

Father, into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit
Luke 23:44-49
March 25, 2015
6th Wednesday in Lent

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Tonight, is the last in our Lenten series on the seven words from the cross; the last seven things Jesus said before he died.

For the benefit of all who took part in this crucifixion, Jesus said: *Father, forgiven them, for they know not what they do* (Lk 23:34).

To a repentant thief he promised: *Today, you will be with me in paradise* (Lk 23:43).

To insure the care of his mother, Jesus spoke these words to Mary and John: *Here is your son* (Jn 19:26), *Here is your mother* (Jn 19:27).

In total anguish and abandonment, Jesus cried out: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*, which means: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Mk 15:34).

To fulfill Scripture, and out of pure humanness, Jesus said: *I am thirsty* (Jn 19:28).

Jesus completed his mission on earth with one word: *Tetelestai*, which means: *It is finished* (Jn 19:30).

Now, with the last breath of his human life, Jesus cries out: *Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit* (Lk 23:46).

Between the sixth word and the seventh word, a strange thing happen. In the temple, between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, there hung a great curtain. This curtain was 60 feet high, 30 feet wide, and 4 inches thick.

Only once a year, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, through this curtain and offer the yearly sacrifice for the sins of the people. The Holy of Holies was the meeting place between a righteous God and his sinful people. The sacrifice of Jesus meant that he would be the great High Priest. People could now approach the Throne of God without the need of a human high priest. Therefore, God removed the curtain.

According to Matthew: *At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom* (Mt 27:51). A human would have torn the curtain from bottom to top. God tore the curtain from top to bottom.

Max Lucado makes an interesting observation regarding Jesus' last word as one of us: The voice that screamed at God, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,*" now says, "*Father.*"

The two are again one.
The abandoned is taken back.
The schism is now bridged.
"Father." He smiles weakly. "It's over."
Satan's vultures have been scattered.
Hell's demons have been jailed.
Death has been trumped.
It's over.
An angel sighs. A star wipes away a tear.
"Take me home."
Yes, take him home.
Take this prince to his king
Take this son to his father
Take this pilgrim to his home
He deserves a rest.
"Take me home."
Take this wounded soldier to the cradle of his Father's arms!
Farewell manger's infant
Bless You holy ambassador
Go Home death slayer
Rest well sweet soldier
The battle is over.

So Jesus cried out with a loud voice for all to hear his declaration, "*Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit!*"

Dr. William Barclay writes, "Jesus died with a prayer on his lips. '*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*' That is actually Psalm 31:5 with one word added – Father. That verse was the prayer every Jewish mother taught her child to say at bedtime. Just as we may have been taught to say, 'Now I lay me down to sleep,' so the Jewish mother taught her child to say, 'Into your hands I commit my spirit.' Jesus made it even more intimate, for he began it with the word Father. Even on the cross Jesus died like a child falling asleep in his father's arms."

Often, we dismiss or think unimportant what we have learned as children in Sunday School or on our parent's knee. However, we are learning from the behavioral sciences just how important it is to learn the right things in our childhood days.

Back in the early sixties Dr. Karl Barth came to America to lecture at Yale, Princeton, and the University of Chicago. Barth was a theological giant of the 20th Century, who had stood against Hitler and was exiled by Hitler from his teaching position in Germany to his native Switzerland where he held the chair of “Church Dogmatics” at the University of Zurich.

Crowds jammed the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago to hear him speak on various subjects related to the Christian faith. All these years later, most people have lost what Barth said in those lectures except one statement he made in response to a reporter who asked, “Dr. Barth, what is the single, most important discovery you have made in your years of theological work?”

After a pause, the Professor of Zurich said: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” We will never outgrow this simple message, and our response to it sets the tone for every age and every stage of our earthly life.

In the final moments of this earthly life, Jesus didn’t speak volumes of words. He didn’t engage in philosophical debate. He uttered the words of what might have been the first prayer he ever learned. This must have given great comfort to his soul in his last moments. These last words are a testimony to what life is about. He began life with God, and he completed his earthly journey with God.

These last words of Jesus have further inspired some of the great names of history to repeat these same words when death was knocking at the door; people such as Christopher Columbus, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, John Huss, Thomas Becket. I am sure there have been thousands of others whose names are unknown to us, but whose names are known to God the Father.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his book *The Strength to Love*, told how he moved from believing things about God to believing in God. He wrote: “The agonizing moments through which I have passed during the last few years have also drawn me closer to God. More than ever before, I am convinced of the reality of a personal God. True, I have always believed in the personality of God. But in the past the idea of a personal God was little more than a metaphysical category that I found theologically and philosophically satisfying. Now it is a living reality that has been validated in the experiences of everyday life. God has been profoundly real to me in recent years. In the midst of lonely days and dreary nights I have heard an inner voice saying, ‘Lo, I will be with you.’ When the chains of fear and the manacles of frustration have all but stymied my efforts, I have felt the power of God transforming the fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope. I am convinced that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose, and that in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship.”

In this last word from the cross, we see a prayer of communion with God, a prayer of confidence in the power of God, and a prayer of commitment – Jesus trusting God to bless the work he had done on the cross. Jesus deposited his soul, his love, and his life with the Father.

It has been reported what others said as their last words when death was near. Macbeth said, "Out, out brief candle; life's but a walking shadow."

Goethe cried, "Light! More light!"

Anatole France said, "Draw the curtain; the farce is played out."

Jesus Christ said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

We have studied, prayed, and worshiped our way through the seven last words of our Lord Jesus from the Cross. We have traveled this Lenten season to deepen our relationship with God – to see how God in Christ has fully entered into the human experience. We have worshiped and worked to draw closer to the Christ of the Cross.

Now that you and I have probed the meaning and the mystery of the Cross – let the cross do its work. Pick it up and carry it. It will be the most meaningful thing you have ever done. Only when we pick up the cross can we draw closer to our Savior, and understand how he could shout in the presence of utter darkness, "*Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.*"