

Reflection for Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday, Cycle C

The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/041325.cfm>

1st Gospel: Luke 19:28–40 (During the Entrance Rites)

This Sunday there is a Gospel reading, The Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem, as part of the Entrance Rites. The Entrance Rites include the blessing of palms and some form of ritual reenactment of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem. Some scholars, notably Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, suggest that Jesus' entry was a more of a protest of Pilate's triumphal entry on the other side of Jerusalem possibly occurring at the same time. (See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/13/opinion/palm-sunday-protest.html>)

1st Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

This is the third of four Suffering Servant oracles. It is the prophet who is speaking and, obviously, God's word spoken through him is not being accepted. He, himself, is being maltreated. Since the beginning, the Church has applied these Servant Songs to Jesus. He is a model for our discipleship.

2nd Reading: Philippians 2:6-11

This is one of the most beautiful hymns from the early Church about Jesus. Paul points out that Jesus did not come to be served but that God humbled himself, in Jesus, to serve our salvation. At the end, he says that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is a servant Lord, and the question remains, will we allow this type of lord to be Lord in our lives?

Gospel: Luke 22:14–23:56 (Long Form) or Luke 23:1–49 (Short Form)

The long form is Luke's telling of the Last Supper, the Agony in the Garden, Jesus' arrest, Peter's denial, Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Pilate and then Herod, Jesus' sentencing, the Way of the Cross, the crucifixion, and his burial. The shorter form begins with Jesus before Pilate and ends with his death. The short form is simply the Passion Narrative.

Gospel Reflection (Long Form)

Most parishes use the short form of the Gospel assigned for Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday which consists only of the Passion narrative. The long form begins with Luke's telling of the story of the Last Supper then goes into the Passion narrative. There are two things we miss when we separate the story like that.

First we miss the fact that the Last Supper and the Passion of our Lord are two parts of a single action. In the Last Supper, our Lord liturgically offers himself for our salvation. He carries that offering out in his Passion and death. The meaning of each is impoverished by not making the connection; make the sacrifice -> live out the sacrifice.

The other thing that we miss, is that in Luke's telling of the story of the Last Supper he tells it in such a way that the early Church would have recognized it as their early liturgical celebrations which they evidently called "the breaking of the bread." It is also important to make that connection. In the Mass, we make an offering of ourselves, combined with Jesus self-offering, then during the week we live out our offering. It is exactly what he did in the combination of Last Supper/Passion and death. That is how the Mass becomes the center of our lives, as it should be. Luke was pointing that out in his Gospel.

I'm convinced that when Jesus said, "Do this in memory of me" he meant doing both; making the offering and then living it out. The Passover Seder meal, in my understanding, is a liturgical way for the Jewish people to experience the bondage in Egypt and then their deliverance to freedom that God worked for them. It was followed up and connected to the Sinai Covenant, what we think of as the Ten Commandments. And, living the Law is central to the Jewish way of life. The only thing missing is ritual sacrifice which ended with the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. They do continue to live sacrificial lives though.

We can't ignore the sacrificial nature of Christianity either. The Mass is the way to keep that central in our lives. Remember the flow; make an offering of self, live that offering out during the week, bring the fruits of your sacrificial living to give to God at next week's Mass.

By the way, the "amen" we say when we receive Communion, seals our offering. But that's another discussion.

And, I've not talked about how we are nourished by the Lord's presence at Mass; that is another discussion too, a big one.

God bless...

Gospel Reflection (Short Form)

Quite a few years ago, now, a young man came to me to Confession. He was about thirteen or fourteen years old. He told me that he was starting to do things of which he wasn't very proud. After explaining what he meant, he said "I don't want to be that person." I was profoundly touched by that young person and will never forget it.

It's at about his age, I think, that most of us discover that we can do wrong. It's disconcerting and oftentimes feels like betrayal. We feel like we are betraying our parents, or the person that has become our role model in life, a teacher, a scoutmaster, a coach, an older relative, or a best friend... and, we realize we are betraying ourselves.

The liturgy today is all about betrayal. It's about how suddenly it can happen, how our lives sometimes work up to it, how it can selfishly be a part of who we are, and the devastation we can feel when we realize our sin.

As you heard, when Jesus is preparing his last act for our salvation, he is aware of the betrayal he will suffer. The Gospel doesn't tell us why Judas betrayed Jesus, it tells us how he was more interested in the things of this world than the kind of life Jesus taught. Maybe he was disillusioned that Jesus wasn't the powerful king-messiah so many were expecting and his disillusionment turned to hatred.

Peter, on the other hand, seems to have betrayed Jesus out of some sort of cowardice. When he realized it, he wept bitterly.

The leaders of the Jewish people, we are told in the Gospel of John, were afraid of losing their power and privilege set up in the system they had created. They betrayed Jesus to protect that.

That leaves us to the people who joyously acclaimed Jesus in his triumphal entry who turned against him only a short time later. Our liturgy today, works that out wonderfully. First we begin with a ritual reenactment of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Then immediately after, we begin recalling the

hatred and betrayal that was his passion and death. And if you are in a church where the Gospel is proclaimed in parts, the part of the people includes the words “Crucify him! Crucify him!” It feels horrible when you hear yourself say that.

What’s the solution? Faith? Raymond Brown, in the Jerome Biblical Commentary, points out that when Jesus told Peter he was prayed that his faith would not fail, he wasn’t talking about faith as a belief in something. He was talking about faith as a “loyal attachment to Jesus through trust, love and confidence.”

It seems to me that our response to Jesus dying for us should be that loyal attachment. That attachment is a person-to-person thing... it’s called relationship. In particular, this attachment is built on trust, includes love, and results in confidence.

Even with his attachment to Jesus, Peter failed and we certainly fail too. But I think, the more developed our attachment to Jesus is, the lower our chance of failure is. That’s something!

God bless...

Personal Reflection:

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... Lk 23:47-48

Question:

What words or phrases attracted your attention 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 attracted your attention?) 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: (For the Long Form)

What is your usual experience of the Mass? Is it central in your life of discipleship? What do you need to change to make it more central in your life?

Alternative: (For the Short Form)

Share about/Reflect upon a time when you betrayed someone else or when you were betrayed. (Be careful not to identify the other person.) How have you betrayed, or denied, the Lord? What needs to change in your life to help guard against you doing what Judas or Peter did?

Verse by Verse:

Lk 22:16 “...I shall not eat it [again] until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” | AYBC points out that these words are said, in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, after the words of institution. It says they “seem to refer Jesus’ words to his Second Coming.” It says that Luke’s placement, before the words of institution, means that “each celebration of the Eucharist becomes a new manifestation of the glorious Lord.”

Lk 22:17 “Then he took a cup...” | This is the first of two cups in Luke’s telling, probably because there were three cups of wine in the Passover tradition during Jesus’ time. This clearly places it as a Passover meal.

Lk 22:19 “Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it...” | This formula is the same used in the story of the Multiplication of the Loaves (Lk 9:12-17) they seem to point to the liturgy of the Eucharist. AYBC points out that Luke is combining the story of the historical Jesus, here, with the story of the Church. He offers this as another indication of the connection between the Eucharistic Body of Christ and the Church as Body of Christ. He refers to Paul’s making that connection; 1 Cor 10:17; 11:24-25; 12:12, 27.

Lk 22:19c “Do this in memory of me.” The Jewish people had been doing “this” in memory of the ancient Passover from slavery in Egypt to freedom in God’s hands. Jesus identifies himself with the Passover lamb that was slain so they could have that freedom. For the people, the doing of it, with its special foods and symbolism, helped them ritually experience something that they didn’t experience in their lifetime; slavery to the Egyptians, although they must have experienced slavery to sin as we do.

AYBC points out that, in the Passover theology, it is God who does the remembering and in him, his remembrance effects what is remembered. Does our liturgical remembering effect what is being remembered, the saving acts of Christ?

Do this in memory of me invites us to ask, Do what? Are we just to do the ritual, and have a vicarious experience, as the Jewish people have done for centuries? Or, are we to make an offering of ourselves, as Jesus was doing, and have a first-hand experience of the giving of ourselves?

Lk 22:20 “...This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.” | This is the third cup of the meal called the cup of blessing.

Lk 22:21 “...the hand of the one who is to betray me is with me on the table...” | In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, Judas leaves before the institution of the Eucharist. In Luke’s Gospel he is included in it.

The Gospels don’t really tell us why Judas betrayed Jesus. We are told that he held the purse but as we are told that, we have no indication that he did it for the money except that, in the Gospel of Matthew, he asked “how much are you willing to give me?” Also, the Gospel of John says, literally, that he was a thief at the episode wherein Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with costly oil (see John 12:4-6). The Gospels of Mark and Luke seem to say that the chief priests came up with the idea of paying him, presumably to seal the deal. I think that Judas was probably disillusioned with the way Jesus was going about being the Messiah. It seems to me that his remark about selling the oil and giving to the poor showed a disdain for Jesus’ way of doing things along with his apparent desire to steal. Do we show disdain for Jesus in our actions?

Lk 22:26 “...let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant.” | A requirement of a disciple is to be like Jesus, a servant leader.

Lk 22:30 : ...you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” | They will be judges like the Hebrew Scripture judges, leading the people according to God’s will.

Lk 22:32 “...I have prayed that your faith may not fail...” | AYBC says that the word faith should be understood in the Biblical sense of “loyal attachment to Jesus through trust, love and confidence.”

Lk 22:36 “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.” | This is the opposite of the instructions given for the mission of the 72 (Lk 10:4). It is to be taken figuratively to mean be prepared for the coming persecutions of the Church.

Lk 22:38 “...Lord, look, there are two swords here.” | Jesus’ response, “It is enough”, indicates the figurative rather than literal meaning of his previous statement.

Lk 22:41 “...Pray that you may not undergo the test.” | Luke’s telling of the Agony in the Garden begins and ends with these words to the apostles. Differently from the other Gospels, Luke seems to be emphasizing the persecutions to which the Church will be subjected.

Lk 22:50 “...And one of them struck the high priest’s servant and cutoff his right ear.” | John 18:10 indicates that it was Peter who cutoff the high priest’s servant’s ear.

Lk 22:53 “...your hour, the time for the power of darkness.” | Or, it could be said, the power of evil. It is the power of the devil, which will result in physical death but be vanquished by the resurrection.

Lk 22:61 “...and the Lord turned and looked at Peter...” | This devastating detail is only recounted in the Gospel of Luke.

Lk 22:66b “...and they brought him before their Sanhedrin.” | The Sanhedrin was the Jewish high court composed of seventy-two members. It’s authority was over religious matters.

Lk 22:70 “...Are you then the son of God?” | The accusation against Jesus was that he claimed to be the Messiah. The Sanhedrin would not have understood the “Son of God”, used here, to mean God’s divine son but simply the “chosen messiah”. The early Church, hearing this, would most certainly have understood divine son.

Lk 23:1 “...brought him before Pilate.” | Pilate was the governor of Judaea.

Lk 23:7 “...he sent him to Herod...” | Herod was the tetrarch, or ruler, of the principality of Galilee and Perea. This was ruler of one fourth of the kingdom of his father, Herod the Great. Herod the Great was king when Jesus was born.

Lk 23:34b “...They divided his garments by casting lots.” | This comment points back to Psalm 22:19, connecting Jesus with the innocent sufferer in the psalm.

Lk 23:45 “...then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle.” | This is the veil that acted as a barrier to God’s presence in the Holy of Holies. It is the veil through which, in the story of John the Baptist’s birth, Zechariah entered to burn incense (Lk 1:9).