



SPY

WEDNESDAY

INTRODUCTION

The ancient office of Compline, or Night Prayer, derives its name from a Latin word meaning 'completion' (completorium). It is above all a service of quietness and reflection before rest at the end of the day. It is most effective when the ending is indeed an ending, without additions, conversation or noise. If the service is in church, those present depart in silence.

The service is designed to be used easily by one person. If there is more than one person participating, either everyone present may join in with all the words, or the words may be divided up into different sections. If so, it is wise to work out before starting, who is doing what.

Consider how you have set up your space: check you are going to be free from interruptions. You may wish to light a candle, if it is safe to do so. Some may wish to play some music before the service and at the end. Take time to be quiet before you begin and read the service in an unhurried way. Similarly, when you are asked to pause and reflect, consider allowing yourself a good thirty minutes to do this.

The sections in *red italics* are rubrics: these explain what needs to happen at various points.

NIGHT PRAYER

The eternal God is your refuge,
and underneath are the everlasting arms. *Deuteronomy 33.27*

OPENING SENTENCES

The Lord almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end.
Amen.

Our help is in the name of the Lord
who made heaven and earth.

Pause and reflect on the day that is past and anything else that is on your mind at this moment.

Save us, O Lord, while waking,
and guard us while sleeping,
that awake we may watch with Christ
and asleep may rest in peace.

BIBLE READING

MARK 11:27-33

It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, ² for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

³ And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. ⁴ There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. ⁹ And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹ And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

REFLECTION: THE PLOT THICKENS

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

The Wednesday of Holy week must have felt like a victory for the disciples. After facing conflict in the temple on Monday and Tuesday Jesus gets through an entire day of teaching without disturbance. The wisdom he showed yesterday must have spread throughout all Jerusalem as 'all the people came to him in the temple to hear him' (Lk. 21:37-38) and not one member of the religious establishment attempted to stop Jesus. On the surface, everything seemed to be finally falling into place for Jesus and the disciples.

But I feel it was just like those moments in the movies, those moments when everything is peaceful, there's no danger or fighting and then someone says: "It's quiet, too quiet." When that phrase is uttered you know that something evil is lurking in the shadows and at any moment something bad is going to happen.

And so it was for Jesus, for lurking in the shadows, away from public view and listening ears, the Jewish authorities were plotting against Jesus and 'seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him' (Mk 14:1). Their fear of Jesus and the threat he posed to their way of life, their status, and their authority meant that the chief priests and the scribes felt they had no other choice than to kill Jesus. But fearing the reaction of the Jewish people at arresting someone not three days ago they had welcomed into Jerusalem as the Messiah the chief priests had their hands tied. They would wait until after Passover, when the majority of people had left the city (Mk 14:2) - at least that is what they had initially planned to do. Enter Judas Iscariot.

THE SELFISH SPY

We see from the story of Jesus' anointing at Bethany that Judas is not your typical disciple. Although the ignorance of the disciples regarding Mary's devotion to Jesus in anointing him with a bottle of expensive perfume is widespread (Mk 14:4, Mt. 26:8) Judas's motivation is singled out. It is not out of care for the poor that

Judas protests, but out of selfish greed 'he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it' (Jn 12:6).

At the end of this gathering Judas heads to the chief priests and a heinous act of betrayal towards someone he has devoted the last three years of his life to (Mt. 26:14-16). Judas becomes a spy for the chief priests and agrees to do so for only thirty pieces of silver, the price of the life of a slave (Ex. 21:32). How can someone Judas viewed as the messiah suddenly be worth so little to him?

Maybe it was a rash overreaction to the waste of a years wages in anointing Jesus; or maybe Judas thought Jesus would escape like he always did, maybe he did still believe that Jesus was the messiah and thought his betrayal could no more stop Jesus than the scheming of the chief priests so why not make a bit of money out of it?

THE HEART

We do not know what Judas's reasoning was but we do know that the 'heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick, who can understand it?' (Jer, 17:9). So not only do we not know why Judas did what he did, but we will never understand it. Situations like Judas' are still around today such as when someone abandons their faith. We can no more comprehend why they have abandoned their faith than we can understand Judas' betrayal. We cannot understand the human heart.

Judas is a prime example of how people react to the light of Christ. Some, when they get closer to the glory and majesty of Christ embrace it, they hand over all their burdens and sins and deepen their faith. Their hearts are transformed, made new (Ezk. 36:26) as they become more like Christ himself (2 Cor. 3:18). For others the light of Christ reveals their sinfulness and instead of embracing the light, accepting the grace and forgiveness of Christ and repenting of sin, they recoil back into the darkness they are comfortable with.

No one can understand the heart but we can see how it responds to Jesus as we get closer to him: we either devote ourselves to him completely, or give up on him entirely. This Easter search your heart, is it seeking to be transformed to be more like Christ, or is it recoiling into darkness? Whatever it is, the story of Judas shows us that nothing good can come from giving up on Jesus Christ.

PRAYERS

Merciful God,
we entrust to your unfailing and tender care this night
those who are ill or in pain,
knowing that whenever danger threatens
your everlasting arms are there to hold us safe.
Comfort and heal them,
and restore them to health and strength;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Be present, O merciful God,
and protect us through the silent hours of this night,
so that we who are wearied
by the changes and chances of this fleeting world,
may rest upon your eternal changelessness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Visit this place, O Lord, we pray,
and drive far from it the snares of the enemy;
may your holy angels dwell with us in peace,
and may your blessing be always upon us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from Evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

THE CONCLUSION

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.

Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.