

THE SEVEN FIRST WORDS

A litany for Good Friday



*Photo: Crucifix at 'Erimophila'
Little Brothers of Francis,
Tabulam, NSW*

Seven candles are arranged on the altar or a table placed at the centre of the nave to be lit, one at a time, after each part of the litany.

Good Friday is the day we make much of 'The Message of the Cross,' emphasising the sacrificial death of Jesus as he took our sins on himself, 'making atonement for the whole world.' In other words, his death makes possible the forgiveness of our sins, i.e. those that we commit.

While this is absolutely true, what about the sins inflicted on us, deliberate or otherwise - or rather, the effect of those sins on our lives? Or any suffering we endure through no fault of our own, which keeps us from living free and fulfilled lives? What does Christ's suffering on the cross mean to those who are suffering? Perhaps these sufferings also need to be 'confessed' in order for us to be healed. Perhaps it is also an opportunity to pray for those whom we know are suffering, and journey with them.

As we come to this Good Friday service and contemplate the enormity of Christ's sacrifice, his seven last words can become the means of healing, reconciliation and peace in our lives, so that those last words become *first words*, first steps in our journey towards wholeness, and freedom from the fears that imprison us. During the silences you are invited to reflect on Christ's words and your responses to them.

THE FIRST WORD

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one of his left. Then Jesus said, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."
(Luke 23:32-34)

Leader: Loving Lord, You forgive those who hurt you:
Response: **Lord, we embrace that holy forgiveness towards those who have hurt us,
and journey with you towards resurrection.**

-:Silence:-

Leader: Lord, we wait at the foot of your cross:
Response: **Show us the way through our own suffering, visited on us by others.**

(The first candle is lit)

-:Silence:-

THE SECOND WORD

*One of the criminals who were crucified with him said to him, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."
(Luke 23:42-23)*

Leader: Loving Lord, you promise us a beautiful future at your side:
Response: **Lord, we embrace your promise of healing and peace, forgiving others and ourselves, as we journey with you towards resurrection.**

-:Silence:-

Leader: Lord, we wait at the foot of your cross:
Response: **Show us the way through our own suffering, visited on us by others.**

(The second candle is lit)

-:Silence:-

THE THIRD WORD

*When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her,
he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son."
Then he said to his disciple, "Here is your mother."
(John 19:26-27a)*

Leader: Loving Lord, even in your pain you recognise the pain of others, and promise companionship for their journey:
Response: **Lord, we embrace your promise, and dare to share each other's suffering on our journey with you towards resurrection.**

-:Silence:-

Leader: Lord, with Mary and John we wait at the foot of your cross:
Response: **Show us the way through our own suffering, visited on us by others.**

(The third candle is lit)

-:Silence:-

THE FOURTH WORD

*From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.
And 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?"*
(Matthew 27:45-46)

Leader: Loving Lord, you experience the deep grief of rejection and alienation:
Response: **Lord, you understand our own deep grief of separation from others, and our own fragmentation. We embrace you in your grief, and journey with you towards resurrection.**

-:Silence:-

Leader: Lord, we wait at the foot of your cross:
Response: **Show us the way through our own suffering, visited on us by others.**

(The fourth candle is lit)

-:Silence:-

THE FIFTH WORD

*After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scriptures),
"I am thirsty."
(John 19:28)*

Leader: Loving Lord, you long for the love of others to satisfy your thirst:
Response: **Lord, we meet your thirst with our own tears of longing, and journey with you towards the fulfilment of resurrection.**

-:Silence:-

Leader: Lord, we wait at the foot of your cross:
Response: **Show us the way through our own suffering, visited on us by others.**

(The fifth candle is lit)

-:Silence:-

THE SIXTH WORD

*.....they put a sponge full of the [sour] wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to
his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished."
(John 19:30)*

Leader: Loving Lord, your suffering is not in vain; it has always had a purpose and goal:
Response: **Lord, our suffering also is not in vain, and this gives us courage to journey purposefully with you towards resurrection.**

-:Silence:-

Leader: Lord, we wait at the foot of your cross:
Response: **Show us the way through our own suffering, visited on us by others.**

(The sixth candle is lit)

-.Silence:-

THE SEVENTH WORD

It was about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed: and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

(23:44-46)

Leader: Loving Lord, the world's evil is overcome by completely letting go of ourselves into the hands of the Father:

Response: **Lord, we will die with you, and you with us, as we abandon ourselves to the Father in whom is our resurrection.**

-.Silence:-

Leader: Lord Jesus, your wounds are our wounds, and our wounds are your wounds:

Response: **We will journey together with you towards resurrection. Amen.**

(The seventh candle is lit)

-.Silence:-

Leader: Tender God,
you see my affliction
and you are unbinding my eyes;
you are bereaving me of the burden
to which I cling;
you are weaving my pain
into patterns of integrity;
the wound that I cherish
you are turning into worships,
and the scars I keep hidden
into marks of truth.

Response: **You are touching me gently;
I see your face, and I live.**

'Out of the Silence:' - Jim Cotter & Paul Payton

*The litany concludes with a four part round, 'In Manus Tuas Pater',
or any other suitable hymn.*

Suggestions: Here hangs a man discarded (TIS 356)

O sacred head sore wounded (TIS 339)

Taizé: 'In Manus Tuas'

In Manus Tuas Pater

(Father, into your hands)

Sr. Sandra Sears CSBC

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$\text{♩} = 80$

1 2

In manus tuas Pa - ter com - men - do spi - ri - tum me - um. In

5 3 4

ma - nus tu - as Pa - ter com - men - do spi - ri - tum me - um. In

9 *Unison ending. Repeat ad lib; dim. al fine* *fine*

me - um. Com - men - do spi - ri - tum me - um. Com - me - u - m.

Performance notes: Sing through once in unison, then six times in round, then repeat the last line ad lib in unison al fine.