

A Service of Tenebrae

A Ciborium may be placed upon the Holy Table, and near it a single lighted Candle.

Opening Reading

Many and great, O God, are Thy things, Maker of earth and sky; Thy hands have set the heavens with stars, Thy fingers spread the mountains and plains. Lo, at Thy word the waters were formed; Deep seas obey Thy voice.

Grant unto us communion with Thee, Thou star-abiding One; Come unto us and dwell with us: With Thee are found the gifts of life. Bless us with life that has no end, Eternal life with Thee.

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, Earth Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of all, Loving God, in whom is heaven: The hallowing of your name echo through the universe! May the way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world! Your heavenly will be done by all created beings! May your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth. With the bread we need for today, feed us. In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us. In times of temptation and test, strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, spare us. From the grip of all that is evil, free us. For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen.

When Jesus was judged, he was brought before religious leaders and government officials who reacted out of their traditional orthodoxies, self-interest, political expediency, and an impetus to preserve the status quo that protected their privilege. They apparently forgot the bigger picture. We are told that he had come into the world he'd made, and it did not know him.

We have forgotten who we are.

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We have alienated ourselves from the unfolding of the cosmos.

We have become estranged from the movements of the earth.

We have turned our backs on the cycles of life.

We have forgotten who we are.

We have sought only our own security.

We have exploited simply for our own ends.

We have distorted our knowledge.
We have abused our power.
We have forgotten who we are.

Now the land is barren.
And the waters are poisoned.
And the air is polluted.
And plague fills the earth.
We have forgotten who we are.

Now the forests are dying,
And the creatures are disappearing,
And the humans are despairing.
We have forgotten who we are.

We ask for forgiveness.
We ask for the gift of remembering.
We ask for the strength to change.
We have forgotten who we are.

The earth and sky, My God, are stunned, seeing the love that in wanting to save humankind you gave your life, beloved. The innocent one was sentenced in order to free the sinner.

Thus with tender lament, all of us, we pray to you: Hear us. In you, Holy One, we hope. Let us not be confounded, beloved. Cleanse us and purify us.

Our darkness is never darkness in thy sight. The deepest night is clear as the daylight.

Here is a passage from the prophecies of Isaiah:

The earth dries up and withers, The world languishes and withers;
The heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; For they have transgressed laws Violated the statutes, Broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, And its inhabitants suffer for their guilt. [Is. 24: 4-6]

And from Hildegard of Bingen, the 12th century religious leader and mystic:

The high, the low, all of creation God gives to humankind to use. If this privilege is misused, God's Justice permits creation to punish humanity. With my cross I am

following you, more so with your grace and favor; for my weakness is great, I shall not be able to finish this step. For your suffering today comfort me. Comfort me by your love.

Our darkness is never darkness in thy sight. The deepest night is clear as the daylight.

On this dark day, as the shadows deepen,
We come to be present with Jesus.
With the glory of Palm Sunday behind us and the victory of Easter not yet come,
We will sit together in this space with our breaking, our broken hearts.
In this world that is at once beautiful and holy and tragic,
We seek to be present with all who suffer.
In the dark valleys of life, when sorrow threatens to overwhelm,
We long for a safe and sacred space to sit with our grief and our questions.

Jesus Christ, holy friend, is here with us. May we be here with him. Amen.

MEDITATION

A passage from the essayist Annie Dillard.

At a certain point you say to the woods, to the sea, to the mountains, the world,
Now I am ready. Now I will stop and be wholly attentive.

You empty yourself and wait, listening. After a time you hear it: there is nothing there. There is nothing but those things only, those created objects, discrete, growing or holding, or swaying, being rained on or raining, held, flooding or ebbing, standing, or spread.

You feel the world's word as a tension, a hum, a single chorused note everywhere at the same. This is it: this hum is the silence . . .

The silence is all there is. It is the alpha and the omega. It is God's brooding over the face of the waters; it is the blended note of ten thousand things, the whine of wings. You take a step in the right direction to pray to this silence, and even to address the prayer to "World." Distinctions blur. Quit your tents. Pray without ceasing.

Be still, and know God.

The Bread and Wine of Remembrance

When the time was right,
God sent Jesus to be among us.
Born into this life,
seeing God's grace revealed in all things,
he laughed with those who laughed,
and mourned with those who mourned.

Through God's love, he healed the sick,
he welcomed the outcast,
he challenged those in power,
and the structures that kept them there.
And he called us back to God's love.

In the power of the Holy Spirit,
the Christ laughs and cries,
heals and welcomes,
challenges and loves,
again and again and again.

We have been told that,
on the night before he was taken
to be tortured to death on a cross,
Jesus sat with his disciples,
and ate with them, in a meal of remembrance.

Jesus took a loaf of bread,
asked Your blessing upon it, broke it,
and gave it to his disciples saying:
"Take this – all of you – and eat it.
This is me. My Body. Given for you.
Each time you eat it, remember me."

Close to the meal's end,
he took a cup filled with wine,
asked Your blessing upon it,
and gave it to his disciples saying:
Take this – all of you – and drink it.
This is me. This is my promise in my life's blood -

poured out for you and for the world.”
Each time you drink it, remember me.

So we, his disciples, eat bread and drink wine – and remember.

Silence

The candle is extinguished.

Silence

READING *Matthew 27: 57-61*

That evening a rich disciple named Joseph from the town of Arimathea went and asked for Jesus’ body. Pilate gave orders for it to be given to Joseph, who took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. Then Joseph put the body in his own tomb that had been cut into solid rock and had never been used. He rolled a big stone against the entrance to the tomb and went away. All this time Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb.

Silence

Closing Prayer and Benediction

God thank you for being with us in this wondering moment where we stand poised between life and death, filled to the brim with sorrow, filled with thoughts of what has been and what lies before us.

Creator God, we thank you for the gift of life. We thank you for Jesus who was a gift to the world, a gift in each of our lives. We thank you for the Spirit who lives within us and guides is in caring for each other. Comfort us even as we are shaken by the fears of the present time. We pray that you would be our companion in this time of uncertainty, and sustain us in the days to come.

Benediction

May God bless you and keep you, May the very face of God shine upon you, and be gracious to you, May God’s presence embrace you and give you eternal peace.
Amen.