

BENEATH *the* **CROSS**

A Good Friday Service Based on the
Seven Last Words of Christ



POST TENEBRAS LUX SERIES
Good Friday Services of Scripture, Story, and Song
(Song Suggestions Provided)

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Although many publishers do not capitalize terms, and particularly pronouns which refer to the Trinity, in this study CDM publications has capitalized those elements for clarity of reference.

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Beneath the Cross

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INTRODUCTION

MEANING

Holy Week

Since the late 4th century, the Church has observed the unique importance of the week we call “Holy.” This eight-day period begins on Palm Sunday and culminates with the great celebration of Christ’s Resurrection on Easter.

Throughout the centuries, the Church has especially noted the events of the first Palm Sunday, Maundy (“Commandment”) Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, as well as Easter, and often commemorate them each year.

Good Friday Tenebrae Service

The Psalms are filled with expressions of sorrow and lament. The Tenebrae service, in its many forms, harkens back to that biblical foundation. Consideration of the events surrounding Christ’s crucifixion is a powerful and legitimate way to reflect on the sorrow of sin and a call to repentance.

The word “tenebrae” comes from the Latin meaning “darkness/shadows.” The Reformers used the term in their motto: *Post Tenebras Lux—After Darkness, Light!*

The Tenebrae is an ancient Christian service that poignantly makes use of physical darkness, gradually diminishing light through the extinguishing of candles, in remembrance of Christ’s passion and death on the cross.

Moving and sacred, the Tenebrae service that began in medieval times has been adapted in rich and diverse ways and is now observed in a variety of denominational traditions.

This service of reflection is worshipful and unique in its tone and experience; it provides believers a place to ponder, to feel the sorrow and the cost and the weight of Jesus’s sacrifice. It allows us to be sad, to lament.

As adapted by Protestants, this service is generally condensed and relies on the customs of reading Scripture and extinguishing candles to lead a congregation through the solemn events of the crucifixion.

We join Christians across generations and around the world as we use this distinctive observance of darkness to prepare for the moment, three days later, when we join in celebration to proclaim: “He is risen! He is risen, indeed!”

Beneath the Cross

Beneath the Cross

Beneath the Cross provides the readings and structure for a Tenebrae service of Scripture, story, and song that is based on the seven last words of Christ from the cross. The balance of all three elements, with the gradual dimming of lights and extinguishing of candles, creates a meaningful opportunity for thought and reflection. Musical selections are suggested.

One of the strengths of this service is that it is accessible and adaptable to a host of settings. It is designed to fit your context.

Originally presented in a mid-sized church, the readers were members of the congregation or choir who were comfortable reading aloud and expressively. Through the years, the readers became more comfortable portraying the biblical characters, and that was reflected in their representations. In addition, selecting music that fit the strengths of the church musicians was key.

The Tenebrae quickly became one of the most beloved services of the year.

The Service

(THE FIRST WORD)

NARRATOR: The first word, from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 23:

And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified Him.
And Jesus said:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

FIRST READER:

Forgiveness? (*pointing to cross*) *For this?* Is this possible?

Forgiveness for the things we do *not* know, as well as the things we do?

For the things that I know . . .
About the life I've led, far from God?
The very things *everyone* in my village knew.
Things that caused them to turn their faces from me.

They had the right to do so.
I knew it.
You (*looking up*) must have known it, too.
Even if You had not heard the gossip, surely a prophet of God would *know* such things.

But there was something different about You.
You did not look away. You looked *toward* me. You *saw* me.

And so, my tears flowed with the perfume I had brought,
to anoint Your feet,
as You sat and ate with those righteous people.
All around me, they judged me.
They even judged You, because of me.

But You did not pull away. No, You turned *toward* me when You said,
in front of them all: Whoever has been *forgiven* much, *loves* much.
“Your sins are forgiven. . . . Go in peace.”

On this day of such *great* forgiveness,
should not the world be filled with great love?

(FIRST READER turns the page in the binder, walks to the table and extinguishes the candle closest to her. She returns to her seat in the audience. Turn off or dim lights. The ENSEMBLE sings (for example): “When You Prayed Beneath the Trees.” As the song ends, the SECOND READER leaves his seat in the audience and takes his place at the podium stage right.)