

2004 Prayer Vigil

40 Hours in a Year of Prayer

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. Colossians 4:2

We are pleased that you have accepted the invitation to pray during these blessed hours when Jesus hung on the cross and when He rested in the tomb.

It is our prayer that this time will be a blessing to you and that your daily prayer life will grow through this time with the Lord.

For our Prayer Vigil in this Year of Prayer, I invite you on a journey of prayer and meditation on the Words of Scripture, and on the Lenten hymn, “Go to Dark Gethsemane.” You will have hymn verses to read and think about, Scripture readings upon which to meditate, prayer suggestions, and actual prayers to pray. We start in a garden.

**Go to dark Gethsemane,
All who feel the tempter’s power;
Your Redeemer’s conflict see,
Watch with Him one bitter hour;
Turn not from His griefs away,
Learn from Jesus Christ to pray.**

Start by reading Luke 22:39-46 and Matthew 26:36-46.

What can we learn about prayer as we journey to the Mount of Olives and watch Jesus pray?

The Mount of Olives sounds like a pleasant enough place, almost like a park, but a lot of history took place here, not all of it pleasant. A thousand years before Christ, King David fled to the Mount of Olives when his son Absalom led a rebellion and tried to take over the throne of Israel. What a contrast! A disobedient son tried to exert his own will ... and now a very obedient Son, on the same location, is about to submit to His Father’s will. This is a place, and this is a time for sorting out where one’s loyalties really reside. This will be no walk in the park. Pray:

Lord Jesus, this Gethsemane is a dark place. Not just because You and Your disciples arrived there at night. There is an ominous gathering taking place. The powers of darkness are coming together. Lord Jesus, when the devil tempted You in the wilderness, You resisted him with the power of the Word. You sent him packing and he departed, until an opportune time. This is the time when You will be tempted again. Lord, so often I approach prayer thinking only about what I want. That’s how the devil tried to tempt You when You were hungry. That’s how the devil tempted Adam and Eve in that other garden. I know that the devil often tempts me in the same way ... think about what I want ... pray about my needs and my will and my plans. Lord, give me eyes to recognize the temptation to put me ahead of You. Remind me that the “tempter’s power” is nothing to be toyed with or taken lightly. Your Word says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). Whenever temptation comes alluring, give me the power to withstand it, and at the last, to stand. Amen.

The purpose of Lent is precisely this, to see my Redeemer’s conflict. By myself, I don’t stand a chance against the old evil foe. But with Jesus at my side, on my side, surrounding me, defending me, strengthening me, directing me, lifting me when I fall ... and forgiving me ... I have more than a chance. I have my Redeemer’s own promise of victory.

Some Prayers of Thanksgiving:

- Give thanks to God for the assurance that Jesus is your Redeemer, He is the One who has paid the terrible price that purchased your salvation, the price of His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.
- Give thanks to God that “for us fights the Valiant One” and for the victory over the devil.
- Give thanks to God that He will deliver you from every evil, including those you bring upon yourself.
- Give thanks to God for the future hope that He will one day welcome you into the mansions prepared for all who trust in Him.

A pitched battle is taking place here in Gethsemane. It might not look like a battle until you observe how your Redeemer is perspiring, and *what* He is perspiring. He said to the wind and the waves, “Peace, be still!” and there was a great calm. But not this time. This time I am called to see what my Redeemer endured for me.

- How often have I broken a sweat for Him?
- How often has an hour seemed too long to pray?
- How often have I turned away from seeing what He has done for me?
- How often have I said I would pray, only to be distracted or fall asleep?

Lord Jesus, I confess to you that the cup about which You prayed, was filled partly by me. You prayed that the Father would let this cup pass, if possible, but if not, then His will be done. The Father didn't take away the cup, but He did send His angel to strengthen You for what You would endure in the day ahead. The griefs you were to bear weren't really Yours, they were mine. They were not things You brought on Yourself, not things You deserved, but griefs that I heaped upon You. No wonder I want to turn away. And all the more reason that I shouldn't. You were wounded for my transgressions, bruised for my iniquities; the punishment that gives me peace was upon You, and with Your stripes I am healed. Lord Jesus, help me to learn from You. Help me to listen when You teach, to do what You command, and to follow Your example. Help me to trust in You for my redemption. Keep me faithful in my attention to Your Word and to prayer. Teach me to pray, "Your will be done," and to trust that Your will is good and gracious at all times. And keep my attention focused on Your cross. Amen

**Follow to the judgment hall;
View the Lord of Life arraigned.
Oh, the wormwood and the gall!
Oh, the pangs His soul sustained!
Shun not suffering, shame, or loss,
Learn from Him to bear the cross.**

Read Matthew 26:57-27:2 and Matthew 27:11-31

“Follow Me,” the Saviour says. It sounds like a pleasant invitation, like a stroll in the park. Following Jesus will lead eventually to heaven, so it can't be that bad. But following means denial of self. It means taking up our crosses. It means leaving the old

life behind. But that's okay when you think about it. After all, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

Lord Jesus, help me to follow You. With Peter, I want to confess, "Lord, to whom shall I go, You have the words of eternal life!" You are the best! With Paul, I want to say, "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of You. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing You." Keep me from following You half-heartedly. You gave Your all for me. Let my life be lived, "Ever, only, all for Thee." Amen.

I often cringe and stumble at words in hymns that I don't understand. You know, like the line, “Never grudging for the lost ones ...” from *Lord of Glory You have Bought Us*, or “And makes the nations prove...” from *Joy to the World*. Every once in a while I get curious enough to actually try and find out what the words mean.

Here we have the words, “Oh, the wormwood and the gall!” What does this mean? Wormwood has the reputation of being terribly bitter. It's the kind of thing that would make you throw up if you tried to drink it, and then leave a bad taste in your mouth. If that's not bad enough, gall is poisonous ... in fact, deadly. The hymn is trying to describe our Lord's suffering on our behalf. Did you ever picture Jesus retching as part of His suffering?

“Pang” is another one of those words. The dictionary defines it as a sharp and sudden pain. When they slapped Jesus about and punched and beat Him in the high priest's court, when the Roman soldiers pounded the crown of thorns into His brow and ripped his back raw with the heavy scourge ... each of these would have been a heavy jolt, made worse by the unexpected suddenness of it.

Lord Jesus, I see Your physical suffering, and I can try to imagine Your mental anguish, but tell me about the pangs Your soul sustained. What Your Word describes is something even greater than the sum total of Your physical and mental suffering. This is a sorrow that goes to the very depth of Your being. It is the accumulated guilt and punishment of all of history, the bitter taste of every sin that ever was. Lord, help me comprehend the enormity of it all, and to be thankful that, somewhere in the midst of all that overwhelming filth, my sins were included ... and suffered for. Amen.

Reflect for a few minutes on suffering. Many times we try to avoid it. We take pain relievers because we'd rather not suffer if we didn't have to. In this hour I want you to notice the tendency we have to avoid the suffering of others. We turn our backs or pretend we didn't see it or didn't know. Or we tell ourselves that there's nothing I can do about it. I can't help everybody ... so I end up helping nobody. Do you tend to see suffering as a kind of *thing* without putting a face on it? Would you notice if someone you really loved were suffering? Well, someone you love is suffering, and He really loves you. He has carried your sorrows. St. Paul writes, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Start now by praying for those who are suffering:

- That those who are sick might know God's healing and comfort.
- That those who are lonely or depressed might know God's peace.
- That those who grieve might be comforted.
- That parents without partners would find strength and encouragement.
- That those who are unemployed might find meaningful work.
- That those who struggle with addictions might be set free from them.
- That the Lord would awaken us to the needs of those around us and that we might be channels of His grace to those who are hurting.

**Calvary's mournful mountain climb;
There, adoring at His feet,
Mark the miracle of time,
God's own sacrifice complete.
"It is finished!" hear Him cry,
Learn from Jesus Christ to die.**

Think about it. Today and every day, God the Father extends an invitation; to school teachers and bright-eyed children, preachers and bartenders, car mechanics and accountants, college students and garbage collectors, bankers and homemakers. It is an eternal and unchanging summons to kneel in the shadow of the Cross where He sacrificed His only Son. It is an invitation to make the shadow of the Cross our soul's home this side of heaven.

God beckons us to gaze in awe at what we see on Calvary's mount. He challenges us to bathe in the wonder of such love until we lay ourselves down weary with unworthiness, yet cleansed and renewed in the healing stream of blood He shed there. He invites us to be transformed by the Cross.

Reflect on the suffering of Christ. As you do, consider the vileness of your own sin in your life, and pray:

Lord Jesus, I confess ...

- The sin of taking the easy road instead of doing what you know is right (like Pilate who knew Jesus was innocent, but gave in to the will of the crowd.)
- The sin of fear, which is really unbelief and failing to trust the promises of God (like the disciples who forsook Jesus and fled, and like Peter who denied His Saviour).
- The sin of covetousness and greed, always wanting more and more and more (like Judas who betrayed Jesus for a few pieces of silver).
- The sin of ...

A good place to start is with what He endured physically. Read John 19:1-30 slowly. You might want to read it quietly out loud. What is most painful here? The two inch Judean thorns? The whip with the cat-o-nine-tails tipped with metal barbs? The beating and punching received from the soldiers as they had their fun with Him? Did it hurt so terribly to carry that rough wooden cross on His scarred back? How did it feel to have nails pierce His hands and feet? What was it like to shift His weight from His arms to His bloodied feet in order to take a breath? Such physical pain few can fully imagine.

But there is other pain too. It is pain of the heart. It is the hurt that Jesus feels for sinners. He is silent before King Herod because Herod is only interested in a miracle Jesus might do to entertain him. He tries to speak to Pilate about the kingdom of God, but Pilate is only interested in clinging to his own power. Jesus hurts for the lost ... for Judas who betrayed Him, for Peter who denied Him, for the others who forsook Him and fled.

The people of Jerusalem shout, "His blood be upon us and upon our children!" and the Saviour knows that the soldiers of Rome will crush the city and destroy the temple within a generation. Their blood will fill the streets. Jesus hurts for sinners. They shout at Him, they mock and insult Him, they spit on Him. "Come down from the cross and we will

believe in you!” Jesus hurts for each one, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34).

Physical pain ... pain of the heart ... how could anyone endure?

Yet there is more ... infinitely more. Read Isaiah 53:1-12. These verses speak of the suffering of His soul. Note these verses especially:

“Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all ... Yet it was the LORD's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer ...”

What did Jesus endure for us? He endured the suffering of the soul that comes from being abandoned by the Father. Think of His grief in the Garden of Gethsemane and how He sweat drops of blood. Consider His cry from the cross, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” Here He suffers being forsaken by the Father. Take the accumulated sins of all people of all time. Then try and calculate the accumulated justly deserved wrath of God for those sins. In Romans 3:23-26, St. Paul says:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”

God’s holiness and justice requires obedience ... or punishment. If the punishment for sin does not fall on us, then upon whom does it fall? Jesus is the sacrifice of atonement. The Father in heaven left the sins committed beforehand unpunished ... saving up the accumulated punishment until the day Jesus would carry it all to the cross. Truly “the

deepest stroke that pierced Him was the stroke that Justice gave” (from the hymn: “Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted”).

When Jesus stumbled under the weight of the cross, it was not because the wood was so heavy. It was not because of the physical punishment He had already endured. It was not because all had deserted Him. It was because He was about to endure the accumulated wrath of God for the sins of the world.

**Early hasten to the tomb,
Where they laid His breathless clay.
All is solitude and gloom.
Who has taken Him away?
Christ is risen!
He meets our eyes!
Saviour, teach us so to rise!**

Read Matthew 28:1-10.

The life that burst forth from the tomb on Easter Sunday is more than any of us can understand. We don’t even fully understand life itself, much less the new life of the Resurrection. No wonder the women were perplexed, no wonder the apostles found it difficult to believe their story. We can understand sin and death, but what is this new life of Easter morning?

Lord Jesus, on that resurrection morning, You called Mary Magdalene by her name and filled her heart with joy. You entered the closed room where Your disciples were gathered in fear. At the end of that Easter day You walked with two friends on what had started out as a sad journey. Later You called from the shore of the lake to the disciples to throw out their nets. Lord, all these are special favours to dear friends. They were not done to impress or overwhelm anyone, but simply to show that Your love is stronger than death and that the victory over Satan had been won. Lord, the life You have given me and the new life You have won for me are treasures that will never decay. Teach me what this new life is all about. Teach me how to serve You. Help me to appreciate these treasures deeply, to give endless thanks and praise to You, and to use all Your gifts of grace to me to Your glory. Amen.