

"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

Bishop's Note: February 19th - The Last Words of Jesus



"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." With these words, we receive the gritty sign of the cross on our foreheads, made with ashes. On Ash Wednesday we are asked to think of our own mortality, but throughout the season of Lent we are invited to think of a more important death – that of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.

Throughout Lent my Bishop's Notes will focus on the Seven Last Words of Jesus. These statements - recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John - give us insight into the meaning of Jesus' death.

The first of the "Last Words" is taken from Luke 23:34: ***"And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."***

What extraordinary words! In the midst of such suffering, inflicted without cause, Jesus intercedes to his Father - on behalf of his tormentors - for mercy. Jesus, indeed, practiced what he preached. Not only did he turn the other cheek (Mt. 5:39), he offered his life as the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Of course, for those of us who know and are known by Jesus, it makes perfect sense – Jesus is all about forgiveness. In fact, that is the whole point of the cross.

Because of Jesus' sacrifice, forgiveness is offered to all who repent and turn to him. How beautiful it is to know that God not only forgives our sins, He wipes our sins away.

Too many people do not know that forgiveness is theirs, if they would but repent – confess their sins to God, ask for forgiveness with a contrite heart, and seek amendment of life.

Let me ask you: Do you really believe that God can and will forgive your sins? This week, will you take the time to examine your life and - where you are in sin - ask for God's forgiveness? Will you share with one other person about the joy of receiving God's forgiveness and grace?

I pray you all a Holy and Blessed Lent!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 76 - 78

76. Should you be afraid of God's judgment?

The unrepentant should fear God's judgment, for “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness,” but for those who are in Christ, there is no condemnation. I have no reason to fear the coming judgment, for my Judge is my Savior Jesus Christ, who loves me, died for me, and intercedes for me. (Romans 1:18; 8:1, 31-34)

77. What does Scripture mean when it tells you to fear God?

It means that I should live mindful of his presence, walking in humility as his creature, resisting sin, obeying his commandments, and reverencing him for his holiness, majesty, and power. (Exodus 20:20; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 8:13; 9:10)

78. Should you pass judgment on sinners or non-Christians?

No. God alone judges those outside the Church. The Church may proclaim God's condemnation of sin and may exercise godly discipline over members who are unrepentant; but I am called only to judge between right and wrong, to judge myself in the light of God's holiness, and to repent of my sins. (Matthew 7:1-5, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13;

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Bishop's Note: February 26th, 2015 - The Last Words of Jesus, Part #2



"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)

The last words of Jesus are some of the most powerful ever spoken. They have resounded throughout the last two thousand years, and will continue doing so until our Lord returns. In the first week of Lent we concentrated on Jesus' statement: "***Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.***" (Luke 23:34) This week we see Jesus put those words into action as he responds to the plea of a criminal. Allow me to set the scene.

Jesus has been falsely accused and convicted. He has been beaten and scourged, nailed to a cross, and hoisted aloft between two criminals - one on his right and one on his left.

The religious officials and Roman soldiers were mocking Jesus. They divided his garments, and even one of the criminals berated Jesus saying: "***Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!***" ***But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*** (Luke 23:39-42)

It was the plea of the criminal to be remembered that caught Jesus' attention. Jesus' response had to have been the sweetest words imaginable: "***Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.***" (Luke 23:43) The Greek term that Jesus used for "Paradise" (*paradeisos*) is the same term used in the Greek Old Testament to mean "garden" - specifically the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8). In addition, in the first century "Paradise" was also used to refer to the place one went following death while awaiting the coming of the Messiah, or "Heaven." In other words, Jesus promised the criminal, whose heart called out to Jesus, that he would be with Jesus in Heaven that very day. Whether Heaven was the Garden of Eden restored or the great wedding banquet that Jesus spoke of to his disciples, is academic. The Good News - the Gospel - for this criminal is that Jesus would have mercy upon him - not saving him from the consequences of his action

that led to crucifixion, but showing him the ultimate mercy of saving him from banishment to hell.

It is important to note that this criminal was not a disciple of Jesus, nor did he live a virtuous life. He simply recognized who Jesus really was and asked with a contrite heart, **"...remember me when you come into your kingdom."**

Salvation really is that simple. It comes with the recognition of who Jesus really is and who we really are, and with pleas for mercy and grace.

Of course, the criminal was actively dying, and in fact shortly would have his legs broken by the Roman soldier in order to hasten his death. 99.99% of the rest of us who come to that knowledge of who Jesus really is need to follow up that plea for mercy with the humble invitation for Jesus to be Lord of our lives. Have you made that plea for mercy? Do you know in your heart of hearts what awaits you the very next second after you take your last breath on earth? If in any way you are unsure, I encourage you to take this moment to make the same plea that the criminal made, and to invite Jesus into your life as Lord.

This Lent I would like to invite you to meditate upon the mercy of the Father for us, granted through His Son - mercy which is given not because we deserve it or have in any way merited it. God's mercy is simply given through love. Having received God's love and mercy, what in your life reflects your response to God? Have you put your full trust in Jesus?

I pray you a blessed Lord's Day and a Holy Lent!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 79 - 81

79. How do you judge yourself?

With the help of the Holy Spirit, I judge myself by examining my conscience. I may use the

Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, or other equivalent Scriptures, as well as godly counsel, to help me see my sins. (Exodus 20:1-17, Matthew 5:1-11)

80. How does the Church exercise its authority to judge?

A priest, acting under the authority of the bishop, may bar a person from receiving communion because of unrepented sin, or because of enmity with another member of the congregation, until there is clear proof of repentance and amendment of life. But the authority Christ gave to his Church is more often exercised by declaring God's forgiveness in absolution. (Matthew 16:19)

81. Who is the Holy Spirit?

God the Holy Spirit is the third Person in the one Being of the Holy Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Son, and equally worthy of our honor and worship. (Luke 11:13; John 14:26; 16:7)

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The Bishop's Note March 5, 2015 – The Last Words of Jesus #3



"Woman, behold your son. Son behold your mother."

(John 19:26–27)

In the Autumn of 2013, Florence and I traveled to Rome for a few days of vacation on the way home from GAFCON 2. This was my first trip to Rome, and sadly it was cut short with the news of Bishop Schofield's death. I had hoped to spend time in St. Peter's Basilica, and especially to see the amazing works of Christian art there; not least of which is the Pieta – Michelangelo's sculpture, which I have longed to see in person.

I cannot think of Jesus' statement from the cross to his mother and the disciple known as the "beloved disciple," without also thinking of Michelangelo's amazing sculpture of the lifeless Jesus in his mother's arms. (Picture [HERE](#))

If anything points to the humanity of Jesus as he hung on the cross, it is the haunting image painted for us in St. John's Gospel: ***"...but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."*** (John 19:25-27 ESV)

I can't imagine how horrific Golgotha must have been, but it would have been doubly so for a mother watching her innocent son suffer such an ignominious death. In the midst of that horror, Jesus' thoughts were of his mother and her welfare, and not on himself. He calls on the unnamed disciple, who seemed to be especially close to Jesus, to care for his mother following his death. This was not a momentary duty, but rather a sacred responsibility for a lifetime.

I cannot help but think that Jesus' care and concern for his mother also extends to those of us who are the adopted children of his Father. Thereby we, like the beloved disciple, have been given a sacred responsibility to care for one another until such time as we are called home or the Lord returns.

I pray you all a truly Holy Lent!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 82 - 84

82. What principal names does the New Testament give to the Holy Spirit?

Jesus names the Holy Spirit “Paraclete” (the one alongside). This signifies Comforter, Guide, Counselor, Advocate, and Helper. Other names for the Holy Spirit are Spirit of God, Spirit of the Father, Spirit of Christ, and Spirit of Truth. (John 14:15-17; Matthew 10:20; Romans 8:9)

83. What are the particular ministries of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit imparts life in all its forms throughout God’s creation, unites believers to Jesus Christ, indwells each believer, convicts believers of sin, applies the saving work of Jesus to the believer’s life, guides the Church into truth, fills and empowers believers through spiritual fruit and gifts given to the Church, and gives understanding of the Scripture which He inspired. (2 Peter 1:21; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15)

84. How does the Holy Spirit relate to you?

Jesus Christ sends the Holy Spirit to make Jesus known to me, to indwell and empower me in Christ, to bear witness that I am a child of God, to guide me into all truth, and to stir my heart continually to worship and to pray. (John 16:12-15; Romans 8:15, 26; Ephesians 1:17-19)

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The Bishop's Note: March 12th, 2015 - The Last Words of Jesus #4



“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, **“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”** which means, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Mark 15:34)

In this, the fourth of the last words, Jesus cries out from the cross: ***“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”*** Large spikes have been hammered through his wrists and feet. Jesus has been beaten, mocked, and has been abandoned by his disciples; save for his mother, the beloved disciple, and a couple of other women whose courage is beyond measure.

In his moment of anguish, Jesus turns to Holy Scripture and the words of King David in Psalm 22. This is the cry of an innocent man who has suffered greatly at the hands of unjust and sinful people.

I don't think we will ever fully understand what happened at that moment on the cross, nor the meaning of Jesus' cry, but we do know that Jesus bore this pain, suffering, and abandonment for us – for you and me – so that we would not have to know the crushing weight of God's righteous judgment for our sin.

At the moment of that cry, Jesus knew what hell was and is. Scripture gives us many images of hell - the place of “outer darkness,” of “weeping and gnashing of teeth;” a “fiery furnace.” I think we can add to that list something even worse – a place utterly abandoned by God, with no hope, no love, no peace. Jesus knew that hell for three days, so that we would not have to.

As we continue to journey through Lent, let us ponder the weight of what Jesus bore for us. Let us ask ourselves how we should live our lives in response to such great

love. And let us commit once again to sharing with others the Good News of Jesus Christ. Because, as St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: ***“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:21)

I pray you all a blessed and holy Lent!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 85 - 87

85. How do you receive the Holy Spirit?

The Scriptures teach that, through repenting and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, I am forgiven my sins, indwelt from then on by the Holy Spirit, given new life in Christ by the Spirit, and freed from the power of sin so that I can be filled with the Holy Spirit. (John 3:1-7; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:14; Ephesians 5:18)

86. What is the fruit of the Holy Spirit?

The fruit of the Holy Spirit is the very character of Jesus developing in us through the work of the Holy Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

87. What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

The manifold gifts of the Holy Spirit include faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, other languages, the interpretation of other languages, administration, service, encouragement, giving, leadership, mercy and others. The Spirit gives these to individuals as he wills. (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 27-31; Ephesians 4:7-10)

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The Bishop's Note: March 19, 2015 – The Last Words of Jesus #5



"I thirst."

The last words of Jesus as he hung on the cross have penetrated the years to reach the hearts and minds of countless Christians and non-Christians. Of the seven last words, the statement above represents the only reference to Jesus' physical struggle.

We cannot begin to imagine the pain and suffering that Jesus underwent. Not only did he have the nails pounded through his wrists and feet and then lifted high upon the cross like other men who are crucified, but he was also stripped, mocked, beaten, and had a gnarled crown of thorns shoved down on his head. He had been without food or drink since the night before, when he instituted the sacrament of Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper. Therefore, it is obvious that Jesus would be thirsty.

However, John tells us that it was more than physical thirst that caused Jesus to utter these words – it was his desire to fulfill scripture: ***"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst."*** (John 19:28 ESV) What was the scripture that Jesus fulfilled? King David, centuries before, wrote these words about the coming Messiah: ***"They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink."*** (Psalm 69:21 ESV)

St. John tells us that the soldiers who were there responded to Jesus' statement: ***"A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth."*** (John 19:29 ESV) This "sour wine" is what the Roman Soldiers would drink both to quench thirst and to provide a mild analgesic. It appears as though this was an act of kindness from the soldiers, though I suppose we'll never truly know if this was done in kindness or in a mocking gesture – in either case, the Word of God tells us that this was prophesied centuries before Jesus'

crucifixion.

That Jesus suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually is a fact. The question is: How do we respond to Jesus' statement? Does it evoke sadness within us? Do we identify with his thirst? Do you recognize that Jesus suffered so greatly not only for the people "out there" beyond your scope and knowledge, but that he suffered for YOU?

This Lord's Day, as you receive the gift the Lord's body and blood, remember his words to the woman at the well: ***"Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*** (John 4:13-14 ESV)

Jesus suffered so that you and I may never thirst again. And to that I say, AMEN!

I pray you all a truly Holy Lent!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 88 - 90

88. Why does the Holy Spirit give these gifts?

The Holy Spirit equips and empowers each believer for service in the worship of Jesus Christ, for the building up of his Church, and for witness and mission to the world.
(Ephesians 4:12-16)

89. What is the Church?

The Church is the whole community of faithful Christians in heaven and on earth. The Church on earth gathers in local congregations to worship in Word and Sacrament, to serve God according to the Scriptures, and to proclaim the Gospel, under the leadership of

those whom God appoints for this purpose. (Articles of Religion, 19; Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Peter 2:9)

90. How does the New Testament teach you to view the Church?

The New Testament teaches me to view the Church as God's covenant people and family, as the body and bride of Christ, and as the temple where God in Christ dwells by his Spirit. (John 1:12; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16b-7:1; Revelation 19:6-10; 21:9-10)

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The Bishop's Note: March 26, 2015 – The Last Words of Jesus #6



"It is finished."

This week we have come to the penultimate of the Last Words of Jesus. "It is finished," speaks volumes – theologically, spiritually, and physically. Jesus utters these three words as his life ebbs away. He's endured so much pain, sorrow, and anguish that his heart just cannot take it any more. St. John describes it simply this way: ***"When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."*** (John 19:30)

Physically, Jesus' body could just take no more. I can't begin to imagine what this could have been like – no living soul could, I suppose. However, I recently read *Unbroken*, the story of Louie Zamperini. In it he describes an experience in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, where a particularly sadistic guard forced him to hold aloft a heavy beam. He was told that if he dropped the board, he would be shot. After a long period of time, with scores of other prisoners looking on, the guard just walked away and Lt. Zamperini was able to drop the beam. The relief that he must have known would have been an, "It is finished," moment. The physical and mental pain had ended – at least for the time being. When Jesus uttered the words, "It is finished," it was a factual statement – his last breath proclaimed that he was done; spent; emptied.

Spiritually, Jesus' statement proclaimed that he had completed his assignment on earth. Jesus was the Word made flesh in order to bridge the gap - created by the Fall of Adam and Eve, and experienced by everyone following - between God and mankind. "It is finished," spiritually represented a sense of satisfaction – the only begotten Son of God perfectly fulfilled the will of his Father. Jesus is the only one to have experienced complete emptying and fulfillment at the very same moment.

Theologically, Jesus' statement speaks to the new reality that you and I are allowed to experience as the Father's adopted sons and daughters. "Finished" (in the Greek, *tetelestai*) only occurs twice in the New Testament – both times it's in chapter 19 of the Gospel of John. The first use is in verse 28: ***"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, (tetelestai) said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.'"***

And, of course, the second is in verse 30, quoted above. Biblical scholars tell us that *tetelestai* was used in the first century with regards to having paid a bill – i.e. paid in full! That is exactly what occurred - Jesus paid to the Father, in full, what was and is owed on our part; namely, justice for sin. Jesus paid, with his own flesh and blood, the price that we should pay. What more can be said beyond – IT IS FINISHED!

I pray you all a truly blessed Holy Week.

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 91 - 93

91. Why is the Church called the Body of Christ?

The Church is called the Body of Christ because all who belong to the Church are united to Christ as their Head and source of life, and are united to one another in Christ for mutual love and service to him. (1 Corinthians 12: 12-27)

92. What are the "marks" or characteristics of the Church?

The Nicene Creed expands on the Apostles' Creed to list four characteristics of the Church: it is "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" (see Articles of Religion, 8).

93. In what sense is the Church "one?"

The Church is one because all its members form the one Body of Christ, having "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." The Church is called to express

this unity in all relationships between believers. (Ephesians 4:5-6)

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The Bishop's Note: April 02, 2015 – The Last Words of Jesus #7



“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Today is Maundy Thursday. On this night some two thousand years ago, our Lord washed the feet of his disciples, instituted the Lord’s Supper, and was arrested. These events lead off the whole process of his faux trial and shameful crucifixion - ending with these words uttered by our Lord: **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”** (Luke 23:46)

Jesus’ familiarity with Holy Scripture is evident in his Seven Last Words. For the second time, Jesus had quoted the Psalms. The first time was when he said, **“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” - “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Psalm 22:1) The second quote - this Final Word from Psalm 31:5 - comes as Jesus breathes his last, surrendering his life for you and me.

With these words Jesus is simply saying: *“Abba, I’m done. I’ve done all that I can and I place these past 33 years into your hands along with all of my eternity.”*

In his Last Words, Jesus demonstrates for us what God desires for all of us: that we surrender our whole lives to Him – past, present, and future.

As we prepare to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, isn’t that the proper response to eternal life – complete surrender?

Of course, that is easier said than done, and it requires us to be intentional every day.

The discipline of praying the offices assists us in this endeavor – waking up with prayer and scripture reading, and going to bed with prayer, scripture, and self-examination. What a wonderful response to Jesus’ resurrection - to intentionally spend time with him every day.

I pray you all a truly blessed Holy Week along with a heavenly Easter Celebration!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 94 - 96

94. Why is the Church called “holy?”

The Church is holy because the Holy Spirit dwells in it and sanctifies its members, setting them apart to God in Christ, and calling them to moral and spiritual holiness of life.

95. Why is the Church called “catholic?”

The term “catholic” means “according to the whole.” The Church is called “catholic” because it holds the whole faith once for all delivered to the saints, and maintains continuity with the apostolic Church throughout time and space.

96. Why is the Church called “apostolic”?

An apostle is one who is sent. The Church is called apostolic because we hold the faith of Christ’s first Apostles; because we are in continuity with them; and because we, like them, are sent by Christ to proclaim the Gospel and to make disciples throughout the whole world. (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 9:1-6)