



The Watch of the Passion

Maundy Thursday

9 April 2020

As we continue to recall the events of the first Holy Week, we place ourselves with Jesus as he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus said to his disciples: 'remain here, and keep awake, while I pray.' As we prepare to commemorate his Passion, let us hear his call to watch and to pray; you are invited to join via livestream in a watch of prayer kept until midnight, at the sacramental bread surrounded by candles and greenery commemorating Jesus' prayer in the Garden.

At midnight, the Gospel of the Watch (Luke 22: 39-62) will be read and the candles extinguished. Christ is left alone.

Four short meditations follow, drawing on verses from the Gospel, which you may wish to use to guide your reflections.

Not my will, but yours

Jesus said to the disciples, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.' Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.' ... In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

Luke 22: 40b–42, 44

In the Garden of Gethsemane, our God bears the weight of human misery. Alone, weeping, overwhelmed with grief, the weakness of humanity meets the strength of God; and in that strength Jesus prays that God's will be done. As we watch with him in this garden, let us pray for God to fill us with that same courage, and strengthen us for all that we face.

O God, who hast commanded us to be perfect,
as thou our Father in heaven art perfect:
Put into our hearts, we pray thee,
a continual desire to obey thy holy will.
Teach us day by day what thou wouldest have us to do,
and give us courage and strength to fulfill the same.
May we never, from love of ease,
decline the path which thou pointest out,
nor, for fear of shame, turn away from it.
We ask this for the honour of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Henry Alford (1810-1871)

Sleeping because of grief

Jesus came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'

Luke 22: 45–46

Exhausted by pain, by confusion, by the events of the past days, the disciples seek solace in sleep and are met by Christ.

As we wait with Christ tonight, let us pray for all those who are weary and worn down by over-work, grief or despair. Let us whose pain and confusion lead us to watch and pray be generous to those who are driven in despair to sleep. Let our prayers carry those who cannot form their own prayers. And if our eyes and our hearts are heavy with grief, may we know that the watch is taken by others and Christ forgives us if we sleep.

I never watch the scatter'd fire
Of stars, or sun's far-trailing train,
But all my heart is one desire,
And all in vain:

For I am bound with fleshly bands,
Joy, beauty, lie beyond my scope;
I strain my heart, I stretch my hands,
And catch at hope.

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)

No more of this

When those who were around Jesus saw what was coming, they asked, 'Lord, should we strike with the sword?' Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!'

Luke 22: 49–53

Sometimes the hardest thing to do is nothing. For many of us, in self-isolation or quarantine, recent weeks have shown us how difficult it is to stand to one side as others are in need, to resist the urge to act.

Yet Jesus was passive as he was taken to trial and execution; yet through his submission to the hour of darkness came the salvation of the world.

In Christ's presence, let us share with him our anger and frustration at our helplessness, knowing that he has walked this path before us and holds all our pain in the arms of his mercy.

Give me the strength to keep still and waiting
when all about me is pushing towards movement
and activity and choice.

Give me the grace to live in the emptiness of not doing
without the rewards of achievement, fulfilment or success.

Give me the faith to trust in your obscurity,
the obedience to stay faithful to your mystery,
the courage to keep tryst with your inscrutability.

Nicola Slee

Peter wept bitterly

Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about!' At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

Luke 22: 60-62

*At dawn, Peter wept for his unfaithfulness; in the darkness, we remember ours.
We watch with the same Jesus who will hang upon the cross; who suffers for our sin.
But Easter is coming, and the dawning day will bring with it the love that
conquers death. And in that love we too are forgiven and restored.
As we rest in the presence of God, pray for that love to surround us.*

O God of patience and consolation, grant we beseech thee that with free hearts we may love and serve thee and our brethren; and, having thus the mind of Christ, may begin heaven on earth, and exercise ourselves therein till that day when heaven, where love abideth, shall seem no strange habitation to us; for Jesus Christ's sake.

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

The Gospel of the Watch

Luke 22: 39-62

Jesus went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.' Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.' Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?' When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, 'Lord, should we strike with the sword?' Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!'

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, 'This man also was with him.' But he denied it, saying, 'Woman, I do not know him.' A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, 'You also are one of them.' But Peter said, 'Man, I am not!' Then about an hour later yet another kept insisting, 'Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.' But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about!' At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.