

THE SEVEN LAST WORDS

- CHRIST'S LAST SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS -



For centuries, Christians have pondered Christ's *Seven Last Words*, which refers to the seven brief sayings uttered by Jesus from the Cross before he died. Each has deep Biblical references and is rich in spiritual significance. The fact that there are Seven Words is significant. In the Bible seven is the number of spiritual perfection and completeness. From Genesis through Revelation, the number seven is used to reflect God's creative divine work. Taken individually and together, these seven sayings provide us with Christ's greatest spiritual teaching:

1. *Father Forgive Them for They Know Not What They Do*
2. *Today You Will Be with Me in Paradise*
3. *Woman, Behold Your Son...Behold Your Mother*
4. *My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?*
5. *I Thirst*
6. *It Is Finished*
7. *Father Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit*

“Father Forgive Them for They Know Not What They Do” (Luke 23:34)

The Gospel of Luke captures the first of the seven sayings. Of significance is the fact the Jesus *intercedes* for those most responsible for his crucifixion. Jesus is not focused on His suffering, but rather on the *spiritual fate* of those who persecuted him. In contrast to the fallen angels, who knew the consequences of their actions, those responsible for the cross, were ignorant of the divine nature of Jesus. Here, Jesus is exemplifying his teaching ***“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”*** Matthew 5:44.

“Today You Will Be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)

Moments before the redeeming exchange with Jesus, Matthew’s Gospel notes that *the good thief* was someone who mocked, reviled, and taunted Jesus. ***“The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.”*** (Matthew 27:44). However, while on the Cross, *the good thief* experienced a spiritual conversion, which enabled him to rebuke the other thief, acknowledge his sin, and entrust himself to Jesus’s mercy.

“Woman, Behold Your Son...Behold Your Mother” (John 19:26-27)

By addressing his mother as **woman**, Jesus is reminding us of the Bible’s first prediction of a Savior, the protoevangelium (literally the first Gospel) found in Genesis 3:15. As the **New Eve, Mary** is the mother of all “Living Creatures”. More important, as the mother of the Apostle John, the beloved disciple, Mary also becomes our Spiritual Mother. The Beloved Disciple is not only an eyewitness to the miracles and ministry of Jesus, but also serves as a symbolic representative of all faithful disciples.

“My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46)

Ancient Jewish rabbis often quoted a line from Scripture to reference the whole context of a particular passage. Therefore, in uttering these words, Jesus is not primarily

referring to his forsakenness, but quoting the opening line of **Psalm 22**, to point His hearers to that psalm. When they read Psalm 22, they would no doubt see the many fulfilled prophecies included in that song of David. Even while experiencing the agony of the cross, Jesus was teaching the crowds and proving that He was the Messiah who fulfilled the Scriptures.

“I Thirst” (John 19:28)

In response to this utterance, Jesus is given a sponge full of sour wine, lifted to his mouth on a branch of hyssop, thus completing His Passover sacrifice, which He began at the Last Supper. However, Jesus thirsts for us. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, ***“God thirsts that we may thirst for him”*** (CCC 2560).

“It Is Finished” (John 19:30)

In addition to completing the Passover sacrifice, Jesus completes the Plan of Salvation of the Father. As noted in John 17:4, Jesus stated ***“I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do”***. Jesus completes this work by giving His unconditional love away in total self-sacrifice, at the cost of humiliation, betrayal, rejection, desertion, brokenness, and death.

“Father Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit” (Luke 23:46)

In uttering these final words, Jesus again quotes Scripture, Psalm 31: 3-5:

**You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name’s sake lead me and guide me,
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.
Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.**

Throughout the Passion, Jesus remains in control: Jesus is victimized, but never a victim. From the cross, Jesus teaches us the true meaning of love and the redemptive value of suffering. From the Passion, we gain wisdom on how to live and die with Christ.