

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
PASSION SUNDAY
April 13, 2025**

SCRIPTURES:

Procession: Luke 19:28-40
Isaiah 50:4-7
Philippians 2:6-11
Luke 22:14 - 23:56

Blessed is he who comes as king in the name of the Lord.
The Lord’s Servant submits to humiliation and torture.
Humble and obedient to death, Jesus is raised up.
The Passion and death of Jesus Christ.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Luke:

The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke! This is how the Church presents the Gospel, the good news, to the community of faith on the Sunday before Easter. As we enter the week that has come to be called holy, we need to hear *good news*. The “good news” is simply that we have been saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We need to hear that all the time. The earliest Christian communities always told the story of the Lord’s Supper and of his suffering, and of his dying, and of his rising, every time they gathered. These proclamations came from the living memories of those who had been present or from the memories of those who had been converted to Christ from having heard these stories proclaimed by those who had been there. Before these narratives were ever written, they were living memorials; that is, they brought the events back to life as they were proclaimed.

Luke, like the other evangelists, has his own particular emphasis as he tells the story: Jesus is seen in the company of sinners, of the outcasts from society; Jesus is generous with mercy and forgiveness for those around him who need these divine gifts so very much; Jesus begins his “suffering” at a meal that is so characteristic of him in Luke; Jesus is faithful to God to the very end; the disciples are not; the Righteous One is handed over to sinners; his last hours are spent surrounded only by Gentiles and sinners.

When the hour arrived... Luke connects the Passion with the temptations at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry: “The Devil left him to await another hour!” Now, that hour has come. The devil reenters: he has prepared a mighty assault against the Holy One of God. Now, the devil thinks he will prevail!

A dispute arises among the disciples as to who has more prestige and more power among them. Now, of all times! Jesus resolves the argument by pointing out that even Peter, who has been given a leadership role, will himself deny the Master. Peter ends up being no better than Judas.

During the Agony in the Garden, the water of his sweat becomes like the blood already flowing so that we can be saved.

In Luke’s version, the Roman centurion says, not that this was the “Son of God” as he does in Mark but that “Surely, this was an *innocent* man.” The Righteous and Innocent One of God, in the midst of sinners and of Gentiles!

The Church had better simply listen, again and again, to this proclamation. Whenever the suffering and death of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, our salvation is obtained, again and again. Not just once in our lifetime do we need to hear this good news. We need to hear it again every time we are gathered together by God.

Luke:

Jesus is hailed as a king who comes to the royal city of Jerusalem: hailed by the people, rejected by the leaders, he takes possession of the Temple. He is the Temple. The journey continues. It began with Zechariah in the Temple: Jesus started out for Jerusalem in Chapter 9, v. 51. He is now arriving at his destination. Luke deals with Jesus' mission in geographical terms. He goes toward Jerusalem (the Temple). John will use temporal language: the "hour" of the Lord. With divine knowledge, Jesus orders that a colt be brought. Jesus will enter the city in kingly style: "on a colt which has never yet been ridden." Cloaks are laid on the road. These are the people's most prized possessions, therefore, a sign of their deepest reverence. (Notice: There are no palm branches in Luke's version!)

Isaiah:

The third Servant Song of the Suffering One: Israel? Isaiah himself? The future Messiah? In the midst of exile and servitude, the Servant maintains confidence in God's love and power. He is an obedient disciple. He will not be abandoned.

Philippians:

Every 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 use a hymn probably already in wide circulation among worshipers: "Who, though he 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 Holy Week? For Easter? Look back over the past several years and ask yourself, "What impact has the reading of the Passion had on me up to now? Have I been moved by it? Have I been drawn to a deeper commitment to Jesus the Lord? Have I been drawn to a deeper conversion from sin?" Why?

2. What character(s) do you most identify with this year in the reading of the Passion? Has this changed over the years? Why? Have you ever been tempted to identify with Jesus? That was the point, for the early Church, wasn't it? How does that make it different for you if the author really intended that you identify with Jesus? Point out how we are really shortchanging ourselves if we do not identify with Jesus in his dying so that we may rise with him.

3. What would the Gospel be like were there no Passion Narrative? Would it still be a "Gospel?" How come the Passion is "good news?" What is it that is "good" for the Church in this story? What is there that is "good" for us as individuals? Can you imagine the Christian faith without the story of Jesus' crucifixion and death? Why is there no Christianity without the Passion of Jesus? Why is there no human life without its own measure of sorrow and of pain?

PRAYER

**Lord God our Father,
your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, shed his blood on the cross
for our salvation.**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

St. Paul says that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Christians have formulated a rather complex set of beliefs concerning the effect of the death and resurrection of Christ on our salvation. One of the “fundamentals” for Fundamentalist Protestants consists in what they call “substitutionary atonement” for sin; that is, the belief that Christ’s death was accepted by God as a substitute for our death, which was due to us because of sin.

The Catholic tradition is direct and forceful: By the death and resurrection of Christ, we have been saved from eternal damnation. Obviously, that is the death from which we are saved. In the Catholic Church, we have not used the expression “substitutionary atonement” for the work of Christ on our behalf. Our theology and our doctrine would rather stress that we, too, have some role in our salvation: We need to accept, to appropriate to ourselves the merits of Christ who died and rose for us, not instead of us. Especially in the celebration of sacraments, we enter into the dying and rising of Christ so that we can have eternal life. There has to be some cooperation on our part with the saving works of Christ.

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 into Christ’s sacrifice where his body and blood are “given for our salvation.” Faith is the medium through which we have access to God, to Christ who died and rose again for our salvation. Through faith, we have access to the gift or the grace of salvation. Those who do not have faith do not have access to the works of Christ on our behalf. Faith is both a gift from God (grace) and a choice that we make to accept and to utilize that gift. In the mystery of that marvelous exchange and cooperation between heaven and earth, we are able to participate in the work of our salvation.

The reality of Jesus’ human nature makes his death on the cross a true sacrifice offered willingly on our behalf. The celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is truly a sacrifice also since it is celebrated in continuity with that one sacrifice that Christ offered once and for all. The reality of the sacraments, rooted as they are in the natural world and in the human experience, serve as channels of the grace coming to us from the death of Christ.

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

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