

# REFLECTIONS FOR HOLY WEEK

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Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

In New Testament Greek, the word for 'holy' is *hagios*, meaning 'set apart, reverent, sacred, and worthy of veneration'. Throughout this Holy Week, then, we may want to set some time apart to be with Jesus as he lives his Passion. Our reflections are built around the well-known Afro-American spiritual, 'Were you there when they crucified my Lord?'. You can find several recordings of the song online.

### Monday in Holy Week

Were you there ... when Jesus was anointed in Bethany?

*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. Mary (Martha's sister) 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 said, 'Why wasn't this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor?' Jesus said, 'Leave her alone; she had to keep this scent for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, but you will not always have me.'*

*St John 12: 1-5, 7-8*

To put myself in the right frame of mind and help come to some inner quiet, I may want to listen to the song 'Were you there ...?'

Or I may simply hum the melody gently on my breath, perhaps repeating the first line. What mood am I in today?

Eventually I read the text above. What strikes me?

Maybe the mention of Lazarus, Martha and Mary brings to mind other stories from Scripture. I stay with these and ponder.

How do I feel as I recall them?

In time, I return to today's scene to visualise it in as much detail as I wish.

I imagine I am there with them. I look at Jesus, Mary and Judas.

I smell the expensive perfume; I touch Mary's hair; I hear Judas's complaining voice; I taste the food brought to them.

I tell the Lord in my own words what comes to my mind ... what I feel about each person, about him.

Jesus is aware that life for him is coming to an end, yet he still defends Mary, his friend.

Can I recall such support for me in a time of adversity in my own life? I give thanks.

Were you there when Jesus was anointed in Bethany?

Yes, I was there.

Thank you, Lord, for helping me to be there.

## Tuesday of Holy Week

Were you there ... when Jesus predicted His death?

*Some Greeks approached Philip and put this request to him, 'Sir, we should like to see Jesus'. Philip went to tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together went to tell Jesus. Jesus replied to them: 'Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. ... Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour.'*

*St John 12: 20–24, 27*

I go to the place where I like to meet with and talk to the Lord as I would to a trusted friend.

I settle myself comfortably in a posture of receptivity and humility ... a posture of surrender to my God. I try to slow down my mind, body and heart ... and gradually become aware that he is here by my side, full of love for me.

I ask the Holy Spirit for light and wisdom as I read the text a number of times.

I may be drawn to being there, present in the scene with Jesus and his friends, as the realisation of his imminent suffering and death deeply troubles him. What is that like?

Sometimes it causes me to tremble, when I see Jesus looking at the road ahead.

Maybe it brings to mind experiences from my own life ... perhaps times when I have journeyed with loved ones facing their own death. I speak to Jesus from my heart.

I consider how Jesus was willing to lay down his life out of a powerful, all-consuming love for me. I tell him how that makes me feel.

I allow myself to rest in the Lord's presence, as I slowly bring my prayer time to an end.

Were you there when Jesus predicted his death?

It caused me to tremble, but yes, I was there.

Thank you, Lord, for helping me to be there.

## Wednesday of Holy Week

Were you there when Judas betrayed Jesus?

*While Jesus was still speaking to his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, Judas, one of the Twelve, came up with a number of men armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the traitor had arranged a signal with them. 'The one I kiss', he had said, 'he is the man. Take him in charge, and see he is well guarded when you lead him away.' So when the traitor came, he went straight up to Jesus and said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. The others seized him and took him in charge.*

*St Mark 14: 43–46*

Before reading today's Scripture from St Mark's Gospel, I remind myself of why I am coming to prayer. I want to try to be there with Jesus in all the difficult moments leading to his death and his resurrection.

So how do I feel? I may need to slow down, take a deep breath, then breathe normally and try to leave behind the busy-ness of my day. Perhaps I ask the Holy Spirit to help me.

Eventually, I read the text above several times taking my time. Mark's concise account leaves plenty of room for my imagination.

I try and visualise the garden, the light, the men, the atmosphere, Judas.

Perhaps, in my imagination I see myself as one of the people present.

Who am I? What do I do ...? say ...?

Or I focus my attention on Jesus.

How does he look? What can I read in his eyes?

Surprise, understanding, resignation, fear, or ...?

I let the scene unfold fully and stay as long as I need.

Maybe I want to speak with Judas.

What do I say to him? How does he react?

After a while, I leave the scene and speak to the Lord. I tell him in my own words how I feel now after seeing him being betrayed by his friend.

Maybe it also brings back bad memories in my life; I tell him about them and ask for any healing I might need.

When the time comes, I conclude my prayer with a slow sign of the cross.

Were you there when Judas betrayed Jesus?  
It caused me to tremble, but yes, I was there.  
Thank you, Lord, for helping me to be there.