



Tenebrae Service

Narrator:

"Tenebrae" is a Latin word meaning darkness or shadows. The purpose of our Tenebrae service is to recount the emotional aspects of the love and suffering that we memorialize each Good Friday. This ancient solemn service centers on the following words—"and darkness came over the land" (Matt. 27.45; Mark 15.33; and Luke 23.44)—within the Crucifixion account of the gospels.

During our service, may Readers narrate 14 scriptural accounts that detail the Passion Story of Christ. "Darkness will come over the land" as the lighting from our candles will gradually be reduced as Readers extinguish one candle each immediately after reading their scriptural account. As a result, increasing shadows and darkness will come over us as we get further and further into the Passion Story with culminates with the death of Christ. The red candle is the Christ candle and will be the last one extinguished by the last Reader signifying the death of Christ and the sealing of his tomb.

Let us commemorate the Passion of our Saviour.

Reader 1: Gethsemane

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."



Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"¹

Reader 1 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 2: The Betrayal

While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is

¹ Matt. 26.36-46

your hour—when darkness reigns." Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest.²

Reader 2 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 3: The Denial

Peter followed at a distance. But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "I am not!" Peter replied. About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." Peter replied, "I don't know what you're talking about!"

Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.³

Reader 3 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 4: Field of Blood

Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

² Luke 22.47-54a

³ Luke 22.54b-62

So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."⁴

Reader 4 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 5: Barabbas

Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.

While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

"Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered. "What shall I do, then,

⁴ Matt 27.1-10

with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.⁵

Reader 5 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 6: Crown of Thorns

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.⁶

Reader 6 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 7: Simon from Cyrene

As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.

⁵ Matt. 11.11-26

⁶ Matt. 27.27-31

For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed! Then they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"⁷

Reader 7 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 8: The Crucifixion

It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!" In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe."⁸

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."⁹

Reader 8 extinguishes a black candle

⁷ Luke 23.26-31

⁸ Mark 15.25-31

⁹ Luke 23.39-43

Reader 9: Mother of Jesus

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.¹⁰

Reader 9 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 10: Death of Jesus

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining.¹¹ Knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.¹² When he had received the drink,¹³ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"¹⁴ and also said "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.¹⁵

Reader 10 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 11: Revelation

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were

¹⁰ John 19.25-27

¹¹ Luke 23.44-45

¹² John 19.28-29

¹³ John 19. 30a

¹⁴ Luke 23.46a

¹⁵ John 19.30b

guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"¹⁶ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.¹⁷

Reader 11 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 12: No Bones Shall Be Broken

Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."¹⁸

Reader 12 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 13: The Burial

It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he

¹⁶ Matt. 27.51-54

¹⁷ Luke 23.48

¹⁸ John 19.31-37

learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.¹⁹

Reader 13 extinguishes a black candle

Reader 14: Securing of the Tomb

The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.²⁰

Reader 14 extinguishes the red candle

Narrator:

All the candles including the red candle have been extinguished signifying the death of Christ and the sealing of his tomb. Let us take time for silent reflection.

A brief period of reflective silence follows

Passionate love prayers by ancient and contemporary church mystics are often intense and intimate and express a love of Jesus Christ that is born out of his suffering and death upon the cross. Let us pray three passionate love prayers and let the words resonate within us as we soon share a meal together in remembrance of our Savior's death.

¹⁹ Mark 15.42-46

²⁰ Matt 27.62-66

Reader: (All Women)**A Passionate Love Prayer of Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897)**

O Jesus, who in your cruel passion became the reproach of men and the man of sorrows, I worship your divine face. Once it shone with the beauty and sweetness of the Divinity; now for my sake it has become the face of a leper. Yet in that disfigured countenance I recognize your infinite love and I am consumed with the desire for loving you and of making you loved by all humanity. The tears that streamed in such abundance from your eyes are to me as precious pearls which I delight to gather, that with their infinite worth I may ransom the souls of poor sinners. O Jesus, whose face is the sole beauty that ravishes my heart, I may not behold here upon earth the sweetness of your glance, nor feel the ineffable tenderness of your kiss. I consent to this, but I pray you to imprint in me your divine likeness, and I implore you so to inflame me with your love that it may quickly consume me, and soon I may reach the vision of your glorious face in heaven. **All: Amen.**

A brief period of reflective silence follows**Reader: (All Men)****A Passionate Love Prayer of Francis Xavier (1506-1552)**

O God, you are the object of my love, not for the hope of endless joys above, nor for the fear of endless pains below, which those who love you not must undergo. For me and such as me, you once did bear the humiliating cross, the nails, the spear; a thorny crown transpierced your sacred brow; what bloody sweats from every member flow. Such as then was, and is, your love for me, such is and shall be still my love for thee; Your love, O Jesus, will I ever sing—O God of love, sweet savior, dearest king. **All: Amen.**

A brief period of reflective silence follows

Reader: (All Women and Men)**A Passionate Love Prayer of Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)**

Dear Lord Jesus, your broken heart is the source of my salvation, the foundation of my hope, the cause of my love. It is the sacred place where all that was, is, and ever shall be is held in unity. There all suffering has been suffered, all anguish lived, all loneliness endured, all abandonment felt and all agony cried out. There, human and divine love has kissed, and there God and all men and women of history are reconciled. All the tears of the human race have been cried there, all pain understood and all despair touched. Together with all people of all times, I look up to you whom they have pierced, and I gradually come to know what it means to be part of your body and your blood, what it means to be human. **All: Amen.**

A brief period of reflective silence follows**Narrator:**

As previously encouraged, let the words of these prayers resonate within us as we share a meal together in remembrance of our Savior's death.

(copies of the Tenebrae Service can be obtained on www.urban-monk.org)