

Paschal Mystery Meditation



Time: 3rd meditation on Die Day

Length: 25-30 minutes

Speaker: assistant spiritual director

Purpose: This meditation is the keynote meditation of the TEC weekend. It is the core spiritual reality out of which the rest of the themes flow: through death to self to life in Christ. The speaker shares how we must die to ourselves as we grow in our love of God and one another. This is what life is all about; it is the key to the tensions and struggles that go on within ourselves when we try to live as Christ's followers. The candidates are deeply involved in living this truth as they give up their personal comfort and wishes so that the TEC community comes alive around them. In the course of the weekend, this core truth will be celebrated and affirmed through the meditations, celebrations and symbols.

This meditation is designed to clearly set before the candidates that what God offers them through Jesus is the fullness of life. "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10). To possess the fullness of life demands willingness to be transformed, to realize life at a deeper level. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain. But if it dies it yields a rich harvest." (John 12:24). To accept God's unconditional love for us is to place us in a condition in which we can clearly see the deepest values of life. To reach for those values involves a dying to something less good so that something of much greater worth may be achieved. We do not die to ourselves for personal gain, but we die to ourselves for others. "A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13). This self-sacrificing love to which Jesus calls us requires a radical change in our attitudes, one that is not unlike death many times. We are called to a letting go that is the equivalent of losing our lives. Jesus is challenging his followers to a personal death to sin in order to be born again. This conversion turns our lives upside down, calls for a new way of looking at life. It is possible only when we are keenly aware of how much God loves through Jesus and in the circle of those who are His friends.

The wheat letters are introduced and explained as concrete evidence of the care, concern, and sacrifices of fellow Christians for the benefit of those making the weekend, thus providing concrete examples of how the candidates may live out the Paschal Mystery themselves.

Setting: The candidates are invited to examine the story of Jesus in relation to their own personal stories. Jesus is God's gift to us; He brings to us a totally new concept of love, the love that He enjoyed in the intimate heart of God. It is gift-love. His presence among us has made a tremendous difference in our lives. He told us that God, His Father, loves us personally as He loves Him. Through all of His live among us, He taught us to trust in God, to be aware that our Father loves us in spite of our fears, tensions and, at times, frustration. He told us that there is no unimportant person in the world; our value comes from the fact that our Father sees us and loves us. He taught us that we only truly possess ourselves when we give ourselves away. He invited us to move from self-centeredness to other-centeredness. He gave us the courage to transform our life patterns and values by offering us an

intimate permanent bond of love with us. He would live in us and we would live in Him. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love." (John 15:9).

The human/divine love of Jesus ended on the cross, where all those who blocked our His love from their lives had placed Him in one desperate and dastardly act. There, in an intense way, He experienced the full depth of His total self gift, both to His Father and for us, as He died to all He held most precious and dear to Him, including His own life. Having proven His love, even unto death, His Father raised Him up in His resurrection to live among us in a new and marvelous way. His was a life-giving death; He returned to us to complete His self-gift to us through His resurrection, where He graced, and continues to grace, us with His life-giving Spirit. We call this total plan through which God revealed His unconditional love for us through Jesus the **Paschal Mystery**.

Jesus in His total self-gift to the Father opened a path into God's life for us, and through the resurrection He continues to share the Holy Spirit; the bond of divine love; with all who chose to live in His company. Thus, the Paschal Mystery continues to be a vital force in the Christian community today. Evidence is found in the notes bearing the prayers and love sacrifices which we call wheat.

This meditation prepares the way for the Metanoia Meditation in that it provides the basis for a sense of courage as well as trust in God's care and power for the candidate. "Jesus did this and other people are voluntarily experiencing it in order that I might do it also" is the thought that the speaker wants to lead the candidates to conclude. The speaker must communicate his/her own conviction that the death-to-life process leads to true joy and freedom rather than self-destruction. Thus a confident and hope-filled attitude is needed in the speaker. While these are the threads that bind this meditation together, the actual meditation should be story after story; clothing the truth with life actually lived. The speaker must seek to bring the truth alive in the imagination and memory of the candidates so it can seep into their hearts.

Outline:

Scripture: (John 12: 24) *"Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit."*

1. Some realities are too big to be captured in words. We call them mysteries, not because they are some sort of puzzle, but because they are so filled with life, so rich in meaning, they cannot be captured in language. They must be lived to be understood.
 - a. Life itself is a mystery as it unfolds within and around us.
 - b. Love is a very precious mystery.
 - c. Why God should choose to come into our lives through Jesus to share His love with us, is the supreme mystery.
2. Jesus loved life and lived it to its fullest.
 - a. Loved nature; the lilies of the field, the sparrows.
 - b. Jesus was very normal; generated a close knit group of friends. Make the humanity of Jesus come alive through stories: how he outsmarted those who were going to stone the woman, how he went fishing with the apostles. He did not go around talking theology all the time.

- c. He never counted the cost of extending His love to everyone He met. He was whole hearted. Stories...
 - d. He made all persons aware that they were important and he challenged them to become the best they could be.
 - e. Even when He hung on the cross, He was still thinking of others, He asked His Father to forgive those who nailed Him there and He was mindful of youthful John and His mother and asked them to take care of one another.
 - f. His death was His finest hour: His love and trust triumphed over evil and despair.
 - g. The heart of the Paschal Mystery is the heart of Christ. It is like a prism through which the living love of the Father for us falls on our lives with its many rich colors and hues.
3. Jesus knew, too, that to live life to its fullest is to undergo constant deaths to something less so that something greater can come alive in us.
- a. Shortly before His death, Jesus was talking to His circle of friends and made the statement above about the grain of wheat. It is a powerful insight into life.
 - b. Jesus knew that all life is a dying process. Only children think that things go on the same forever. The seasons change, butterflies are born from caterpillars, our lives move through stages of childhood to young adulthood and old age, we overcome doubt and fear to love someone.
 - c. Jesus did not run away from life when it became a challenge. He faced the challenge squarely; He lived through the dark moments to arrive at the joyful ones. He knew that the very moments when it seemed most overwhelming, were the moments filled with the greatest potential.
 - d. He once said, "Unless you give yourself away, you cannot possess yourself." (Matthew 10:39, Luke 9:23-24). Jesus showed us what complete generosity, living life with all our heart, involved. It makes us vulnerable but secure.
4. On the cross, Jesus revealed the fullness of His love. It was His finest hour.
- a. His death was a real death. It is the most dreadful human experience of dying known.
 - b. He was stripped of all dignity, branded as a criminal, and treated with contempt. Even the rough Centurion was impressed.
 - c. In spite of Jesus' complete self gift to all His friends, Peter swore publicly he did not know Him out of fear. Judas sold Him for \$30. All the rest ran away. To love wholeheartedly is to make oneself vulnerable but joyful.
 - d. And then, Jesus opened up to His Father's abiding love and said, "Into your hands, Father, I commend my spirit." What made dying easier for Jesus was that He knew His Father was waiting to embrace Him. It might be by the blindness of human persons who had blocked the awareness of God's love for their lives.
5. But Jesus' death proved to be a life-giving death. He came back among us in His resurrection and offered to bond us to His living love, His loving life, permanently. This bond is created through Baptism.
- a. St. Paul, thinking through the mystery of Jesus' life and death and resurrection said: "When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized in His death; in other words, when we were baptized we went into the tomb with Him and joined Him in death, so

- that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life. (Romans 6:3-4). We were plunged into the Paschal Mystery.
- b. This mysterious but real bond between our spirits and the Spirit of Christ was described by Jesus at the Last Supper by saying "I am the vine, you are the branches." (John 15:5)
 - c. St. Paul was privileged to have this lived experience and he did not hesitate to say "I live now in Christ, and He lives in me." (Gal 2:20)
 - d. Christians, always, have recalled what Jesus once said, "Unless you take up your cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciples." (Luke 9:23-24).
 - e. Thus our lives become very precious as they now unfold in the death-unto-life pattern of Jesus. His experience is our experience too in our daily lives as Christians. The mystery of our lives takes on meaning and purpose in living enveloped in the paschal mystery of Jesus.
6. We find ourselves confronted with the same life situations that Jesus had to live through:
 - a. Affirming our values when our friends draw us another way.
 - b. Living with disappointments; family problems, lack of encouragement, friends who do not reciprocate our love.
 - c. Leaving our familiar circle of friends and our families to move on.
 - d. Forgiving persons who falsely interpret our good intentions.
 - e. Giving up something good (like marriage, for example when we chose a vocation to the priesthood).
 - f. Overcoming physical illness that incapacitates us.
 - g. Overcoming lethargy in our spiritual life (Mass, etc) to discover the peace of Christ.
 - h. Under all circumstances saying "no" to selfishness and "yes" to self-giving (in each story used to illustrate the above suggested points, show how abundant life was experienced after the dying. "I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:11)
 - i. JESUS DID NOT COME TO EXPLAIN AWAY SUFFERING OR REMOVE IT. HE CAME TO FILL IT WITH HIS PRESENCE, Paul Claudel
 7. Jesus expressed His final wish thus: "This is my final commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:17) That this commandment is being fulfilled is shown by the wheat letters we now have to share with you. They have been sent to you both personally and as a group to tell you that countless persons have been praying for you and doing special acts of sacrificial love, asking God to bless you abundantly with His presence and His personal love during this weekend.
 8. Read several of the wheat letters written to the group. Allow time for the candidates to experience the intense peace from the letters.