

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, your Son our Savior suffered at human hands and endured the shame of the cross. Grant that we may walk in the way of his cross and find it the way of life and peace; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

SCRIPTURE READING..... Luke 23:44-46, KJV

nd it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. <sup>45</sup>And the sun was Adarkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. <sup>46</sup>And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is the seventh and last word of our Lord Jesus from the Cross:

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:  
“...and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.”

Some of the earlier words of our Lord on the cross can be understood to be the final expressions of his ministry on earth. His strength is fading, his life ebbing, yet he has time to love this world to the very end, and that he does.

With his cry, Father forgive them... he continues to practice generosity toward those who “despitefully used” him, as he had first preached in his Sermon on the Mount:

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;(Matt 5:44, KJV)

With his promise of Paradise to the repentant thief on his right hand, Jesus continued his ministry of seeking and saving the lost and the straying.

With his entrusting of his mother to John and John to his mother, he continues his protective care of those he loved. There is little a poor man in his death throes can do to take care of others, but this he did: he entrusted his mother and his beloved disciple to each other.

Even such words as “I thirst,” and “It is finished,” can be thought of as final words to a world that had been very hard on him.

But this final word leaves this world behind and constitutes a prayer of complete self-surrender to the will of his heavenly Father:

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:

In the garden of Gethsemane, he had set his soul in this direction. He had worked his way through his agony of soul at the approaching cup of suffering. He had prayed himself through to victory, to a blessed resolve, to a holy “nevertheless”:

O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.( Matt 26:39, KJV)

Now, with his final word on the cross, there is nothing more he can do in submitting to the will of his Father. He has done everything. He has no secret fallback plan, no resources held in reserve. In Gethsemane he started the path he now completes: he yields himself utterly to his heavenly Father. What his Father will do with him is *all* he has left, all he desires.

This final word puts me in mind of a prayer in my minister’s prayer book. It is a prayer meant to be used when comforting the bereaved. Also, it can be used at the graveside, before the final Benediction:

O Lord, support us all the day long of this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, Lord, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last; through Jesus Christ our Lord.(“Commendation of the Dying,”

*Occasional Services* — a companion volume to the *Lutheran Book of Worship*)

So it is now with Jesus in his final word from the cross. The shadows have lengthened, the darkness approaches, the busy world is becoming hushed, the fever of life is over, and our Lord's work is done. Nothing remains except the commending of oneself into the hands of God — that self-surrender Luther urges Christians to offer every night when we are slipping into sleep. Let me read Luther's nighttime prayer for us. It is from his *Small Catechism*:

In the evening, when you retire, make the sign of the cross and say, "In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Then you may say this prayer:

"I give Thee thanks, heavenly Father, through thy dear Son Jesus Christ, that Thou hast this day graciously protected me. I beseech Thee to forgive all my sin and the wrong which I have done. Graciously protect me during the coming night. Into thy hands I commend my body and soul and all that is mine. Let thy holy angels have charge of me, that the wicked one may have no power over me. Amen."

This Jesus does. With his final breath he commends his body and soul and all that is his into the hands of his heavenly Father.

Now, let me tell you the blessed outcome of our Lord's last word. To do this, I must dash ahead to Easter, and that I am eager to do, though it is only Holy Wednesday. For the news is too good to hold in reserve. Jesus has commended himself into the hands of his Father. Let me tell you his Father's answer.

To do this, I borrow words from St. Paul, from the upward swing of his great "kenosis" hymn in Philippians Chapter Two. *Kenosis* is a Greek verb word meaning "to empty." Paul uses that verb to describe the divine condescension of Jesus, by which he lays aside his glory and his dignity as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, adored through the ages by the angels and the whole host of heaven... Jesus lays aside that glory in order to come and rescue us.

So that is the "kenosis" part of the hymn. But now, I draw your attention to the second part — the exultation of our Lord. The whole hymn goes thus:

<sup>5</sup>Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11, RSV)

Each nighttime, we are granted a chance to repeat this last word of Jesus from the Cross: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." For you too are a child of the heavenly Father, brother or sister to Jesus by Holy Baptism. This is the adoption and the dignity won for you by Jesus on the cross, that you too might entrust yourself to God as to your most loving Father.

And as he was raised and exulted, so shall you be who remain in Christ, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.