

Good Friday Sermon, April 22, 2011  
by The Rev. Thomas Nelson Green  
The Final Words of Christ † In Nomine Domini Iesu Cristi

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Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. † I thirst. † Woman, behold your Son; behold your mother. † Today you will be with me in paradise. † My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? † It is finished. † Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

Today, the Church, our fostering mother, invites us to invoke the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of faith that we may stand together on Golgotha and see the Man – Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary impaled on the cross. As we stand there the Spirit enables us to grasp the mystery of Good Friday. We see His arms stretched out to embrace us and to enclose us in the warmth of His redeeming love. When we behold Him thus, reaching out to us, His last words take on a new and mystical meaning. They are not merely the dying utterances of a righteous man; they are a magnificent seven-fold blessing for us and for all the faithful.

Let the Man on the cross embrace you as He prays, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*” Since the first sin of Adam and Eve people have never really known what they were doing when they sinned against God and their brothers and sisters. They might be able to identify an action as sinful, but they have never had a sense of the full consequences of those sins. The great consequence is universal mortality. The soul that sins dies, and there is no exception! But in the embrace of our Divine Lord we hear the prayer, “Forgive them!” “Father, forgive them and let them be reunited with You and one another. Father, let the blessing of forgiveness rest upon all who are penitent today and all days.

The Man on the cross continues: “*I thirst!*” This is no mere physical thirst. It is that spiritual thirst that drove Christ to press on through the long days of His ministry. It is a thirst to do the will of the heavenly Father, a thirst to reunite God with His wayward creation, a thirst to bring salvation and to show to the world the love that God has for it. In His sacrificial death Christ was about to slake that thirst. Let Him embrace you and bless you with the same thirst to do the will of the Father and to seek after righteousness.

The Man on the central cross speaks again: “*Woman, behold your Son; behold your mother!*” With the fall into sin the mutual love and affection which God had breathed into Adam and Eve was shattered. Immediately the first man and woman began to bicker and find fault with God and each other. Cain slew his brother Abel. Since then even in the best of families attempts at love and understanding and compassion have left much to be desired. The love that the man on the cross had for His mother is a sign that through His redeeming sacrifice and with the help of the Holy Spirit it becomes possible to love the neighbor as we love ourselves. As you experience the embrace of the Man on the cross hear His blessing. You are set free to love one another as I have loved you.

To the penitent thief the Man on the cross said, “*Today you will be with me in paradise!*” Whether the thief fully understood the promise we cannot know, but we do know that the words brought supernatural cheer and comfort to him in his dying moments. But Christ also blesses us with those words! Today and each day you can be in paradise with Him. Paradise is not merely for some time in the future. Every day of our lives the Man on the cross reaches out to embrace us with His presence. He was present in our Holy Baptism and united us with Him in His death and resurrection. He is present in His Word. He is present in the Holy Eucharist. And here is the mystery! Where Christ is there is paradise. Listen carefully to the blessing of the Man on the cross. Today and every day you have been freed to enjoy the paradise of My presence as you use the means of grace.

As life began to fail Him, the Man on the cross spoke to His Father, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” This Man was bearing the weight and guilt of the sins of all people! One of the results of sin is being literally “God forsaken.” There is a great and impassable gulf between God and His fallen creation. No human being could bridge that separation. However, on the cross God abandoned God. That is a mystery that can be grasped only by faith. And through that abandonment and forsakenness Christ removed the gulf of separation. Remain in the loving embrace of the Man on the cross and hear His blessing. Because for your sake I was forsaken by the Father, you cannot be forsaken by Him!

Then came the word that is perhaps the most welcome of all, “*It is finished!*” The saving work that Christ had come to do has been completed. Nothing is lacking; nothing need be added to that work. The sacrificial work that began with the incarnation of the Son of God and continued through the days of His ministry and on to Golgotha has been finished. Salvation has come to the human race. Listen carefully to the blessing spoken by the Man! You have nothing to fear; you have no

cause for anxiety! The work of redemption has been finished, and eternal life has been restored!

Finally, the Man speaks a prayer of childlike peace and confidence, *“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!”* His task on earth has come to an end. He dies, but His death is but a sleep from which He will rise in three days. There is no fear present. He has been faithful and He knows that He can rest confidently in the love of His Father. Listen again to the Blessing of the Man on the cross. At the end of the day and at the end of the days of your life you can lie down in peace and take your rest. Waking or sleeping you are in the loving hands of your heavenly Father.

But this is only the beginning of the mystery of the crucifixion of the Son of God. Look at the cross and see God’s Son and the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary reaching out to embrace you with His infinite grace and mercy. But one embrace invites another. As the Man on the cross embraces you, He invites you to embrace Him in return. As you by faith embrace Him, you are identified with Him. You dwell in Him and He dwells in you. And in the mystery of salvation His final words become your words.

As you embrace Him, you learn that those who have sinned against you did not know what harm they were doing, and neither did you when you sinned against your neighbor and God. But, in the spirit of Christ, you can forgive. And with forgiveness the sin is blotted out and your loving relationship can be restored. Embrace the Man on the cross and forgive as He forgives. Let His thirst to complete the work of the heavenly Father become your thirst. Day by day this thirst can be slaked as you carry out the will of God in your life. As you embrace Christ and become an imitator of Him, familial love can return. You can not only love the members of your family, but also your neighbors as yourself. You can work to restore that wondrous love that the Creator breathed into the soul of our first parents. Embrace the Man on the cross and make use of the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. In that faithful use discover anew the presence of your Divine Savior. In that daily presence experience the wonder of being in paradise already in this world. Embrace the Man on the cross and in that embrace rejoice that you will never be forsaken by God. Whatever vicissitudes you may encounter, however dark the moment, God remains with you. Embrace the Man on the cross and rejoice daily that the work of salvation has been completed. God has called you to share the message of salvation with your neighbors. Finally, when you embrace the Man on the cross you can lie down at night and commit your spirit into the hands of God, for through

Christ God is your loving heavenly Father who guides you when waking and guards you when sleeping.