

Introduction and prayer:

This Holy Week we journey to the cross with our Lord Jesus Christ. As we hear John's account, we focus on seven moments during that day and, as darkness still seeks to conquer the light, pause to reflect on our own sin, and that of the world.

If you can, light a candle before beginning each day. At the end of each reading keep silence and extinguish your candle to mark the prevailing darkness as we approach Good Friday.

Saturday 4th April

Let us pray:

God of the daytime and the night-time, God of light and darkness, God of joy and sorrow, we worship you.

Through you alone are we able to know that even in the darkest hours hope is present through Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen

1ST MOMENT: 'ECCE HOMO'

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

John 19:1–7 (NRSV)

Reflection:

'Here is the man', 'Ecce homo', the Roman prefect said as he offered Jesus to the crowd. No name now for this nuisance-man whose silent threat causes such alarm.

Yet even the no-name 'Ecce homo' has become a title for paintings, sculptures and verse over the centuries. A no-name title becoming his title, and a no-name handing-over soon to become his fate. Ecce homo – the Word made flesh.

We pray:

Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.

The candle is extinguished.

Sunday 5th April

2ND MOMENT: GABBATHA

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called the Stone Pave-ment, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

John 19:8–16a (NRSV)

Reflection:

Pilate asked what crime Jesus had committed.

It was a good question.

Jesus had annoyed the religious leaders, of that there was no doubt.

He had been critical of social and religious structures.

He had healed the villagers.

He had told stories to the crowds;

He was probably a threat to public law and order;

But was that enough to condemn him, to end his life?
But he would not defend himself –
The storyteller was silent now
And the crowd was noisy,
And Pilate handed him over to be crucified.

We pray:

Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.

The candle is extinguished.

Monday 6th April

3RD MOMENT: GOLGOTHA

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.'

John 19:16b–22 (NRSV)

Reflection:

The article was finished and passed on to the editor for approval. Within a few minutes the call came. 'Are you sure you want to say this?' she asked.

'It's what happened,' the reporter replied. 'Those were the words that were used.'

'But they don't quite reflect our brand, fit in with our readers. Maybe you could say "it seemed" ... or "it appeared that" ... or "she was unclear".'

'But she wasn't. She was clear about what was said and when it occurred and what was meant by it – very clear.'

'OK,' the editor responded, 'if it goes wrong, I'll take the flak. Let it be as you have written.'

Pilate, in a moment of bravery, insists on what has been written – no fudging – ‘the King of the Jews’ it is. Even in the face of the crowd sometimes it has to be said as it is. Even when the mood of the crowd threatens, sometimes it needs to be said as it is.

We pray:

Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.

The candle is extinguished.

Tuesday 7th April

4TH MOMENT: CASTING LOTS

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.’ This was to fulfil what the scripture says, ‘They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.’ And that is what the soldiers did.

John 19:23–25 (NRSV)

Reflection:

Stripped now –
Of clothing
Of disciples
Of friends.
Alone,
Naked and vulnerable,
With nothing to protect you from the pain to come.

We pray:

Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.

The candle is extinguished.

Wednesday 8th April

5TH MOMENT: ‘HERE IS YOUR MOTHER’

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19:25–27 (NRSV)

Reflection:

In a moment all can change. That moment of fearful angelic promise. That moment of Bethlehem's birth pain and first-nursing. That moment of fleeing. That moment of apparent rejection. That moment ... So many moments with him.

And now this moment, this handing over, as the care given to him from birth to death is now received from him, and in this moment, a new home for him and for me.

We pray:

Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.

The candle is extinguished.

Maundy Thursday 9th April

6TH MOMENT: FINISHED

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:28–30 (NRSV)

Reflection:

Finished. So final a word, but what is ever really finished accomplished, completed, except life itself?

A race run, a record set, only serve to herald the next attempt, a new champion and holder of the prize.

But once for all a death of life, an obscuring of light bringing darkness in its wake, as a moment of completion is echoed with finality. Finished ... the end ... extinguished light but only till a brighter dawn.

We pray:

Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.

The candle is extinguished.

Good Friday, 10th April

7TH MOMENT: PIERCED

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

John 19:31–34 (NRSV)

Reflection:

Seven moments of the ordinary.

Crowds, fear, power. Inhumanity made ordinary ...

And so it continues as those with power quash unrest, break limbs, execute trouble-makers, instil fear.

As the chilling ordinariness of shoes and spectacles piled high whilst those who had chosen and bought them, cleaned them and worn them, are nameless numbers in a place of everyday death. No-names, each loved by God, but treated as less than human by others who, being loved by God themselves, risk their very humanity.

And we pause. And we wonder.

In seven moments of ordinary violence, would we be different? Other days will soon come ... the deep, deep sorrow of a garden visit met with a name; a fear-filled room gathering an unexpected visitor; a sad path home becoming a way back to hope; a picnic transformed into a place of restitution. But for now the candles are extinguished, and the darkness prevails.

We pray:

Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.

The candle is extinguished.

Prayers:

We pray for those for whom the terrifying has become the ordinary: for the victims of warfare; for children and mothers unable to live in homes that are their own; for fighters who have become immune to the cries of others; and for politicians who hear only praise.

Lord of the cross, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves, if we have become immune to those who suffer, who have no name, who count for little. We ask for forgiveness for those times when we failed to speak or act.

Lord of the cross, **hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for those who remind us that even in the shadows of pain humanity may shine forth. We give thanks for those who care for the dead and the dying, for those who bring hope.

Lord of the cross, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of the cross, in you alone do we find our hope, even when hope is gone. Amen

A closing reading:

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and

aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

John 19:38–42 (NRSV)

Final prayer:

When hope has left, still we watch and wait.

When darkness prevails, still we search for light.

When the road is hidden, still we seek a guide.

Christ of the cross, hold us in these moments as we wait for a garden vision, a mealtime revelation, a locked room blessing, and a lakeside renewal.

We go in peace.