

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD**  
**in**  
**THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**

**PASSION (PALM) SUNDAY**  
**April 2, 2023**

**READINGS FROM THE LECTIONARY:**

Procession:

Matthew 21:1-11

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Mass:

Isaiah 50:4-7

The Servant does not avoid humiliation and torture.

Philippians 2:6-11

Jesus is humble and obedient and is raised up.

Matthew 26:14 - 27:66

The Passion and death of Jesus Christ.

**BIBLE BACKGROUND:**

**Matthew:**

Matthew was an old, Greek-speaking Christian Jew who had long been a “rabbi” among this largely Jewish Christian community in Antioch of Syria. He was a “teacher” in the tradition of the Teacher from Nazareth who had lived 50 to 75 years earlier. He had long reflected and prayed over the tradition that had come down to him and his community. Among the written resources at his disposal were the Gospel according to Mark and another “Source.” This other “Source” document did not contain a Passion and death narrative, but Matthew’s community already knew that story. It stood at the heart of the good news in Jesus Christ, which they recalled and proclaimed all the time. In fact, some accounts of the Passion of Jesus Christ existed before any other material was ever written about Jesus. Matthew is fond of this story: “The Passion of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Matthew comes to the climax of his witness and testimony: The Suffering and Death of Jesus (26:1-27:66). He will add a testimony about the resurrection and the Great Commission (28:1-20). Matthew amplifies on Mark’s account. He develops the Last Supper account; he adds to the scene of the arrest of Jesus; he gives an account of what happened to Judas after Jesus’ arrest; and then, he really dramatizes the scene at Pilate’s palace: namely, the cry from the Jewish religious leaders that Jesus’ blood be upon them; Pilate’s wife and her dreams; Pilate washing his hands of the whole affair. When Jesus dies on the cross, Matthew gives us an account of the cosmic signs that take place in the sky and in the Temple. After the death, he adds the story of the guards and their explanation for the missing body in order to deal with issues that had arisen between the Jews and Christians up to the time of his writing.

Matthew makes three points: 1. This is the kind of Messiah Jesus was destined to be: mocked, rejected, killed. 2. Those responsible are the leaders and their supporters. 3. All now need to follow the moral example given by Jesus, the women, other disciples, and the Gentile soldiers. Matthew’s community needed to hear and we need to hear this Gospel. We are being saved as we hear. As we surrender ourselves into the hands of the heavenly Father, as we endure the sufferings of this world, as we suffer the outrages of our own “passion and death,” we come to realize that our Savior is with us. We are not alone.

Our role as hearers of this word does not end with our calling out: “Crucify him!” We also surrender our lives into the care of the heavenly Father.

### **Isaiah:**

During the Exile in Babylon (587-539 BCE), a prophet among the exiles, a disciple of the great Isaiah of Jerusalem, continued to work on the Book of Isaiah. He added chapters 40 through 55. We call this section Deutero-Isaiah (2nd Isaiah). These chapters contain the famous “Servant Songs” (Isaiah 40:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; and 52:13 - 53:12), poems which express the submission and surrender of God’s servant to the will of God. The “servant” may have been the author himself. Israel came to see itself as that “servant” of the Lord. Early Christians were prompt in applying these passages to Jesus, as the perfect Servant of the Father. We have here part of the 3rd Song. The Servant will suffer for the sake of his people. He will take their responsibilities upon himself to make amends to God. Since he is an obedient servant, he will not be abandoned. His faithfulness and unflinching loyalty will not go unrewarded.

### **Philippians:**

For Paul, the death of Jesus on the cross is for the benefit of those who believe. He takes an already existing Christian hymn and inserts it, with a few additions, into his Letter to the Church at Philippi. Each Sunday at Evening Prayer I in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, the Church prays the great Christ-Hymn from Philippians. Paul exhorts the Christian community to have the same mind as Christ had: humility and service. Then, he goes on to quote from the hymn, probably in wide circulation among Christians: “(Christ) who, though his condition was divine, did not consider being like God something to exploit for selfish gain ....”

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What effect do you think the Proclamation of the Passion has on the average person who participates in the liturgy on Palm Sunday? What difference does it make for the week called holy? What difference does it make for Easter Sunday? Do you think most people just experience a momentary sadness and then blot it out of their minds? Is it part of the memory that you carry with you every day? Does the Passion “shape” your life as a disciple of Christ? How has the Passion Narrative “shaped” the Church community down through the ages?

2. What character(s) do you identify with this year during the reading of the Passion? Has this changed over the years? Who were you in this story when you were younger? If you are older now, who are you today in this story? Why has this changed? Do you see the community of the Church as one or several of the characters in the story? What role does the Church have to play in the narrative of the Passion?

3. “Surely, it is not I, Rabbi!” Judas is not only a betrayer, he lies about it. What is this inclination in us that would deny that we have had anything to do with the Passion and death of Jesus? Would it not be to our advantage to acknowledge our sinfulness and to ask to be included in the merits of Christ on the Cross?

## **PRAYER TO JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED**

**My good and dear Jesus,  
I kneel before you,  
asking you most earnestly  
to engrave upon my heart  
a deep and lively faith, hope, and charity,  
with true repentance for my sins,  
and a firm resolve to make amends.  
As I reflect upon your five wounds  
and dwell upon them with deep compassion and grief,  
I recall, good Jesus, the words the prophet David spoke  
long ago concerning yourself:  
They have pierced my hands and my feet; they have counted all my bones!**

## **CATHOLIC DOCTRINE**

The Passion and death of Jesus Christ proclaimed in the liturgy for Passion Sunday introduces the hearts of the faithful to recalling those mighty deeds by which we have been saved from eternal damnation. There is no passage from sacred Scripture that is more central to our salvation than the account of the dying and rising of Jesus Christ.

The Sunday of the Passion introduces Holy Week, during which we will come to the end of Lent (Thursday afternoon), enter into the Last Supper of the Lord (Thursday evening), go to the Cross With Jesus (Good Friday) and wait by the tomb (Holy Saturday). At the end of Holy Week, The Three Days (Triduum) bring us to the resurrection at the Easter Vigil and into Easter Sunday.

The entrance into Jerusalem is proclaimed at the blessing of the branches and in the procession to the place where the Passion will be announced. The Passion Narrative is often proclaimed dramatically and solemnly, sometimes with a whole cast of readers joining the priest or deacon in the reading. The assembly will also take part, at least in calling for the crucifixion of the Lord!

There is more than drama and sentimental effect in these liturgical proclamations. The Catholic tradition holds that when Scripture is proclaimed in the liturgical assembly, that which is proclaimed becomes real again. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is applied to our salvation as Church and as individuals in the Church. The drama is in fact a ‘sacrament’ by which the saving grace of Jesus Christ’s death is communicated to us who participate in the celebration. This is not just a theatrical performance done on a stage on Broadway! Calvary is now for us who take part.

St. Paul says that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:3). Christians have formulated a rather complex set of beliefs concerning the effect of the death and resurrection of Christ. The Catholic tradition is direct and forceful: By the death and resurrection of Christ, we have been saved from eternal damnation.

The merits of Christ are communicated to those who believe through faith and the sacraments of the Church. In baptism, we die to sin and are raised to new life in Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist, we enter again into Christ’s sacrifice wherein his body and blood are “given for our salvation.” In his human body, Christ becomes the sacrifice offered to the Father on our behalf.

(See **The Catechism: # 599-623**)

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