



Opening Prayer for Good Friday

Gracious and eternal God,
look with mercy on this your family,
for which our Lord Jesus Christ
was content to be betrayed
and given up into the hands of sinners
and to suffer death upon the cross;
who is alive and glorified with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Psalm of the Day – Verses from Psalm 22 (Singing the Faith 804)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,
and are so far from my salvation,
from the words of my distress?
**O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer;
and by night also, but I find no rest.**
Yet you are the Holy One,
enthroned upon the praises of Israel.
**Our forebears trusted in you;
they trusted, and you delivered them.**
They cried out to you and were delivered;
they put their trust in you and were not confounded.

**But as for me, I am a worm and not human,
scorned by all and despised by the people.**

All who see me laugh me to scorn;
they curl their lips and wag their heads, saying,
**'He trusted in the Lord; let him deliver him;
let him deliver him, if he delights in him.'**

But it is you that took me out of the womb
and laid me safe upon my mother's breast.

**On you was I cast ever since I was born;
you are my God even from my mother's womb.**

Be not far from me, for trouble is near at hand
and there is none to help.

**Save me from the lion's mouth,
from the horns of wild oxen.**

You have answered me!

I will tell of your name to my people;
in the midst of the congregation will I praise you.

Praise the Lord, you that fear him;

O seed of Jacob, glorify

him; stand in awe of him, O seed of Israel.

For he has not despised nor abhorred the suffering of the
poor; **neither has he hidden his face from them;**

but when they cried to him he heard them.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; I will
perform my vows in the presence of those that fear you.

**The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek the
Lord shall praise him; their hearts shall live for ever.**

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the
Lord, and all the families of nations shall bow before him.

**For the kingdom is the Lord's
and he rules over the nations.**

How can those who sleep in the earth bow in worship,
or those who go down to the dust kneel before him?

He has saved my life for himself; my descendants shall serve him; this shall be told of the Lord for generations to come. They shall come and make known his salvation, to a people yet unborn, declaring that he, the Lord, has done it.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.
Amen

Prayers of Renewal

Jesus told his disciples that if they wanted to follow him, they needed to deny themselves, and take up their crosses.

God calls us into that same movement of dying to sin and rising again with Christ.

In this quiet space for reflection, let us bring to God those things in need of renewal:

Silence is kept for a few moments...

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;
have mercy upon us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;
have mercy upon us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;
grant us peace.

God of our journeys and false starts and new beginnings, you walk with us all of our days, and nothing in life or death or all creation can separate us from your love in Jesus Christ.

Thank you that you forgive us our faults and mistakes, share with us in our worries and struggles, and lead us onwards into fullness of life.

We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus. **Amen**

Reading Matthew 26:57 – 27:66

Sermon

Imagine having walked out of Jerusalem, past the municipal rubbish dump, and up the hill to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull. This is the place where rebels and criminals come to die in unimaginable terror and horror and agony, outside of the city walls so that the stench of death and the cries of literally excruciating pain will not contaminate or disturb those within. Look up at the three latest victims of the *Pax Romana*, the 'peace' of the Roman Empire. All are naked and hence shameful; there are no loincloths to preserve a man's modesty here. Having been whipped beforehand, they are each bleeding and hard to look at for the scarring across their bodies, even before one turns to the nails driven brutally into their hands and feet, fixing them upon the wooden crosses they were forced to carry to that dreadful place. You utter a prayer under your breath, thanking God that these three men were all single and childless, so you do not have to see or hear the horrific distress of the crucified as their loved ones are murdered there in front of them, while they themselves can do nothing but cry out. If ever there had been a punishment devised to break a person, mentally and spiritually as well as physically, this was it. The sounds and sights of this suffering always sickened you; yet, there was also something strangely compelling about watching an execution...

And so, there you are, stood at the foot of the crosses of three men. From what you have been able to gather, the two on the outside are petty criminals who simply chanced their arm once too often and so are paying the price. The bloke in the middle, however, is a different kettle of fish. There's a sign nailed to the top of his cross which says,

'Jesus, King of the Jews', and despite a crown of thorns making red streaks of blood trickle down his bruised face, you recognise him as the same man who'd arrived into the city just a few days beforehand and who was cheered from the rafters by the Passover pilgrims who journeyed with him and his friends. Rumour is that he had fallen foul of the Chief Priests and Elders, who took exception to his teachings and his challenging their authority. While you had kept away for fear of the Roman soldiers who were in town to enforce the peace at the point of a sword, strange whispers had nonetheless reached you at your lodgings. The word 'Messiah' was being quietly spoken behind the hands of those folks who had spent time in the Temple courtyard listening to him. It does not take a genius to reason that, as the High Priest, Caiaphas would have been afraid about insurrection kicking off again, especially with Pilate being so sensitive to signs of trouble and looking for a reason to take him down a peg or two.

Looking around you, one thing that jumps out is that none of Jesus's friends seem to be here. They have probably run away. Those stood around with you seem to be a mixture of officials from the Jerusalem authorities come to mock him and gloat, the usual suspects who all enjoy this sort of spectacle a little too much, and others who appear shocked into silence. There are some women crying loudly who you can see when you look back down the hillside, and the two criminals being crucified with him are goading Jesus as viciously as the Chief Priests and their cronies. It is unusually cold for the time of year and feeling yourself shivering involuntarily pulls you away from the sight in front of you and towards the skies. Even though it's the middle of the day, it has steadily been growing darker, as if the Sun is too sad to shine in the face of this scene. The chill breeze whips across your face, and you draw your cloak around you for warmth, unable to feel your fingers and toes properly.

Then, just as you are contemplating turning around and going home to sit in front of the fire, you accidentally catch Jesus's eye, and find

yourself suddenly feeling a profound uneasiness. It is as if you have been abruptly stripped naked and you yourself are the one exposed and unable to hide. The intensity of his stare is too much, and hence you turn your eyes to the ground, carefully studying your shoe rather than risk looking up and being seen so clearly again. Everything you have heard about this man suggests not only is he no bandit or rebel like the man Barabbas they had set free that morning, but that those things he did were all about justice and hope and love. One woman, who was staying in the same inn as you, had been healed by Jesus. Others were talking about how his meals were shared with the sorts of people the authorities condemned, and how he called out the folk who thought they knew God but actually had missed the point totally as they judged and marginalised others.

As these thoughts run through your mind, you seriously flirt with the idea of shouting out. Why was someone so good being put to death, if not simply to satisfy the bloodlust of those mocking and jeering all the while? Before you can open your mouth to speak, you are jolted from your thoughts by the most anguished cry you have ever heard, one which will invade your nights and haunt you, till the day you die. It must have taken most of the breath he had left, but Jesus shouted clear as day: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". Hairs on the back of your neck are stood on end, and you can feel yourself shivering more violently than ever, but not because of the cold. The people next to you are speculating that the prophet Elijah may come down and save him. Then, with another terrible cry, it's all over. The man they were saying had come to set Israel free to be with God at last was dead. What have we done?

The ground sways underneath your feet, your knees buckle and you can no longer prevent yourself from vomiting. As you attempt to turn and move away, full of a profound anger reaching too deep for mere words, hot tears stream freely down your reddening cheeks and the rushing of blood to your head is loud enough to drown out the taunts

of those who are against Jesus. Perhaps, when you look back, your hours spent at the foot of this particular cross will make sense, or at least, more than they do right now, in these terrible moments of pure nothingness. What started as an outing inspired by morbid curiosity has ended with being totally consumed by the enveloping darkness. All is desolation. Where is God now?

Prayers of Intercession

The following response may be used at the end of each bidding:

Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord's Prayer

Final Prayer

Almighty God,
whose most dear Son went not up to joy
but first he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:
mercifully grant that we,
walking in the way of the cross,
may find it to be the way of life and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**