

14 April 2006
Year D, Good Friday
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St Mary Magdalene
Oxford

Behold the wood of the Cross
whereon was hung the world's salvation!

Such grief have you ever known?
Such a wretched sight have you ever seen?

O foolish and gentle Lamb,
lifted high upon the cross,
nailed through his calloused palms,
that healed the wounds of the unclean and the outcast
drilled through his wearied feet,
that walked with the poor and the oppressed,
pierced through the compassionate heart of God
that knew the pains of the broken hearted,
fixed now on a barren and lifeless tree,
arms spread like an eagle's wings,
vulnerable with nothing to hide,
only his silent loving embrace,
the naked truth of God's grace.

O sacred head,
adorned with a mocking crown of thorns,
streaming with blood of his Passion,
mingled with tears of compassion,
outpoured over the dust of the arid souls,
sweetening the embittered spirits,
invigorating the lifeless hearts of stone,
O Paschal Lamb of God!

O my eyes, can you dare behold
the sacred head of Christ,
a tearful gaze of your Redeemer?
O my soul, can you dare long for
the loving embrace of his slashed arms,
to hide under the shadow of his wings?
O my heart, can you dare approach
the Holy Cross which bears your judgment?

Bend the knee of your heart, and
kneel before the Holy Cross.
A heart of stone as no sword can pierce,
a heart of stone as no word can shatter
a heart of stone as no fire can melt,
washed and cleansed by his blood,
gently caressed and softened by the streams of his tears,
shattered by the Word of God,
melted by the fire of his love,
pumped with his sweet blood,
a new heart re-created in the image of his Sacred Heart.

O my lips, can you dare kiss
the hard wood of the Holy Cross,
burning with love of God, yet
unconsumed by its fire?
Burn away my sins,
cleanse me from my iniquities.
A sweet odor of the burnt offering,
unconsumed by the fire of God's wrath, but
preserved in his love and mercy.

O faithful Cross,
a stump of Jesse grown to be noble,

barren with no foliage nor blossom, yet
bearing the most magnificent fruit of God!

O noble tree,
beholding the Lamb of God
once held by Mary his mother,
bearing the fruit of God's redemption
once borne by the Virgin Mary,
presenting from a forsaken hilltop
him once offered to God in the holy temple,
a prophecy of the hope of Israel,
now in utter despair and anguish,
forsaken in the desolate hill of sacrilege,
faithful to the crucified Lamb of God.

O one and only noble tree,
a tree of new and unending life,
a tree that bears the eternal truth,
a tree that reveals the naked truth of God,
unadorned, unembellished, unclothed,
truth that exposes all hypocrisy,
truth that judges all iniquity,
the eternal truth of God's justice and mercy.

The judgment seat of Christ,
a suffering that judges all injustice,
a blood-shed that atones for all the blood-shed,
a death that redeems all the innocent dead.
How noble indeed to bear such truth!

O Holy Cross,
revealing a God self-defined,
a God self-emptied to suffering and death,

to heal the pain of bruised hearts,
to mend the wounds of broken spirits,
to bind the divisions of fear and hatred,
to reconcile all with his flesh and his blood,
a suffering become a means of healing,
the great feast of victory over death
revealed as Pascha, a suffering.

Draw near and kiss the Holy Cross,
a union of mercy and truth,
a union of righteousness and peace,
a symbol of the divine suffering,
a symbol, thus, of all human suffering,
heart of the divine mysteries,
holy of holies,
paradox of paradoxes.
Draw near and kiss the holy suffering.

How terrifying this moment of truth!
How awesome the silence of the Holy Cross!

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Such a wretched sight have you ever seen?

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