

The First Word: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

The first word of Jesus from the cross is a word of forgiveness. That's the point of the cross, after all. Jesus is dying so that we might be forgiven for our sins, so that we might be reconciled to God for eternity. But the forgiveness of God through Christ doesn't come only to those who don't know what they are doing when they sin. In the mercy of God, we receive his forgiveness even when we do what we know to be wrong. God chooses to wipe away our sins, not because we have some convenient excuse, and not because we have tried hard to make up for them, but because **he is a God of amazing grace, with mercies that are new every morning.**

As we read the words, "Father, forgive them," **He is asking forgiveness for Jews and Gentiles alike.** We are all included in his forgiveness. Forgiveness restores divine order. **The only alternative to forgiveness is destruction:** the end of oneself and the unforgiven other. In the Christian family, children begin to learn about authentic forgiveness from parents who love each other.

Reflection: How often have I forgiven someone who has hurt me? How many times have I refused to forgive someone who hurt me?

The Second Word: "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

As Jesus hung on the cross, he was mocked by the leaders and the soldiers. One of the criminals being crucified with him added his own measure of scorn. But the other crucified criminal sensed that Jesus was being treated unjustly. After speaking up for Jesus, he cried out, **"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom"**. Jesus responded to this criminal, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise".

Reflection: The sacrament of anointing at the hour of our death is our cry to Jesus. **"Jesus, remember me," we cry. And Jesus, embodying the mercy of God, says to us, "You will be with me in paradise."** Do we take care to receive/facilitate the sacrament of Anointing for the dying?

The Third Word: “Woman, behold your son.” (John 19:26)

As Jesus was dying, his mother was among those who had remained with him. Most of the male disciples had fled, with the exception of one "the disciple he loved." Jesus was forging a relationship between this disciple and his mother, one in which the disciple would take care of Mary. Jesus wanted to make sure she would be in good hands after his death.

Reflection: How about our aging parents? Do we willingly and joyfully care for our elderly parents? Jesus told Mary “This is your son.” Do we as parents care for our children? Do we accept our children including the child in the womb as a gift from God?

The Fourth Word: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

As Jesus was dying on the cross, he echoed the beginning of Psalm 22, which reads: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night you hear my voice, but I find no relief.

Why did Jesus cry out to the Father? Was he asking this question because, in the mystery of his incarnational suffering, he didn't know why God had abandoned him?. The Father abandoned him because Jesus took upon himself the penalty for our sins. In that excruciating moment, he experienced something far more horrible than physical pain. The beloved Son of God knew what it was like to be rejected by the Father.

Reflection: When we die in mortal sin, cut off from the love of God, we experience the terrible pain of Hell and eternal separation from God who loves us.

The Fifth Word: “I am thirsty.” (John 19:28)

No doubt Jesus experienced extreme thirst while being crucified. He would have lost a substantial quantity of bodily fluid, both blood and sweat, through what he had endured even prior to crucifixion. Thus his statement, "I am thirsty" was, on the most obvious level, a request for something to drink. In response the soldiers gave Jesus "sour wine", a cheap beverage common among lower class

people in the time of Jesus.

Spiritual authors of every period tell us that Christ thirsts for more than something liquid to drink. **His real thirst is for souls. He thirsts for the salvation of the world.** Today the Church calls for the universal call to Holiness. Catholic faith always remains eminently personal. So when we hear Jesus cry out, "I thirst" we should think of all about ourselves.

Reflection: Jesus thirsts very much for my soul. My soul yearns for the living water that Jesus supplies. Are we always in the grace of God?

The Sixth Word: "It is finished!" (John 19:30)

When Jesus said "It is finished," surely he was expressing relief that his suffering was over. "It is finished" meant, in part, "This is finally done!" Jesus had accomplished his mission. **Because Jesus finished his work of salvation, you and I don't need to add to it.** He accomplished what we never could, taking our sin upon himself and giving us his life in return. **Jesus finished that for which he had been sent, and we are the beneficiaries of his unique effort.** We have hope for this life and for the next. We know that nothing can separate us from God's love. One day what God has begun in us will also be finished, by his grace. Until that day, we live in the confidence of Jesus' cry of victory: "It is finished!"

Reflection: At the hour of our death, can we say with Jesus I have fulfilled the mission entrusted to me?

The Seventh Word: "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" (Luke 24:46)

The Catholic believer does not wait for the moment of death to commend his or her life to the heavenly Father. The Catholic believer repeats Christ's seventh word in every circumstance of life. There is not a moment in our daily lives that does not require from us an act of submission to God's will.

Reflection: Every time we suffer, every time we are in pain, every time we mourn the lose of someone dear to us, we need to repeat the same words of Jesus. O LORD, I have come to you for protection; don't let me be disgraced. Save me, for you are my salvation.