

**Luke 23:46**

Death is the separation of body and spirit. The spirit leaves this world, while the body stays behind. On the cross, Jesus truly died. As He breathed His last, His spirit left this world—His lifeless body remained hanging from the cross. The last words He uttered before He died are the words we shall ponder on this Good Friday, “Father,” He said, “Into Thy hands I commit My spirit.”

With these words our Lord teaches us how to die. “Father,” He says, “into Thy hands.” Jesus knew where He was going. He committed His spirit into the hands of His Father. This same prayer came from the lips of Stephen as he was being stoned to death. And this was not mere coincidence, for Stephen recognized that our Lord’s prayer from the cross, is the prayer of all Christians upon death.

When a Christian dies, the spirit (or soul) is immediately with the Heavenly Father. We are never alone. We are never left to the darkness. Our dear Father, whose hands were open to give us every good gift during our lifetime, now opens His hands to receive our spirit to Himself. And so Jesus, with these words, in teaching us how to die, teaches us to die in peace.

The Christian need never fear death. Our Lord has been that way before. By His death, He has taken the sting out of death. He has turned death into our servant, so that all death can do to the one who believes in Jesus Christ, is deliver us into the Father’s hands. The same hands that formed us in the womb—the same hands that poured upon our head the water and Spirit of Holy Baptism—the same hands that placed the body and blood of our Savior into our mouth at Holy Communion—the hands that, during our life have always extended to us the peace that surpasses all understanding; which sets our heart at peace by forgiving our sins—these are the hands that cradle us in death. Our Lord did not fear these hands and neither should we. For the Heavenly Father’s hands are full, only of mercy and love toward us, for the sake of our Lord Jesus.

Jesus does not just teach us to die in peace, He allows us to die in peace. His suffering on the cross took away every bit of anger that was within the hands of the Father, so that the only thing left in the Father’s hands for us to receive, is mercy upon mercy, and grace upon grace.

“Father, into Thy hands.” With these words, Jesus teaches us to have faith. As He died, He fell into the hands of His Father. That’s faith—believing but not seeing. Closing our eyes in death, but trusting that our Father’s hands are open to receive our fall. Open, not because of anything good in us, but because of the Righteous One, Jesus, who opened the Father’s hands to us.

And we don’t just die in that faith—we live in that faith. For we are baptized into that faith. In Baptism, Jesus gives to us the faith He had on the cross. The faith that trusts the hands of the Father. The faith that allows us to live securely amid the storms of life—for we live in the shelter of the Father’s hands. The faith that lets us fall asleep each night in the care of those strong hands. And the faith which prepares us for the sleep of death, as we learn from our Lord to pray, “Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.”

There was a practice among some Christians of the Early Church, where after a child was baptized, the water which was used for the baptism was then taken out to the cemetery and poured upon the grave of that young child. This was done to remind the child, throughout his entire life, that we fear the grave as little as our bed—that having been baptized into Christ, we die with Christ; we are buried with Christ; and we rise with Christ—that God’s hands, which received us in Holy Baptism, are the same hands that will receive us in death.

Dear fellow baptized Christians, we are gathered here this night on the day when we remember our Lord’s death. His final words, “Father, into Thy hands,” are the words He has given to you in your baptism. It was there that your gracious Father opened His hands to receive you, so that you may live each day securely in the shelter of those loving hands—so that when you lie upon your deathbed, the words of our Lord may rest upon your lips and give comfort to your heart—“Father, into Thy hands.” Amen.