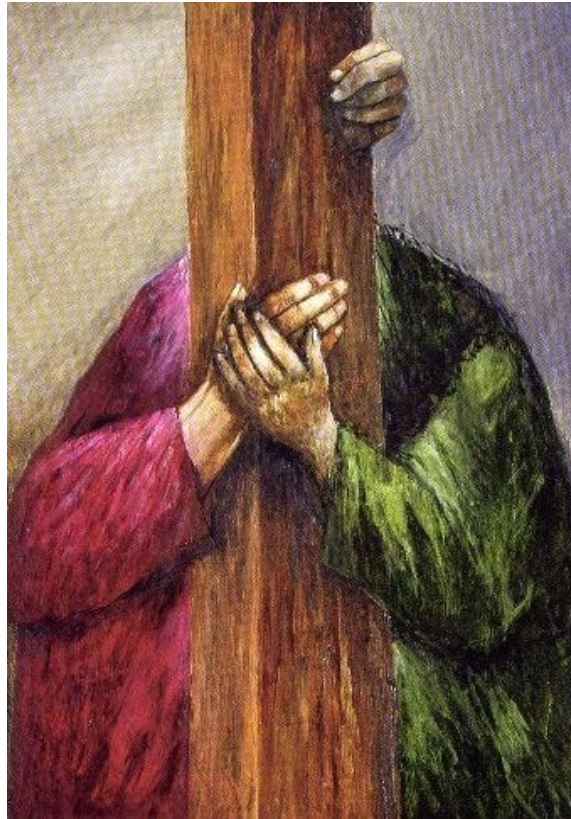


PRAYING HOLY WEEK 2019 WITH WORD AND IMAGE



Sieger Köder (1925–2015), *No words*

Reflections adapted and abridged with gratitude from Nicholas King SJ,
Walking together with Jesus, Pathways to God Lent retreat, 2019



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MONDAY

Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there; Martha waited on them and Lazarus was among those at table. Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was full of the scent of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot – one of his disciples, the man who was to betray him Come close with Mary, Martha, Lazarus, said, ‘Why wasn’t this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor?’ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contributions. So Jesus said, ‘Leave her alone; she had to keep this scent for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me.’

Meanwhile a large number of Jews heard that he was there and came not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. Then the chief priests decided to kill Lazarus as well, since it was on his account that many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus.

John 12: 1–11

How might I pray the passage as my journey through Holy Week begins? I might simply opt to ‘be there’, and gaze contemplatively at the scene, through the eyes of the characters involved. The heart of the story is an anointing; the setting is a dinner-party, apparently given to thank Jesus for having raised Lazarus from the dead.

I might also want to focus on Mary: What kind of person do I imagine her to be? Maybe I observe the intimacy and the generosity of what she does: ‘a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard’; and as for intimacy, her anointing Jesus’s feet and wiping them with her hair? What feelings arise in me? Then I exercise my nose: ‘the house was full of the scent of the ointment’. What does this say to me?

In the same way, I turn my attention to the other characters in this scene: Judas ... the Jews who are looking on ... and, of course, Jesus.

As I pray, I consider these questions: which character(s) do I identify with in this story? Which one would I like to identify with?

What difference might that make to the way I live today?

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY

Malcolm Guite (b. 1957)

Come close with Mary, Martha, Lazarus,
so close the candles flare with their soft breath,
and kindle heart and soul to flame within us
lit by these mysteries of life and death.
For beauty now begins the final movement,
in quietness and intimate encounter,
the alabaster jar of precious ointment
is broken open for the world’s true lover.
The whole room richly fills to feast the senses
with all the yearning such a fragrance brings,
the heart is mourning but the spirit dances,
here at the very centre of all things,
here at the meeting place of love and loss
we all foresee and see beyond the cross.



James Woodward, *Jesus anointed at Bethany*

TUESDAY

Having said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, 'I tell you most solemnly, one of you will betray me'. The disciples looked at one another, wondering which he meant. The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus; Simon Peter signed to him and said, 'Ask who it is he means', so leaning back on Jesus's breast he said, 'Who is it, Lord?' 'It is the one', replied Jesus, 'to whom I give the piece of bread that I shall dip in the dish.' He dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. At that instant, after Judas had taken the bread, Satan entered him. Jesus then said, 'What you are going to do, do quickly'. None of the others at table understood the reason he said this. Since Judas had charge of the common fund, some of them thought Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival', or telling him to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the piece of bread he went out. Night had fallen.

When he had gone, Jesus said: 'Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself and will glorify him very soon.' [...]

Simon Peter said, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus replied, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now; you will follow me later'. Peter said to him, 'Why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' 'Lay down your life for me?' answered Jesus. 'I tell you most solemnly, before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.'

John 13: 21–38

How might I pray this text?

First, I could try to just be there, at the Last Supper. I am present in the room, and look around at the others; I hear Jesus announcing his betrayal; I notice the signal between Simon Peter and the 'Beloved Disciple', to find out who he was talking about. I watch the scene unfold.

Night has fallen. I ponder.

Jesus speaks of his glory, and the glory of God. How can this be? I ask the Lord to help me understand.

Maybe I now feel I want to focus on Simon Peter.

What is the tone of his voice? Sulking, petulant, puzzled ...?

And what about Jesus's reply? Is it resigned, sad, knowing...?

Before concluding my prayer, I ask myself: Which character in this story am I most like? How can I follow Christ today?

ON SEEING LEONARDO DA VINCI'S 'LAST SUPPER', MILAN 1904

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926)

They are assembled, astonished and disturbed
round him, who like a sage resolved his fate,
and now leaves those to whom he most belonged,
leaving and passing by them like a stranger.
The loneliness of old comes over him
which helped mature him for his deepest acts;
now will he once again walk through the olive grove,
and those who love him still will flee before his sight.
To this last supper he has summoned them,
and (like a shot that scatters birds from trees)
their hands draw back from reaching for the loaves
upon his word: they fly across to him;
they flutter, frightened, round the supper table
searching for an escape. But he is present
everywhere like an all-pervading twilight-hour.

From *Das Abendmahl*, translated Albert Ernest Flemming



Leonardo da Vinci, *L'Ultima Cena* (1490s, Milan)

WEDNESDAY

Then one of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you?' They paid him thirty silver pieces, and from that moment he looked for an opportunity to betray him.

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus to say, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' 'Go to so-and-so in the city,' he replied, 'and say to him, "The Master says: My time is near. It is at your house that I am keeping Passover with my disciples".' The disciples did what Jesus told them and prepared the Passover.

When evening came he was at table with the twelve disciples. And while they were eating he said, 'I tell you solemnly, one of you is about to betray me' They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn, 'Not I, Lord, surely?' He answered, 'Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with me, will betray me. The Son of Man is going to his fate, as the scriptures say he will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born!' Judas, who was to betray him; asked in his turn, 'Not I, Rabbi, surely?' 'They are your own words', answered Jesus. Matthew 26:14–25

How are we to pray this grim moment?

First, I might try and drink in the atmosphere that Matthew creates.

As soon as Judas knows there is to be something in it for him, he looks for a window of opportunity to betray his Master.

What stirs in me as I witness this exchange?

Then perhaps I am there with the rest of the disciples, as they hurry to make their last-minute preparations. I hear Jesus give them a coded message, 'The time is near' ... How do I feel?

Then comes the Passover meal itself, which should be the moment of greatest joy in the Jewish year ... but it all turns sour as Jesus predicts that one of them will betray him.

Perhaps I listen to each of the disciples in turn – Judas last of all – asking, 'It's not me, is it, Lord ...?'

I might reflect on the mood created by Jesus's response: 'You said it'.

How do I feel at this point? How do I want to respond?

JUDAS, PETER

Luci Shaw (b. 1928)

Because we are all
betrayers, taking
silver and eating
body and blood and asking
(guilty) is it I and hearing
him say yes
it would be simple for us all
to rush out
and hang ourselves
but if we find grace
to cry and wait
after the voice of morning
has crowed in our ears
clearly enough
to break our hearts
he will be there
to ask us each again
do you love me?



HOLY THURSDAY

It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was.

They were at supper ... and Jesus got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand'. 'Never!' said Peter, 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me'. 'Then, Lord,' said Simon Peter, 'not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has taken a bath needs washing, he is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, that was why he said, 'though not all of you are'.

When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand', he said, 'what I have done to you? ... I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'

John 13: 1-15

Today is the start of the Sacred Triduum, the three days forming the climax of our Lenten journey. The readings and the ceremonies are almost too rich to digest.

So I spend some quiet time reading how Jesus, to Peter's horror, performs for all the disciples – including Judas – an act that was thought too lowly even for slaves, the washing of their feet.

John explains why Jesus is doing this: 'He showed how perfect his love was'.

I pause and ponder.

Looking at my life so far, where am I able to see the Lord's love for me and for those I care about?

Perhaps in my imagination, I see Jesus washing my feet; I feel the trickle of the water, the gentle rubbing of the towel. What is it like? Comforting and sustaining ...? Or, like Peter, do I find it embarrassing and uncomfortable?

What do I say to Jesus?

I reflect on the way tonight's rich liturgy will affect the way I am going to celebrate these three days. How will it change me?

THE TOUCH OF THE TOWEL

Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia (2011)

Jesus, you kneel before me
You remove my shoes and I am exposed
My feet are grimy
full of callouses and cracks
pungent with sweat and toe jam
I'm embarrassed by them
I pull back but you reassure
You're not offended
I feel welcome in your hands
vulnerable, yet safe

The cleansing begins
I see your reflection in the ripples
I see me, too
Your water brings truth and life
Who I am and who I can be

I am whole and home in the touch the towel
You look at my neighbour and hand it to me.



Ford Madox Brown, *Jesus washing Peter's feet* (1852-6, detail)

GOOD FRIDAY

See, my servant will prosper, he shall be lifted up, exalted, rise to great heights.

As the crowds were appalled on seeing him – so disfigured did he look that he seemed no longer human – so will the crowds be astonished at him, and kings stand speechless before him; for they shall see something never told and witness something never heard before: ‘Who could believe what we have heard, and to whom has the power of the Lord been revealed?’ Like a sapling he grew up in front of us, like a root in arid ground. Without beauty, without majesty (we saw him), no looks to attract our eyes; a thing despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, a man to make people screen their faces; he was despised and we took no account of him. And yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried. But we, we thought of him as someone punished, struck by God, and brought low. Yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each taking his own way, and God burdened him with the sins of all of us.

Isaiah 52: 13–53: 6

Today we have the solemn emptiness of Good Friday.

How do I feel on this momentous day?

I might like to follow the instincts of the very earliest Christians as they grappled to make sense of Jesus’s appalling death, and pray part of this ‘Song of the Suffering Servant’, written for the Jewish exiles in Babylon.

It may help me pray through the sadness of today, as I think of Jesus himself as the suffering servant, ‘a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering’.

The writer is well aware of the suffering that can come with answering God’s call. Have I too, experienced this? I reflect on this, in the presence of God.

I hear God speaking of ‘my servant’, telling that the victory is won – though it is clear how the servant is disfigured and marred. Can I recognise my own part in this story?

Today I may simply sit with this extraordinary passage, reading it slowly, several times over, and see what it says to me.

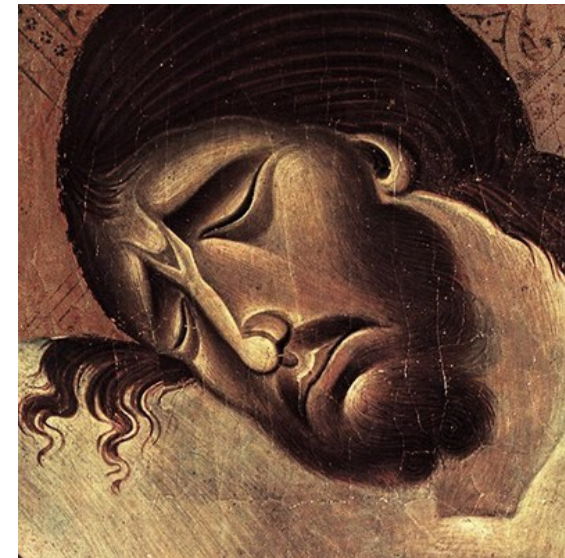
Whatever I find myself thinking or feeling, I can trust that the Lord will be there with me.

MY GOD DIED

Edwina Gateley (b.1943)

My God died
and left me rootless,
floating like a shadow
without a home –
no place to snuggle down
safe and warm
like a nesting bird.
In a moment,
it seemed,
all my gathered
little twigs

and well-placed branches
fell apart,
leaving spaces
I had never known
and a great hollowness
in my belly.
My God died,
leaving me
orphaned.



Cimabue (1240–1302), Crucifix (detail), San Domenico, Arezzo

HOLY SATURDAY

On the first day of the week, at the first sign of dawn, the women went to the tomb with the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but on entering discovered that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there. As they stood there not knowing what to think, two men in brilliant clothes suddenly appeared at their side. Terrified, the women lowered their eyes. But the two men said to them, 'Why look among the dead for someone who is alive? He is not here; he has risen. Remember what he told you when he was still in Galilee: that the Son of Man had to be handed over into the power of sinful men and be crucified, and rise again on the third day?' And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

Luke 24: 1–8



Mikołaj Haberschrack, *The Three Marys at the Tomb* (15th century)

Perhaps I start my prayer by noticing the bravery of these women, who dare to come to the tomb 'in the deep dawn' ... even though they do not believe in the resurrection, since they are intending to anoint a corpse. But God is there, and the women have to be reminded that Jesus had predicted this turn of events. Do I need to be reminded of this joyous event too? What *has* happened at the tomb, in my view? What is the Lord telling *me* about the Resurrection in my prayer today?

Remember us in the roads, the heaven-haven of the Reward:
Our King back, Oh, upon English souls!
Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us,
be a crimson-cressed east,
More brightening her, rare-dear Britain, as his reign rolls,
Pride, rose, prince, hero of us, high-priest,
Our hearts' charity's hearth's fire,
our thoughts' chivalry's throng's Lord.

Gerard Manley Hopkins SJ (1844–89),
from *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1875)



Lyn Constable Maxwell, *The Crucified and Resurrected Christ* (1994, All Saints, London Colney)