

Good Friday 2024
Meditation - Father Craig Looney
Saint Joseph Parish
"Hymn 70...Go to dark Gethsemane"



Go to dark Gethsemane, Ye that feel the tempter's power...

The compelling words to our opening Hymn were written by James Montgomery. He was born in 1771 in Scotland, the son of a Moravian minister. He spent most of his life in Sheffield and died there in 1854. He lived during a time of political, social and religious upheaval, much like in Jesus' day, much like today.

Last night we created our own version of Garden of Gethsemane. The name means "place where oil is pressed". It is located on the Mount of Olives outside of Jerusalem. During the Liturgy we received the Body of Blood of Christ, and we placed the Blessed Sacrament in our "Garden". It is at this moment we are most vulnerable to the Tempter's power. The Devil is an arrogant and self-assertive liar and deceiver and he doesn't want us to be here.

Your Redeemer's conflict see, Watch with him on bitter hour...

How could Jesus be in conflict? He was always in conflict with those who criticized him and laughed at him. He remained focused and determined to complete his mission. Now he seems alone in the Garden, lost in his thoughts. He is not alone, but his closest friends, Peter, James and John fall asleep.

Jesus asks us if we will watch with him just one hour? Is that too much for him to ask? But we are so busy in our daily lives we often forget to leave time for God. We too are conflicted by what we see? We are not alone because we have the example Jesus sets for us how to remain focused and determined.

Turn not from his griefs away, Learn of Jesus Christ to pray...

But we do want to turn away. We don't like what we see. We experience as best we can here in our version of Gethsemane his pain and his sorrow for what sin has done to the world. We become more aware of our

complete dependence on God's love and forgiveness. We can no longer turn away.

We learn from Jesus how to turn to God in prayer. Prayer is conversation with God. He wants us to know we can come to him with all our troubles and challenges. Nothing is too small or too great for God. We just need to be honest with him, just as Jesus was honest with him.

Follow to the judgment hall, View the Lord of Life arraigned...

We leave the Garden of Gethsemane and follow him to watch him be arraigned on the charge and sedition and conspiracy to overthrow the Roman Government. It's a trumped-up charged orchestrated by religious leaders who were afraid of losing power over the people.

Jesus is Lord of Life. He is the one who has power and authority over the Universe. They made fun of him by putting a purple robe on him...purple the sign of royalty. He dared to proclaim himself King. The charges against him are serious. He faces Pilate with courage and dignity, and he never lashed out at his accusers. Pilate's wife told him not to get involved. He washes his hands of the whole matter. But we can't wash our hands. Remember, he is going through this trial for us, so we wouldn't have to.

O the wormwood and the gall! O the pangs his soul sustained...

His trial is over. The verdict...Guilty as charged! The sentence...Death! Jesus is about to face the worst form of execution. He would endure excruciating pain. He would be weakened from blood loss. They would give him a drugged drink to keep him from suffocating. Wormwood is a bitter herb and mixed with wine dulled the pain...gall was vinegar mixed with myrrh...it has the same effect.

Jesus was willing to submit to physical torture and the pain it caused him because he loved us. But no drugged drink would lessen the pain his mind and soul experienced. It was an emotional pain that he endured for us.

Shun not suffering, shame or loss; Learn of him to bear the cross...

Jesus could very easily have stopped what was happening to him. He could have made all the physical and emotional pain he was experiencing go away. The shame of the trial, verdict and death sentence could have disappeared like it never happened. He didn't have to lose his human dignity by being stripped naked and placed on display for everyone to see. But Jesus knew there was no other way to redeem us...he had to complete his mission.

Along the way he had some help carrying his cross. The Scriptures tells us a man named Simon from Cyrene was forced by the soldiers to help Jesus carry the cross. He had no choice either. If he refused to soldiers orders he could have been arrested. We learn from Jesus as Simon how to bear our crosses. Our crosses are the challenges we face every day of our lives. We must face them with the same dignity Jesus faced in carrying his cross.

Calvary's mournful mountain climb; There adoring at his feet...

Calvary or Golgatha is a hill just outside Jerusalem's walls. Both names mean "Place of Skulls". This was the place condemned people were put to death...by crucifixion. They were stripped naked and hung on the cross until the weight of their bodies caused them to suffocate to death. The bodies were left on the cross to rot...a warning to anyone passing by not to mess with the State.

We can't abandon Jesus during his last hours. We are sickened by the sight of his suffering. There is nothing we can do but stay with him. Where are his disciples? They are not with him...cowards who ran off at the first sign of trouble. Only Mary and the other women are at the foot of the cross. We can only pray Jesus will die soon. But we can't leave.

Mark the miracle of time, God's own sacrifice complete...

We continue to watch the spectacle. We can tell time is short now, Jesus' breath is heavy and labored. The soldiers know Jesus will not last longer. They play a game of chance...the winner gets Jesus' coat. The religious leaders continue to stir up the crowd and laugh at Jesus. One of the men crucified with Jesus asks him to remember him when he came into his Kingdom. Jesus assures the man he will. We ask Jesus to remember us when he come into his Kingdom. Jesus calls out "My

God, My God, why have you abandoned me." God has not abandoned him. He doesn't abandon us either.

"It is finished!" hear him cry; learn of Jesus Christ to die...

God's own dear Son, whom he loves so much, now completes his mission. Jesus is priest, sacrifice and God. His self-less sacrifice of himself for us is complete. It is the one perfect sacrifice of redemption that can never be repeated. He places his mother in John's care...he was the only disciple to be with Jesus to the end. There is nothing more for Jesus to say or do...IT IS FINISHED!

Many Christian martyrs have faced death bravely. It is unlikely any of us here will face the kind of death Peter any many of the other Saints of God...young and old...rich and poor...have faced. But we must learn from Jesus what it means to give completely of ourselves for someone else...regardless of the consequences.

Early hasten to the tomb, Where they laid his breathless clay...

There is a fourth verse to the hymn that does not appear in the *Hymnal* 1940...

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

Good Friday is the darkest day in human history. There is nothing remotely funny or entertaining about the execution of a condemned man. We can't fully grasp what Jesus went through for us. All during Holy Week we have been getting ourselves ready for this day. Were we ready?

We can never be fully ready to meet Jesus at the cross. The Crucifixion forces us to confront ourselves, our total reliance on God's mercy, and the awesome redemption Jesus won for us on the cross. Good Friday is about life, not death. The darkest day in human history will be superseded by the brightest day in human history...Easter!

We learned of Jesus Christ to die. Soon he will teach us to rise!

