

# Reflection for Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday, Cycle A

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The readings for this Sunday can be found at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040520.cfm>

## **1st Gospel (at the blessing of the palms):** *Matthew 21:1–11*

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

## **1st Reading:** *Isaiah 50:4-7*

The third of four Suffering Servant oracles. Scripture scholars don't know to whom they originally referred. Eventually they were applied to the expected messiah. They seem to fit Jesus perfectly.

## **2nd Reading:** *Philippians 2:6-11*

Paul points out that Jesus took on the form of a slave. I think that means a slave to the will of the Father who desired that we be saved through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. This is a pretty phenomenal truth which I think needs no explanation. Recalling it is a good way to begin Holy Week.

## **Gospel:** *Matthew 26:14-27:66*

**"... after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee.** Mt 26:32

From the first Gospel, at the blessing of the Palms, to this Gospel, there is a stark contrast. I think the liturgy for today does that on purpose. It wants us to feel that we, like Peter, are traitors; we praise the Lord at one moment and deny him by our actions at another. We may not deny him by our words but sometimes our actions, our sinfulness, denies that we know him.

This type of betrayal of another seems to be part of the human condition. We find ourselves doing it to our spouses, our children, our parents, our friends... whoever! But the whole crowd, praising Jesus as "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord", turned against him and cried "crucify him, crucify him". How does this happen... to the Son of God... sent to be our savior?

It seems to me that this happened because people had the wrong idea about Jesus in the first place. Remember... they were saying "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." They wanted a king-messiah... to restore the Kingdom of David and throw off the yoke of the oppressors. They wanted someone who would fix things outside of them convinced that it would make their lives perfect.

That wasn't the messiah that Jesus is. Jesus wanted to fix them from the inside in order that they might fix the external. He was constantly calling them to growth, to living the depth of the law – the law of love – not the minimalist attitude they had of not breaking the law. He wanted them to leave their perceptions of how to do life behind and look at living life in a new way. He wanted them to learn to care about others before they took care of their own perceived needs. That's not the kind of messiah they wanted, so it is easy to see how they turned against him.

I'm reminded of the movie *The Passion of the Christ* and of a Penance Service I participated in. Both concentrated on the cosmic battle between good and evil, and they were both right, Jesus won it! But, that should not get in the way of our seeing that Jesus wants to join with us to win the battle of evil in our own lives. This is about more than lifting high the cross. It is about taking up our own crosses, in our own lives, and joining it with His.

We focus, this week, on Jesus' passion and death, but remember He told his apostles that after the resurrection He would go before them to Galilee. Galilee was where the apostles were born and lived and worked and played. He was going to see them in their day-to-day lives. As we liturgically experience the sadness and grief over our Lord's death, and the manner in which He died, how do we hold on to His promise to see us in our day-to-day lives. How can we join our lives, our cross, to his?

I think the way is to understand what I believe is the most neglected teaching of our Church and, in my mind, one of the most important. Paragraph 48 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, from Vatican Council II, says "they (the lay faithful at Mass) should give thanks to God by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him; they should learn also to offer themselves, through Christ the Mediator." For me, this echoes Thomas' statement from the story of the raising of Lazarus, "Let us also go to die with him" (Jn 11:16). For me, it is how we join our day-to-day lives to His. It is how we experience His presence in our day-to-day lives. And, it is how we experience the resurrection, as much as we can in this world, with Him.

### **Reflection:**

Then Jesus said to them, "This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed'; but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee."

### **Question:**

What words or phrases jumped out at you during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they jumped out at you?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

### **Alternative:**

Where is your Galilee? Where is the risen Lord in your Galilee? Share about/think about a time when you have experienced His presence there. What would need to change for you to live your life with more awareness to the Lord's presence?

## Verse by Verse

Mt 26:14 “Judas Iscariot” | Used as name here, it evidently means “zealot” (see Lk 6:15). The zealots were an anti-Roman party of Jesus’ times.

Mt 26:15 “they paid him thirty pieces of silver” | The amount, here, doesn’t appear to have any particular significance.

Mt 26:18 “my appointed time draws near” | This is an emphasis in Matthew’s Gospel that doesn’t exist in the others. It may point to Matthew’s understanding of God’s plan.

Mt 26:25 “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” | Is Judas just trying to play along. Does he not trust that Jesus knows what he is doing? Or, is he thinking he is doing the right thing and disagreeing with the judgement that “it would be better for that man if he had never been born”? Mt 26:24b

Mt 26:28 “...this is my blood of the covenant...” | This points back to Jeremiah 31:31-34 where God speaks of a new covenant wherein He will forgive our sins and we will be His people and He will be our God. Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy. I take this as superior to the similarities with Ex 24:8 and Zechariah 9:11 because of its reference to the forgiveness of sins.

Mt 26:28 “...which will be shed on behalf of many...” | This refers to a covenant (agreement) sealed with the offering of a sacrifice. Here Jesus is the sacrifice.

Mt 26:32 “... after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee.” | Galilee was the area where the apostles were born and were raised, where they lived and worked and played. In Matthew’s Gospel that is where the ministry of the Church begins.

Mt 26:42 “...if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it...” | Jesus expresses the human condition but accepts the realities of life. I don’t believe God’s will is details here, but in the goal to bring His love to humanity no matter the cost.

Mt 26:52 “...put your sword back into its sheath...” | This whole section shows Jesus’ attitude toward bending to God’s will. To accomplish our goal with the sword, or any type of power, is to make ourselves God. Jesus, on the other hand, teaches only submission to life (God’s will) and carrying through to the end God has in mind. It raises the question of when do we act and when do we submit.

Mt 26:53 “Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father...” | This comment shows that the human Jesus could choose to not fulfill his destiny and not bring us salvation. It shows that Jesus is aware of his choices. It is similar to the second temptation recorded by Matthew 4:5.

Mt 26:56 “...then all the disciples left him and fled.” | It is interesting that this comment is connected to the comment about the Scriptures being fulfilled. What is it from which they are fleeing? Do we flee from the same thing?

Mt 26:58 “Peter was following him at a distance...” | The disciple follows the master closely. I think it significant that Peter was following at a distance at this time. Do we follow the Lord closely or at a distance?

Mt 26:59-60 | Matthew’s description of the trial was that it was prejudiced and unlawful from the very beginning.

Mt 26:63 “...the Messiah, the Son of God.” | The Messiah and the Son of God are the same. This is actually two questions; Are you the messiah, are you the sone of God? Messiah and Christ are interchangeable, Hebrew and Greek words meaning the same thing, the anointed one. The anointed one was expected to be sent by God to deliver the Jewish people.

Mt 26:64 “...You have said so.” | Unlike in Mk 14:62, Jesus isn’t really answering the question here. He is putting it back on the High Priest to judge whether or not he is the Messiah.

Mt 26:64 “... at the right had of the Power...” | This simply means at the right hand of God.

Mt 26:67-68 “Then they spat in his face and struck him...” | Matthew’s Gospel makes it sound as if it is the leaders of the Jewish people ridiculing Jesus. Marks Gospel, Mk 14:65 says “some began to spit on him...” Luke doesn’t mention this first episode of Jesus being mocked. John 18:22 says that Jesus was struck by one of the guards, but it wasn’t in mocking. It was because of Jesus’ response to the high priest.

Mt 26:69-75 Peter’s denial | All four Gospels relate Peter’s denial with some differences, Mk 14:66-72, Lk 22:54-62 and Jn 18:25-27.

Mt 27:3 “...seeing that Jesus had been condemned...” | Judas’ regret came after he saw the consequences of his actions. How many times have we done the same thing?

Mt 27:15-23 The release of Barabbas | This story is told in all four Gospels, here, Mk 15:6-14, Lk 23:17-23 and Jn 18:39-40.

Mt 27:28-31 The mocking of Jesus | Mathew and Mark give similar accounts (see Mk 15:17-20). Luke 22:63-65 seems to be talking about the same mocking. John 19:1-3 speaks of it briefly also.

Mt 27:45-54 The crucifixion. | Matthew’s telling is very similar to Mark 15:33-39 except that Matthew adds the story of the earthquake and the saints rising from their tombs (Mt 27:51b-53). Luke 23:44-48 gives an abbreviated version and Jn 19:28-30 focusses on the ministry of Jesus brought to completion.

Mt 27:55-56 Witnesses to the crucifixion. | Matthew is similar to Mk 15:40-41. Luke 23:49 doesn’t name the witnesses and John 19:25-27 states the Jesus’ mother Mary was there.

Mt 27:57-61 Joseph of Arimathea buries Jesus’ body. | All four Gospels recount this story, here, Mk 15:42-47, Lk 23:50-56 and Jn 19:38-42.

Mt 27:62-66 The Guard at the tomb. | Matthew is the only Gospel which recounts this story.