed cross on Calvary's hill,
Or, gambling, tossed the dice to win Your robe.
I am the one, O Lord, who brought You there,
I am the heavy cross you had to bear,
I am the rope that bound you to the tree,
The whip, the nail, the hammer, and the spear,
The blood-stained crown of thorns you had to wear:
It was my sin, alas, it was for me.

Jacobus Revius (1586-1658)

Prayer of St Richard of Chichester

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the many benefits which thou hast won for me, for all the cruel pains and insults which thou hast borne for me. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Holy Saturday April 8th

Holy Saturday is a day of waiting and preparing as Mary did near the tomb of her Son. It is a day without liturgy, caught as between two waves of the sea. While Mary did not really know what would happen next, there was a sense of anticipation that there is more to come; a sense we need to keep with us today. We can identify with her in our own waiting.

Reading

Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth.'

Hosea 6. 1-3

Reflection

A curiously empty day,
As if the world's life
Had gone underground.
The April sun
Warming dry grass
Makes pale spring promises
But nothing comes to pass.
Anger relaxes into despair
As we remember our helplessness,
Remember him hanging there.
We have purchased the spices
But they must wait for tomorrow.
We shall keep today for emptiness
And sorrow.

Elizabeth Rooney

Prayer

Almighty, ever-living God,
whose only-begotten Son descended to the realm of the dead,
and rose from there to glory, grant that your faithful people,
who were buried with him in baptism, may,
by his resurrection, obtain eternal life.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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