



The Holy Scriptures
are our letters
from home

6th Sunday Lent, Yr B

Passion (Palm) Sunday

Lectio Divina

Lectio: The longer Reading of the Passion by Mark begins with the conspiracy against Jesus. They were out to find some trick to have Jesus put to death. But it should be before the festivities of the Passover; they needed to keep the people onside. Then in Bethany, at the house of Simon the leper, a woman comes in and anoints Jesus' head¹. Then Judas Iscariot plots with the chief priests to betray Jesus for money. Preparations are then made for Jesus and his disciples' Passover supper in the city (i.e. Jerusalem). At this, Last Supper, Jesus institutes the Eucharist and predicts his betrayal. After the meal Jesus in the Mount of Olives predicts Peter's thrice denial. Then at the Gethsemane estate, he prays earnestly while the disciples fall asleep. Then follows Jesus betrayal and arrest; the disciples run away. They take Jesus to the High Priest's palace and question him. Jesus remains silent to their false accusations. When asked "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed one?" He answers: "I am". This is blasphemy to the High Priest who was set in his rejection of Jesus. So the verdict is: Jesus deserved to die. They immediately start demeaning Jesus and punching him. Meanwhile in the courtyard, Peter, when challenged, denies Jesus three times. The shorter version begins from here.

The next morning Jesus is taken to Pilate. Jesus is silent other than letting Pilate name him: 'the king of the Jews'. Pilate wants to free Jesus by releasing him as was his custom to release a prisoner at the Passover. However, the chief priests incite the crowd to ask for the release of Barabbas and to cry out for Jesus' crucifixion. So Pilate, fearful of the crowd, agrees to their demands and hands Jesus over to be crucified. Out of sight in the Praetorium, the soldiers dress Jesus in purple² and crown him with a ring of thorns. They salute him, jeering: "*Hail, king of the Jews*". Dressing him in his own clothes, they have Jesus carry his cross to Golgotha, with Simon of Cyrene's helping. They offered him myrrh in wine to dull the pain of crucifixion but he refuses it. Then they crucify him. Passers-by jeered at him. The chief priests challenged him to save himself and then they would believe in him. After six hours on the cross Jesus gives up his life with a loud cry³. Jesus' death reconciles us with God; the barrier of our sin is 'torn in two' symbolized by the rending of the veil in the Temple⁴. Only a Roman soldier, the centurion, who acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God.

Read: Mark 14: 1 – 15: 47 (or shorter version – Mark 15: 1 – 39)

Meditatio: Do I let people sway my decisions just to 'keep the peace'? What is my anointed role – I have been anointed at my Baptism and Confirmation? Have I experienced the Sacrament of the Anointing of the sick – did it give me confidence to face the challenges of older life and/or sickness? Am I prepared to carry my crosses? What are my feelings about death, about my inevitable death? Do I pray earnestly before major choices or challenges in my life? Have I been betrayed? Have friends ever deserted me? Do I trust that Jesus will never desert me? Have I suffered unjust accusations? How have I stood up for innocent victims? Have I let jealousy cloud my judgements? Do I realize that when I sin I am, to a certain extent, joining in the crowd's cry: "*Crucify him!*"? Have I used swear words that demean Jesus? Do I use drugs appropriately? What words do I hope will be on my lips when I come to the moment of my death?

Oratio: Lament the sufferings of Jesus – how much must he love us! Pray that we will never forget to pray before important decisions. Pray that people will look on the Cross as the sign of the victory of good over evil. Pray that we will not add weight to Jesus' Cross by our sinning. Pray for courage to carry our crosses – it is through the Cross that we come to resurrection! Pray to St Joseph for a happy death. Pray for a prayerful and reflective Holy Week.

Contemplatio – Dwell in stillness, simply aware of the boundless expanse of mercy that surrounds you.

After your prayer – Make Holy Week, Holy!

✍ Fr Joe

Mark 15: 1 - 39

First thing in the morning, the chief priests together with the elders and scribes, in a short the whole Sanhedrin, had their plan ready. They had Jesus bound and took him away and handed him over to Pilate.

Pilate questioned him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' He answered, 'It is you who say it.' And the chief priests brought many accusations against him. Pilate questioned him again, 'Have you no reply at all? See how many accusations they are bring against you!' But to Pilate's amazement, Jesus made no further reply.

At festival time Pilate used to release a prisoner for them, anyone they asked for. Now a man called Barabbas was then in prison with the rioters who had committed murder during the uprising. When the crowd went up and began to ask Pilate the customary favour, Pilate answered them, 'Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?' For he realized it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over. The chief priests, however, had incited the crowd to demand that he should release Barabbas for them instead. Then Pilate spoke again, 'But in that case, what am I to do with the man you call the king of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, "Why? What harm has he done?" But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!' So Pilate, anxious to placate the crowd, released Barabbas for them and, having ordered Jesus to be scourged, handed him over to be crucified.

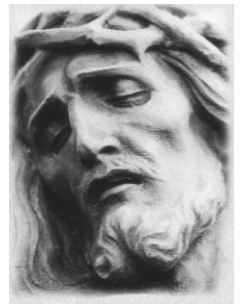
The soldiers led him away to the inner part of the palace, that is, the Praetorium, and called the whole cohort together. They dressed him up in purple, twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on him. And they began saluting him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' They struck his head with the reed and spat on him; and they went down on their knees to do him homage. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the purple and dressed him in his own clothes.

They led him out to crucify him. They enlisted a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull.

They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it. Then they crucified him, and shared out his clothing, casting lots to decide what each should get. It was the third hour when they crucified him. The inscription giving the charge against him read: "The King of the Jews." And they crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said, 'Aha! So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself: come down from the cross!' The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves in the same way. They said, 'He saved others, he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, for us to see it and believe.' Even those who were crucified with him taunted him.

When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice³, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' This means "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" When some of those who stood by heard this they said 'Listen, he is calling on Elijah.' Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink saying, 'Wait and see if Elijah will come to take him down.' But Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.



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And the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom.⁴ The centurion, who was standing in front of him, had seen how he died, and he said, 'In truth this man was a Son of God.'

Notes:

¹ Jesus is the Christ i.e. the anointed one (Mk 1:1). The woman anoints Jesus before his Passion.

² Purple is the colour of divinity.

³ Jesus is in control. He does not die with a whimper as most people crucified would have died. And his last words: "Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabachthani?" are the first words of Ps 22. This Psalm begins with lament but concludes with certainty of victory. The Jews would have known this psalm and, as they heard Jesus' words, would be asking themselves: Would this moment be defeat or victory?

⁴ No one could enter beyond the veil in the Temple. Through Jesus' death, all can now enter the kingdom of God.