



THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF CHRIST

REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FROM ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE

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INTRODUCTION

The Seven Last Words is a beloved devotion of the Church that invites us to recall and meditate on Jesus' last words as he hung on the cross.

In this collection, each *word* is accompanied by the corresponding Gospel passage and a reflection and prayer from St. Josemaria Escriva. The devotion can be prayed over a week – each day devoted to one of the seven words – or it may be prayed in a single day.

Holy Week, especially Good Friday, is an ideal time to make use of this devotion for personal prayer: to silently and prayerfully contemplate Jesus' passion and death, to be united to him in his suffering, and to dwell on the strength and mercy of his love.

THE FIRST WORD

“Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.”

Luke 23:34

GOSPEL

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. [Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”] They divided his garments by casting lots.

Luke 23:33 – 34

REFLECTION

“Christ’s generous self-sacrifice is a challenge to sin. We find it hard to accept the reality of sin, although its existence is undeniable. Sin is the *mysterium iniquitatis*: the mystery of evil, the inexplicable evil of the creature whose pride leads him to rise up against God. The story is as old as mankind. It began with the fall of our first parents; then came the unending depravities which punctuate the behavior of mankind down the ages; and, finally, our own personal rebellions. It is very difficult to realize just how perverse sin is and to understand what our faith tells us. We should remember that even in the human context the scale of an offense is frequently determined by the importance of the injured party – his social standing, his qualities. But with sin man offends God, the creature repudiates his creator.

“But ‘God is love.’ The abyss of malice which sin opens wide has been bridged by his infinite charity. God did not abandon men. His plans foresaw that the sacrifices of the old law would be insufficient to repair our faults and re-establish the unity which had been lost. A man who was God would have to offer himself up. To help us grasp in some measure this unfathomable mystery, we might imagine the Blessed Trinity taking counsel together in its uninterrupted intimate relationship of infinite love. As a result of its eternal decision, the only-begotten Son of God the Father takes on our human condition and bears the burden of our wretchedness and sorrows, to end up sewn with nails to a piece of wood.”

St. Josemaria Escriva
Christ is Passing By, no. 95

PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE

My Lord and my God:
into your hands I abandon
the past and the present and the future,
what is small and what is great,
what amounts to a little
and what amounts to a lot,
things temporal and things eternal.
Amen.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

THE SECOND WORD

“Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Luke 23:43

GOSPEL

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today, you will be with me in Paradise.”

Luke 23:39 – 43

REFLECTION

“The Christian is obliged to be *alter Christus, ipse Christus*: another Christ, Christ himself. Through baptism all of us have been made priests of our lives, ‘to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ Everything we do can be an expression of our obedience to God’s will and so perpetuate the mission of the God-man.

“Once we realize this, we are immediately reminded of our wretchedness and our personal failings. But they should not dishearten us; we should not become pessimistic and put our ideals aside. Our Lord is calling us, in our present state, to share his life and make an effort to be holy. I know holiness can sound like an empty word. Too many people think it is unattainable, something to do with ascetical theology – but not a real goal for them, a living reality. The first Christians didn’t think that way. They often used the word “saints” to describe each other in a very natural manner: ‘greetings to all the saints’; ‘my greetings to every one of the saints in Jesus Christ.’

“Take a look now at Calvary. Jesus has died and there is as yet no sign of his glorious triumph. It is a good time to examine how much we really want to live as Christians, to be holy. Here is our chance to react against our weaknesses with an act of faith.”

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THE THIRD WORD

“Woman, behold, your son.” (...) “Behold, your mother.”

John 19:26 – 27

GOSPEL

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

John 19:25 – 27

REFLECTION

“When it comes to the scandal of the Sacrifice of the Cross, Mary is there, hearing with sadness how ‘the passers-by blasphemed against him, tossing their heads, *Come now, they said, you would destroy the temple and build it up in three days, rescue yourself; come down from that cross, if you are the Son of God.*’ Our Lady is there listening to the words of her Son, united to him in his suffering, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ What could she do? She united herself fully with the redemptive love of her Son, and offered to the Father her immense sorrow, which pierced her pure Heart like a sharp-edged sword.

“Jesus is comforted anew by the quiet, loving presence of his Mother. Mary does not shout; she does not run about frantically. *Stabat*: she is there, standing next to her Son. It is then that Jesus looks at her, and then turning his gaze to John he exclaims, ‘Woman, this is thy son. Then he said to the disciple, This is thy Mother.’ In the person of John, Christ is entrusting all men to his Mother, and especially his disciples: those who were to believe in him.

“*Felix culpa*, the Church sings. Happy fault, that has brought us so great and wonderful a Redeemer. Happy fault, we could add, which has merited that we should receive Mary as our Mother. Now we are safe. Nothing should worry us now, because Our Lady, the crowned Queen of heaven and earth, is omnipotent in her supplication before our Father God. Jesus cannot deny anything to Mary, nor to us, who are children of his own Mother.”

St. Josemaria Escriva
Friends of God, no. 288

PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE

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Amen.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

THE FOURTH WORD

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Mark 15:34

GOSPEL

At noon darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, *“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”* which is translated, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

Mark 15:33 – 34

REFLECTION

“Be eager to adore, yearn to make reparation, suffering quietly and calmly. Then Jesus’ words will come alive in your lives: ‘he who does not take up his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me’. Our Lord becomes more and more demanding with us. He asks us to make reparation, to do penance, and the time comes when he makes us experience a fervent desire to want ‘to live for God, nailed on the Cross with Christ’. But ‘we have this treasure in vessels made of clay,’ which is fragile and brittle, ‘to show that the power that shines through us is not ours but God’s.’

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not without hope,’ or sustenance; ‘we are persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; we carry about continually in our bodies the dying state of Jesus.’

“We may even imagine that Our Lord does not hear us; that we are being deluded, that all we hear is the monologue of our own voice. We find ourselves, as it were, without support on earth and abandoned by heaven. Nevertheless, we have a real and practical horror of sin, even venial sin. With the stubbornness of the Canaanite woman, we go down on our knees as she did, adoring him and imploring ‘Lord, help me’. The darkness will vanish, vanquished by the light of Love.”

St. Josemaria Escriva
Friends of God, no. 304

PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE

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Amen.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

THE FIFTH WORD

"I thirst."

John 19:28

GOSPEL

After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth.

John 19:28 – 29

REFLECTION

"All the circumstances in which life places us bring a divine message, asking us to respond with love and service to others. 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.

"Then the King will say to those at his right hand, *Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.* Then the righteous will answer him, *Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?* And the King will answer them, *Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'*

"We must learn to recognize Christ when he comes out to meet us in our brothers, the people around us. No human life is ever isolated. It is bound up with other lives. No man or woman is a single verse; we all make up one divine poem which God writes with the cooperation of our freedom."

St. Josemaria Escriva
Christ is Passing By, no. 111

PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE

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Amen.

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THE SIXTH WORD

“It is finished.”

John 19:30

GOSPEL

When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, “It is finished.” And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

John 19:30

REFLECTION

“God our Father has seen fit to grant us, in the heart of his Son, ‘infinite treasures of love,’ mercy and affection. If we want to find evidence that God loves us – that he not only listens to our prayers but anticipates them – we need only follow the same line of thought as St Paul: ‘He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things in him?’

“Grace renews a man from within and converts a sinner and rebel into a good and faithful servant. The source of all grace is God’s love for us, and he has revealed this not just in words but also in deeds. It was divine love which led the second Person of the holy Trinity, the Word, the Son of God the Father, to take on our flesh, our human condition, everything except sin. And the Word, the Word of God, is the Word from which Love proceeds.

“Love is revealed to us in the incarnation, the redemptive journey which Jesus Christ made on our earth, culminating in the supreme sacrifice of the cross. And on the cross it showed itself through a new sign: ‘One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.’ This water and blood of Jesus speak to us of a self-sacrifice brought to the last extreme: ‘It is finished’ – everything is achieved, for the sake of love.”

St. Josemaria Escriva
Christ is Passing By, no. 162

PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE

My Lord and my God:
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and what amounts to a lot,
things temporal and things eternal.
Amen.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

THE SEVENTH WORD

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Luke 23:46

GOSPEL

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”; and when he had said this he breathed his last.”

Luke 23:44 – 46

REFLECTION

“A Cross. A body fastened with nails to the wood. His side pierced... Only his Mother, a few women and a young man remain with Jesus.

“The apostles? Where are they? And the people who were healed of their infirmities: the lame, the blind, the lepers? And those who had acclaimed him? Not a single one acknowledges him! Christ is surrounded by silence.

“You too some day may feel the loneliness of Our Lord on the Cross. If so, seek the support of him who died and rose again. Find yourself a shelter in the wounds in his hands, in his feet, in his side. And your willingness to start again will revive, and you will take up your journey again with greater determination and effectiveness.”

St. Josemaria Esciva
The Way of the Cross, Twelfth Station

PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE

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ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE

St. Josemaria Escriva dedicated his priestly life to helping men and women of all backgrounds *to understand that ordinary life can be holy and full of God* – naturally and simply, living in the middle of the world dedicated to one’s work and family, sharing in the needs and interests of one’s neighbor and society, respecting the freedom of every person, and striving towards holiness.

The St. Josemaria Institute seeks to increase devotion to St. Josemaria and to share his message among all men and women who desire to find meaning and happiness in their daily lives by growing closer to God. Our hope is that people everywhere will have the opportunity to hear the message of St. Josemaria and accept the challenge he set forth in the first point of his spiritual classic, *The Way*:

“Don’t let your life be sterile. Be useful. Blaze a trail. Shine forth with the light of your faith and of your love... light up all the ways of the earth with the fire of Christ that you carry in your heart.”



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