

# Seven Last Words

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our very self was a process He understood as none before or since. He saw how some words could cause a vicious man to become more vicious, or, when spoken with power and timely grace and forceful love, words could lead such a man to put aside his malice and regain his self-respect. Jesus understood that a word can be a matter of life or of death. In fact, He was keenly aware that His words were fated to bring the true life to those who could accept them and let them enter and work in their depths. He experienced how some were offended by His words; how they took them ill and became embittered upon hearing them, and resolved to destroy Him because of them.

His words were too much a part of Himself to be shrugged off. He put His very self in them. If one did not accept His words, then He Himself was rejected. If one wished to blot out His words then He had to be destroyed. His words were living. They did not die upon being uttered. They breathed and pulsed with a life-force that could not be encountered without effect. Indeed, so great was Jesus' power over words and so acute His awareness of their significance that He came to be known simply as The Word. The Word of God who became flesh and pitched His tent among us.

Jesus well understood the force of words and so He was ever attentive in His use of them. Not always solemn about it, He could be lighthearted and He was, at times, the most approachable of men to the most timid of creatures. He understood that words carried a grace when pronounced with spirit and sensitivity and concern, and

that this grace made life more full. In fact, He knew that words convey life and raise it to a higher density of significance.

And so He put Himself in His words. He stood behind them and entered into them. There was no doubt about it. Where His word was He was present Himself. In person. Even in the words He left behind. The words that were lodged in the hearts of His disciples who heard them with love, and in faith. Above all, in the heart of His mother: "Mary kept these words and pondered over them in her heart."

Jesus did not speak His last words to any of us. Not even to His mother or one of His apostles. He spoke it to His Father. Directly to His Father in heaven:

But He did not whisper them softly, under His breath. He shouted them aloud. He wished to be heard, even though He did not speak to any man or woman. He wished us all to hear His final words to His Father so they would enter into the fibers of our heart and become the very substance of our being.

We have to get confidence someplace. We cannot create our own out of nothing. We are not made that way. We are only what we are given and receive and identify with, whether we know it or not. And most of the time we do not know it. It just happens. When we listen and open ourselves. Jesus here shows us how to live and to die. Trusting, like children, in our Father. Without limit. Even in death. That is His last word. For us.

Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

## Only One Could Escape Death

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 20:1-9. (R1) Acts 10:34, 37-43. (R2) Col. 3:1-4.

Charles Dillingham and Florenz Ziegfeld, eminent producer of the Ziegfeld Follies that glorified the American girl, were pallbearers at the funeral of the great escape artist, Houdini. As they lifted the heavy, beautiful casket, Dillingham whispered to Ziegfeld, "Suppose he isn't here."

Houdini was there all right! He could not escape death. Nor could he keep his promise to communicate after death. For every man death is final — except for one Man, Jesus Christ. He came back from the dead as He had promised. And He communicated with His friends, not because He was some trick artist, a Houdini, but because He is God!

In fact, St. John in the gospel tells of our Lord's resurrection in a rather strange way. He wrote: "Jesus had to rise from the dead." That is odd, isn't it? The more natural expression would have been — had Jesus been only a man — that Jesus had to die. We all have to die. Because Jesus was a man, He had to die. But because He was God,

He had to rise! God is life. In Him there can be no death, as in light there can be no darkness.

In recent years, thanatology (the study of death) has become quite popular. We read of people who have apparently undergone clinical death, and then returned to tell tales of wonder, comfort and delight as they seem to leave their bodies. Some, however, narrated frightful and painful post-mortem experiences. While these accounts can bolster one's belief in the afterlife — even in a heaven and a hell — they are not proof positive of an eternity that we are destined to share. Only one Man tasted death, not clinical death, for He was entombed. Only one Man came back and told us of the life beyond. He is Jesus Christ.

When a biography is written of a person, it begins with his birth and ends with his death. The gospels do not end with the death of Jesus, but with His resurrection and a promise to be with us all days even to the end of the world.

This is the joy of Easter. Jesus is not dead, but alive. Not living in some far off country, but present in the midst of His people. What are the sacraments? Are they not encounters with the risen Christ through the ministry of the Church? What is the Mass? Is it not the celebration of the mystery of Christ's presence in the midst of His people? What is God's word? Is it not the Lord speaking to us here and now? That is why we are an Alleluia people from head to toe. We are destined for life, not death. We have as friend and brother, Him whom death could not conquer. "Death and Life were locked together in a unique struggle. Life's Captain died; now he reigns, never more to die."

With Him we die in baptism. With Him we have been raised up through new life poured into us by the Holy Spirit at baptism. Therefore, says Paul, "Set your heart on what pertains to higher realms . . . Be intent on things above rather than on things of earth. After all, you have died to sin in baptism!" Yes, let us walk with the risen Lord. Then we shall appear with Him in glory.

Christ had died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

Alleluia!

## Scottsville Postmaster Announced

Rudolph E. Knuti has been named postmaster of Scottsville, it was announced in Washington, D.C.

Knuti's appointment was effective March 20. He has been a postal career employee for 16 years, serving at Bristol Center, Willard and West Henrietta.

## Deadline

The deadline for submitting news to the Courier-Journal is noon on Thursday preceding the following Wednesday's publication.

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The Polish Tribute Fund is nearing \$100,000, having hit \$96,838.69 as of last Friday, according to Father Joseph Reinhart, diocesan missions director, who is coordinating the campaign.

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