



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**Palm Sunday of The Lord's Passion
March 24, 2024**

Theme: "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Gathering Prayer

All: Almighty ever-living God, who as an example of humility for the human race to follow caused our Savior to take flesh and submit to the Cross, graciously grant that we may heed his lesson of patient suffering and so merit a share in his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Mark 15:1-39

¹ And as soon as it was morning the chief priests, with the elders and scribes, and the whole council held a consultation; and they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him to Pilate. ² And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." ³ And the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." ⁵ But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate wondered.

⁶ Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. ⁷ And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. ⁸ And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he was wont to do for them. ⁹ And he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. ¹² And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man whom you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³ And they cried out again, "Crucify him." ¹⁴ And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." ¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas; and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

¹⁶ And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the praetorium); and they called together the whole battalion. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ And they struck his head with a reed, and spat upon him, and they knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. ²² And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). ²³ And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided

his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take.²⁵ And it was the third hour, when they crucified him.²⁶ And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews."²⁷ And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.²⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days,³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!"³¹ So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself."³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

³³ And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Elo-i, Elo-i, lama sabach-thani?" which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"³⁵ And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah."³⁶ And one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last.³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Gospel Reflection

How quickly praise can turn to derision. We see it in business, politics, even with friends and family. One minute somebody is singing praises, the next it's insults and scorn. The gospel readings display that very juxtaposition today. We come into church singing "Hosanna!" and fifteen minutes later we cry, "Crucify him!"

The people wanted an earthly king to shake off Roman occupation and achieve political independence. But how quickly they turned on Jesus when they realized that he would not fulfill their plans. God had something else in store.

As Jesus did not meet the expectations of the crowd, or even his disciples, they turned and fled. One disciple ran so fast he ran out of his clothes (Mark 14:51-52)! Peter, of course, denied he even knew Jesus. The crowd chose to have an insurrectionist released to them rather than Jesus. By the time Jesus was on the cross the only remaining friends were some women and Joseph of Arimathea, though it seems Jesus wouldn't have known about Joseph's act of courage. The women were said to have ministered to him and followed him when he was in Galilee. Though the women lacked the "disciple" title, they were clearly his followers, offering a ministry of presence up to and during his death and subsequent burial. They stand in contrast to the behavior of the "real" disciples (those who bear the name) who denied Jesus, or simply fled the scene.

The entire passion narrative in Mark shows the confusion, bewilderment, and misunderstanding that punctuated the horrific scene of Jesus' crucifixion. The crowds believe Jesus is calling for Elijah, the chief priests and scribes mock Jesus as one who cannot save himself, Pilate acquiesces to the crowd's demands and participates in a miscarriage of justice. The centurion alone (a Gentile) is the only one to face the crucified after death and proclaim faith in him. Peter (a Jew) confessed Jesus as Christ (Mark 8:29) and now the centurion (a Gentile) confesses Jesus as Son of God, only after his death. To be the Christ, the Son of God, necessarily means suffering and death. To have come down from the cross would have been to deny Jesus' own identity as Christ and Son of God. Rather than a political military leader commanding armies in a revolution, Jesus is the crucified Son of God, Messiah. God's plans are not our own.

Living the Paschal Mystery

We are fickle human beings, often in search of entertainment. We are designed by eons of evolution to look toward the future rather than the past. Palm Sunday is our conscious effort to

root ourselves in our past, the very foundation of our faith, the paschal mystery. This week we celebrate the most ancient and fundamental mysteries of faith. Without this effort to reach our touchstone we would likely be fleeting from one moment to the next, seeking to fulfill various desires and cravings. Being in touch with the paschal mystery reminds us that this life has meaning beyond the here and now. We have a future that is eternal. The love, relationships, and bonds we create in this life will endure. The passion and death of Jesus necessarily result in his resurrection, which gives us a promise and foretaste of that eternal life. Rather than seek the next best thing, upon entering this Holy Week we recall that our faith is rooted in the past, and our destiny is eternal.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Isaiah 50:4-7

⁴ The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. ⁵ The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. ⁶ I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. ⁷ For the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

Second Reading — Philippians 2:6-11

...⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

444. The Gospels report that at two solemn moments, the Baptism and the Transfiguration of Christ, the voice of the Father designates Jesus his "beloved Son".(Cf. Mt 3:17; cf. 17:5) Jesus calls himself the "only Son of God", and by this title affirms his eternal pre-existence.(Jn 3:16; cf. 10:36) He asks for faith in "the name of the only Son of God".(Jn 3:18) In the centurion's exclamation before the crucified Christ, "Truly this man was the Son of God", (Mk 15:39) that Christian confession is already heard. Only in the Paschal mystery can the believer give the title "Son of God" its full meaning.

597. The historical complexity of Jesus' trial is apparent in the Gospel accounts. The personal sin of the participants (Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate) is known to God alone. Hence we cannot lay responsibility for the trial on the Jews in Jerusalem as a whole, despite the outcry of a manipulated crowd and the global reproaches contained in the apostles' calls to conversion after Pentecost.(Cf. Mk 15:11; Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13-14; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52; 10:39; 13:27-28; I Th 2:14-15) Jesus himself, in forgiving them on the cross, and Peter in following suit, both accept "the ignorance" of the Jews of Jerusalem and even of their leaders.(Cf. Lk 23:34; Acts 3:17) Still less can we extend responsibility to other Jews of different times and places, based merely on the crowd's cry: "His blood be on us and on our children!", a formula for ratifying a judicial

sentence.(Mt 27:25; cf. Acts 5:28; 18:6) As the Church declared at the Second Vatican Council:

. . . [N]either all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his Passion. . . [T]he Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture.(NA 4)

603. Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he himself had sinned.(Cf. Jn 8:46) But in the redeeming love that always united him to the Father, he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, to the point that he could say in our name from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"(Mk 15:34; Ps 22:2; cf. Jn 8:29) Having thus established him in solidarity with us sinners, God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all", so that we might be "reconciled to God by the death of his Son".(Rom 8:32; 5:10)

2605 When the hour had come for him to fulfill the Father's plan of love, Jesus allows a glimpse of the boundless depth of his filial prayer, not only before he freely delivered himself up ("Abba . . . not my will, but yours."), (Lk 22:42) but even in *his last words* on the Cross, where prayer and the gift of self are but one: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do";(Lk 23:34) "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise";(Lk 23:43), "Woman, behold your son" - "Behold your mother";(Jn 19:26-27) "I thirst.";(Jn 19:28) "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?";(Mk 15:34; cf. Ps 22:2) "It is finished";(Jn 19:30) "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"(Lk 23:46) until the "loud cry" as he expires, giving up his spirit.(Cf. Mk 15:37; Jn 19:30b)

Sharing and Discussion

1. What is the most "beautiful thing" you could do to express your love for the Lord?
2. What examples of good intentions gone awry do you see in this passage? What were the reasons they were not kept?
3. Who do you most identify with in this Gospel account?
4. How can we bring Christ to people who feel hopeless and abandoned?

Closing Prayer

All: God who hears the cries of the hurting, your Son gave himself up to death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of all. Hear our prayers that during Holy Week we might enter ever more deeply into the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen