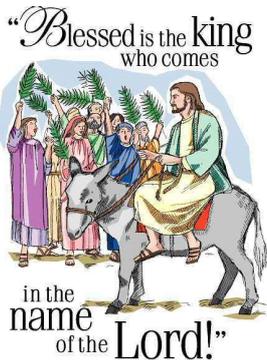


Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, Cycle A

Sunday, April 5, 2020

Readings & Background

This Sunday's Reading ([click here](#))



Gospel at the Procession with Palms

Matthew 21:1-11

Jesus enters Jerusalem as the crowd waves palm branches and shouts, "Hosanna!"

First Reading

Isaiah 50:4-7

The Lord's Servant will stand firm, even when persecuted.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalms 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24

A cry for help to the Lord in the face of evildoers

Second Reading

Philippians 2:6-11

Christ was obedient even to death, and God has exalted him.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 26:14—27:66

Jesus is crucified, and his body is placed in the tomb. (shorter form: *Matthew 27:11-54*)



Background on the Gospel Reading

Today we begin Holy Week, the days during which we journey with Jesus on his way of the cross and anticipate his Resurrection on Easter.

Today's liturgy begins with the **procession with palms** to remind us of Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem.

The events of Jesus' Passion are proclaimed in their entirety in today's Liturgy of the Word. **Those events will be proclaimed again when we celebrate the liturgies of the Triduum — Holy Thursday's Mass of the Lord's Supper, the Good Friday of the Lord's Passion, and the Easter Vigil.**

In communities that **celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation with catechumens**, these liturgies take on special importance because they invite the catechumens and the community to enter together into the central mysteries of our faith. **These days are indeed profound and holy.**

In Cycle A, we read the Passion of Jesus as found in the Gospel of Matthew on Palm, or Passion, Sunday. (On Good Friday, we will read the Passion of Jesus from the Gospel of John).

The story of Jesus' Passion and death in Matthew's Gospel focuses particularly on **the obedience of Jesus to the will of his Father**. As Jesus sends his disciples to prepare for Passover, he indicates that the events to come are the will of the Father (Matthew 26:18). In Jesus' prayer in the garden, **he prays three times to the Father to take away the cup of suffering**, but each time, **Jesus concludes by affirming his obedience to the Father's will** (Matthew 26:39-44).

Even Matthew's description of Jesus' death shows Jesus' obedience to the Father.

Another theme of Matthew's Gospel is to show **Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture**. Throughout the Passion narrative, Matthew cites and alludes to Scripture to show that the events of **Jesus' Passion and death are in accordance with all that was foretold**. And if the events were foretold, **then God is in control**. In addition, Matthew is particularly concerned that the reader does not miss the fact that Jesus is the Suffering Servant of the Old Testament.

Jesus acts in obedience to the Father even in death, so that sins may be forgiven. Matthew makes this clear in the story of the Lord's Supper. As Jesus blesses the chalice, he says: **". . . for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins."** (Matthew 26:28)

While the Gospels of Matthew and Mark have many parallels in their narrative of the Passion, *there are a few details worth noting that are unique to Matthew*. Only Matthew indicates the price paid to Judas for betraying Jesus. The story of Judas's death is also found only in Matthew, as is the detail that Pilate's wife received a warning in a dream and that Pilate washed his hands of Jesus' death. Finally, Matthew's Gospel alone mentions the earthquakes and other phenomena that happened after Jesus' death.

Matthew places the responsibility for Jesus' death on the Sanhedrin, the chief priests and elders who were responsible for the Temple. However, ***the animosity that those Jewish leaders and the Jewish people demonstrate toward Jesus is not to be interpreted in ways that blame the Jewish people for Jesus' death.*** Throughout Matthew's Gospel, the narrative reflects the tension that probably existed between the early Christian community and their Jewish contemporaries.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Council Fathers made clear that ***all sinners share responsibility for the suffering and death of Jesus and that it is wrong to place blame for Jesus' Passion on the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus or on Jewish people today.***

There are many vantage points from which to engage in Jesus' Passion. In the characters of Matthew's Gospel, ***we find reflections of ourselves and the many ways in which we sometimes respond to Jesus.***

- Sometimes we are ***like Judas***, who betrays Jesus and comes to regret it.
- Sometimes we are ***like Peter***, who denies him, or
- Sometimes we are like ***the disciples***, who fell asleep during Jesus' darkest hour but then act rashly and violently at his arrest.
- sometimes we are ***like Simon***, who is pressed into service to help Jesus carry his cross.
- sometimes we are like the leaders who fear Jesus or like Pontius Pilate, who washed his hands of the whole affair. Jesus dies so that our sins will be forgiven.

The events of Jesus' Passion, death, and Resurrection are called the Paschal Mystery. No amount of study will exhaust or explain the depth of love that Jesus showed in offering this sacrifice for us. After we have examined and studied the stories we have received about these events, ***we are left with one final task, to meditate on these events and on the forgiveness that Jesus' obedience won for us.***

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion Family Connection

Palm, or Passion, Sunday begins the most sacred week of the Church year—Holy Week. During these days, we ***prepare ourselves for Easter by prayerful reflection upon the events of Jesus' Passion and death.*** You might display a crucifix in a prominent place this week, as reminder of the salvation Christ won for us. The crucifix can also be the focal point for family prayer during Holy Week.

Because of the length and complexity of the **Passion narrative**, young children have difficulty remaining attentive when it is proclaimed in its entirety. Families can choose to read a portion of this Sunday's Gospel ***each day of Holy Week***, providing ample opportunity for children to ask questions and respond to the events described there. ***In this way, the entire week can become a "way of the cross."***

Each day during Holy Week, the family can gather in a prayerful space with a crucifix as the focal point. **The Passion as found in Matthew's Gospel** might be read as follows throughout the week:

Sunday: Matthew 21:1-11 (Gospel at the Procession with Palms)

Monday: Matthew 26:14-25

Tuesday: Matthew 26:26-35

Wednesday: Matthew 26:36-56

Thursday: Matthew 26:57—27:14

Friday: Matthew 27:15-54

After reading from the Gospel each night, the family might reflect on the reading together. Conclude your prayer time together by praying the **Lord's Prayer** and/or singing an appropriate hymn, such as "Were You There when they crucified my Lord"