

Notes for Good Friday (Gospel) Passion Reading for Readers and Cello

Cello score by Robert Sandford

The Good Friday passion reading is powerful in its own right. The cello score, rather than adding something new, is intended to open us to what is already there. The cello is uniquely suited to offer our Lord one more means for opening our hearts to the fullness of the great gift he offers us even now in the telling. In a small way, like our Lord who turned suffering and death to eternal life, the cello has an extraordinary capacity to embrace human suffering and give it full voice— to honor it and transform it into something poignantly beautiful.

As an agent of the Spirit, it draws us into the emotional undercurrents of this turning point in our salvation in part by accentuating certain dramatic moments. And, by singing a song unique to each at key moments, it invites us into the hearts of Jesus, Peter, Mary and Judas. In Peter's song is his impetuosity, his heart-rending denials of Jesus and the beginnings of his change of heart at the foot of the cross. In Judas' song is a heart poisoned by his betrayal and destined for a tragic end. And Mary's theme, like the *Stabat Mater* on which it is based, invites us to empathize with Mary as Jesus suffered and died.

And when Jesus dies and we kneel, the cello first invites us into Mary's heart at the foot of the cross by weaving their songs together just as their lives were woven together into that moment. It then does the same for Peter and Jesus, weaving their songs together. Then, by singing his passion song in all its fullness, it places us at the foot of the cross to contemplate our Lord's great act of sacrificial love.

Finally, as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus care for Jesus's body, the cello places us in the wake of his passing by playing the barest outline of his song—a requiem holding his sacrifice in prayer.

A note on style:

The Spanish flavor of the score is inspired by the spirituality of the Spanish mystic, San Juan de la Cruz (St. John of the Cross) who emphasized that we are made for union with God. The hope is that this music, growing out of Jesus' passion and united with the Spirit, will help open us to the call to greater intimacy with God.

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