

**Reflection on the 7 Last Words:
"My God, why have you forsaken me?"**

Good Friday, March 25, 2005
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Tenebrae Reading #14

⁴⁵From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ⁴⁶And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." ⁴⁸At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." ⁵⁰Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. ⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. ⁵³After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

⁵⁵Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. ⁵⁶Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. (Matthew 27:45-56)

(The fourteenth candle is extinguished.)

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" My.

Jesus cried out to his God; his personal God. The one who created him out of Divine love is the same God who gave birth to creation, made covenant with Abraham and Moses, who anointed David, and who spoke by the prophets.

The God of Jesus is one-and-the-same as our God. We share with Jesus a relationship with a God who loves us, who smiled upon us the day each of us were born, who has watched over and protected us every living day, who has quietly guided us throughout our lives.

Jesus' God is our God; and the signature characteristic of our God- is love.

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" God.

It is out of this love that God's grace blossoms and grows. A loving God gave us His Son, that we might be given an example for living- loving our enemies and our

neighbors, reaching out to the lost, the least, the dispossessed, welcoming the stranger, taking in the widow and the orphaned, visiting and forgiving the prisoner. A loving God gave us His Son, that we might be forgiven of our sins. Jesus hangs on the cross this day to atone for our sins, taking our sins upon himself, so that when he dies he takes away all our sins, the sins of the world, too.

A loving God gave us His Son, that by his resurrection, we too will be given victory over our grave and be resurrected into God's heavenly kingdom. God so loves the world, you and me, that God gave us His Son.

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" Why.

Why, oh why, did it have to happen this way? O Lord, if you wanted to forgive the world, why didn't you strike your staff upon a rock, and make it so? O Lord, if you wanted to bring salvation to the world, why didn't you still the wind and the waves, and make it be so?

Instead, you chose to send us your Son; to allow him to be delivered up onto death. Unlike with Isaac, you did not intervene at the last moment. You allowed suffering and death to take its course. You allowed Jesus to linger in death for three days, like Lazarus, who stank up his tomb.

You did not choose the easy way, O Lord. Perhaps you knew that the easy choice would not always be ours, either.

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" Have.

O God, you have the whole world in the palm of your hand. You have the power to create, and the power to destroy. You have given us your faithful word to always be our God, and that you will continue to bless our generations. What else could you have?

We know there is only one thing you desire. You desire our faithfulness to you. You want our heart, our love, our all. You don't want just 10% of our lives. You don't just want us on Sunday mornings. You want our whole life.

May we live our lives as a tribute to you, O Lord. May our behaviors give testimony to your glory. May our actions always be according to your Will. May our minds and hearts be cleansed of all desires of the flesh and tuned only upon you. O God, may we be faithful to you; as faithful to you as you are to us.

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" You.

It is all about you, O God. Whenever we place anything else in the center of our universe, we know that you call it idolatry. Only you, O God, can be the object of our worship, our desires, our love. Only you, O God, can be the one we thank for the grace you give. Only you, O God, can be the one we praise, with Word, song, and Sacrament.

Only you, O God, would go to such an effort to suffer and die, to share in the realities of this earth, to walk in our shoes, to know us so completely. Only you, O God, would love us even when we are unlovely, even when we have done nothing to deserve your love, even before we were aware that we needed your love.

Only you, O God, have the patience to wait for our penitent return. Only you, O God, would act with mercy and compassion to redeem us of our sins and save us into eternal life. Only you, O God, have the ability to bring judgment upon us.

“My God, why have you forsaken me?” Forsaken.

Did you really forsake your Son? Did you abandon Jesus, O God? Did you renounce or entirely turn away from him? Or was Jesus crying out in an end-of-life delusion? No. Jesus used the word “forsaken” for a reason.

The world turned against God. We ate the forbidden fruit from the garden. David committed murder and adultery. We turned away from you time and again, and paid the price for our unfaithfulness. Yet, God has always been faithful to us. God has never abandoned us.

The only possibility is that God forsakes the flesh. The flesh returns to ashes and dust, we are reminded when we gather at a grave and at the start of Lent. The body returns to the elements of cosmic dust. God has no use for it, other than possibly as the raw materials for new creation. The broken, bloodied, bruised body of Jesus had served its purpose- for the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of Christ lived on.

Death is the enemy of the body, but it has no hold over the soul. Death is simply the doorway through which we pass in our eternal journey to the Father.

“My God, why have you forsaken me?” Me.

It is easy to become so caught up in Holy Week that we forget it is about the suffering, passion, and death of Jesus- the man. We forget that he had feelings, as we have, that he hurt when he was denied, that he wept bitterly when he was betrayed, that he prayed fervently in the garden while his disciples slept, that he was humiliated before crowds and authorities, that he lost all dignity when he was murdered by capital punishment.

The suffering of Jesus brings meaning and value to suffering, whereas before Christ, suffering was without meaning. Suffering is an invitation to walk with the Savior, a pathway to grace previously unknown, a thread in the garment of humanity that we now share with our Lord.

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus cried. ⁵⁰Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last."