



Good Friday *The Collect*

ALMIGHTY God, we beseech thee graciously to behold this thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry, may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

MERCIFUL God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor desirest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live; Have mercy upon all who know thee not as thou art revealed in the Gospel of thy Son. Take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy fold, that they may be made one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

As we turn down the bright lights of the Sanctuary in reverence to the great sacrifice that was made for us, let us not forget to "Let the Lower Lights be Burning." In our acknowledgement of ourselves as the Lower Lights, we are acknowledging that Christ – the Light that was briefly extinguished on this day – is the Greater Light; in fact, the Light of the World, and we are His disciples and Lower Lights. That brilliant Light that burst forth out of the Tomb on Easter morning will never be extinguished!

So what is so good about 'Good' Friday? Was it not a day of horrible suffering and pain for our Redeemer? Yes, it was that. His virtue and modesty were violated in addition to the terrific pain He bore. He even tolerated the dogs of avarice to ridicule Him while He hung naked there on that instrument of torture called the cross. What forbearance He displayed in not calling down the armies of Heaven (as most of us would have done had we the power as He had). Being lifted up as the Brazen Serpent in the Wilderness, He drew all men to Himself who had been stung by the fiery serpent and Prince of the Air. He lingered there for hours in the heat of the sun, and to the shame of the multitudes. He was so thirsty that His tongue clave to the roof of His mouth. Yet, His heart of Mercy was not stopped from expressing forgiveness and

reception even to a thief on an adjacent cross.

So why is Friday of the Crucifixion considered so 'Good'? It is because the greatest good that has ever been done to humanity was given at the greatest cost that has ever been paid. As He hung there, His eyes of compassion blurred by pain, blood, and clammy perspiration, His great heart swelled with all of the hurt and guilt that you or I have ever felt. Not only did His heart contain all of that hurt for the present generation that had crucified Him, but for the millions and billions of people from eternity past to eternity future. His weary eyes looked out on a horizon that was far too distant for the Roman soldiers and the cruel multitudes gathered there to see. Never doubt that He saw your face from that high vantage point of the cross.

What do you suppose was forefront in His Mind as He beheld His executioners dividing His garments by lot at the foot of the cross? When He heard the scribes, priests, and Pharisees deriding and mocking Him, what do you suppose was in His heart of Mercy? *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* (Luke 23:34) This is the first of seven words, or utterances, expressed by our Lord from the cross that day at Calvary. This utterance is consistent with my own belief that the mind of a sinner is maddened and crazed by sin. He truly does not know the great ramifications of sin. He cannot at all help himself. He must be drawn, as a net the fish, to Christ on the cross. And because of that shameful event on Calvary, 2,000 years ago, the net of the Holy Ghost has been drawing men to Christ on the cross ever since. But the story does not end at the cross! It is only after we have taken grips of that rough-hewn cross that we bear it to an open tomb. Just as Christ needed only a borrowed Tomb, so shall all who take up that cross daily and follow Him. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.* (Luke 9:23)

Do you ever wonder why Christ pronounced those words of request to the Father – did He not have power to forgive sins? Yes, Jesus had power to forgive all sins; however, this particular sin was not against Him alone, but was also directly against God the Father. It was the only Begotten Son of God who was being crucified. The forgiveness of the Father was also necessary to forgive such an egregious sin against His own beloved Son. 'FORGIVENESS'. Let us forever remember that this was the first word Christ spoke from the cross for, without forgiveness of our sins, there is no remission of sin; and, if there is no remission of sin, then do we believe in vain. (Romans 3:25, 1 Cor 15:1-2, et al) And for whom did Christ plead forgiveness? For the most murderous malefactors imaginable (and that would include you and me, Friend).

They laid Christ down upon the cross and drove nine inch spikes into His hands and feet. What a terrible thud that must have been! They then, without the slightest compassion for their victim, lifted the cross up and slide it into the posthole which had been prepared. This caused a shocking and penetrating pain in the body of Christ from head to foot as the cross fell into the posthole with the force of all its weight. The sudden impact may even have caused the shoulder sockets to be pulled out of place further reducing the Lord's ability to lift Himself in order to breath. (see a deeper account of the horror of the cross in Psalms 22). The purpose of that cross was to inflict the greatest pain while prolonging the life of the victim as long as possible so that the duration as well would be greatest. Yet, the first words of Christ was a plea for forgiveness for those who "knew not what they did". We have not such a heart of forgiveness. If another hurts us with the slightest offending word, we remember it to our graves. How much different is Christ!

You will remember that on the night previous to His passion, the Lord prepared a Table for us in the presence of our enemies. This is the Communion Table whereby we draw near by faith in regular observance of our salvation in His shed Blood and Body broken for us. Our cup runneth over as we observe the service of the Cup symbolizing His Blood, and Bread, His Body broken for us.

You will recall that Christ pronounced six other utterances from the cross: the second word was Salvation (*Today shalt thou be with me in paradise* – spoken to the repentant thief on the adjacent cross); the third word is LOVE – "*Woman, behold thy Son....Behold thy mother* – spoken to John and the mother of Jesus, Mary; the fourth word is ATONEMENT – "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world. God, the Father, could not behold sin. He turned His face away as darkness fell upon all the land. I like to think of this quality as being "at-one-ment" with God. His death reconciled us to God through the remission of sin. Without that propitiary death, we would still be without hope. This was an expression, by Jesus, of spiritual suffering. This was the greatest hurt of all.

The fifth word was a word of 'physical suffering.' "*I thirst.*" Our physical suffering may even be useful in making us thirst for the Word of God and the hope it holds forth. Perhaps we are justified to weep at the tender thought expressed in Psalms: *O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; 2 To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.* (Psalms 63:1-2)

Next comes the sixth word - considered the greatest single word ever uttered: "*It is finished!*" Had Jesus not uttered this word, it would still not be finished. In the Greek, this utterance is, indeed, a single word - $\hat{\omicron}\hat{\alpha}\hat{\omicron}\hat{\alpha}\frac{1}{2}\hat{\epsilon}\hat{\nu}\hat{\alpha}\hat{\omicron}\hat{\omicron}\hat{\alpha}\hat{\epsilon}$. The sacrifice, established in the Councils of Heaven from before the foundations of the world, had now been consummated. ALL that was required for the salvation of the soul of man had been done. Now the dimensions of time are constrained to that single moment that follows. The seventh word from the cross: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.* (Luke 23:46) His giving up of the spirit enabled the Comforter to come and soothe our pains and hurts of sin. Had Christ not given up the Ghost, the Holy Ghost would not be with us to teach and lead us into all truth about Christ (for *He speaketh not of His own*).

Now, having reviewed all seven of those words, let us not forget the foundation of all that followed the first word – **FORGIVENESS**.

Have you been forgiven this Good Friday. If not, all the other works of Christ are of no efficacy to you, Friend.