

THE SHANNON
BENEATH THE CROSS
A CONTEMPLATIVE JOURNEY
THROUGH THE PASSION OF
CHRIST WITH HYMN,
REFLECTION, AND SILENCE

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INTRODUCTION

FROM NOON until three o'clock on Good Friday, Christians remember the hours when Christ hung upon the cross. For generations, the Church has marked these hours with prayer, reflection, and silence—listening again to the words spoken from the cross and contemplating the mystery of Christ's suffering and love.

This small booklet offers a simple pattern for keeping those sacred hours. Five short reflections explore themes of the Passion through the imagery of the natural world—river, stone, wind, and creature—reminding us that the cross is not only a moment in history but a turning point for all creation.

After each reflection, a verse of the hymn The Shannon Beneath the Cross may be sung, followed by a period of silence. In the quiet that follows, we allow the words of Christ and the witness of creation to settle into the heart.

At the conclusion of the reflections, the hymn may be sung in full as a prayer of trust and hope.

May this time of reflection draw us deeper into the mystery of Good Friday, where love is poured out for the life of the world.

12 NOON

FIRST REFLECTION: THE LAND HOLDS ITS BREATH

The sky darkens over Calvary. In the gospel story, the world itself seems to pause: darkness falls, the earth trembles, and the veil of the temple is torn. Creation reacts to the suffering of its Creator.

When we imagine the cross through the landscapes we know—fields, rivers, quiet ruins—we are reminded that the Passion is not distant history. The same world that holds our lives held the grief of that day.

The hymn begins with the land itself watching: reeds bowing, ancient stones answering, the river sighing beneath a darkened sky.

The sky grows dark on Calv'ry's hill,
the Shannon's waters sigh;
by Clonmacnoise the reeds bow low,
its ancient stones reply.
A wounded Christ hangs silent now,
His final hour is nigh;
and all the land holds trembling breath
to watch the Saviour die.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Silence.

12:30 PM

SECOND REFLECTION: THE CRY OF ABANDONMENT

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This cry from the cross echoes the words of Psalm 22. It is not the voice of despair alone, but the prayer of one who speaks honestly before God.

In this moment, Christ enters fully into the depths of human suffering—loneliness, abandonment, and the feeling that heaven itself has fallen silent.

Yet the river keeps flowing. The world holds the cry and carries it onward.

Even our darkest prayers are not lost.

“My God, where are you in this pain?”

His spirit seems to call;

the river bends at Athlone’s weir,
slow-moving, deep, and tall.

At Shannonbridge the heron waits,
still-shadowed by the wall;
creation aches with Him who bears
the deepest grief of all.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Silence.

1:00 PM

THIRD REFLECTION: THE THIRST OF GOD

“I thirst.”

These words reveal the profound humanity of Christ. The one through whom all waters were made now thirsts upon the cross.

But there is another thirst here too — the thirst of God for humanity, the longing that draws Christ to give everything for the sake of love.

The hymn imagines the wind across the river carrying this whispered word through the land. Creation listens.

“I thirst,” He whispers to the wind
that sweeps through Banagher;
the Shannon answers with a moan,
its currents thick with prayer.
By Portumna the otter stops,
mid-glide as though aware;
the whole earth listens as He speaks
His final words of care.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Silence.

1:30 PM

FOURTH REFLECTION

MERCY IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

“Father, forgive them.”

Even in agony Christ speaks mercy.

The cross reveals a love that refuses to answer violence with violence. Instead, forgiveness flows outward like water from a spring—healing what hatred has broken.

The stillness of the landscape in the hymn reflects this moment: the quieting bird, the hush over the water, the pause of creation as mercy is spoken into the world.

“Forgive,” he breathes, though torn and bruised,
though mocked by passing men;
at Killaloe the waters hush,
Lough Derg grows still again.
A blackbird quiets in the thorn,
the dusk leans close to Him;
and mercy flows from wounded hands
to heal a world of sin.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Silence.

2:00 PM

FIFTH REFLECTION
INTO YOUR HANDS

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

With these words, Christ entrusts himself completely to the Father. The Passion reaches its quiet climax—not with triumph, but with surrender.

Yet Good Friday silence is not empty.

Like seeds carried on the current of a river, hope begins to move unseen beneath the surface. What appears to be an ending is already the beginning of resurrection. The Church waits in that stillness.

“Into your hands,” He yields at last,
the veil of night draws near;
the Shannon broadens into grief
as Lim’rick’s stones stand clear.
A silence settles on the tide,
a silence edged with fear;
yet in that hush the seeds of hope
drift out toward light from here.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Silence.

2:30 PM

SIXTH REFLECTION

The river continues to flow, the land breathes again, and the Church holds the mystery of the Cross—trusting that from the deepest darkness God will bring new life.

We sing the whole hymn

The sky grows dark on Calv'ry's hill,
the Shannon's waters sigh;
by Clonmacnoise the reeds bow low,
its ancient stones reply.
A wounded Christ hangs silent now,
His final hour is nigh;
and all the land holds trembling breath
to watch the Saviour die.

"My God, where are you in this pain?"
His spirit seems to call;
the river bends at Athlone's weir,
slow-moving, deep, and tall.
At Shannonbridge the heron waits,
still-shadowed by the wall;
creation aches with Him who bears
the deepest grief of all.

"I thirst," He whispers to the wind
that sweeps through Banagher;

the Shannon answers with a moan,
its currents thick with prayer.
By Portumna the otter stops,
mid-glide as though aware;
the whole earth listens as He speaks
His final words of care.

“Forgive,” he breathes, though torn and bruised,
though mocked by passing men;
at Killaloe the waters hush,
Lough Derg grows still again.
A blackbird quiets in the thorn,
the dusk leans close to Him;
and mercy flows from wounded hands
to heal a world of sin.

“Into your hands,” He yields at last,
the veil of night draws near;
the Shannon broadens into grief
as Lim’rick’s stones stand clear.
A silence settles on the tide,
a silence edged with fear;
yet in that hush the seeds of hope
drift out toward light from here.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
**because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the
world.** *Silence*

3:00 PM

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,
who stretched out Your arms upon the Cross
to gather the whole world into the embrace of Your love:

As we leave this hour of silence and remembrance,
keep us close to the mystery we have contemplated.

Teach us to carry Your mercy into the wounded places
of the world,
to speak forgiveness where there is bitterness,
to offer hope where there is despair,
and to trust that even in the deepest darkness
Your light is already at work.

Through Your Cross and Passion
bring us at last to the joy of Resurrection;

for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy
Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

We leave in Silence

A NOTE ON THE IMAGERY

This hymn reflects on the Passion of Christ through the landscapes of Ireland, following the course of the River Shannon as it moves quietly through the heart of the country.

The river, the ancient monastic stones, and the creatures of field and water are imagined as witnesses to the mystery of Good Friday. In this way, the hymn echoes the scriptural sense that all creation responds to the suffering of Christ — the darkened sky, the trembling earth, and the stillness that fell over the land.

By placing the Passion within familiar landscapes, the hymn invites us to remember that the cross is not distant from our own world. The love revealed at Calvary flows outward through all creation, like a river carrying hope even through the deepest silence.

ABOUT THE HYMN

The Shannon Beneath the Cross is written in Double Common Metre (DCM). This metre allows the hymn to be sung to several traditional hymn tunes.

A suggested tune is *Third Mode Melody*, a plainsong melody often used with metrical psalms and well suited to the contemplative character of Good Friday.

COLOPHON

The Shannon Beneath the Cross was written as a devotional resource for the Three Hours observance on Good Friday.

The reflections and hymn draw upon the landscapes of Ireland—river, stone, wind, and living creatures—as a way of contemplating the mystery of Christ’s Passion and the love revealed in the cross.

This booklet is offered as a resource for churches, groups, and individuals who wish to keep the quiet hours of Good Friday in prayer, reflection, and silence.

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