

# Tenebrae

## The Liturgy of Shadows

### Instructions

*All family members gather around a table. This can be a dining table or a coffee table in a living space. Choose one, two, or three people to be readers and assign the readings to those individuals. It is good to include children when possible. Set out three candles on a table and light each. You will blow out one candle at the conclusion of the first two readings.*

*During these liturgical practices we should prepare ourselves to be receptive to the story and any details which 'jump out' to us. Let your imagination draw images of the scenes and picture what you hear. This is a very effective form of prayer. You may, if you are comfortable, add in some discussion after each reading. Just be sure to keep the conversation on topic so as not to derail the prayer time.*

### The Introduction

'Tenebrae' means darkness or shadows.  
As we come to the end of Lent,  
we begin a journey into darkness to a place of deep shadows.  
Today we accompany Jesus in his last hours.  
We witness the cruelties and the suffering he endures.  
We listen to the words of condemnation and ridicule.  
In all this he is innocent.  
He is the faithful servant of God,  
doing his Father's work;  
bringing the gospel of love, peace and hope.  
And so, in this liturgy, we are invited to walk solemnly and attentively with Jesus.  
Better to know.  
Better to understand.  
Better to be his friend, his disciple, his witness.  
Be still and know that God is here.

Leader: In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

## I The First Reading

Jesus eats the last supper with his disciples

Matthew 26:17-29

The disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, 'My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal. When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve. And while they were eating, he 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?" He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so." While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup and, after giving thanks. He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*The first candle is extinguished in silence.*

*A hymn or song is sung.*

*Stand for the prayer:*

Father in heaven,  
on the night before he died,  
your son shared the Passover meal with his friends,  
giving them bread to nourish their spirits  
and wine, poured out as his blood, for the forgiveness of their sins.  
We pray that we may turn to him  
for forgiveness.  
Through Christ, our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## II The Second Reading

Jesus is betrayed and arrested

Matthew 26:36-56

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.' And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third

time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.' While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.' At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?' At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*The second candle is extinguished.  
A hymn or song is sung.*

*Stand for the prayer:*

Father in heaven,  
your son, Jesus, prayed in the garden of Gethsemane,  
seeking to understand what you were asking him to do.  
Help us to pray, to persevere in discovering the thing  
you call us to do with our lives.  
Give us the strength and courage to follow your calling  
whatever the cost, when we feel alone or betrayed,  
afraid or helpless.  
Through Christ, our Lord.  
**Amen.**



### **The Third Reading**

Jesus appears before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor

*Mark 15:1-15*

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' He answered him, 'It is you who say so.' Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, 'Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.' But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, 'Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, 'Then what do you wish

me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him!' So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them and, after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*The third candle is extinguished.*

*A hymn or song is sung.*

*Stand for the prayer:*

Father in heaven,  
when the whole world is against us,  
accounting us of little worth,  
give us your Spirit that we may speak the truth  
and stay firm in our calling to be like Jesus,  
whatever the cost.

Through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## IV **The Fourth Reading** Jesus is crucified

*Mark 15:16-32*

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*The fourth candle is extinguished.*

*A hymn or song is sung.*

*Stand for the prayer:*

Father in heaven, we so often stand by,  
as others are mocked or belittled,  
as cruelty and injustice are allowed free reign,  
afraid to speak, afraid to act,  
silent and guilty. Forgive us.  
Through Christ, our Lord.

**Amen.**

## V **The Fifth Reading**

Jesus dies on the cross

*Matthew 27:45-54*

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once, one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly, this man was God's Son!"

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*The fifth candle is extinguished.*

*A hymn or song is sung.*

*Stand for the prayer:*

Father in heaven,  
when we cannot find you,  
and are not sure that you are there,  
give us faith. Let us understand that you are always faithful,  
always present, holding us and sustaining us,  
even in the darkest moments when all seems hopeless and lost,  
and death surrounds us.  
Through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## VI **The Sixth Reading**

He was despised and we took no account of him

*Isaiah 52:13 – 53:5*

See, my servant will prosper. He shall be lifted up, exalted, rise to great heights. As the crowds were appalled on seeing him, so disfigured did he look that he seemed no longer human, so will the crowds be astonished at him, and kings stand speechless before him. For they shall see something never told, and witness something never heard before. Who could believe what we have heard and to whom has the power of the Lord been revealed? Like a sapling he grew up in front of us, like a root in arid ground. Without beauty, without majesty we saw him, no looks to attract our eyes; a thing despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, a man to make people screen their faces. He was despised and we took no account of him. And yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried. But we, we thought of him as someone punished, struck by God and brought low. Yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On him lies punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*The sixth candle is extinguished.*

*A hymn or song is sung.*

*Stand for the prayer:*

Father in heaven,  
today we look on Jesus your son,  
stripped and humiliated, scourged and crowned with thorns,  
mocked and spat upon, betrayed and led out to be nailed to a tree.  
Yet this man takes upon himself our sins, our faults, our failings,  
and promises us new life.  
Through Christ, our Lord.

**Amen.**

## VII **The Seventh Reading**

Jesus is laid in the tomb

*Matthew 27:62-66*

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*The seventh candle, representing Jesus Christ, Light of the world, is hidden as Jesus' body was hidden in the shadows of the tomb. Have a member of the family take the candle out of the room.*

*All depart in silence.*