

READING THE YEAR
THROUGH
EASTER



For educators, staff, and administrators, the trauma and pain of the past year has been compounded by the crises of students and campus. This four-day study walks through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday, using each day as a lens to process the experiences of the year. You'll find recommended passages of Scripture, reflections, questions to prompt contemplation, and guided prayers. We recommend taking time to slowly read through (or listen to) the Gospel narratives, allowing time for God to speak.

We pray that this guide gives hope in the midst of grief and strength as you pursue your calling to the campus in such a time as this.





Anonymous French artist,
The Garden of
Gethsemane, painted for
the Jesus Mafa project in
North Cameroon, c.1970

MAUNDY THURSDAY

SELECTED SCRIPTURE:

JOHN 13, MATTHEW 26:36-46

REFLECTION

On the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus tends to his students. He washes their feet. He instructs them. Comforts them. He prepares them for the coming days, assuring them that he will return. He commands them to love each as he has loved them. He gives them a way to remember him. **Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.**

A little while later, Jesus is no longer surrounded by his students. He is alone and in anguish. In just a few hours, he will bear humanity's sins as he is crucified. With his face to the ground, he prays to the Father. His students are in the distance sleeping, unaware of their teacher's suffering. But even in this moment of unfathomable heartbreak, Jesus continues to care for them. He warns them to keep from temptation and keep in prayer. He prays over them as the time of his arrest draws close.

In the midst of the pandemic, the continuous cycle of racial violence and injustice, and the tumultuous end of a difficult semester, we find ourselves carrying the suffering of our campuses even as we process our own tragedies from this past year. We sit with students in their hurt and anxiety. We make sure that they have accommodations for testing and studying. We help them fill out applications and plan for graduation. We work to ensure that they have safe places to live and opportunities to experience community. We care for them, even as we mourn our own losses and struggle to take care of ourselves and our loved ones.

But we do not do so alone.

Maundy Thursday reminds us that we "do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus knows our pain. He knows what it is like to care for students while experiencing unspeakable sadness. As we continue in our roles as educators, we must remember that we are still Jesus' students. And while he invites us to love our students as he loves, he also comes to comfort and tend to us.

REFLECTION

1. Take a moment to think of the ways you've tended to the needs of students and colleagues over the past year. Which moments stand out? Why do they stand out?
2. In what ways have you carried your own pain and your students' pain over this past semester? Over this past year?
3. What burdens are you carrying, professionally or personally? How do you need Jesus to comfort you right now?

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for willingly entering human pain. You have carried suffering in your heart and in your body. I come to you with the burdens I carry for my students, colleagues, and loved ones. I come to you with my fears and anxieties. As the trials and heartaches of this season continue, please stay by me. Help me to know the comfort and peace of your presence. **Amen.**

GOOD FRIDAY

SELECTED SCRIPTURE:
MATTHEW 27:32-50

REFLECTION

The students of Jesus are at a loss. Jesus was a teacher like no one had seen, speaking with authority and power. But today he has been silenced. Jesus had incredible power to heal, restoring broken daughters and sons of God. But his enemies have broken his body. Jesus had authority over nature and principalities, commanding the sea and evil spirits. But he is now bound by imperial authorities. Jesus was the savior of the world, coming to claim his throne. But he is nailed to a cross.

On this Friday, the expectations of the students are shattered. Jesus won't drive out the occupying Roman Empire as they had dreamt. Jesus won't restore the Kingdom of Israel to its former glory, as in the days of David. Jesus won't make them heroes of their people. The students' grand hopes give way to bleak uncertainty.

We come to Good Friday with our own broken expectations for this past year. Dreams for our programs, retreats, and collaborations with students. Hopes for growing our influence and continuing our own educational pursuits. Plans to spend time with loved ones and see new places. Promising opportunities to grow professionally, personally, and spiritually.

We mourn over and with our students. They've lost out on graduation ceremonies. Lost time with their communities and friends. They've been called back from once-in-a-lifetime experiences abroad. Some have experienced displacement and homelessness. Others have lost family. This year has brought us into a unique communion with our students, one marked by shared loss and broken expectations.

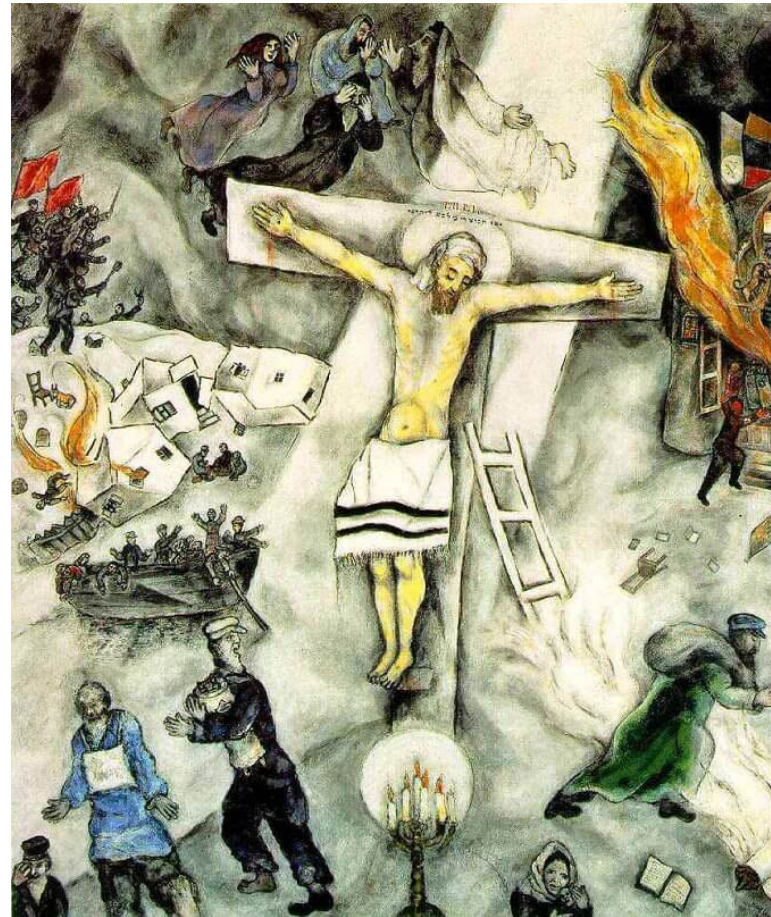
Despite the shattered hopes of the disciples and ourselves, Jesus tells us that there is light at the edge of the darkness. Jesus' despondent cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" seems to be an affirmation of complete despair. Yet, hope persists. Jesus' words come from the opening of Psalm 22, which begins in anguish but ends in God restoring the one who suffers. Even from the cross, Jesus gives new hope. As we lament our broken expectations, we also trust in the coming work of God.

QUESTIONS

1. What lost expectations are you grieving from this past year? Have these broken expectations affected your walk with Christ? If so, how?
2. What new expectations have you formed after this year? Are they characterized by hope? Despair? A mixture of both?
3. How do you hope to see God work in the coming academic year?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I come to you with broken expectations, unsure of what will come. Yet, I know that you work through mystery and through the unexpected. Through the tragedy of the cross, you brought about victory and new life. I give you my disrupted dreams, trusting that your imagination for my future is so much richer and more beautiful than what I could conceive. **Amen.**



Marc Chagall, White Crucifixion, 1938

HOLY SATURDAY

SELECTED SCRIPTURE:

LUKE 23:50-56, MATTHEW 27:62-66

REFLECTION

The shock and horror of Friday gives way to despair and grief. For the first time in years, Jesus' students wake to a world without their teacher. He is not there to comfort them. He can offer no wisdom. He cannot come to their rescue, as he did in the face of the forces of nature and darkness. He cannot embrace them or lay his hands upon them. His warmth, his laughter, his tremendous kindness are gone. The one who loved them like no other is swallowed by death.

What could possibly overcome this terrible Saturday?

This is also the day that Jesus' enemies secure their apparent victory. They seal the tomb. They post guards, anxious to put Jesus' influence to rest. There will be no fables of his resurrection, they assure themselves. His body will remain in the grave and he will no longer insult their piety. No longer question their status among the people. No longer expose their sin. This teacher who proclaimed himself equal to God will be known as one cursed of God.

For many of us, the past year has been an unending Saturday. We have witnessed unthinkable loss in our communities, and we have experienced it in our own homes. We have lamented with students in ways we never dreamt would be part of our vocation. We have spent too much time in isolation and loneliness. We have watched families and communities break down from the inside out. Sisters and brothers of color continue to witness their own people slain, only to be vilified and have justice denied them.

Why, Lord, do you stand far off?

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

Several of Jesus' female followers remind us that the Saturday of grief is also a day of rest. They pause the preparation of Jesus' body in obedience to God's call to sabbath. It is a gracious command that echoes from the dawn of creation. No matter our work, no matter our sorrow, we are called to a divinely sanctioned respite. We rest as our Father bids us, waiting for the Sunday when He will bring new life.

QUESTIONS

1. What ways have you felt the despair of Jesus' students throughout this year?
2. What ways have you encountered enemies, spiritual or otherwise?
3. Where have you found time and space to sabbath in the past semester? The past year? What ways do you need to experience sabbath rest?



Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, 14th Station: Walking in the Shadow of Death, from the series Stations of the Cross from Latin America 1492 - 1992

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I come to you with the fatigue of loss. Amid calls to do more, to pick up the slack, to fill in the gaps of a year of lost labor, would you save for me a place to enter Your rest. As I work, advocate, and educate in a world scarred by the pandemic and ongoing injustice, would you give me time to mourn and heal. Would you make for me a place to sabbath. **Amen.**



Woonbo Kim Ki-chang,
The Resurrection, c. 1953

EASTER SUNDAY

REFLECTION

Easter Sunday begins with the pain of the preceding days. Mary Magdalene, along with other women who followed Jesus, leave to finish the preparations of his body. They depart in the early morning darkness, arriving to an open tomb. Mary believes Jesus' body has been stolen. She rushes away and tells the Twelve. After reporting the missing body, she comes back to the empty tomb, and weeps.

Through tears, Mary peers once more inside the tomb. To her dismay, two figures sit where Jesus once lay. "Why are you crying?" one of them asks.

Mary tells them of the missing body of her beloved teacher and turns away. Another figure stands in front of her. He asks her why she is weeping. Mary responds and pleads for her teacher's body. She doesn't recognize that she stands in the presence of her Lord and two of his messengers. But then, a warm, familiar voice speaks her name.

"Mary."

With that one word, joy returns. Mary recognizes the voice of her teacher. He isn't dead. His enemies didn't stop him. The grave did not consume him. Jesus is risen. For Mary and the others who see Jesus alive once more, Sunday is the day of hope restored.

SELECTED SCRIPTURE:

JOHN 20:1-18

As we come to the end of an incredibly difficult year, we need to know that there is hope. We have carried our students' burdens along with our own. We have felt the sadness of isolation and broken expectations. We have wondered if the tragedies and injustices that surround us will ever go away. But the risen Christ calls us by name. The one who overcame death guides us through death's valley, even when it is too dark to see him. Sunday is not the day that all evil is rid from the world, but it is the day when evil loses its staying power. Our hope is found in the simple truth that the resurrected Jesus walks with us and works through us as we face the darkness of our time, awaiting the coming of a glorious, endless day.

REFLECTION

1. How are you coming into this Easter Sunday? What emotions do you notice?
2. In what ways have you heard Jesus speak this past year? In what ways do you hope to hear from him?
3. How does the resurrection give you hope for your campus? For your loved ones? For yourself?

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, thank you for coming as our constant Comforter. Remind me once more of the hope of the risen Christ. Breathe life into me and the joy of salvation. Give me strength for the coming days to minister to my campus and loved ones. Help me walk in the hope of Jesus' resurrection as we wait for him to come again and make all things right. **Amen.**