

- Almighty God, your blessed son, was lead by the spirit to be tempted by Satan, come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations, and as you know the weakness of each of us, let each one find you mighty to say, through Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord, amen. (piano music) (choir singing)

- Early in the morning, he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and he began to teach them, the scribes and the pharisees brought a woman, who'd been caught in adultery, and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery." Now in a loll, Moses commanded us to stone such woman, now what do you say, they said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him, Jesus bent down, and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up, and said to them, "let anyone among who is without sin, be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down, and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders, Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him, Jesus straightened up, and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you, go your way and for now on, do not sin again. Neither do I condemn you, go your way, and for now on, do not sin again." (choir singing)

- Toward the end of his critique of pure reason, Emmanuel Comte admits that reason alone fails us on just two points, within the limits of reason, one can explain neither the existence of evil, nor the presence of hope, how is it possible to hope in the midst of evil, evil itself is a great mystery. Why are you so bad, no more to the point, why do I sin? Why am I conjunctively disposed to organize the whole world around me, and I lie, why I even stand on the bathroom scales fully clothed in the morning, I say, why, such heavy cloths I have on today. Look I'm not right left to my own devices, I will always present to you my idealized image, I will manipulate, I will love me and I will use you to love me even more. In short, I sin, there are seasons of the church here more incomprehensible than Lent, but Lent, this 40 day focus on our sin and it's consequence, this annual call to repentance and introspection, Lent, has the cold, clear ring of reality about it, doesn't it? All new age or pop psychology, blatant wishful thinking to the contrary, we, no I sin, Lent's 40 days is about that, where you there when they crucified my Lord? As a matter of fact, yes, you organize a good old fashioned crucifixion for the child molester, a convenient store stick up man, a welfare chiseller, the president of the NRA, a sleazy TV evangelist, what's a guy that produces MTV's Real World? I'll be there, God help us, we have marched up calvaries so many times to nail somebody to the wood in our righteous indignation, yeah I was there, what of it? God help us, and what hope, how to account, not for evil, but how more difficultly, how do you account for hope? If reason can't explain evil, is it anymore helping in moving toward hope, one reason we or I find it hard to be honest, where in the world do you take these moments of latten truthfulness and honesty, wallow in our sin, say, oh guilt is good, good for what? No, if there is hope for us, for me, it might be a hope not of our own devising, it must be some external more than me gift, sin must be forgiven to be faced, I need a God who doesn't shirk from taking me as I am, sin, and all, some savior who doesn't shrink even from a cross, because having me very long, and I'll find a cross for you that fits, oh, God help us, and he does. (choir singing)

- When we gaze upon the crucifixion of Jesus, we are also reminded of the eniability of our own death, Henry Owen, who's spiritual writings have inspired so many of us reflects, upon the reality of death is his book, Walk with Jesus, his words are especially poignant giving Owens' own recent death, in the following excerpt, he reminds us that in the light of the cross, our own death is illumined with hope and meaning. People are dying, every day, every hour, every minute. They die suddenly or slowly, they die on streets of big cities or in comfortable homes, they die in isolation or surrounded by friends and family, they die in great pain, or as if falling asleep, they die in anguish, or in peace, but all of them die alone, facing the unknown, dying is indeed a reality of daily life, and yet the world generally goes about it's business, disowning this reality, dying is often a hidden event, something to ignore or deny, but all of life comes to an end, dying belongs to living. Jesus was nailed to the cross, and for three hours he was dying, he died between two men, one of them said to the other, "We are paying for what we did, but this man has done nothing wrong." Jesus lived his dying completely for others, the total exhaustion of his body, the abandonment by his friends, and even of his God, all became the gift itself. And as he hung dying in complete powerlessness, nailed against the wood of a tree, there was no bitterness, no desire for revenge, no resentment, nothing to cling to, all to give, by being given away for others, his life became fruitful, Jesus the completely innocent one, the one without sin, without guilt, without shame, died an excruciatingly painful death, in order that death no longer would have to be ignored, but become a gateway to life, and a source of a new communion, as we look at the dying Jesus, we see the dying world, Jesus, who on the cross, drew all people to himself, died millions of deaths, he died not only to death of the rejected, the lonely and criminal, but also the death of the high and powerful, the famous and the popular, most of all, he died the death of all the simple people who lived their ordinary lives who grew old and tired, and trusted that somehow their lives were not in vain. We all must die, and we all will die alone, no one can make that final journey with us, we have to let go what is most our own, and trust that we did not live in vain. Somehow, dying is the greatest of all human moments, because it is the moment in which we are asked to give everything. Jesus' death reveals to us that we do not have to live pretending that death is not something that comes to all of us. As he hangs stretched out between heaven and earth, he asked us to look our mortality straight in the face, and trust that death does not have the last word. We can then look at the dying in our world and give them hope, we can hold their dying bodies in our arms and trust that mightier arms than ours will receive them, and give them the peace and joy they always desire. In dying all of humanity is one, and it was into this dying humanity that God entered in Jesus Christ to give us hope. Let us pray. Oh, Christ our Lord, we are overwhelmed by your willingness to give your all for our sake, we wonder what thoughts went through your mind as you hung there on the tree. What inner strength sustained you when you were abandoned by everyone you loved? What comforted you as you faced the abyss of death? What gave you the courage to endure the suffering and shame without anger or bitterness? What hope enabled you to accept powerlessness, trusting the outcome to God? Your willingness to die on the cross remains a mystery to us, but also a source of comfort and strength because you lived and died and rose again, we have confidence that our lives and deaths are not in vain, because you walked the path that we must walk, we can face death without fear, knowing that death does not have the last word. May the certainty of hope give us courage to live and die as you lived and died, with nothing held back. Help us open ourselves to the suffering and dying of those around us, and also may they experience compassion and hope, unite us in our shared suffering that our individual burdens may be lightened, and teach us how to live that in our lives, the world may gain a glimpse of your love given

freely to all people. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we pray and hope, amen. (choir singing)

- Oh, all you who pass along this way, behold, and see if there is any sorrow, like unto my sorrow. These words from the Book of Lamentations, are the text you have just heard set to music by Pablo Casals, an ancient text dating back to the six century BC, married to a modern composition written in 1942 AD, an unlikely match? Spanning a bridge of 26 centuries in time. What might have drawn this gifted composer to these particularly anguished words? Going back to the days after the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem in 587 BC we find a city which lay in ruins, the palace and temple had been destroyed, many, many people had been killed, and leading citizens had been deported to Babylon. The Book of Lamentations tells the heart breaking story of the struggle for survival for those who were left behind, graphic vignettes of the suffering of the people are included, especially the children. We read of infants and babes who faint in the street, of children who beg for food, but there is no food, and even of mothers who resort to cannibalism. It's as if the poets are driving home the point that can a people be even more devastated than this, than when their own children cannot survive. The sorrow and grief experienced in the face of war, is so powerfully expressed in Lamentations, that it has echoed throughout the ages as a testimony to the horrors of violence. Jews recite Lamentations to commemorate the fall of the second temple, and Christians use parts of the book, including this text, during holy week services. Thus Pablo Casals, as an artist and Christian, who's life was forever changed by the ravages of war, chose a text with a rich heritage to address the suffering of his own time. In the spring of 1939, he became an exile after his Spanish homeland was occupied by fascist forces, he writes of that time, "These things were too horrible to think about, but I could not drive them from my mind. I shut myself up in a room with all the blinds drawn and sat staring into the dark, perhaps in the darkness I hoped to find forgetfulness, relief from the pain, but an endless panorama passed before my eyes. Horrors I had witnessed in the war, faces of dear ones, cities in ruin, and weeping women and children. I remained in that room for days, unable to move, perhaps near to madness or to death, I did not really want to live." But Casals never succumbed to the despair which threatened to destroy him, he obtained a simple residence in southern France, in a little village called Prada. There he embarked upon a campaign to elicit aid for the tens of thousands Spanish refugees, even though conditions in Prada were both difficult and dangerous, the conditions in the refugee camps were far worse. Men, women and children, herded together like animals in tents and crumbling shacks, with no sanitation facilities, little water, and barely enough food to prevent mass starvation. Casals was a tireless advocate for his people, in spite of poor health, carrying on voluminous correspondence, loading supplies, visiting the camps, and giving benefit concerts on his cello around France, even though his hands were beginning to tremble because of so much letter writing. After the end of the war, he continued to carry the banner for world peace throughout his lifetime. Having experienced suffering first hand, he was unafraid to acknowledge the suffering of others, and he was unwilling to let the rest of the world forget about their plight. All you who pass along this way, behold and see if there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow, could it be that uttering such a lament, is one of the greatest acts of fidelity to God? As it was in the days of the Babylonian exile, of World War II, and now in our own time, in the midst of unspeakable suffering, God hears our every cry.