

At the Procession with Palms C

GOSPEL: Luke 19:28-40

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus proceeded on his journey up to Jerusalem. As he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples. He said, "Go into the village opposite you, and as you enter it you will find a colt tethered on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. And if anyone should ask you, 'Why are you untying it?' you will answer, 'The Master has need of it.'" So those who had been sent went off and found everything just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying this colt?" They answered, "The Master has need of it." So they brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks over the colt, and helped Jesus to mount. As he rode along, the people were spreading their cloaks on the road; and now as he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to praise God aloud with joy for all the mighty deeds they had seen. They proclaimed: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He said in reply, "I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out!"

The Gospel of the Lord.

At the Mass A B C

FIRST READING: Isaiah 50:4-7

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them. Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24.

***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?***

All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads: He relied on the LORD; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, if he loves him.

***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?***

Indeed, many dogs surround me, a pack of evildoers closes in upon me; They have pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones.

***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?***

They divide my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots. But you, O LORD, be not far from me; O my help, hasten to aid me.

***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?***

I will proclaim your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise you: You who fear the LORD, praise him; all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him; revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?***

SECOND READING: Philippians 2:6-11

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians:

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The word of the Lord.

Gospel: Luke 22:14-23:56

The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke:

When the hour came, Jesus took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it again until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God. Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you that from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me. And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you. And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me is with me on the table; for the Son of Man indeed goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed. And they began to debate among themselves who among them would do such a deed. Then an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest. He said to them, The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as Benefactors; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves. It is you who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers. He said to him, Lord, I am prepared to go to prison and to die with you. But he replied, I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows this day, you will deny three times that you know me. He said to them, When I sent you forth without a money bag or a sack or sandals, were you in need of anything? No, nothing, they replied. He said to them, But now one who has a money bag should take it, and likewise a sack, and one who does not have a sword should sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me, namely, He was counted among the wicked; and indeed what is written about me is coming to fulfillment. Then they said, Lord, look, there are two swords here. But he replied, It is enough!

Then going out, he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. When he arrived at the place he said to them, Pray that you may not undergo the test. After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done. And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground. When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief. He said to them,

Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test. While he was still speaking, a crowd approached and in front was one of the Twelve, a man named Judas. He went up to Jesus to kiss him. Jesus said to him, Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? His disciples realized what was about to happen, and they asked, Lord, shall we strike with a sword? And one of them struck the high priests servant and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said in reply, Stop, no more of this! Then he touched the servants ear and healed him. And Jesus said to the chief priests and temple guards and elders who had come for him, Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? Day after day I was with you in the temple area, and you did not seize me; but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness.

After arresting him they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest; Peter was following at a distance. They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it, and Peter sat down with them. When a maid saw him seated in the light, she looked intently at him and said, This man too was with him. But he denied it saying, Woman, I do not know him. A short while later someone else saw him and said, You too are one of them; but Peter answered, My friend, I am not. About an hour later, still another insisted, Assuredly, this man too was with him, for he also is a Galilean. But Peter said, My friend, I do not know what you are talking about. Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times. He went out and began to weep bitterly. The men who held Jesus in custody were ridiculing and beating him. They blindfolded him and questioned him, saying, Prophecy! Who is it that struck you? And they reviled him in saying many other things against him. When day came the council of elders of the people met, both chief priests and scribes, and they brought him before their Sanhedrin. They said, If you are the Christ, tell us, but he replied to them, If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I question, you will not respond. But from this time on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God. They all asked, Are you then the Son of God? He replied to them, You say that I am. Then they said, What further need have we for testimony? We have heard it from his own mouth.

Then the whole assembly of them arose and brought him before Pilate. They brought charges against him, saying, We found this man misleading our people; he opposes the payment of taxes to Caesar and maintains that he is the Christ, a king. Pilate asked him, Are you the king of the Jews? He said to him in reply, You say so. Pilate then addressed the chief priests and the crowds, I find this man not guilty. But they were adamant and said, He is inciting the people with his teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here. On hearing this Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean; and upon learning that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod who was in Jerusalem at that time. Herod was very glad to see Jesus; he had been wanting to see him for a long time, for he had heard about him and had been hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at length, but he gave him no answer. The chief priests and scribes, meanwhile, stood by accusing him harshly. Herod and his soldiers treated him contemptuously and mocked him, and after clothing him in resplendent garb, he sent him back to Pilate. Herod and Pilate became friends that very day, even though they had been enemies formerly. Pilate then summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people and said to them, You brought this man to me and accused him of inciting the people to revolt. I have conducted my investigation in your presence and have not found this man guilty of the charges you have brought against him, nor did Herod, for he sent him back to us. So no capital crime has been committed by him. Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him. But all together they shouted out, Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us. Now Barabbas had been imprisoned for a rebellion that had taken place in the

city and for murder. Again Pilate addressed them, still wishing to release Jesus, but they continued their shouting, Crucify him! Crucify him! Pilate addressed them a third time, What evil has this man done? I found him guilty of no capital crime. Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him. With loud shouts, however, they persisted in calling for his crucifixion, and their voices prevailed. The verdict of Pilate was that their demand should be granted. So he released the man who had been imprisoned for rebellion and murder, for whom they asked, and he handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they wished.

As they led him away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed. At that time people will say to the mountains, Fall upon us! and to the hills, Cover us! for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry? Now two others, both criminals, were led away with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. They divided his garments by casting lots. The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God. Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, If you are King of the Jews, save yourself. Above him there was an inscription that read, This is the King of the Jews. Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal. Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. He replied to him, Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise. It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Father, into your hands I commend my spirit; and when he had said this he breathed his last. The centurion who witnessed what had happened glorified God and said, This man was innocent beyond doubt. When all the people who had gathered for this spectacle saw what had happened, they returned home beating their breasts; but all his acquaintances stood at a distance, including the women who had followed him from Galilee and saw these events. Now there was a virtuous and righteous man named Joseph who, though he was a member of the council, had not consented to their plan of action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea and was awaiting the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. After he had taken the body down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried. It was the day of preparation, and the sabbath was about to begin. The women who had come from Galilee with him followed behind, and when they had seen the tomb and the way in which his body was laid in it, they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils. Then they rested on the sabbath according to the commandment.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Reflection for Passion Sunday Year C**

Each of the four evangelists tells the story of Jesus' passion in a slightly different way. Most of the gospels are collections of Jesus' words and deeds. All four evangelists collected, edited and assembled the sayings, actions and miracles of Jesus into the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each has its own style, point of view and audience (or congregation). The gospels are episodic. This allows the gospels to be read in parts as we do at mass. However, the Passion Narratives are each one complete story. When we read the passion of Jesus, it's all at once. On Passion Sunday, we read the passion of Matthew, Mark and Luke in year A, B, and C respectively. The gospel passion of John we always read on Good Friday.

The Church calls today Passion Sunday. The rest of us refer to it as Palm Sunday. Before the changes and renewal of Holy Week, there were two separate feasts. Today they are combined into one. There's a reason. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is part of the passion story. The reason it happened is directly linked to Jesus' suffering and death, his true glory. His kingship, as the entry into Jerusalem implies, is not in the parade but being hung on the cross to die as a criminal. The cross is Jesus' throne.

We read the gospels from start to finish and expect the story to be written in the same way. They are not like a novel, biography, history or the news. They are written from the perspective of faith. Since most of us have been hearing these gospels all our lives, we also read them in the same way. We know how the story plays out. As believers we know that Jesus rose from the dead, returned to the father and sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We await Jesus' return at the end of the age to complete the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

The apostles and disciples who witnessed these events happening in real time had no idea of what would happen since it hadn't happened yet. It was only later, after these events and after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost could they begin to understand what they had witnessed. It was only in retrospect that they made the connections with the prophecies and promises God had made. Upon Moses' death God promised to raise another like him. The prophets promised to restore Jerusalem, God's people and a king.

Moses was God's anointed one, or Messiah in Hebrew and Christ in Greek, who had the three-fold office of priest, prophet and king. A priest offers prayers and sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of sins. A prophet first discerns God's Word and then preaches God's Word to God's people. A king leads and guides God's people and is the symbol of God's living rule of them. Through these three offices God is the true author, leader and connecting power in the people's midst.

In the Holy Spirit, the early Church came to believe and know that Jesus was the fulfillment to God's promise to Israel. Jesus was the Messiah, Savior and Lord of all. We, today, take this all for granted for the Church has believed this for two millennia. We take Jesus entry, as king, into Jerusalem for granted. It led directly to Jesus death on the cross which was our salvation. These two gospel stories we read today are two parts of a single event; our salvation.

We have inherited much from our ancient Jewish origins. Our style of prayer, more than half of our scriptures, our sense of liturgy and our God have deep Jewish roots. We have also inherited something else too. We celebrate these things together. Celebration, for us, is often at a party. There is, however, a very deep human experience that we can miss. Celebration is not in the

having fun, but the reason for it. Let me explain. Each year we celebrate our birthday. None of us remembers the day of our birth. Our parents, especially our mother, remembered it. When we celebrated their birthdays; we weren't even a glimmer yet. Celebration is remembering the past as if it is our present and if we actually remember our birth and the births of our folks.

This is a very Jewish experience. Each year, when Jewish families gather to celebrate the Passover with the Seder meal, they do so as if they themselves are slaves in Egypt whom God leads to freedom and the Promised Land through Moses. Exodus, in that way, remains a living and present experience; now not just then. They know what God had done and experience what God does now through them. They celebrate the Passover because God saved them, personally and God saved their ancestors.

This is how we celebrate the Passion of the Lord. We weren't there. We have never heard Jesus voice as he preached and taught. We never witnessed the events that led to our salvation. They have happened long ago. We celebrate them as if the past is our present. We believe in Jesus and know that Jesus died for you and me. For us salvation is personal and happening now as we live.

In many ways, during this on-going pandemic, I miss preaching at mass. I see my job as a priest to keep as many of us safe from COVID 19 as I can. We worship in a basement with no filtration or intake of fresh air. The longer mass lasts, the more we can be exposed to possible infection. I write these reflections and read my closing paragraph to make sure mass is quick. Since this is a reflection that people can download and read at leisure, I can afford to expand on themes that normally I would avoid. The reading of the Passion takes a long time; usually my homily would not go into the depths of context as I can afford now. At mass, you are part of a captive audience. With this, you are not for you don't have to read and finish this.

Isaiah wrote today of the suffering servant. Was he writing about himself? Was he writing of the nature of God's coming Messiah? Probably both. As he wrote of the trial of the servant, there's no bitterness or anger that I detect. He's not saying, "poor little old me." He has written from the perspective of his conclusion. Yes, he's suffered pain and indignity. That's the fact. This has happened as he knows the presence, guidance and strength of God. He has lived this through, with and in the grace of God.

He also knows what God does to help him. He has a mission and ministry at which he works. God gave him eloquence and gives him what to say. God opens his ears, heart and mouth to do this. He focuses not on the pain of rejection but on the promise God's Word can reveal. We witness Isaiah's resolution of his situation as prophet. In a way, he knows salvation and hope in the resurrection that will come as we have new life in Jesus. We hear Jesus and hopefully ourselves mirrored in his words. God does the same for us. Here we are; alive and believing.

Isaiah is saying, "I know that my redeemer lives!" God has resolved Isaiah's problems by healing the pain he experienced. Isaiah has integrated God's life within his own. The Psalm and response of today, Psalm 22, has done much the same thing. However, in a very different tone. It is a strong lament infused with powerful affect; fear, doubt, disenfranchisement and very deep pain. All of this, the psalmist addressed directly to God. The refrain, which is the opening line of the Psalm, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me," is prayed in despair.

I can hear the bitter anger and hopelessness in these words. I can almost see the person shaking a fist in mouthing these words. The lament and affect continue to mount to a crescendo and then the next words are in praise of a loving, gracious God. It's not that the psalmist ran out of steam, something wondrous has happened here. In spilling guts and expressing inner turmoil to God, what happened? God, to whom the psalmist expressed this, turned it around. The psalmist heard the words too. Healing happened. God's presence and life had been an integral part of the psalmist all along. God never abandoned the psalmist. God was the reason Psalm 22 could be prayed at all. When we turn to God in our pain we will discover what Isaiah and the psalmist discovered. God is a mere thought away and always near.

We all know the story of Jesus' passion. Luke's version shows the humanity of Jesus and his ability to have compassion for others as he suffers. Note what Jesus says to others in Luke's Passion. At the last supper, what is Jesus lesson to the disciples? Don't be concerned with ambition and being in charge. Care for each other and serve them. This is the basis of our Christian ministry. We serve through Jesus' words. Jesus did not expose Judas as his betrayer. It is when Judas appeared with the mob that the other eleven lads discovered his identity. He did call out Simon Peter and his denial. Jesus also anticipated Peter's betrayal as being forgiven before it happened. Jesus mentioned Peter's, "turning back," after the fact to strengthen the rest. Peter still believed in Jesus as he saved his own skin. Jesus knew that Peter needed to survive for Jesus' Church to be established and built. Peter may have faltered but would help build the Church despite his failures. This is powerful to us as we try to witness. We have our flaws too.

Jesus, in the Garden after dinner, prayed intensely. His sweat as if drops of blood showed that Jesus sweat was, as we put it, as bullets. He was in pain and in turmoil because of what he was to face. We witness his humanity. He was afraid. Because Jesus was as human as we, how can we be surprised? Aren't we afraid of suffering and death too? In Luke's version he prayed this intensely but once, not three times and added here what he omitted in his version of the Lord's Prayer, "Not my will, but yours be done!" (Chapter 11, Luke; look it up!) This placed Jesus in the loving arms of his Father. Thus did God help Jesus fulfill his mission as Son, Messiah and Savior.

As the crowd, led by Judas, came to arrest Jesus, Jesus performed one last sign. So set on killing Jesus they completely missed the deed. In the scuffle to arrest Jesus, someone cut off some guy's ear. Jesus healed it immediately. I've always wondered why they missed it and arrested Jesus regardless. Jesus preaching, teaching, ministry and miracles could not eclipse Jesus mission. Nothing could stop God's will being done. Jesus was born to die. As fully human his reality is the same as ours. We're born to die too. Jesus freely became the sacrifice to save us from sin and death. Jesus rose as the sign of God's veracity.

Simon the Cyrenian carried Jesus cross from the beginning. Luke did not have Jesus fall at all. When Jesus met the women, he redirected their grief away from him to themselves and their families. Jesus did the same thing, too, with his answers to the Sanhedrin and Pilate, "You say so." Jesus addressed his executioners and presumably the hostile mob with the profound prayer, "Forgive them, father, for they know not what they do." In his interaction with his fellow convicts, He diverted his attention to the man he could help, "This day, you will be with

me in paradise.” With Jesus’ final words, “Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit,” Jesus who entrusted himself to his Father’s will, died in peace. Mission accomplished.

During the entire Passion of Luke, Jesus’ character remained the teacher and servant. His actions, to his death, served and taught those who betrayed, deserted, turned on him and killed him. These details are critical and can get lost in the story’s familiarity. Can they also get lost within the chaotic familiarity of our lives? Jesus is a mere thought away and always near us. Can we adopt his way and pray to our Father Jesus’ prayers? “Not my will, but yours be done!” “Forgive them, father, for they know not what they do.” “Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit.” Life in Jesus is life in each other and life in God.

May Jesus’ way become our own.

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