

THE LIVING
WORD
OF
HOLY
WEEK

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

March 30 - April 8



MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK

On this Monday of Holy Week, let us meet Mary on the ground at the feet of Jesus.

John 12:3 is the second time we meet her at these feet. The first time, she fell at his feet in grief over her brother's death (Jn 11:32). Jesus wept with her and restored her brother to life. This second time, she covered these same feet with a year's wages of expensive perfume and wiped them with her hair (Jn 12:3).

Now, let us move the focus to Judas.

John 12:4-5 is the first and only time he speaks in the Gospel of John. Mary's extravagant act put the spotlight on Jesus, but Judas wanted it. In asking the question about the poor, he pretended to be righteous while actually being greedy.

What blinded Judas to his own blindness? He was in the physical presence of "the light of the world" (Jn 9:5) and "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25), but he could not see what Mary saw. And because he could not see, he had to pretend to be something he was not: a person who actually cared.

Scripture Reading

Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm 36:5-11

Hebrews 9:11-15

John 12:1-11



for reflection, pray:

Jesus, we have a choice.

*We can meet Mary at your feet, vulnerable and grateful.
Or we can stand aloof from you like Judas, pretending and greedy.*

Jesus, I lay down the pretending and choose vulnerability.

Help me with the losses in my life.

Jesus, I lay down the greed and choose gratitude.

Thank you for the gifts in my life.

Amen

TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

Holy Week probably seems like foolishness to people who don't believe in Jesus. Today's readings remind us of this fact. But God intentionally chose foolish, small, weak things to make a point about his work and his kingdom. The way of Jesus—resurrection life, peacemaking, love, putting others first—will never make much sense. Even to those of us who follow Jesus, it can sometimes seem illogical. We await a world where, “Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see you and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

We Christians would like to believe that God chose us because of something good within us, but today's reading from 1 Corinthians totally disavows us of that belief. It reminds us that:

“God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”

Holy Week is a great reminder to not take ourselves too seriously or think of ourselves too highly. What we can brag about—what Scripture encourages us to boast about—is Christ crucified.



for reflection:

*Take some time today to recall
what you were like before Jesus.*

Were you wise, influential, or noble? If the answer is no, no worries—
1 Corinthians reminds us that we are in great company! When we
think about what God has done, we can join with the psalmist in saying,
**“My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your
splendor all day long.”**

Amen

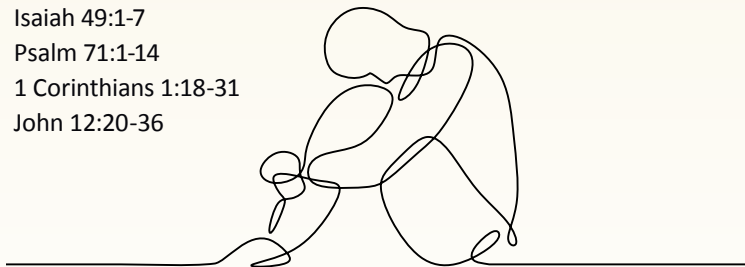
Scripture Reading

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalms 71:1-14

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

John 12:20-36





WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

The reading for today in the Gospel of John is the story of Judas leaving the presence of Jesus to betray him. This text is always shocking because it reveals hidden motives and describes a follower of Jesus falling away, seemingly passing the point of no return.

But don't ever get the idea that it has become too late for you. That's not possible. It may seem to be the record of Judas in the Gospels, but if you are alive and kicking, it is never too late for you to consider your motives and start following Jesus again.

In the previous chapter of John, we see that motives matter in sustaining our discipleship. Mary had clear motives of love, dependence, and gratitude as she poured out expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. In the same text, we see that Judas had dubious motives.

Not only do motives matter in our discipleship, but our motives are revealed under pressure. You can only sustain a false motive for a certain length of time.

If you took stock of your motives for following Jesus, what would you discover? Maybe mixed motives have you doubting you can continue following Jesus or you're close to throwing in the towel. But your story is not over if you're still alive. The grace of Jesus can do anything.

for reflection:

Maybe you know someone who has walked away from their faith. Perhaps you could lift them up to God today in prayer. Maybe your own motives have been broken and you just need the mercy of God. If you are reading this, there is hope. If you are breathing, there is hope. Come back to him today. Follow Jesus out of simple obedience, love, or gratitude.

It is not too late.



Scripture Reading

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 70

Hebrews 12:1-3

John 13:21-32





MAUNDY THURSDAY

The moment of a loved one's death is hard to forget. The memory of their presence is hard to preserve. The greater distance we have between a person's life and death, the harder it is to keep them with us. What was it like to walk with them and talk with them? To laugh with them or argue with them? What was it like to share life?

I wonder, who are the loved ones you long to remember?

It is no small thing that we are given a living picture of Jesus on the night before he died. We are given a story that preserves the fullness of his life and character. It begins with a simple phrase, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1).

Maundy Thursday inaugurates the Triduum, or three Holy Days: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The Triduum is presented as a single, unbroken experience in three parts (echoing the life of the Trinity). On Thursday, we enter the Triduum with a combination of stories and rituals (i.e., foot washing and holy communion) that unite us with the living presence of God's love in Christ. We are given a seat at the table with Jesus and his closest friends. And here, at the Last Supper, Jesus sets the tone for everything to follow in his Passion and Resurrection:

He humbles himself so that others can be exalted.

On Maundy Thursday, he lays down his outer robe, and his dignity, so that others can be honored and exalted—despite their pending betrayal.

On Good Friday, he lays down his life in excruciating fashion, so that others can be exalted and reunified with God—bearing the shame and pain that they deserved.

On Holy Saturday, he enters the humbling darkness of death itself so that others can be rescued and exalted to resurrection life—breaking the curse of humanity’s primal sin.

These three Holy Days are an unbroken experience of God’s self-giving love; a love that creates new life. Self-giving love is a living picture of Jesus.

Here’s the invitation: We are given a living picture of Jesus so that we can preserve his presence in the world. We are the Body of Christ who are meant to keep his self-giving love alive and active. Holy Communion, or Eucharist, is our nourishment (1 Cor 11:23-26).

for reflection:

As you enter these three Holy Days, consider:

- **Where do you most need to be filled with God’s self-giving love?**
- **Do you ever find yourself, like Peter, offended or overwhelmed by God’s self-giving love (Jn 13:6-9)?**
- **How can you exercise humility for the sake of exalting others?**
- **What would it mean to embody God so fully that even before people learn about Jesus they have already experienced his self-giving love through you (Jn 13:35)?**

Scripture Reading

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalms 116:1-2, 12-19

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35



GOOD FRIDAY

Good Friday does not mean good in the sense that we use it in modern English (e.g., “This cookie is really good”). The term *good* likely comes from Middle English and means holy or sacred.

Good Friday is a holy or sacred day because on this day we remember that Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Son of God who took on flesh, was crucified for our sins.

As you begin, understand that this day exists because of you and me. Men and women were created by God to worship and love their Creator. Instead, we chose, and continue to choose, to be our own kings, to be self-ruled, to rebel against our Maker, to satisfy our own pride and lust.

You and I willfully sin against the law of God. All sin is worthy of the displeasure and wrath (righteous anger) of God. Modern people revolt at the idea of the wrath of God. We wonder, “How can a loving God also be a God of wrath?”

Becky Pippert, in her book *Hope Has Its Reasons*, writes, “Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might toward strangers? Far from it. ... Anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference ... God’s wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer of sin which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.”

Good Friday is a sacred day because, on this day, the Father did not show indifference to the cancer of sin destroying his children. Instead, he offered the one thing that would heal us: the life of his Son, Jesus Christ. The Scripture readings for today are saturated with the agony Jesus faced as he was tried, tortured, and crucified on the cross.

Psalms 22 is a psalm Jesus will recite on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This psalm, written centuries before Jesus’ earthly life, is deeply messianic, in that it clearly foreshadows his death. It mentions the insults, mockery, hands and feet being pierced, and lots cast for his clothing.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is another messianic, prophetic text about this sacred day. It tells of a servant who “was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness ... despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.” Take some time to read this Scripture slowly, specifically 53:4-6, to see how Isaiah points to the reality that his punishment brings us peace, his wounds our healing.

This was no mistake, Isaiah tells us, but the “Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer ... to make his life an offering for sin.”

Read John 18:1-19:42, which is John’s account of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. Again, notice Jesus’ command to Peter: “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” Jesus is fully aware that the cup of wrath he is about to drink comes not from his enemies but from his Father.

Good Friday is a holy, sacred day because Jesus paid for your sins on the cross. His life was a gift of love from the Father to you, and the Son offered it willingly for your healing. This is why the final readings from the book of Hebrews are so powerful.

Hebrews 10:16-25 tells us “we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.” Therefore, Hebrews 4:14-16 and 5:7-9 encourage us, “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Your sin is forever paid for because of Jesus’ obedience on Good Friday. As Jesus surrendered his final breath on the cross, he cried, “It is finished.” You are forgiven and free from sin’s penalty to live your life as the beloved son or daughter of your Father. Go running, like a child with confidence, into the Father’s throne room. An endless store of mercy and grace is there for the taking.

for reflection:

Meditate on the song

“Thank You Jesus for the Blood” by Charity Gayle.

Here is the chorus:

Thank you, Jesus for the blood applied

Thank you, Jesus, it has washed me white

Thank you, Jesus, You have saved my life

Brought me from the darkness into glorious light

Scripture Reading

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

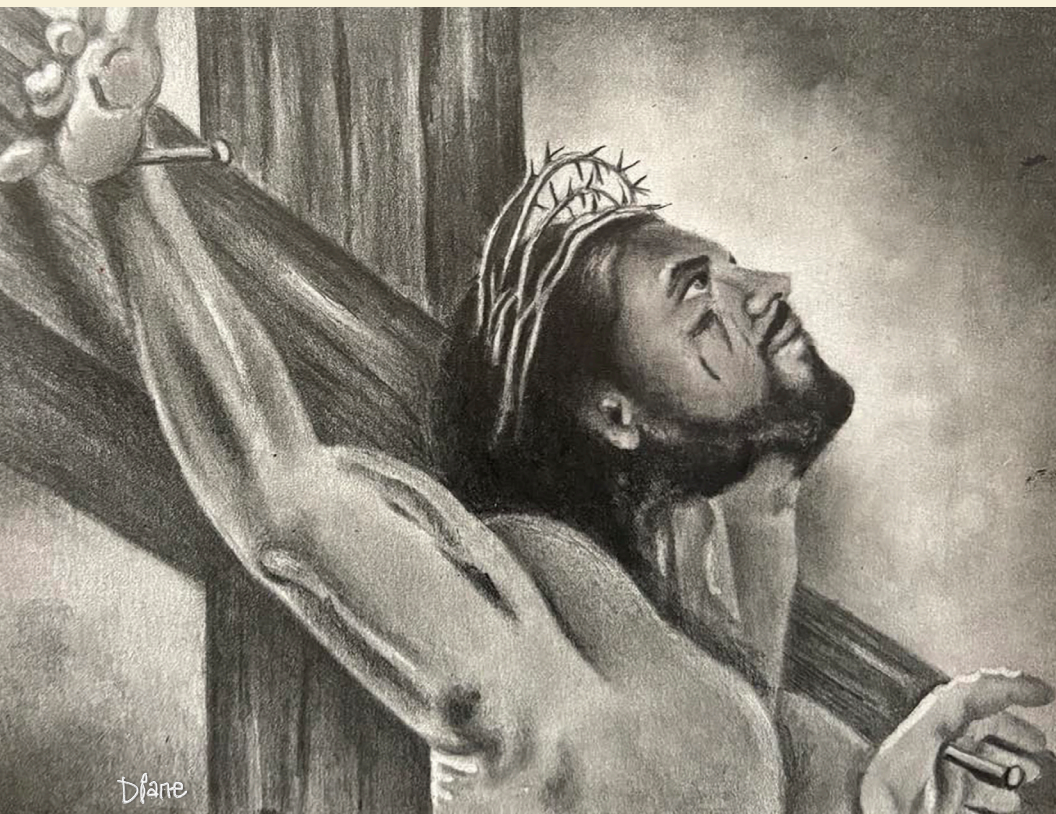
Psalm 22

Hebrews 10:16-25

Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9

John 18:1-19:42





Scripture Reading

Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24

Psalms 31:1-4, 15-16

1 Peter 4:1-8

Matthew 27:57-66

John 19:38-42



HOLY SATURDAY

In the darkness of Holy Saturday, our gaze is drawn to the garden tomb where the body of Jesus was laid. Behind the stone the lips that once spoke truth, now discolored from abuse. The hands that once brought life, now limp. The eyes that once looked with love, now closed.

Today is an invitation to bury your losses and grief behind that stone. Today is also an invitation to consider those who live with a sort of extended “Holy Saturday,” dealing with compounded trauma or grief upon grief.

Remember: This is a garden tomb. Around the stone are hints of the life that is to come. The mortal flesh of our Savior will be resurrected immortal on Easter morning. What was dead will come to life.

So, surrender your losses and grief. Lay them down with Jesus behind the stone. Name the difficulties of the past few months and year. Ask God to do his Holy Saturday work in you.

for reflection:

Lift up those who are enduring their own extended Holy Saturday. Name the ongoing tragedies in our community and world. Ask God to do his Holy Saturday work in them.

EASTER SUNDAY

The Resurrection of the Lord

John 20:14 says, “She (Mary) turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but did not realize that it was Jesus.”

Throughout Lent, we’ve been seeking an encounter with the risen Jesus. We’ve walked with Jesus through the Gospel accounts as he walks to the royal city of Jerusalem. It is a journey toward coronation by crucifixion. It’s a journey that ends with Jesus being laid, dead, in a garden tomb.

And then on Easter Sunday, we see Jesus on the other side. He is on the other side of death. Jesus didn’t come back from the dead, he went through death to the other side. He made death no longer a dead-end. He did this for all humanity. Death is no longer a dead-end. This is what we celebrate at Easter.

In 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, we come across some of the most powerful words of the New Testament. Here, Paul proclaims that the risen Jesus is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep—that death came through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in one man (Jesus) “all will be made alive.” Verse 26 underscores that because of the risen Jesus, death is no longer a dead-end.

Isaiah 65:17-25 tells us this was God’s plan all along—a new heaven and new earth—where former things will not be remembered. His redemptive plan is unfolding, where one day weeping and crying will be heard no more. Isaiah tells of a future where never again will there be an infant that lives but a few days or an old man who doesn’t live out his years. Isaiah is describing a day when death will no longer be a dead-end.

Finally, in the psalm for Easter Sunday, the Church exclaims: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!" The words of Psalm 118 have long been a part of celebrating Easter. Jesus is risen, and in him, we too shall rise. God's steadfast love endures forever.

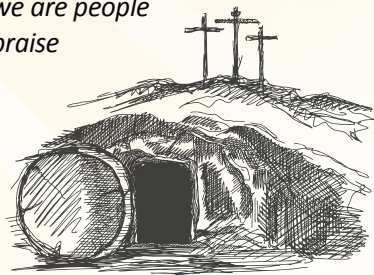
The great reformer, Martin Luther, treasured Psalm 118 and wrote a wonderful commentary about it. On the wall of a room in his home was inscribed his personal motto: "I shall not die, but live, and recount the deeds of the Lord" (v. 17). This really is the main message of this psalm—it applies to Jesus and then through him to all believers.

Just as the psalmist was delivered by God, now Jesus takes hold of us and lifts us out of the realm of death, which he has defeated. It is no longer a dead-end! All this is done so we may proclaim the deeds of the Lord. Easter is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

for reflection:

This week, we are reminded that we are people of the resurrection. How can you praise God today for what he has done?

How can you recommit yourself to the resurrected Christ?





SCRIPTURE

READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Sunday

Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24;
Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10

Monday

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Exodus 14:10-31, 15:20-21; Colossians 3:5-11

Tuesday

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Exodus 15:1-18; Colossians 3:12-17

Wednesday

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Joshua 3:1-17; Matthew 28:1-10

Why do the daily readings (usually) begin on Thursday?

The daily readings for each week begin on Thursday and end on the following Wednesday. The Thursday through Saturday readings prepare the reader for the Sunday ahead. The Monday through Wednesday readings reflect on what was presented on Sunday. This week is unique because of Holy Week.

