Dwell

AN EIGHT-DAY DEVOTIONAL

HOLYWEEK

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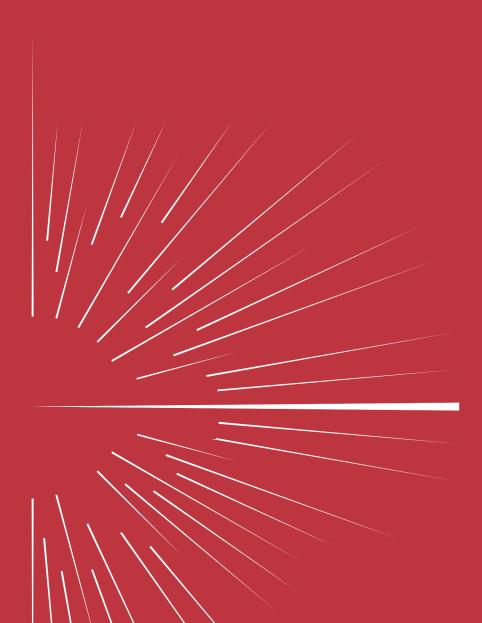
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Holy Week



PALM SUNDAY

The God Who Saves

Open Dwell and listen to Day 1 of the Holy Week plan
Liturgy of the Palms: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 | Mark 11:1-11
Liturgy of the Passion: Isaiah 50:4-9a | Psalm 31:9-16 | Philippians 2:5-11
Mark 14:1-15:47

It was not God's pleasure to give an earthly kingdom to the powerful, but a heavenly kingdom to the gentle.

-The Venerable Bede

Palm Sunday invites us into a place of incredible tension and apparent contradiction. We turn our hearts and minds towards Jerusalem, celebrating the triumphal entry of the King. However, we do so as people who have seen the scandal and shame of the cross. This revolutionary ruler reveals to a world, drunk on its own success and self-preservation, the nature of *true* power. The way of glory is found in gentle submission. Humility and self-giving love are the singular paths to victory and freedom.

The movement of Holy Week is a pattern upon which we must build our entire lives. Our destination is the empty tomb. We are bound for glory. However, the way of death is the way of life. Salvation is impossible without sacrifice. We must hold together that which we constantly seek to fragment and tear apart. Good Friday is *good* only in light of Easter Sunday. The joy of Easter comes only by way of the cross. And so today, with the cross and resurrection before us, we join our voices with the crowds and say, "Hosanna, *you* are the God who saves us."

Prayer for Palm Sunday

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*.

Reflective Practice

As the world thirsts for power and dominance, how can you model the subversive way of simplicity and humility in the small and often unseen rhythms of your daily life?

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MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

The Shadow of the Cross

Open Dwell and listen to Day 2 of the Holy Week plan

Isaiah 42:1-9 | Psalm 36:5-11 | Hebrews 9:11-15 | John 12:1-11

Many people say that the Christian life is unpleasant and difficult; I say that it is most pleasant and easy. But it requires two prerequisites: humility and love.

-St. Porphyrios

Your personal salvation is not the end of God's story of redemption. Yes, the Scriptures are filled with accounts of God's faithfulness to specific men and women, bringing them out of the darkness and into the light of his love. However, just as God created the world in its entirety, it is his desire to see the *whole* of creation healed and restored. If this is not our understanding of the Christian life, our vision of salvation may be too small.

In a single breath, Isaiah 42 holds in perfect tension the personal and corporate dimensions of redemption. To each one of us, the Lord takes us by the hand and keeps us safe *so that* we can be "a light to the nations" (Is 42:6). If the good news you believe and live is not good news for your neighbor and neighborhood, is it truly good news? As we walk towards Good Friday, we remember today that it is in the Passion of Christ that we see the fulfillment of the Psalms, for in the shadow of the cross *all people* are invited to take refuge underneath his wings (Ps 36:7).

Prayer for Monday in Holy Week

Almighty God, whose dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other that the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

As you follow Jesus and are filled with his life, allow that personal transformation to spill over into love and acts of service for the sake of others.

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Tuesday in Holy Week

Rock of Refuge

Open Dwell and listen to Day 3 of the Holy Week plan
| Isaiah 49:1-7 | Psalm 71:1-14 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | John 12:20-36

The first stage of this tranquility consists in silencing the lips when the heart is excited. The second, in silencing the mind when the soul is still excited. The goal is a perfect peacefulness even in the middle of the raging storm.

-St. John Climacus

Refuge is needed in the midst of a great storm, not under clear skies or while sailing peaceful waters. When lost at sea, salvation comes either by removing yourself *from* the danger, or by a stronger force entering *into* the raging sea with you. Holy Week is a story of entry into chaos, *not* victory by retreat. Christ did not send us to the shore for safety but entered into the madness of our world and waged a holy battle.

Make no mistake about it: though he was led like a lamb to the slaughter (Is 53:7), Jesus Christ was not led *against his will* to his passion and death. Our Lord obediently ascended the cross as a victorious conqueror, placing himself at the heart of the storm in order to establish a rock of refuge and a fortress of impenetrable safety for all who draw near (Ps 71:3). And while his victory is certain and the outcome secured, we must never forget the depths to which he descended in order to set us free.

Prayer for Tuesday in Holy Week

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*.

Reflective Practice

Where have you been trying to flee to the shore for safety when the Lord is instead asking you to steady yourself and encounter his victory *in the storm*?

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WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

An Enduring Faith

Open Dwell and listen to Day 4 of the Holy Week plan Isaiah 50:4-9a | Psalm 70 | Hebrews 12:1-3 | John 13:21-32

Patient endurance kills the despair that kills the soul; it teaches the soul to take comfort and not to grow listless in the face of its many battles and afflictions.

-St. Peter of Damaskos

Are you teachable? In the truest sense of the word, do you awaken daily to the belief that you are lacking in direction and purpose apart from the Spirit of God filling you with his life? Often, from a place of insecurity or perceived inadequacy, we overcompensate and attempt to convince ourselves (and others) that we are strong and independent creatures. And while this temptation is understandable, it is toxic to our Christian faith. Remember, we never leave behind our position as students under the Word of God. We daily listen "as those who are taught" (Is 50:4).

The life of discipleship has more in common with a training field than it does a lecture hall. Our ears are opened and we are *trained*, not simply taught. Our thoughts *about* the Lord must begin to form our life *with* the Lord. As the author of Hebrews encourages us, we must "run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1). With Good Friday approaching, today we remember that this faithful endurance is found as we look to the cross, for there alone we encounter the joy and victory of God that triumphs over shame.

Prayer for Wednesday in Holy Week

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*.

Reflective Practice

Do you have a "training routine" that helps you move from *thinking* about the life of God to truly *living* with Christ? Effort is not opposed to grace but is our faithful response to the work of God in our lives.

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MAUNDY THURSDAY

Concrete Love

Open Dwell and listen to Day 5 of the Holy Week plan

Exodus 12:1-14 | Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19 | 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 |

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

While we are commanded to offer tithes of our substance and all our fruits, it is much more needful for us to offer tithes of our life and ordinary employments and actions.

-St. John Cassian

Maundy Thursday, which draws its name from the Latin for "new commandment," *mandatum novum*, is the day in which the Church recalls Jesus announcing in advance the meaning and message of the cross. Love defined by self-giving service is the aim of the Christian life. Jesus proclaims this as the way of life, sets it forth as the path for his disciples, and then proceeds to walk it himself. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34).

Jesus will never ask you to journey down a road that he himself has not walked. There is never a moment in which you are left without example. Love applies affection in concrete acts of humility. Jesus *said* weakness was the way, and then *enacted* the radical values of the kingdom before their very eyes. The uncreated Son of God, through whom all things were made, "got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself" (Jn 13:4). Give your life away *concretely* for your brother or sister, for in so doing you will discover the freedom of sacrificial love.

Prayer for Maundy Thursday

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*.

Reflective Practice

Who are the *specific* people in your life that the Lord is asking you to love in concrete ways? Pick up the servant's towel, and commit yourself to washing their feet in love, just as Christ has loved you.

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GOOD FRIDAY

Purged With Hyssop

Open Dwell and listen to Day 6 of the Holy Week plan Isaiah 52:13-53:12 | Psalm 22 | Hebrews 10:16-25 | John 18:1-19:42

It is not only that joy will take the place of sorrow, but the sorrow itself becomes the joy. The Cross is not for Christians a stumbling-block which the Resurrection has removed; it is not a defeat of which the effect has been cancelled by a subsequent victory. It is itself the triumph. What was the devil's worst has become God's best.

-William Temple

Hyssop. With a single word, John's gospel ties together the story of Scripture, revealing the fulfillment of God's ancient promises to his people. This word is mentioned roughly a dozen times in the Bible, and though it is a seemingly small and insignificant plant (1 Kgs 4:33), it is often connected to the priestly ministry of purification, as well as the famous line from Psalm 51:7, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." Yet most significantly, hyssop is central to the Passover, for it was with hyssop that the Israelites marked their doorposts with blood (Ex 12:22). Hundreds of years later, hyssop was again lifted high, this time with sour wine dripping from a sponge (Jn 19:29).

The story of the Exodus is the story of the cross. The cross is God's offering of himself to bring us out of slavery, once and for all. Abraham's trust in the Lord finds its true fulfillment on the cross, for here the Lord has provided the sacrificial lamb (Gen 22:14). Good Friday, even in its horror, sorrow, and shame, is nothing less than a passage to freedom and the beginning of a new world.

Prayer for Good Friday

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Take time today to read the story of the Passover from Exodus 12, yet read it through the lens of the cross of Christ and God's definitive action to free his people from their slavery to sin and death.

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HOLY SATURDAY

The Space Between

Open Dwell and listen to Day 7 of the Holy Week plan

Job 14:1-14 | Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16 | 1 Peter 4:1-8 | Matthew 27:57-66

Love is the victor. Death is not the end. The end is life. His life and our lives through him, in him. Existence has greater depths of beauty, mystery, and benediction than the wildest visionary has ever dared to dream.

-Frederick Buechner

It is our tendency to rush through seasons of difficulty. We want to pass through the pain as quickly as possible, hoping to minimize its lasting effects. In a sense, we rush from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, skipping over the harrowing silence of Holy Saturday in the process. Today, we are invited to wait, to join our Lord in the in-between. In this sense, Holy Saturday is where we live the majority of our lives.

Transformation is found in the space between death and life. We have seen the scandal of the cross, yet still await the victory of Easter. Life is spent between the cross and glory, believing this death will give way to a birth, to new and unending life. The tree that is cut down, Job reminds us, "will sprout again, and its shoots will not cease" (Job 14:7). And so, we sit with the discomfort of transformation, believing that morning always follows night. Or, as our Lord Jesus taught us, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24).

Prayer for Holy Saturday

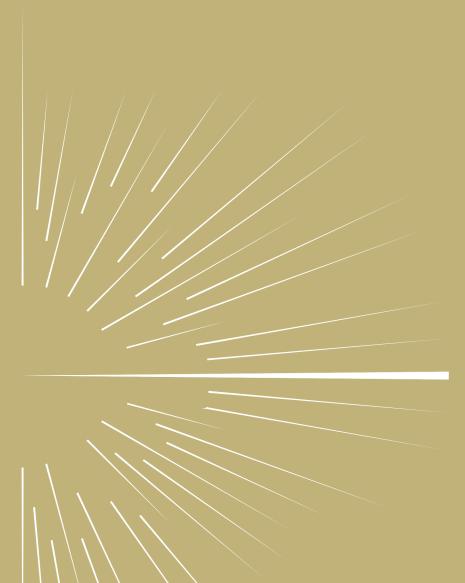
O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*.

Reflective Practice

In what ways are you tempted to rush the process of transformation? On this Holy Saturday, can you remain with Christ in the tomb, believing shoots of new life will soon spring forth?

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Easter



EASTER SUNDAY

A Gate to Freedom

Open Dwell and listen to Day 8 of the Holy Week plan

Acts 10:34-43 | Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 | 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 |

John 20:1-18

A fiery sword barred of old the gates of Paradise; a fiery tongue which brought salvation restored the gift.

-St. Cyril of Jerusalem

We push against the idea of boundaries, believing they limit our enjoyment of life and true self-expression. The only problem with this is that Jesus sought to re-establish boundaries everywhere he went, calling out our upside-down sense of freedom in the process. The Prodigal Son rejected the boundaries of family, only to return and discover the freedom of life with his father. The sheep left the boundary of the pen, yet was found by a shepherd who pursued it and restored it to the flock. It is *within* the walls of the kingdom, not without, that we discover who we were made to be.

Death is the ancient enemy that breached the walls and compromised the integrity of our world. On the cross, Jesus defeated death through his own death, and in his resurrection he definitely restored the boundaries compromised by humankind's quest for autonomy. And so, on this glorious Easter Sunday, with our hearts set on that heavenly kingdom, we join our voices with the psalmist and pray, "Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD" (Ps 118:19).

Prayer for Easter Day

O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Easter is the triumph of God over every enemy that stands in opposition to his kingdom. Such a victory cannot be limited to a single day of celebration but is instead an extended fifty-day season. Having walked the way of the cross, now enter into the joy and delight of resurrection life!

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The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father through Whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And He rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; And He will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets.

In one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.

Amen.

Endnotes

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