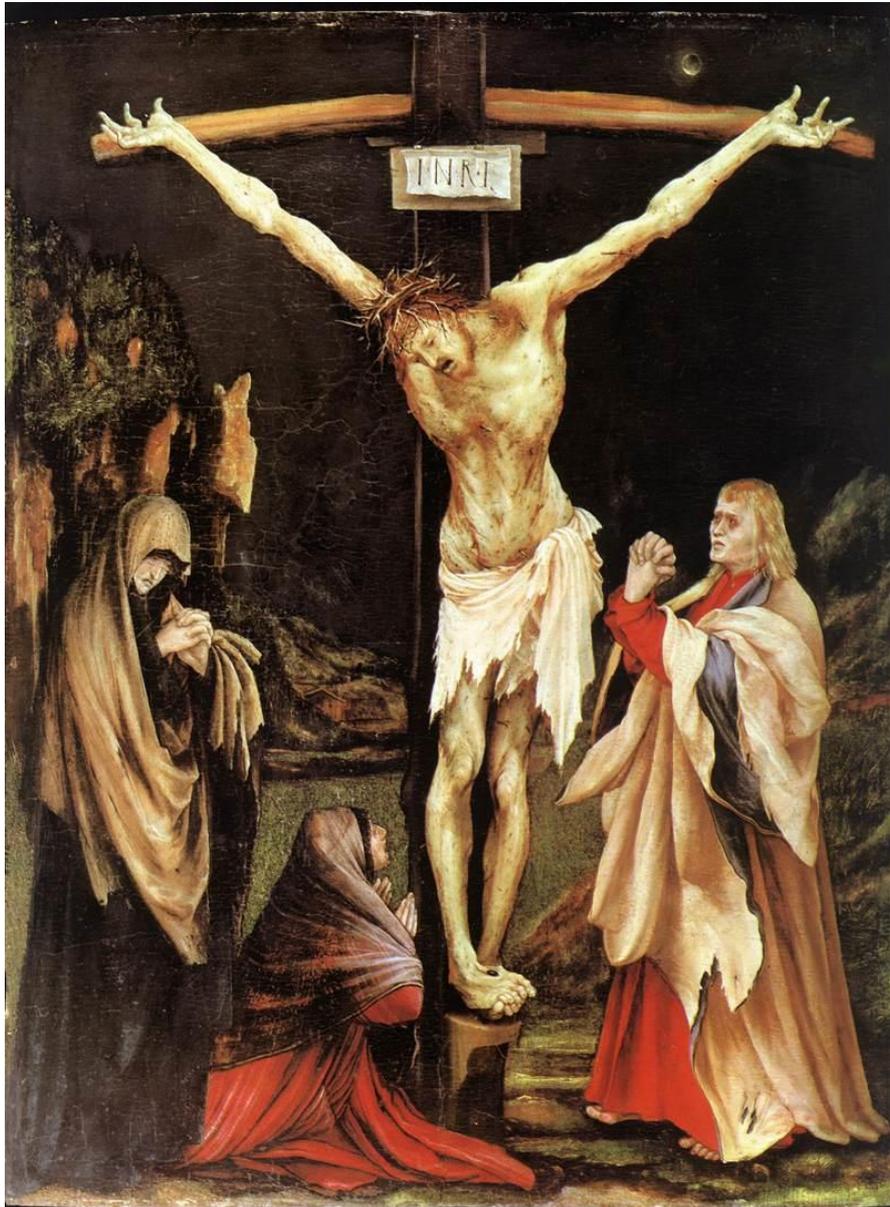


# Christ the Saviour, Ealing



## Spiritual Resources for Holy Week

*Palm Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April -  
Holy Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2022*



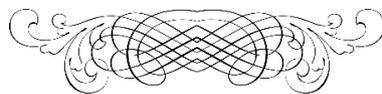
## Holy Week 2022

Holy Week observances began in Jerusalem in the earliest days of the Church, when devout people travelled to Jerusalem at Passover to re-enact the events of the week leading up to the Resurrection.

Egeria was a Christian who travelled widely during the period of 381-385 and wrote about Christian customs and observances in Egypt, Palestine, and Asia Minor. She described how religious tourists to Jerusalem re-enacted the events of Holy Week. On Palm Sunday afternoon, the crowds waved palm fronds as they made a procession from the Mount of Olives into the city. Of course, the observances must have begun quite a number of years before Egeria witnessed them, or they wouldn't have been so elaborate. Holy Week observances spread to Spain by the fifth century, to Gaul and England by the early seventh century, and eventually to Rome in the twelfth century. Egeria's description is important as it is the earliest we still have. The tourists took the customs home with them.

Holy Week is the same in the eastern and western Church, but because eastern Christians use the Julian Calendar to calculate Easter, the celebrations occur at different times. However, the following events in the week before Easter are the same, east and west, relative to the date of Easter:

- Palm Sunday, the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem.
- Maundy Thursday, the institution of the Holy Eucharist and the betrayal by Judas.
- Good Friday, the arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus Christ.
- Holy Saturday, the Sabbath on which Jesus rested in the grave.



Here is love, vast as the ocean,  
Loving kindness as the flood,  
When the Prince of life, our ransom,  
Shed for us his precious blood.  
Who his love will not remember?  
Who can cease to sing his praise?  
He can never be forgotten  
Throughout heaven's eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion  
Fountains opened deep and wide;  
Through the floodgates of God's mercy  
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.  
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,  
Poured incessant from above,  
And heaven's peace and perfect justice  
Kissed a guilty world in love.

*William Rees (1802-1883)*

## Who is the Suffering Servant?

Third Isaiah--the prophet responsible for chapters 40-60 of the book of Isaiah--records four mysterious and beautiful poems, known as the *Servant Songs* (Isaiah 42.1-9, 49.1-6, 50.4-9, 52.13). On Good Friday, we read the fourth Servant Song during the Solemn Liturgy.

The poems are mysterious because we do not know who exactly Isaiah means by *the Servant*. Many Biblical scholars identify the Servant as King Cyrus, who permitted the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem in 516 BC; Jewish writers interpret the Servant as the coming Messiah, or the People of Israel, persecuted for so many generations; for Christians, however, these songs are a lens through which we can view the events of Holy Week. They give us a way into the meaning of the Cross.

The Songs have their origin during the Exile, in the experience of God's people forced to leave Judah as refugees, and live in Babylon in 587 BC. The writer explores a powerful sense of being trapped in a place where we can do nothing but bear suffering patiently. The songs portray the Servant's journey into the darkness of human suffering--this is what accounts for their mysterious power.

A portion of the fourth Song is familiar from Handel's setting in *The Messiah*, *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.* (Isaiah 53.3) As the Servant is led to his death *like a lamb to the slaughter* (53.7), Isaiah asks poignantly, *Who could have imagined his future?*

The shock of war and exile is registered in all its bleakness.

The Servant Songs can give us comfort because they acknowledge the reality of human grief and pain, but they are about more than this: the Servant hears God's call to enter the beauty of the world that God has created, and through his suffering set others free. This Suffering Servant bears human grief and suffering in his own body; by experiencing despair himself, he can be present in our losses and fears, so that we will never be abandoned to suffering alone, or to pain that is unhealed.

But there's another voice in the Servant songs. At the end of the first Song, God speaks of what is new, and is springing into life, and ends with a command (42.9-10),

*Sing to the Lord a new song,  
his praise to the end of the earth.*

For Christians, these four Servant Songs reveal in a profound way the mystery of the Cross. They have a particular resonance as we pray for the suffering people of the Ukraine, so many of whom have been driven out of their own country. The Songs, for all the brutal language of suffering they contain, give us hope that ends in joy: this suffering, all suffering, has been born and redeemed. Through the Suffering Servant we will be set free to live in newness and praise God.

During this Holy Week may we draw close to the Suffering Servant; we know the presence of God in darkness; and on Easter Day may we know the Servant's joy at suffering redeemed, and sing to the Lord. Amen.

## Palm Sunday

April 10<sup>th</sup>

### A Penitential Psalm for Holy Week

*Each Sunday in Lent Fr Jonathan Aitken has introduced us to one of the Penitential Psalms. In this final week he looks at Psalm 22.*

- <sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
- <sup>2</sup> O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.
- <sup>3</sup> Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- <sup>4</sup> In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.
- <sup>5</sup> To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
- <sup>6</sup> But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.
- <sup>7</sup> All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
- <sup>8</sup> 'Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver – let him rescue the one in whom he delights!'
- <sup>9</sup> Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
- <sup>10</sup> On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
- <sup>11</sup> Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.
- <sup>12</sup> Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- <sup>13</sup> they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.
- <sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax;  
it is melted within my breast;
- <sup>15</sup> my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.
- <sup>16</sup> For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shrivelled;
- <sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me;
- <sup>18</sup> they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.
- <sup>19</sup> But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!
- <sup>20</sup> Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog!
- <sup>21</sup> Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
- <sup>22</sup> I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
- <sup>23</sup> You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
- <sup>24</sup> For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me,  
but heard when I cried to him.
- <sup>25</sup> From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
- <sup>26</sup> The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord.  
May your hearts live for ever!
- <sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.
- <sup>28</sup> For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.
- <sup>29</sup> To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;  
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.
- <sup>30</sup> Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,
- <sup>31</sup> and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

This extraordinary Psalm, traditionally read in many churches on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday, combines agonising cries of pain with amazing words of prophesy. No Christian believer can read it without bringing to mind the horrors of the crucifixion. Yet it is an historical fact that the psalm was written many hundreds of years before the scenes of the Cross, so uncannily depicted in these verses actually took place. So there is mystery here. It is a mystery with a message.

The psalm opens with the haunting words: *My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?* (verse 1).

The identical cry came from the lips of Jesus in his death agony on the cross. Was he quoting the psalm? Many Christians have been persuaded to accept this view but the notion is surely implausible. When a man is being executed he does not reach for the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*.

The idea of Jesus of behaving an equivalent way on the Cross seems just as fanciful.

The facts become even become even stranger. The psalm is a poetic portrait of a man going through the worse ordeals of physical torture and emotional trauma during a humiliating public punishment – possibly the preliminary stages of an execution. He is mocked and insulted (verse 7). He hears the taunts of the crowd shaking their heads in mockery and saying: He trusts in the Lord, let the Lord rescue him (verse 8). His sufferings include a terrible thirst, pain from disjoined bones, and agony from the piercing of his hands and feet. His clothes were shared out by the casting of lots (verse 8). As these actual scenes were all played out at Jesus's crucifixion it is easy to understand why Christian tradition regards Psalm 22 as a prophecy.

The author not only wrote this psalm with the voice of a prophet, he also spoke with the voice of experience. The first 21 verses are too deep a cry of anguish to have been composed from imagination. Yet what is really extraordinary are not the details of the sufferer's pain but his spiritual agony over his God forsaken-ness. This is an experience many others have shared. 'Where is God when we really need him?' is not merely the title of a Philip Yancey best seller, but also a familiar complaint. Yet the sufferer in this psalm is not a despairing complainer. He is bewildered by God's silence but he does not lose his faith in God's presence. Even when surrounded by evil men who he compares with bulls, lions, dogs and wild oxen, he keeps on appealing to the Lord to come quickly and save him (verses 19-21).

The last ten verses of the psalm are a sudden and dramatic change of tone, from agony to ecstasy. We are not told how God rescued his suffering servant. All we learn is that the Lord did not disdain the afflicted one but listened to his cry for help (verse 24).

In the final verse the psalm swells into an anthem of glory and more prophecy as it predicts that all over the world God's message will be proclaimed to *people yet unborn* (verse 31) and that all the ends of the earth will...*turn to the Lord* (verse 27).

All believers can take heart from this psalm. However dire their circumstances may be and however perplexing the divine silences can seem, God is faithful. In this life or the next, the Lord will raise up his suffering servants and give them his glory, just as he did with the author of this psalm and with his crucified Son.

### Prayer

Lord Jesus you humbled yourself in taking the form of a servant,  
and in obedience died on the cross for our salvation.

Give us the grace to follow you and to proclaim you as Lord and King,  
to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

## Fig Monday

April 11<sup>th</sup>

*The second day of Holy Week is properly known as Holy Monday, but in the Middle Ages, it came to be nicknamed 'Fig Monday', because the Bible tells of how Jesus preached on the power of prayer under a barren fig tree on the day after his entry into Jerusalem.*

### Reading

In the morning, when Jesus returned to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, 'May no fruit ever come from you again!' And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither at once?' Jesus answered them, 'Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, "Be lifted up and thrown into the sea", it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.'

*St John 14. 1-7*

### Reflection

Jesus comes near and he beholds the city  
And looks on us with tears in his eyes,  
And wells of mercy, streams of love and pity  
Flow from the fountain whence all things arise.  
He loved us into life and longs to gather  
And meet with his beloved face to face  
How often has he called, a careful mother,  
And wept for our refusals of his grace,  
Wept for a world that, weary with its weeping,  
Benumbed and stumbling, turns the other way,  
Fatigued compassion is already sleeping  
Whilst her worst nightmares stalk the light of day.  
But we might waken yet, and face those fears,  
If we could see ourselves through Jesus' tears.

*Malcolm Guite (b 1957)*

How could Christ die for our sins? This is the hardest thing for people to realize intellectually. You can tell them about it, but I believe the experience of Christ's death, the freedom from sin, can only be experienced personally. You can hear about it and know about it, but I think this is the gap across which a person has to leap by experience or by faith.

*George Reindorp (1911-1990)*

*Sometime Vicar of St Stephen's Rochester Row, Bishop of Guildford*

### Prayer

We give glory to you, Lord, who raised up your cross to span the jaws of death  
like a bridge by which souls might pass from the region of the dead to the land of the living.  
We give glory to you who put on the body of a single mortal human  
and made it the source of life for every other mortal human.

*St Ephrem of Edessa (306-373)*

## Temple Tuesday

April 12<sup>th</sup>

*The significance of Holy Tuesday is not easily grasped. In a single day, Jesus would simultaneously condemn the religious authorities while confirming his deity. The cleansing of the Temple caused the Pharisees to question Jesus' right to do 'these things.' Jesus had not received his authority from the religious leaders . . . so they wanted answers.*

### Reading

In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

*Psalm 71. 1-3*

### Reflection

*Cleansing the Temple*

Come to your Temple here with liberation  
And overturn these tables of exchange  
Restore in me my lost imagination  
Begin in me for good, the pure change.  
Come as you came, an infant with your mother,  
That innocence may cleanse and claim this ground  
Come as you came, a boy who sought his father  
With questions asked and certain answers found,  
Come as you came this day, a man in anger  
Unleash the lash that drives a pathway through  
Face down for me the fear the shame the danger  
Teach me again to whom my love is due.  
Break down in me the barricades of death  
And tear the veil in two with your last breath.

*Malcolm Guite (b 1957)*

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate ... Returning violence for violence multiples violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.'

*Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968)*

### Prayer

Almighty God, your dear Son did not ascend to joy until he first suffered pain, and did not enter into glory before he was crucified. Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it as the true way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

## Spy Wednesday

### April 13<sup>th</sup>

*Spy Wednesday gets its name because this is the day on which Judas betrayed Jesus to the Sanhedrin. Because Judas is thought to be duplicitous, his actions conjured up the image of a spy. The synoptic gospels all include an account of the betrayal.*

### Reading

As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to the disciples, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised.' And they were greatly distressed.

*St Matthew 17. 22-23*

### Reflection

Life is not about fairness or unfairness. It is often unjust, claiming the good and the innocent as its victims. Life is about making certain choices: between one action and another, between generous self-giving and selfish holding back; and it is also about what we make of the harsh, unlooked-for blows that come to us all: sickness and pain, grief and old age. None of us dare judge the life of another: that is God's prerogative, and his judgement is matched by his mercy. Those who become embittered or lose their faith or take their own life in despair may have had the dice loaded against them from the start, and none of us know whether we should have survived if we had been in their place. All I would dare claim is that it is good if we learn from our own experience of suffering or bereavement, and as a result are wiser, more tolerant, above all more compassionate. There are those who are able to use their sickness, their pain, even their dying as a time for growth and a new-found trust in the God who holds us in death as in life and will not let us go. And perhaps they are not as rare as we think.

*Michael Mayne (1929-2006)*  
*Former Dean of Westminster*

People should not worry as much about what they do but rather about what they are. If they and their ways are good, then their deeds are radiant. If you are righteous, then what you do will also be righteous. We should not think that holiness is based on what we do but rather on what we are, for it is not our works which sanctify us but we who sanctify our works.

*Meister Eckhart, (1260-1328)*  
*German theologian, philosopher & mystic*

### Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love  
on the hard wood of the Cross that everyone might come  
within the reach of your saving embrace.  
So clothe your Church with the Holy Spirit,  
that we, reaching forth our hands in love,  
may bring those who do not know you to faith in your saving love,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Maundy Thursday

April 14<sup>th</sup>

*Maundy is derived from the Latin word for 'command,' and refers to Jesus' commandment to the disciples to 'Love one another as I have loved you.' On this day we commemorate the Last Supper of Our Lord, which instituted the Holy Eucharist.*

### Reading

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

*1 Corinthians 11. 23-26*

### Reflection

The Eucharist recalls the past, it is true, but it ever renews it, causing it to be actually present ... it is a true remembrance of a past event in our Lord's history. But it does far more. It brings back the event which it recalls; it has power to make it an ever-living reality ... the same Presence is before us again and again, as real and true as when first vouchsafed in the night that he was betrayed.

*T T Carter (1808-1901)  
Anglo-Catholic priest & author*

You have your mass, you have your altars, you have begun to get your tabernacles. Now go out into the highways and hedges, and look for Jesus in the ragged and the naked, in the oppressed and the sweated, in those who have lost hope, and in those who are struggling to make good. Look for Jesus in them; and when you have found him, gird yourself with his towel of fellowship and wash his feet in the person of his brethren.

*Frank Weston (1871-1924)  
Priest at St Matthew's, Bishop of Zanzibar*

### Prayer

O blessed Lord, you have commanded us to love one another.  
Just as we have received your undeserved blessings, may we love everyone in you and for you.  
We ask your kindness for all, but especially for the friends whom your love has given to us.  
Love them, O fountain of love, and move them to love you with all their heart,  
that they may will, and speak, and do only those things which are pleasing to you.

Our prayer is cold, because our love is so feeble, but you are rich in mercy.  
Do not measure your goodness to them by the dullness of our devotion,  
but as your kindness surpasses all human affection, so let your hearing transcend our prayer.  
Do what is best for them, according to your will, that being ruled and protected by you  
always and everywhere, they may receive eternal life in the end; to you, with the Father and  
the Holy Spirit, be all honour and praise for ever and ever. Amen.

*St Anselm (1033-1109)  
Theologian, philosopher, Archbishop of Canterbury*

## Good Friday

### April 15<sup>th</sup>

The term 'Good Friday' does not actually mean that the Friday in question was good, positive or nice. Used in this context, the word 'Good' carries the same meaning as the original Old English word, in that it means holy. Thus, this day is also referred to as Holy Friday. However, we argue that the day of Christ's crucifixion was good in its way, because it was the day that Christ died on the cross for the redemption of the world.

### Reading

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shrivelled; I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots. But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!

*Psalm 22. 14-19*

### Reflection

The Cross is the word through which God has responded to evil in the world. Sometimes it may seem as though God does not react to evil, as if he is silent. And yet, God has spoken, he has replied, and his answer is the Cross of Christ: a word which is love, mercy, forgiveness. It also reveals a judgment, namely that God, in judging us, loves us. Remember this: God, in judging us, loves us. If I embrace his love then I am saved, if I refuse it, then I am condemned, not by him, but by my own self, because God never condemns, he only loves and saves.

*Pope Francis*

Through the stark and solemn Liturgy of the Friday we call *Good*, we stand at the Altar of the Cross where heaven is re-joined to earth and earth to heaven, along with the Mother of the Lord. We enter into the moment that forever changed – and still changes – all human History, the great self gift of the Son of God who did for us what we could never do for ourselves by in the words of the ancient Exultet, *trampling on death by death*. We wait at the tomb and witness the Glory of the Resurrection and the beginning of the New Creation.

*Deacon Keith Fournier*

### Prayer

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.

*Good Friday Collect, Book of Common Prayer*

## Holy Saturday

April 16<sup>th</sup>

*Holy Saturday is a day of waiting and preparing as Mary did near the tomb of her son. It is a day without liturgy, caught as between two waves of the sea. While Mary did not really know what would happen next, there was a sense of anticipation that there is more to come; a sense we need to keep with us today. We can identify with her in our own waiting.*

### Reading

Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth.'

*Hosea 6. 1-3*

### Reflection

There should be in the soul  
halls of space,  
avenues of leisure  
and high porticos of silence  
where God waits

*Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)  
Priest & writer*

### *Wait Without Hope*

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.  
Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.  
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,  
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy  
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony  
Of death and birth.

*T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)*

### Prayer

Lord, God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Eric Milner White (1884-1963)  
Dean of York, academic, decorated military chaplain*

On this Holy Saturday, the final day of Lent, let our faith be made stronger; let us be more assured that sin and death are conquered; let us know a little more of the light through the sometimes impenetrable shadows. Whether the Harrowing of Hell is literal or figurative, corporeal or spiritual, it has a message for all of us today: the highest response to evil is to free people from it. Let us rejoice that our Redeemer lives.

*Thomas Cranmer (1489-1456)*  
*Archbishop of Canterbury*

He cannot do anything deliberate now. The strain of his whole weight on his outstretched arms hurts too much. The pain fills him up, displaces thought, as much for him as it has for everyone else who has ever been stuck to one of these horrible contrivances, or for anyone else who dies in pain from any of the world's grim arsenal of possibilities. And yet he goes on taking in. It is not what he does, it is what he is. He is all open door: to sorrow, suffering, guilt, despair, horror, everything that cannot be escaped, and he does not even try to escape it, he turns to meet it, and claims it all as his own. This is mine now, he is saying; and he embraces it with all that is left in him, each dark act, each dripping memory, as if it were something precious, as if it were itself the loved child tottering homeward on the road. But there is so much of it. So many injured children; so many locked rooms; so much lonely anger; so many bombs in public places; so much vicious zeal; so many bored teenagers at roadblocks; so many drunk girls at parties someone thought they could have a little fun with; so many jokes that go too far; so much ruining greed; so much sick ingenuity; so much burned skin. The world he claims, claims him. It burns and stings, it splinters and gouges, it locks him round and drags him down ...

All day long, the next day, the city is quiet. The air above the city lacks the usual thousand little trails of smoke from cookfires. Hymns rise from the temple. Families are indoors. The soldiers are back in barracks. The Chief Priest grows hoarse with singing. The governor plays chess with his secretary and dictates letters. The free bread the temple distributed to the poor has gone stale by midday, but tastes all right dipped in water or broth. Death has interrupted life only as much as it ever does. We die one at a time and disappear, but the life of the living continues. The earth turns. The sun makes its way towards the western horizon no slower or faster than it usually does.

Early Sunday morning, one of the friends comes back with rags and a jug of water and a box of the grave spices that are supposed to cut down on the smell. She's braced for the task. But when she comes to the grave she finds that the linen's been thrown into the corner and the body is gone. Evidently anonymous burial isn't quite anonymous enough, after all. She sits outside in the sun. The insects have woken up, here at the edge of the desert, and a bee is nosing about in a lily like silk thinly tucked over itself, but much more perishable. It won't last long. She takes no notice of the feet that appear at the edge of her vision. That's enough now, she thinks. That's more than enough.

Don't be afraid, says Yeshua. Far more can be mended than you know.

She is weeping. The executee helps her to stand up.

*Francis Spufford (b 1964)*  
*Author & teacher*

