

Palm (Passion) Sunday C



*Father, forgive them;
they do not know what they are doing. (Lk 23:34)*

Commemoration of the Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem

Gospel

Luke 19:28-40

Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. Now when he was near Bethphage and Bethany, close by the Mount of Olives as it is called, he sent two of the disciples, telling them, "Go off to the village opposite, and as you enter it you will find a tethered colt that no one has yet ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you are to say this, 'The Master needs it.'" The messengers went off and found everything just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owner said, "Why are you untying that colt?" and they answered, "The Master needs it."

So they took the colt to Jesus, and throwing their garments over its back they helped Jesus on to it. As he moved off, people spread their cloaks in the road, and now, as he was approaching the downward slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole group of disciples joyfully began to praise God at the top of their voices for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: "Blessings on the King who comes, in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens!" Some Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Master, check your disciples," but he answered, "I tell you, if these keep silence the stones will cry out."

The Mass

First Reading

Isaiah 50:4-7

The Lord has given me a disciple's tongue. So that I may know how to reply to the wearied he provides me with speech. Each morning he wakes me to hear, to listen like a disciple. The Lord has opened my ear.

For my part, I made no resistance, neither did I turn away. I offered my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who tore at my beard; I did not cover my face against insult and spittle.

The Lord comes to my help, so that I am untouched by the insults. So, too, I set my face like flint; I know I shall not be shamed.

Second Reading

Philippians 2:6-11

His state was divine, yet Christ Jesus did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke 22:14 – 23:56

When the hour came Jesus took his place at table and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have longed to eat this passover with you before I suffer; because I tell you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Then, taking a cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and share it among you, because from now on, I tell you, I shall not drink wine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took some bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which will be given for you; do this as a memorial of me." He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you."

"And yet, here with me on the table is the hand of the man who betrays me. The Son of Man does indeed go to his fate even as it has been decreed, but alas for that man by

whom he is betrayed!" And they began to ask one another which of them it could be who was to do this thing.

A dispute arose also between them about which should be reckoned the greatest, but he said to them, "Among pagans it is the kings who lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are given the title Benefactor. This must not happen with you. No; the greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves. For who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely? Yet here am I among you as one who serves!"

"You are the men who have stood by me faithfully in my trials; and now I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father conferred one on me: you will eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel."

"Simon, Simon! Satan, you must know, has got his wish to sift you all like wheat; but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you in your turn must strengthen your brothers." He answered, "Lord, I would be ready to go to prison with you, and to death." Jesus replied, "I tell you, Peter, by the time the cock crows today you will have denied three times that you know me."

He said to them, "When I sent you out without purse or haversack or sandals, were you short of anything?" "No" they answered. He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it: if you have a haversack, do the same; if you have no sword, sell your cloak and buy one, because I tell you these words of scripture have to be fulfilled in me: He let himself be taken for a criminal. Yes, what scripture says about me is even now reaching its fulfilment." They said, "Lord, there are two swords here now." He said to them, "That is enough!"

He then left the upper room to make his way as usual to the Mount of Olives, with the disciples following. When they reached the place he said to them, "Pray not to be put to the test."

Then he withdrew from them, about a stone's throw away, and knelt down and prayed, saying "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine." Then an angel appeared to him, coming from heaven to give him strength. In his anguish he prayed even more earnestly, and his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.

When he rose from prayer he went to the disciples and found them sleeping for sheer grief. He said to them, "Why are you asleep? Get up and pray not to be put to the test." He was still speaking when a number of men appeared, and at the head of them the man called Judas, one of the Twelve, who went up to Jesus to kiss him. Jesus said, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" His followers, seeing what was happening, said, "Lord, shall we use our swords?" And one of them struck out at the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. But at this Jesus spoke. "Leave off! That will do!" And touching the man's ear he healed him.

Then Jesus spoke to the chief priests and captains of the Temple guard and elders who had come for him. He said, "Am I a brigand that you had to set out with swords and clubs? When I was among you in the Temple day after day you never moved to lay hands on me. But this is your hour; this is the reign of darkness."

They seized him then and led him away, and they took him to the high priest's house. Peter followed at a distance. They had lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and Peter sat down among them, and as he was sitting there by the blaze a servant-girl saw him, peered at him, and said, "This person was with him too." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." Shortly afterwards someone else saw him and said, "You are another of them." But Peter replied, "I am not, my friend." About an hour later another man insisted saying, "This fellow was certainly with him. Why, he is a Galilean." Peter said, "My friend, I do not know what you are talking about." At that instant, while he was still speaking, the cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter, and Peter remembered what the Lord had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will have disowned me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly. Meanwhile the men who guarded Jesus were mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and questioned him, saying, "Play the prophet. Who hit you then?" And they continued heaping insults on him.

When day broke there was a meeting of the elders of the people, attended by the chief priests and scribes. He was brought before their council, and they said to him, "If you are the Christ, tell us." He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the Power of God." Then they all said, "So you are the Son of God then?" He answered, "It is you who say I am." "What need of witnesses have we now?" they said. "We heard it for ourselves from his own lips." The whole assembly then rose, and they brought him before Pilate.

They began their accusation by saying, "We found this man inciting our people to revolt, opposing payment of tribute to Caesar, and claiming to be Christ, a king." Pilate put to him this question, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He replied, "It is you who say it." Pilate then said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no case against this man." But they persisted, "He is inflaming the people with his teaching all over Judaea; it has come all the way from Galilee, where he started down to here." When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man were a Galilean; and finding that he came under Herod's jurisdiction he passed him over to Herod who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Herod was delighted to see Jesus; he had heard about him and had been wanting for a long time to set eyes on him; moreover, he was hoping to see some miracle worked by him. So he questioned him at some length; but without getting any reply. Meanwhile the chief priests and the scribes were there violently pressing their accusations. Then Herod, together with his guards treated him with contempt and made fun of him; he

put a rich cloak on him and sent him back to Pilate. And though Herod and Pilate had been enemies before, they were reconciled that same day.

Pilate then summoned the chief priests and the leading men and the people. He said "You brought this man before me as a political agitator. Now I have gone into the matter myself in your presence and found no case against the man in respect of all the charges you bring against him. Nor has Herod either, since he has sent him back to us. As you can see, the man has done nothing that deserves death, so I shall have him flogged and then let him go." But as one man they howled, "Away with him! Give us Barabbas!" (This man had been thrown into prison for causing a riot in the city and for murder.)

Pilate was anxious to set Jesus free and addressed them again, but they shouted back. "Crucify him! Crucify him!" And for the third time he spoke to them. "Why? What harm has this man done? I have found no case against him that deserves death, so I shall have him punished and then let him go." But they kept on shouting at the top of their voices, demanding that he should be crucified. And their shouts were growing louder. Pilate then gave his verdict: their demand was to be granted. He released the man they asked for, who had been imprisoned for rioting and murder, and handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they pleased.

As they were leading him away they seized on a man, Simon from Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus. Large numbers of people followed him, and of women too, who mourned and lamented for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children. For the days will surely come when people will say, 'Happy are those who are barren, the wombs that have never borne, the breasts that have never suckled!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' to the hills, 'Cover us!' For if men use the green wood like this, what will happen when it is dry?" Now with him they were also leading out two other criminals to be executed.

When they reached the place called The Skull, they crucified him there and the two criminals also, one on the right, the other on the left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." Then they cast lots to share out his clothing. The people stayed there watching him. As for the leaders, they jeered at him, saying "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." The soldiers mocked him too, and when they approached to offer him vinegar they said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription: "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals hanging there abused him, saying "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us as well." But the other spoke up and rebuked him. "Have you no fear of God at all? You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me

when you come into your kingdom." He replied "Indeed, I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise."

It was now about the sixth hour and, with the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. The veil of the Temple was torn right down the middle; and when Jesus had cried out in a loud voice, he said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." With these words he breathed his last.

When the centurion saw what had taken place, he gave praise to God and said, "This was a great and good man." And when all the people who had gathered for the spectacle saw what had happened, they went home beating their breasts.

All his friends stood at a distance; so also did the women who had accompanied him from Galilee, and they saw all this happen.

Then a member of the council arrived, an upright and virtuous man named Joseph. He had not consented to what the others had planned and carried out. He came from Arimathaea, a Jewish town, and he lived in the hope of seeing the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He then took it down, wrapped it in a shroud and put him in a tomb which was hewn in stone in which no one had yet been laid. It was Preparation Day and the sabbath was imminent.

Meanwhile the women who had come from Galilee with Jesus were following behind. They took note of the tomb and of the position of the body.

Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. And on the sabbath day they rested, as the Law required.

Meditation

With the children of the Hebrews the Church participates today in the triumph of Christ. He enters the holy city, Jerusalem, to pass from this world to his Father.

The passion narratives which are read on this Sunday form without a doubt the primitive heart of our gospels. There are many concerns which converge around these simple but dramatic stories. They influence the manner of recounting the passion. In the care taken to show that Christianity had nothing to do with a criminal or rebellious movement, the evangelists highlight both the plot which results in the death of Jesus and the innocence of the Saviour crucified for sinners. They also demonstrate to Israel how this death fulfilled the scriptures, accomplished in the central event of the passion and in the details of its unfolding. The historical insertion of the crucifixion into the celebration of the Jewish Passover is decisive for Christians. Jesus replaced the immolation of the paschal lamb with the sacrifice of a new covenant. In addition to these apologetic and theological concerns, the evangelists proposed Jesus as a model of humility, of prayer, of endurance, of suffering. In these virtues which perfected the humanity of Jesus, the Church had much to learn.

The passion narratives are not reduced to a mere recitation of episodes. Marked by the personality of each evangelist, they present an undivided history in which the assaults of evil, carried to their heights in Jesus' passion, are rendered powerless by God.