

# Lenten Liturgical Resources and Reflections

*Prepared by*

*The Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan and the Rev. Luna L. Dingayan  
Ecumenical Theological Seminary*

## Liturgical Resources

By the Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan

### 1. Call to Worship

#### A.

**Leader:** We are gathered today to celebrate life in all its fullness in the name of God who is alive and who sets people free. Come, therefore, and let us worship the God who gives us hope even in the midst of hopelessness.

**All: Amen!**

#### B.

**Leader:** Arise, dear sisters and brothers! Arise and lift up your hearts unto the Lord! Lift up your voices to the living God! God is calling us to celebrate, to witness, and to struggle together, reaching out toward each other as God reaches out toward us. Come, therefore, and let us worship the God of life!

**All: Amen!**

#### C.

**Leader:** Jesus Christ, our Lord, says, "Whoever wants to be great among you must be the servant of the rest."

**People:** "Whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all."

**All: Jesus Christ, our Servant Messiah, unless your Spirit reigns in our lives, we lord it over our people. May you be with us, O loving God, that we may learn of your ways and partake of your love; for you have come not to be served but to serve and to give your life as a ransom for many. Amen.**

#### D.

**Leader:** Beloved in Christ, we are gathered together to worship the God who gives us freedom to live in peace. We have been set free from the power of sin and death to live the fullness of life in Christ Jesus, our Saviour and Lord.

**People:** We have received not the spirit of slavery and fear, but the spirit of freedom and courage as children of God.

**Leader:** Come, and let us worship the God of freedom and peace!

#### E.

**Leader:** The God who gives us life calls us to live our lives according to God's will.

**People:** We are all gathered here today searching for life's meaning in all its fullness.

---

*Please credit:*

The Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan and the Rev. Luna L. Dingayan, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, 42 Bokawkan Road, Baguio City 2600, Philippines. Downloaded from [www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent](http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent).

**Leader:** The God who gives us life in Christ Jesus calls us to share our lives with those in need.

**People:** We are all gathered here today learning to offer our lives in the service of the people.

**All: We are gathered here today to worship the God who has come to be with us in Christ Jesus, our Saviour and Lord, renewing our lives to face the future with confidence and hope.**

## 2. Prayers

**A.** Loving God, may you grant us wisdom to know your will, awareness to see your work of creation, love to experience your compassion, and a meaningful life to reflect your own glory, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

**B.** God of history, we pray that you will not take us away from dangers, but give us the courage to face them; that you will not take us away from difficulties, but give us a strong heart to bear them; that you will not take us away from evil and death, but give us the power to overcome them. May we experience your Loving Presence in all our failures and successes in life; in Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

**C.** May you be with us, dear God, in our worship and work to bring about a new order of genuine and lasting peace in our land. May we be united to overcome the forces of evil that are destroying our people and their future. May you grant us the courage and hope to trust in the renewing power of your Holy Spirit. This is our prayer, in your name and for your sake. Amen.

**D.** Almighty and Everlasting God, we come before your presence with a sense of joy and thanksgiving, for you have shown your greatness and power in the rise and fall of empires and governments, in the history of our suffering people, in their painful and bloody struggle to shape our nation's life and destiny. As we wrestle together with issues confronting our people today, may we be one with the poor and the lowly. Let their cries and longings reverberate in our hearts and minds. As we reflect together, may the memories of our countless martyrs—whose lives have been broken, whose blood has been shed like that of Christ our Lord—illumine our vision for peace based on justice. Let your sword of justice and the power of your peace reign in our land. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

## 3. Litanies

### Litany A

**Leader:** Eternal God, you revealed the mystery of your being in the life of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, and showed to us your glory on the cross.

**People:** Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

**Leader:** Our Creator and Source of life, you dignify your universe with the gift of freedom, and you compassionately wait until it freely returns your love.

**People:** Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

---

*Please credit:*

The Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan and the Rev. Luna L. Dingayan, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, 42 Bokawkan Road, Baguio City 2600, Philippines. Downloaded from [www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent](http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent).

**Leader:** Loving God, you bound yourself in a covenant relationship with your disobedient people; your hands are tied down by your faithfulness, and you could not give them up.

**People:** Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

**Leader:** Compassionate God, in all our afflictions you are afflicted, and no one suffers without you yourself feeling the pain.

**People:** Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

**Leader:** Eternal Word, you entered the weakness of our human condition, you humbled yourself even dying on the cross.

**People:** Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

**Leader:** Liberating God, the poor are your people because they share your powerlessness, the oppressed find you near because they know of your being rejected.

**People:** Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

**Leader:** Your foolishness, O God, is wiser than humanity; your weakness, O Lord, is stronger than the human race.

**People:** Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

**Leader:** You invite us in Christ, O Lord, to stay awake with you in your endurance, but we turn away to our idols of power and violence.

**People:** Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

**Leader:** You call us in Christ, O God, to wait with you in your present hope, but we choose to worship efficiency and speed.

**People:** Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

**Leader:** Teach us, dear God, to stand with you in Christ. Fill us with the divine love that bears hopes and endures all things.

**People:** Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

## **Litany B**

**Leader:** We pray for men and women who find themselves trapped in prison not of their own making;

**People:** Lord, have mercy.

**Leader:** We pray for those who are trapped by poverty and hunger with no sign of relief;

**People:** Lord, have mercy.

**Leader:** We pray for those who are trapped in families where love ebbed away or where the death of a beloved leaves the pain of loneliness;

**People:** Lord, have mercy.

**Leader:** We pray for those who are trapped by the fear of discovery or by dependency on others;

**People:** Lord, have mercy.

**All:** Gracious God, whose will is for us to live freely and who brought to us in Christ deliverance from all powers that would stifle your children, make us instruments of your freedom that the joy of salvation may rise up from earth, like a mighty hymn of praise through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

#### 4. Responsive Readings

##### A.

**Leader:** Our world needs people who cannot be bought and whose word is their bond;

**People:** People who put character above wealth and possess opinion and a will;

**Leader:** People who are larger than their vocations and do not hesitate to take chances;

**People:** People who will not lose their individuality in a crowd and will be as honest in small things as in big things;

**Leader:** People who will not make any compromise with wrong and will not do it because everybody does it;

**People:** People who are true to their friends in adversity as well as in prosperity;

**Leader:** People who do not believe that shrewdness, cunning, and hard-headedness are the best qualities for winning success;

**People:** People who are not ashamed or afraid to stand for the truth when it is unpopular;

**Leader:** People whose ambitions in life are not confined to their own selfish desires, but work for the good of all;

**All: Our world needs these people!**

##### B.

**Leader:** It is not true that this world and its people are doomed to die and be lost.

**People:** This is true: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16)

**Leader:** It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction.

**People:** This is true: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

**Leader:** It is not true that we are simply victims of evil powers who seek to rule the world.

**People:** This is true: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me... And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18, 20)

**Leader:** It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the church, before we can do anything.

**People:** This is true: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall have dreams." (Acts 2:17)

**Leader:** It is not true that our dreams for liberation of humankind, of justice, human dignity, and peace are not meant for this earth and for this life.

**People:** This is true: "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23)

**All: Amen!**

## 5. Blessings

### A.

May the God Almighty grant us peace  
not only to admire but to obey God's teachings;  
not only to profess but to practise our faith;  
not only to love but to live the gospel;  
that what we learn of God may be received into our hearts  
and shown forth in our lives,  
through the power of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### B.

May the suffering love of God be our love;  
may the redeeming life of Christ be our life;  
and may the way of justice and peace be our way,  
now and always. Amen.

### C.

**Minister:** The call for us today is not beyond our reach. It is not up in the sky. Nor is it on the other side of the ocean. No, my brothers and sisters, it is here with us today. We are given the choice between life and death, between God's blessings and curse. Let us choose life!

**All: Here we are, O God; send us now with your blessings! Amen!**

### D.

May the love of God dwell in our hearts  
that we may live as a forgiven and forgiving people.  
May the peace of God dwell in our hearts  
that God's justice and peace may reign in our lives and in our land.  
May the Spirit of God dwell in our hearts  
that we may become God's transformed and transforming people. Amen.

## Lenten Reflections

by The Rev. Luna L. Dingayan

### **Reflection 1: Triumph of Humility**

*Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Mark 11:7-9)*

#### **A Greek Legend**

There is a famous Greek legend about a mighty warrior named Achilles. He was a hero of the epic poem *The Iliad* by Homer. Achilles was the mightiest of the warriors who captured the city of Troy. According to the legend, Achilles was strong because when he was an infant his mother had dipped him in the River Styx. Achilles' mother was told to do this by the gods, because this would make him invincible—with one exception: at the spot where his mother had held him, his heel, he would be vulnerable.

Thus, we have the expression that a person's weak spot is his or her "Achilles heel." Achilles was told that if he were to go to Troy, he would be killed, but he was so certain of his invincibility that he ignored this warning. Sure enough, he was killed by a poisoned arrow shot into his heel.

Greek mythology is full of superheroes, but all of them have one weak spot: passion or lust, greed or avarice, vengeance or cruelty, malice or ambition. In fact, the gods and goddess and heroes and heroines of Greek and Roman mythology show the same strengths and weaknesses that humans show, only on a grander scale, resulting in "larger" consequences.

#### **Love as Weakness**

The story of God is the opposite. Jesus shows us that God's "weakness" is the love God has for us. Jesus knew that if he were to go to Jerusalem he would be killed. Yet, as the New Testament tells us, "His face was set toward Jerusalem." (Luke 9:53)

The importance of Palm Sunday, just before Good Friday, is to emphasize the determination of God to conquer God's enemies with God's weapons, not theirs. In all likelihood, there were children present that day. They may not have been certain of the significance of the palm branches, only aware that something special was happening. And there in the midst of it was that simple man riding on a simple beast, looking a bit disappointed, yet with a subdued, regal bearing that set him apart and drew from the crowd's spontaneous acclaim.

Achilles went to Troy thinking he was invincible. Jesus rode into Jerusalem with the full knowledge that he was totally vulnerable. The disciples were not able to perceive the importance of the situation. They were elated that at last the popular

---

*Please credit:*

The Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan and the Rev. Luna L. Dingayan, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, 42 Bokawkan Road, Baguio City 2600, Philippines. Downloaded from [www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent](http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent).

sentiment had rallied behind their Master. Now the kingdom of God would be established. How they must have cheered! How little could they have guessed that before five more days were ended, they would see Jesus on a cross with a different procession, a different way of hailing him as king!

When we in our faith proclaim Jesus as the Saviour of the world, part of what that salvation means to us is portrayed in the events of the Palm Sunday. We are reminded once again how much of our faith is demonstrated by Jesus in his actions.

Our God is a God who does things. Our faith is in the deeds of God, not just a string of ideas and philosophies. We follow Christ; we do not just sit at his feet and listen. Our Lord shows us the way and leads us in it; our Lord does not just tell us about it.

Palm Sunday is the ultimate demonstration that God will accept nothing short of the complete triumph of God's plan of salvation. God will not accept any hollow, pompous homage. God asks more of us than the waving of palms and shouts of hosannas. It is the Herods and the Caesars, the kings and emperors, the dictators and presidents of the world who are satisfied by "hosannas" and popular acclaim.

Christ is looking for those who believe enough to remain faithful after the crowd has gone home, who will stand by him when he is scorned and ridiculed, who will wait beneath the cross, and who will at last come to an empty tomb and accept the gift of resurrection on faith alone.

#### **True Humility**

Two things are taught by this Palm Sunday event: one about Jesus, and one about our selves. First, when the apostle Paul looked back on the revelations of Jesus, he burst out in a mini-doxology about Christ: "Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:6-8)

The world in which we live is so twisted and so filled with pride that we have difficulty dealing with true humility. We might clip our newspaper each day and divide the stories into a series on pride and power.

The Caesars built Rome with its Forum, through which their chariots could clatter in victory parades. In Jerusalem, those who had conquered Jerusalem also paraded in the streets—Nebuchadnezzar's armies, Syrian invaders, Philistine conquerors, and then the Roman legions. But Christ's entry into the city and into human hearts comes as a king in humility. How ironic it is that this simple ride should in the end prove more enduring than all the armies that had ever stormed Jerusalem's gate! How wonderful that the peace he commanded has outlasted all the weapons of war ever wrought! God demonstrates to us that the ultimate battle for human loyalty is won in the humility of Jesus.

---

*Please credit:*

The Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan and the Rev. Luna L. Dingayan, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, 42 Bokawkan Road, Baguio City 2600, Philippines. Downloaded from [www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent](http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent).

We come to Jesus and accept him as our Saviour and Lord, not because he overwhelms us with his might. It is by an irresistible force of pure and absolute love that we are drawn to him. Had God sent Jesus as a king upon a throne, we might have crawled to him in shameful obeisance. Had he enslaved us in the chains of a moral bond, we might have obeyed him out of fear.

Instead, Jesus demonstrated a humility that is binding because of its liberating freedom. He chose to abandon his might and power. He sets us free to reject him. The first time was in the Garden of Eden, when God gave human beings the freedom to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was not that Adam and Eve were naughty and ate of what they were forbidden. Rather, they wanted to be God. They wanted the power and the pride of being God.

Now, the choice is offered again. Choose the humility of Jesus. Choose his way of peace and love. Walk in the pathway of humble service. Choose not to cry, "Crucify him! ...We have no king but the emperor!" (John 19:15)

#### Bearers of the Gospel

And then the second lesson Palm Sunday teaches us is found in a single line in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus says, "Go into the village...You will find tied there a colt." (Mark 11:2) The other gospels' accounts make it clear that the beast was an ass—the lowliest and least likely animal to be used for a triumphal entry! Jesus says: "If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" (Mark 11:3)

Jesus says it of you and me today. Our lives seem as unlikely a beast to carry the love of God as that on which he rode into Jerusalem. We wonder why God should call us, demand of us, and use us. But God does. We belong to God.

When the Great Wall of China was built, it stretched for thousands of miles. Its builders believed it was impregnable against all attackers: too high to be scaled, too thick to be breached, too long to be circumvented. But it was defeated three times in history, not by scaling, not by battering down. It was breached by bribing the gatekeepers. Indeed, the wall was not stronger than the character of the person who kept its gates.

Palm Sunday carries all the overtones of the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, the abandonment of the disciples, and the smugness of the priests. God's mighty fortress of love was breached by human sinfulness. But God's love prevails. It prevails because God's humility is impervious to all threats. We may fail God, but God never fails us. God still says of our lives: the Lord has need of you.

Our faith seems an unlikely vehicle of God's love. Yet God calls and transforms us to be bearers of the gospel. That's why we preach Christ. We proclaim his crucifixion, and we trust him to take care of our lives and make us more invincible than Achilles. Not even death will prevail against us. And in the end we will appear

---

*Please credit:*

The Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan and the Rev. Luna L. Dingayan, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, 42 Bokawkan Road, Baguio City 2600, Philippines. Downloaded from [www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent](http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent).



before God in thanksgiving and say: "O God, thank you for wanting us enough to come to us—and needing us enough to use us."

## **Reflection 2: Betrayal**

*While they were eating he [Jesus] said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" (Matthew 26:21-22)*

### **A Common Experience**

To be betrayed, to have our goodwill exploited for another's advantage, to suffer the treachery of one in whom we have confidence, is a terrible experience. It violates our trust, our sense of justice, and it destroys mutual confidence, which is the basis of all human relations. Yet, it is one of the most persistent problems of our human existence.

In one form or another we all have experienced betrayal. Perhaps a contract we made was violated, a covenant broken when a man or woman in whom we put our faith turned against us, or when a president who promised not to run for presidency for the sake of the country's unity decided to run anyway. Betrayal happens to all of us in our daily lives.

What arouses and hurts us is the way in which goodness is constantly betrayed by the turn of events that often denies all justice and seems to obliterate any evidence of God's action to conquer or crush evil. Betrayal strikes at our faith. This is where we come closest to the problem. The force of all other betrayals is born of the deep sense of injustice that comes into focus in the crisis of Jesus' encounter with betrayal, both in his life and on the cross. If anyone ever felt the force of betrayal, it was Jesus.

Much has been written and spoken about Jesus' sufferings, and almost without exception we identify ourselves with Jesus, his sufferings, spiritual disappointments, and pains. In doing so, we again become aware of the many setbacks, disappointments, and sad experiences we have been exposed to by other people in our own lives.

But we are wrong when we, in compassion and love for Jesus, our Lord, keep forgetting who we are; that in fact we, too, just like the unfaithful disciples over whom we sit in righteous judgment, are poor, fallible, sinful, and forgetful human beings. Like them, we are also liable to stumble and to fall, to commit errors, mistakes, and deceit, even treachery.

### **Night of Betrayal**

We read in the gospels that on the night of the Passover meal, Jesus sat at table with his disciples and said to them, "One of you will betray me." Upon hearing this, each of the disciples sprang from their seats, and turning to the Master asked him, "Surely not I, Lord?" (Matthew 26:22)

---

*Please credit:*

The Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan and the Rev. Luna L. Dingayan, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, 42 Bokawkan Road, Baguio City 2600, Philippines. Downloaded from [www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent](http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent).

In this brief moment, in this short outcry, we find the expression of a guilty conscience of feeble, frail humanity. These men who asked, "Surely not I, Lord?" were not casual acquaintances or friends. No, they were handpicked, trusted followers and disciples of Jesus. They had pledged their allegiance to him, had even offered to lay down their lives for him. Yet, they were so unsure of themselves that at this crucial moment they asked the question, "Surely not I, Lord?"

Not one, but all asked that question. Despite their loyalty, doubts had been in their minds at one time or another. Sometimes they had been uncertain that they had done the right thing in following the man Jesus, who had asked them to share his poverty and deprivations, who had set before them the image of the kingdom to come, but who so often led them into personal exposure and danger, saying: "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matthew 5:11) But where was their reward?

At that particular moment, their doubts came back to them, and they felt they had been disloyal, in thought, to their Master; that somehow they had betrayed him. The scriptures share that they were sorrowful that they had doubted and in their minds had betrayed him whom they really loved. We know that the one, whom Jesus singled out, unknown to all others, had already committed that sin of betrayal. It was Judas Iscariot who had sold out his Master and friend for the sum of 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave.

This portion of the story in the canonized scripture is quite significant in view of the discovery recently of a copy of the non-canonical Gospel of Judas that tries to exonerate Judas. The Gospel of Judas is a Gnostic gospel. The Gnostics believed that Jesus was not a human being, but pretending to be human; they believed that anything material or physical is evil, created by an evil god. That's why there are no stories in the Gospel of Judas about the death and resurrection of Jesus, which are basic and central in Christian beliefs. Gnosticism was considered heretical in the Early Church, and the Gospel of Judas was never canonized.

In any case, we also know that the betrayal of Judas was not the only betrayal during that night, because before the night was over and the rooster had crowed three times, Peter, the most devoted friend and disciple of Jesus had denied all knowledge of him three times, and at the time of Jesus' arrest on the Mount of Olives, all the disciples fled in terror, fearing that they might also be arrested.

#### **A Time for Self-Examination**

Holy Week could be a time for self-introspection. It is a time when we might look into our innermost hearts and ask ourselves, "Surely not I, Lord?" We must question our innermost thoughts and feelings, our faith, our loyalty, and our behaviour not only toward Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Friend, to whom we have pledged our discipleship, but also toward our fellow human beings, whom we ought to respect and love.

Have we been true to the trust our Lord Jesus has set in us? How often have we betrayed his love for us and sold out our faith and loyalty for worldly profits and material advantages? As we remember that night when Jesus was betrayed, we must ask ourselves how much pain and deepest disappointment we have caused our loved ones, our beloved country, and people through disloyalty and betrayal. Who among us can honestly say: Not I, Lord? I have never deserted you nor betrayed you. I am free of any guilt.

There is an incident in the gospels in which Jesus was called upon to pass judgment on an adulterous woman. He said, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8: 7), and all the accusers faded away.

Surely, not one of us is free from the guilt of disloyalty, of betrayal. Perhaps, this is the time when we must ponder on this, when we must ask for God's forgiveness for what we have done in human blindness, frailty, and foolishness. Redemption for the betrayed and the one who betrays, forgiveness for the sinner and assurance of God's lasting grace for those who suffer in this world—this should have been the message that comes to us through the experiences of Holy Week as we celebrate Christ's passion, death, and resurrection.

### **Reflection 3: The Cry on the Cross**

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*  
(Mark 15: 34)

We are now in the period of Lent. And for our reflections, I would like to take one of the so-called Seven Last Words of Jesus on the cross, particularly when he said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Take note that these words are quotations from Psalm 22, which is a prayer of petition and a cry of anguish for the feeling that God is absent in one's suffering.

To Filipinos, and I'm sure even in other cultures, the words of a dying person are very important. We would listen intently to someone who is about to die, and we would take his or her words seriously because we believe that he or she is telling us the truth. We presume that when someone is dying, he or she has no more time to utter unnecessary words. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why the Seven Last Words of Jesus on the cross are central in our Lenten celebrations.

#### **The Context of Mark's Gospel**

To understand the meaning and significance of Jesus' words on the cross, let us look into the context of Mark, the gospel writer. Mark wrote the story of Jesus' life and ministry for the Christians in Rome, who were threatened by dissensions and persecutions partly as a result of the Jewish Rebellion in Palestine in 66 CE, when Christians were accused of fomenting rebellion against the powerful Roman Empire.

Due to persecutions, a lot of Christians in Rome who were former Gentiles were beginning to lose their hope and faith in Christ. They felt that the Christian

movement was powerless vis-à-vis the forces of the Roman Empire. As a matter of fact, some of Jesus' disciples had been executed by the Romans, such as James the Son of Zebedee (44 CE) and James the brother of Jesus (62 CE).

Hence, by writing about Jesus' last words on the cross, Mark was saying to the Christians in Rome, and even to Christians of today, that the sufferings of Christians in their obedience to God are also Jesus' own sufferings. And that Jesus' cry on the cross is also the cry of believers who are suffering because of the truth they proclaim and for which they stand as living witness.

#### The Context of Jesus' Own Life and Ministry

Moreover, Jesus' words on the cross should also be understood in the light of Jesus' own life and ministry. Jesus' life was dedicated to the proclamation and establishment of God's kingdom. Mark summarizes Jesus' message in his gospel, saying: "The Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:15)

God's kingdom is a kingdom where God's will is done, where there is daily bread, where there is forgiveness of sins, and where temptation is overcome. (Matthew 6:9-13) Jesus inaugurated this kingdom not only by his words, but also by his life. In establishing this kingdom, he cured the sick, fed the hungry, forgave the sinners, and denounced the hypocrites. And because of the truth he proclaimed in words and in deeds, the structures of religion and of the Roman Empire were shaken to their very foundations. Hence, in the eyes of the powers-that-be, Jesus was a very dangerous man. He had to be eliminated; he had to be crucified!

Throughout history, the story of Jesus' life and death has been told thousands of times. Time and again, we see men and women, who, like Jesus, dedicated their lives for the least, the last, and the lost. And like Jesus, they also ended life in a cruel death.

We remember people, like Fr. Nilo Valerio. Fr. Nilo was a Roman Catholic priest who spent his life serving the poor and the lowly in the hinterlands of Northern Luzon. Like anyone working for radical change in society, he was suspected of being a Communist. He had an encounter with the military; and together with two women workers he was killed and beheaded. During the funeral service, his uncle, Bishop Simeon Valerio, delivered a sermon wherein he said in effect: "When we appear before God's throne, the Lord will not ask us whether we are bishop, priest, or pastor. Rather, the Lord will ask us what we have done to the least of our brothers and sisters. For me," Bishop Valerio said, "it would be very difficult to answer. But for Fr. Nilo, it would be very easy. He would just say, 'I have given my own life.'"

#### To Be Forsaken by God Is to Be Forsaken by Friends

Jesus' cry on the cross also shows us the fact that to be forsaken by God is to be forsaken by friends. In his life and ministry, Jesus had his own disciples. They

---

*Please credit:*

The Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan and the Rev. Luna L. Dingayan, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, 42 Bokawkan Road, Baguio City 2600, Philippines. Downloaded from [www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent](http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent).

learned from him and followed him. And when the time came, Jesus told his disciples that he would go to Jerusalem and that there he would be killed. The disciples tried to prevent him and promised to be with him and defend him to the very end. Peter added that even if he were the only one left among the disciples, he would never leave Jesus alone. But before the rooster had crowed, Peter had denied Jesus three times.

Hence, Jesus faced the cross alone because the disciples who were supposed to be with him were gone. Perhaps, they were afraid that they might also be nailed on the cross. They wanted so much to be with Jesus, but not in the moments of his trials and difficulties.

In our personal life, perhaps one of the most painful experiences we could have is when those who are dear to us forsake us at the time when we need them most. The experience of being forsaken by his own disciples was an added suffering to Jesus.

Jesus' cry on the cross was a cry of deep sorrow, because his own disciples, his own friends who had promised to follow him unto death, had proven to be unfaithful to him.

Now is the time when Christians are needed most. Now is the time when believers must show that God has not really forsaken his own people, even in the midst of their trials and difficulties. Our time needs men and women who are willing to show the love and the justice of God in a society ruled by human greed and selfishness. It is only when we respond to this call of the hour that Lenten celebrations find meaning and significance to our lives.

As we offer our lives anew to him who died on the cross, we come to know for sure that our Lord Jesus is not really forsaken by God, and that he has never suffered and died in vain.

#### **Reflection 4: Victorious in Death**

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."*  
(John 11:25)

#### **Suffering and Death**

On March 9, 2006, two of our pastors in Mindanao were ambushed along the national highway in Barangay Mobod, Oroquieta City. The Rev. Jeremias Aguilo Tinambacan and his wife, the Rev. Marilou Lumaya Tinambacan, were travelling from Lopez Jaena to Oroquieta City in their van when four people riding on motorcycles, both with back riders, tailed them and at close range started shooting. The Rev. Jerry was hit in the head twice and died instantly. His wife, the Rev. Marilou, suffered a non-fatal wound in the forehead and was rushed to the Misamis Occidental Provincial Hospital in Oroquieta City. Fortunately, the Rev. Marilou was

---

*Please credit:*

The Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan and the Rev. Luna L. Dingayan, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, 42 Bokawkan Road, Baguio City 2600, Philippines. Downloaded from [www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent](http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent).

able to identify one of the suspects: Mamay Guimalan, who was known as a member of the military intelligence and a resident of Barangay Calaran, Calamba, Misamis Occidental, where the couple are assigned as pastors of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP).

What is alarming is that the Rev. Jerry is among 17 UCCP church leaders killed in cold blood during the recent years of the Arroyo Administration. And none of these killings has been resolved, although there is the usual declaration from political leaders and military officers that they are giving all-out support to the investigations. The problem is that all of the suspects in these killings are connected with the military establishment.

We denounce in strongest terms what they have been doing to our fellow church workers! We cry and long for justice! But how can we find justice, if those who are supposed to investigate are the ones suspected of committing the crimes? Can we find genuine justice in this world? Do we still have to wait for the "final judgment" to come? Can God intervene now in our history, as God has done in the past, and put a stop to this madness of killing innocent people in the name of the false god of national security being worshipped by our political and military leaders?

#### Jesus' Teachings

How do we comfort ourselves in these trying times? As Christians, we view death not as defeat but victory. For not until we look at death victoriously can we learn to live victoriously; and not until we live victoriously can we face death victoriously. Jesus' own teachings about life and death are our sources of hope, comfort, and consolation.

First of all, Jesus teaches us not to fear those who can destroy the body. We believe that we are more than physical beings. According to the scriptures, God has breathed the breath of life in us, and thus we have become a living soul. Our soul is our inner life. It is our sense of what is right, what is just, and what is true. This is a gift of God that no one can ever destroy.

Those who killed the Rev. Jerry thought that they could end his ministry for the poor and marginalized. They thought that they could stop him from speaking for what is true and just. But they were seriously mistaken, because though they have killed his body, they could never kill his soul. The Rev. Jerry may have died physically, but the life he lived will continue to speak to us. What is right and just and true will continue to surface and will triumph in the end. Jesus Christ, our Lord said, "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:39)

The problem today is that many of us have damaged souls. For instance, every election time, we put into power people who do not have the national interests at heart; these leaders are people whose ambition is to amass personal wealth. We applaud leaders who are verbose and bombastic rather than intelligent; the shrewd rather than the wise; the dishonest and corrupt rather than the people with

---

*Please credit:*

The Rev. Dr. Perla P. Dingayan and the Rev. Luna L. Dingayan, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, 42 Bokawkan Road, Baguio City 2600, Philippines. Downloaded from [www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent](http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/lent).

integrity and honesty. We have become an economically impoverished nation simply because our souls have been impoverished or seriously damaged, or simply disappeared.

Secondly, Jesus teaches us that there are some things worse than dying. He said, "What will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?" (Matthew 16:26) It is bad enough that the Rev. Jerry, a man of God, who spent his life speaking for the truth and helping to lift up the lives of the poor and marginalized, was killed in cold blood. But it is far worse for those who masterminded, planned, and executed his killing. The loss of Christian virtues and respect for human rights, sacrificing human life for selfish gains, denying the truth for the sake of a lie—these things are far worse than dying physically.

And thirdly, Jesus also teaches us that the quality of life is far more important than the length of life. According to historians, Jesus started his ministry at the age of 30, and he ministered to the people of his day for two to three years. He never wrote a book; he had no letters attached to his name. He never established an empire nor built a mansion for his own. But of all the politicians who sat in parliaments, of all the generals who won in battles, no one has ever influenced the world as much as this man of Nazareth, who spent his short life in caring for the poor, the sick, and the downtrodden.

The Rev. Jerry was only middle aged when he was killed. Science has learned to preserve and lengthen human life. Modern medicine can cure our bodies of so many maladies, and we take pride in long life—but what if we have nothing to live for? Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "He who doesn't know the thing he would die for is not fit to live." There is no virtue in numbers of years if we have not learned how to live. Quality of life is more important than quantity.

Sometimes we live more in one day than we do in one month, or more in one hour than we do in an entire day. The Rev. Jerry's death may have been short and tragic. However, the most tragic death is that of the one who has never learned to live. When a person dies without friends, it is tragic. When a person dies without having contributed to the good of the world, it is a disaster. When a person dies without having created within a spirit worthy of fellowship with God and his fellow human beings, it is ultimate failure.

Our life consists not in the things we possess, nor in the abundance of our years, but in the quality of our living. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25) This is the kind of life that lives victoriously, even in death.