

# Lenten Reflections 2018

The Seven Last Words of Jesus



## The Seven Last Words of Jesus—Week 2: “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

**By Sister Patricia Cook, RSM**

### Reflection

Back in the 1990s when my prison ministry brought me to a men’s maximum security prison as a chaplain, I served for 12 happy years, trying to make Mercy real in a cold and dreadful atmosphere. On Friday mornings, we met for Bible Study and Meditation.



“Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise”—this passage from Luke’s Gospel, recounting the second word of Jesus from the cross, quickly became a favorite of mine. No other scriptural reference related better to the longings and experience of the inmates.

There was Bernie, who asked me if I really believed that God could still be that merciful. And then there was Jake, who proclaimed loudly to the whole group that he would never trust this story if he had not seen it in his Bible with his own two eyes. No wonder I felt more like a real Sister of Mercy there, teaching, proclaiming the absolute, unconditional love of our merciful God.

### Meditation

Tradition has nicknamed Dismas, the man beside Jesus on the cross, the “Good Thief”—the one who stole heaven, the one who heard a promise right from the lips of a dying Jesus.

Happily, the Bible is the “Living Word” of God, not a collection of ancient stories!

So come, my dear reader; at this moment, please meet me, humbly, reverently, quietly, prayerfully, there on the hill of Calvary.

Using our faith-filled imaginations, let’s dare to enter this scene. Shiver with the heartbreaking atmosphere. Stand there beside his mother Mary, his dear friend Mary Magdalene and the other faithful women, all in loving fidelity, wrapped in grief.

Pause. Breathe. Ponder the triple crosses of public humiliation, back-dropped by an angry sky. Move in closer. Hear the conversation of the condemned crucified. One thief mocks with angry derision. The other thief is incredulous and defensive. Both turn to Jesus in the center, and one dares to ask, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” The response of Jesus tumbles off the hill and echoes around the globe, down the centuries, right into this moment, the pledge of loving, merciful forgiveness:

“Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

No wonder St. John of the Cross could write:

“You looked with love upon me,  
And deep within, your eyes imprinted grace.  
Such mercy sets me free, held in your love’s embrace,  
To lift my eyes adoring to your face.”

## **Invitation**

As we continue today making Mercy more real, each in our own circles of influence, let’s recall the original rule of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas—we are “founded on Mt. Calvary, there to serve a crucified Redeemer.” So said our founder, Catherine McAuley.

So say we, by our choices, our plans, our concerns for the most pressing needs of our time and our engagement with life. We can’t do everything, but we can do something, and we can do it today. Let’s contemplate more deeply the inner stirrings of the Spirit, resident within, calling us to bring Mercy into this day, here and now.

Stop. Breathe. Pause. Plan. From your heart, do something merciful,  
and do it today.

*Art by Sister Genemarie Beegan*