

## The Seven Last Words

Twice in the last month or so I placed a stuffer in our parish bulletin about the Good Friday musical performance of the *Seven Last Words of Christ* the parish will sponsor. A wise advisor mentioned to me that not everyone may be familiar with the concept of the seven last words, the musical composition by Dubois, or why I am encouraging this musical performance in our church. So it is an appropriate subject for this column.

First, the seven last words of Christ are actually not individual words. They are sentences and paragraphs. More important, they are the words Jesus spoke *to us* from the agony of his cross. They are the wishes and thoughts of Jesus as he died. No gospel includes all the words. The seven words are a compilation from the four gospels.

It must be a human need to ask what a dying person's last words were. Sometimes those words encapsulate the person's whole life and meaning. We are curious to know where a person's thoughts lie as he/she faces proximate death. In unexpected death, those left behind either treasure or agonize over the last words of their loved one. If the last encounter was an argument, a mourner can suffer even greater pain.

What was the essence of Jesus' last words as he suffered on the cross? He *thirsted*, not just for water, but also for the love of humankind. He *forgave* his tormentors. He *welcomed* a thief into God's kingdom. He *gave* his mother to the Church in the person of Saint John. He *questioned* whether God, his Father, had forsaken him. In an ultimate act of self-giving, he *commended* his whole life and soul to God. And in a final breath—the Holy Spirit—he pronounced his earthly mission *finished* and

empowered the Church. The seven last words offer a wealth of meditation for Lent, especially for its closing days.

The music by Theodore Dubois (1837-1924) is just as inspirational. According to musicologists, Dubois never got the recognition he deserved. His beautiful romantic works were overshadowed by the innovations of Debussy, Ravel, and Satie.

I'm excited that we will host this event on Good Friday evening. Many folks, I know, work and cannot attend the afternoon church service of the Lord's Passion at 3:00 p.m. This performance will offer an alternative for the evening. It will be performed in conjunction with Tenebrae, a traditional service of light and shadows. I expect it to be a very prayerful and enriching evening.

As indicated in the bulletin flier, we welcome sponsorship for this performance. There will be no charge for the performance, but we will accept offerings. I would like to see any excess revenues be seed money for future religious/cultural events here at Notre Dame.

Our recent popes have shown and encouraged the relationship between faith and culture. They say Pope Benedict, a pianist, plays Mozart after dinner every evening. Our Catholic Church has a breathtaking cultural heritage. We should grow acquainted with it.

*Father Keith*