

Jesus Dies

WE ALL know what it is like to be lost for words. In the face of birth or death we struggle to find words to express ourselves. When we try to meditate on the 12th Station of the Cross, we are often lost for words in the face of the death of the Son of God.

As we kneel at this Station we can at least let the words of Jesus from his Cross speak to our hearts.

The Gospels record seven 'last words' of Jesus which Christians everywhere cherish.

The first is a word of mercy and compassion: *Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.* Forgiveness is a word which brings us straight

to the heart of the mystery of redemption: the forgiveness of sins. This word reminds us that we are a forgiven people, that forgiveness is always possible, that none of us can begin to imagine the extent of God's forgiveness in Christ.

Forgiveness is personal. So the second word from the Cross is addressed to the 'good thief': *I promise you today you will be with me in paradise.* The promise of the dying Jesus to the dying thief reminds us of the good that remains in every human heart – even to the very end.

The third word is an expression of divine intimacy and love: *Woman this is your son; this is your mother.* By this bequest we all receive a spiritual mother to help us on our way of the cross.

I thirst. This anguished cry from the parched lips of Jesus also refers to his longing for all humanity

to share in the beauty of the kingdom of God. Jesus still thirsts – for each one of us.

Perhaps the most distressing of all words, *Why?* startles us. When Jesus quotes psalm 23:

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? we get a glimpse of the inner passion of Jesus as he experiences the godforsakenness common to so many people. There is no human anguish alien to the dying Jesus.

The sixth word from the cross reveals something of the intimate tenderness between Father and Son: *Father into your hands I commend my spirit.* Christian history shows how many saints followed the example

of Jesus using the same prayer at the approach of their death. It is a prayer of utter abandonment and confidence in the Father who loves divinely.

The last word of all is a peaceful acknowledgement not just that this phase of the life of Jesus is over but that the work given him by the Father is completed: *It is accomplished.*

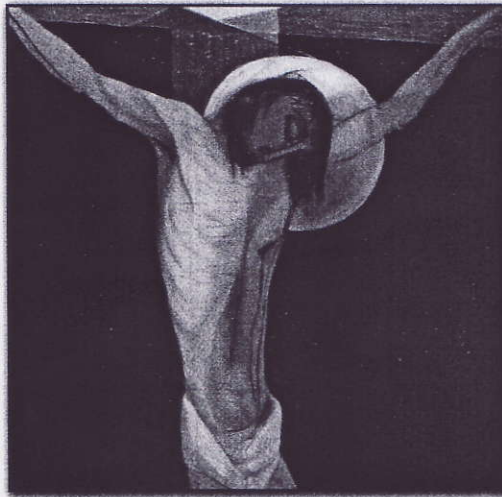
Each of these holy words from the cross can nourish our own journey of faith, addressing both our sorrows and our joys, our hopes and fears, all leading to a fulfilment in God.

I love you Jesus my love, above all things.

I repent with my whole heart
of having offended you.

Never permit to separate
myself from you again,

Grant that I may love you always and
then do with me what you will.



Jesus dies on the Cross – a painting by Maud Sumner in St Mary's Cathedral, Cape Town