

Fasting guide

day 20. darkness falls

Darkness falls over the Earth on Good Friday. God's own Son goes to His death to save us from the darkness in our hearts. While He is walking out this terrifying mission, His followers seem to do everything they can to show how little we humans deserve the favor.

God is a God of Light: He can't tolerate darkness, and darkness cannot survive in His presence. We, who have dark hearts full of sin, should tremble at this fact, but Jesus, who was completely good, took on our sin and stood under the wrath of God.

On the cross, He was destroyed and cut off from His Father. It was to have been our fate. In the midst of humanity's own darkest hour, and in the face of His followers' cowardice, selfishness and laziness, God does not cut us off. In His awesome mercy, He sends His own Son into the darkness so that we might live in the light. Take some time to meditate on the following scripture passage.

Mark 14.32-15:37(NLT):

"Take this cup of suffering away from me."

And they came to an olive grove called Gethsemane, and Jesus said, "Sit here while I go and pray." He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to be filled with horror and deep distress. He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me." He went on a little farther and fell face down on the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. "Abba, Father," he said, "Everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine." Then he returned and found the disciples asleep. "Simon!" he said to Peter. "Are you asleep? Couldn't you stay awake and watch with me even one hour? Keep alert and pray. Otherwise temptation will overpower you. For though the spirit is willing enough, the body is weak."

Then Jesus left them again and prayed, repeating his pleadings. Again he returned to them and found them sleeping, for they just couldn't keep their eyes open. And they didn't know what to say. When he returned to them the third time, he said, "Still sleeping? Still resting? Enough! The time has come. I, the Son of Man, am betrayed into the hands of sinners. Up, let's be going. See, my betrayer is here!"

A kiss and a sword

And immediately, as he said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a mob that was armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent out by the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the other leaders. Judas had given them a prearranged signal: "You will know which one to arrest when I go over and give him the kiss of greeting. Then you can take him away under guard." As soon as they arrived, Judas walked up to Jesus. "Teacher!" he exclaimed, and gave him the kiss. Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. But someone pulled out a sword and slashed off an ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus asked them, "Am I some dangerous criminal, that you come armed with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day. But these things are happening to fulfill what the Scriptures say about me." Meanwhile, all his disciples deserted him and ran away. There was a young man following along behind, clothed only in a linen nightshirt. When the mob tried to grab him, they tore off his clothes, but he escaped and ran away naked.

False witnesses

Jesus was led to the high priest's home where the leading priests, other leaders, and teachers of religious law had gathered. Meanwhile, Peter followed far behind and then slipped inside the gates of the high priest's courtyard.

For a while he sat with the guards, warming himself by the fire. Inside, the leading priests and the entire high council were trying to find witnesses who would testify against Jesus, so they could put him to death. But their efforts were in vain. Many false witnesses spoke against him, but they contradicted each other. Finally, some men stood up to testify against him with this lie: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, made without human hands.'" But even then they didn't get their stories straight! Then the high priest stood up before the

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others and asked Jesus, "Well, aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?" Jesus made no reply. Then the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the blessed God?" Jesus said, "I am, and you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, "Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" And they all condemned him to death. Then some of them began to spit at him, and they blindfolded him and hit his face with their fists. "Who hit you that time, you prophet?" they jeered. And even the guards were hitting him as they led him away.

"I don't know this man ..."

Meanwhile, Peter was below in the courtyard. One of the servant girls who worked for the high priest noticed Peter warming himself at the fire. She looked at him closely and then said, "You were one of those with Jesus, the Nazarene." Peter denied it. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, and he went out into the entryway. Just then, a rooster crowed. The servant girl saw him standing there and began telling the others, "That man is definitely one of them!" Peter denied it again. A little later some other bystanders began saying to Peter, "You must be one of them because you are from Galilee." Peter said, "I swear by God, I don't know this man you're talking about." And immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind: "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and cried.

"Crucify Him!"

Very early in the morning the leading priests, other leaders, and teachers of religious law – the entire high council – met to discuss their next step. They bound Jesus and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say." Then the leading priests accused him of many crimes, and Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to say something? What about all these charges against you?" But Jesus said nothing, much to Pilate's surprise. Now it was the governor's custom to release one prisoner each year at Passover time – anyone the people requested.

One of the prisoners at that time was Barabbas, convicted along with others for murder during an insurrection. The mob began to crowd in toward Pilate, asking him to release a prisoner as usual. "Should I give you the King of the Jews?" Pilate asked. (For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.) But at this point the leading priests stirred up the mob to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. "But if I release Barabbas," Pilate asked them, "what should I do with this man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" "Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?" But the crowd only roared the louder, "Crucify him!"

"Hail! King of the Jews!"

So Pilate, anxious to please the crowd, released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him. The soldiers took him into their headquarters and called out the entire battalion. They dressed him in a purple robe and made a crown of long, sharp thorns and put it on his head. Then they saluted, yelling, "Hail! King of the Jews!" And they beat him on the head with a stick, spit on him, and dropped to their knees in mock worship. When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified. A man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the country just then, and they forced him

to carry Jesus' cross. And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means Skull Hill). They offered him wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it. Then they nailed him to the cross. They gambled for his clothes, throwing dice to decide who would get them. It was nine o'clock in the morning when the crucifixion took place. A signboard was fastened to the cross above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: "The King of the Jews." Two criminals were crucified with him, their crosses on either side of his. And the people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Ha! Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You can destroy the Temple and rebuild it

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in three days, can you? Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!" The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!" Even the two criminals who were being crucified with Jesus ridiculed him.

And darkness fell

At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. Then, at that time Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a stick so he could drink. "Leave him alone. Let's see whether Elijah will come and take him down!" he said. Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

Please spend some time praying for the following:

- Our heavenly Father sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved; that all who believes in Him might be delivered from the power of sin and death, and become heirs with Him of everlasting life.
- Pray, therefore, for people everywhere according to their needs.
- Pray for the Church of Christ throughout the world;
- For its unity in witness and service
- For all ministers and the people whom they serve
- For all Christians in this community
- That God will confirm His Church in faith, increase it in love and preserve it in peace.
- Pray for all nations and peoples of the earth, and for those in authority among them; for all who serve the common good, that by God's help they may seek justice and truth, and live in peace.
- Pray for all who suffer and are afflicted in body or in mind;
- For the hungry and the homeless, the destitute and the oppressed
- For the sick, the wounded and the crippled
- For those in loneliness, fear and anguish
- For those who face temptation, doubt and despair
- For the sorrowful and bereaved
- For prisoners and captives, and those in mortal danger
- That God in His mercy will comfort and relieve them, and grant them the knowledge of His love, and stir up in us the will and patience to minister to their needs.
- Pray for all who have not received the Gospel of Christ;
- For those who have never heard the word of salvation
- For those who have lost their faith
- For those hardened by sin or indifference
- For the contemptuous and the scornful
- For those who are enemies of the cross of Christ and persecutors of his disciples
- For those who in the name of Christ have persecuted others
- That God will open their hearts to the truth, and lead them to faith and obedience.

Prayer:

O God of unchanging power and eternal light: Look favorably on Your whole church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the working of Your providence, carry out Your plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, things which had grown old are being made new, and that the weak and weary are being made strong. Though sometimes it is hidden to our eyes, these things are being done by the One through whom all things were made, Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Grant us patience, faith, courage, and hope worthy of eternity.