

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

From the Last Supper to the Crucifixion

Suggested Environment

Choose or create a quiet space in your home. To help provide a prayerful atmosphere, perhaps light a candle and open a Bible to the scripture gospel passage for today.

Liturgical Readings for Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord



ISAIAH 50:4-7

I will not be put to shame for faithfulness to God.

PSALM 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11

He was obedient, even to death on a cross.

MATTHEW 26:14-27:66

The gentiles witnessed, “Truly, this was the Son of God.”

Focus

We are given the Eucharist, and we must journey with Jesus to the cross.



Opening Song (To download, visit ocp.org/renew-music.)

“Behold the Wood,” Dan Schutte



Opening Prayer

If you are with others, take turns reciting the verses and repeat the responses together.

R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

*All who see me scoff at me;
they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads:
“He relied on the Lord; let him deliver him,
let him rescue him, if he loves him.”*

R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

*Indeed, many dogs surround me,
a pack of evildoers closes in upon me;
They have pierced my hands and my feet;
I can count all my bones.*

R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

*They divide my garments among them,
and for my vesture they cast lots.
But you, O Lord, be not far from me;
O my help, hasten to aid me.*

R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

*I will proclaim your name to my brethren;
in the midst of the assembly I will praise you:
“You who fear the Lord, praise him;
all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him;
revere him, all you descendants of Israel!”*

R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?



The Gospel of the Lord

Jesus is betrayed, suffers, and dies, but he leaves us the Eucharist.

Read aloud *Matthew 26:20-32*

Reflect

What word, phrase, or image from the scripture reading touches your heart or connects to your experience? Share with the group, or write your response here:

Old Testament Connections

Followers of Jesus construed the Temple priests' rejection of Jesus as a rejection of God's plan for his people. Thus God withdrew from his presence among them, leaving their enemies to conquer them (in 70 AD). This was a day of darkness rather than light as the prophet Amos said (Am 5:18). The darkness "over the whole land" at the time of Jesus' crucifixion foreshadowed this catastrophe.

Two psalms show a faithful servant of God on the verge of death at the hands of his enemies. Psalm 69 portrays the servant's sense of abandonment by all of his friends in the last moments. It also reflects the cruelties of the servant's enemies: "I looked for compassion, but there was none; for comforters, but found none. Instead, they gave me poison for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar" (verses 21-22).

In Psalm 22, not only are friends and supporters absent but God himself seems to have withdrawn, as he said he would to those who did not keep the covenant. "My God, my God why have you abandoned me?" (verse 2) The servant trusted entirely in God and now, when he is being torn to pieces by his enemies, he does not feel God's presence:

“Dogs surround me, a pack of evildoers closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and my feet I can count all my bones” (verses 17-18a). Just as the psalmist had described, Jesus was mocked by the bystanders, and his garments were divided among his enemies.

In the end (verses 24-28), the abandoned servant of Psalm 22 experiences the consolation of God and proclaims to those around him that God does not forget the poor or ignore their suffering; God does not turn away but answers those who call for help.

This final vindication by God is understood to take place in the resurrection of Jesus and in the resurrection of all his servants who suffered like him in emptiness and abandonment. The resurrection of the just reflects the teaching of the prophet Ezekiel as he speaks God’s words: “You shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and make you come out of them, O my people,” (Ez 37:13). We see this fulfilled at the moment of Jesus’ death. The beginning of a new era of relationship to God occurs at that moment. We learn that God is the ultimate ruler of this world, the Lord over life and death. In the end it is God’s agenda that is completed for humankind, not the will of his creatures.

Adapted from a reflection by Martin A. Lang in Matthew: Come Follow Me, a forthcoming part of the RENEW Scripture Series.

Reflect

Jesus knows that his journey will lead to death. While he struggles with this in the garden, he ultimately accepts that he, like the suffering servant of the psalm, must trust God to the end. Have you ever faced an experience that seemed too great to bear? What was it? How did you navigate it? What role did your faith play in that journey? Share with the group, and/or write your response here.



Meditation

I participated in World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow, Poland with 2 million enthusiastic young Catholics from around the globe. It was an experience of faith and hope that reignited my zeal for God and mission. However, the most powerful part of my pilgrimage to Poland was a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Nazi death camp where approximately 1.1 million Jews were exterminated along with 200,000 others. I was deeply moved and disturbed as I walked the expansive and grim grounds; entered the gas chambers where men, women, and children were suffocated; crossed the railroad platform where the movement of an officer's thumb sent one to either a work camp or the death chamber; prayed at the brick wall where condemned prisoners were shot, and moved through the brick barracks displaying mounds of shoes, toothbrushes, shaving brushes, glasses, and other personal property.

The room that had the most impact on me was the one in which two tons of human hair was displayed behind glass. I could barely look at it, and my revulsion was made worse when our guide told us hair like this was used by the Nazis to make textiles and other products.

Many times the guide reminded us that what happened at Auschwitz-Birkenau didn't happen just because of a small number of monstrously evil people. It happened also because other people cooked meals, drove trains, designed and built the barracks and, worse, the ovens—people, doing ordinary jobs, who did not know or chose not to know about the horrendous genocide taking place on these grounds. I asked the guide how she could keep coming to this place. She said, "My grandfather was killed here, and I come here each day to warn people against our darkest instincts—to objectify our fellow human beings." Overwhelmed by the cruelty and evil, I entered cell block 13 where Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan priest, died as prisoner No. 16770 in 1941. Father Kolbe was sent to the death camp because he and other friars had organized a shelter for 3,000 Polish refugees among whom were 2,000 Jews. In his cell a lit paschal candle cast a small light on the grim surroundings—a sign of Christ's victory over

suffering and death. How I needed that light.

In July of 1941, a prisoner had escaped and the officers picked ten men to be starved to death as a means of discouraging others from fleeing. One of the chosen was Polish army sergeant Franciszek Gajowniczek. Because Gajowniczek had a wife and children, Father Kolbe proposed to the Nazis that he be allowed to take the sergeant's place. The Nazis agreed, and the priest and the other condemned men were consigned to a kind of dungeon. He languished there until he was near death and was finally killed with a lethal injection. A survivor, Jerzy Bielecki, declared that Father Kolbe's sacrifice was a "shock filled with hope, bringing new life and strength...it was like a powerful shaft of light in the darkness of the camp." Maximilian Kolbe was canonized in 1982.

On the Sunday before his death, Jesus rode into Jerusalem as people lined the road shouting his praises and thanking God for the miracles they had seen. By Friday they were shouting, "Give us Barabbas, we want him. Crucify Jesus, crucify him." In one short week, they turned on Jesus. Many collaborated with the Romans who stripped, beat, and hanged Jesus, the suffering servant of God, on the cross. However, darkness would not prevail, and through the sacrifice of Christ the powerful shaft of resurrection light continues to permeate the world.

Maximilian Kolbe shows us what it means to be a good and faithful servant in the worst of times and conditions. The first sign of his faithfulness was sheltering refugees; the ultimate sign, like Jesus, the suffering servant, was voluntarily giving up his life for another.

Auschwitz, like Calvary, is a grim place overshadowed by darkness that has been preserved to remind us of the worst possibilities of human behavior. It also shines light on the best possibilities by reminding us of what can happen when someone embodies Christ's saving love and mercy for the sake of the world.

Reflect

When you hear about the heroism of someone like Maximilian Kolbe in

circumstances that none of us are likely to endure, how can you relate it to the challenges you face during this pandemic?

Jesus taught that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for a friend—a belief he literally lived out for us. When has another person shown self-giving love for you? When have you done it for another?

There are still many “Calvarys” in the world. The story of Jesus Christ does not end with the crucifixion; the cross is a step toward the resurrection. What opportunities might be waiting for you or your parish to bring new life where there now is despair?

Live Lent!

- † *Reach out by telephone, text, email, or FaceTime to anyone who might be burdened by loneliness or anxiety because of the pandemic.*
- † *Research the work of Catholic Relief Services, the official overseas relief and development agency of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, to see how the Catholic Church in the United States is affecting the lives of our brothers and sisters around the world (www.crs.org). Decide how you can best support this work.*
- † *Spend time prayerfully reviewing your Lenten Plan (page 8), making any adjustments that you think are needed.*



Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You loved us so deeply that you were willing to love us unto death, death on a cross. When we see brothers and sisters who are suffering and afflicted, let us see you, and let us respond with a love “surpassing all understanding”— your love. Amen.

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