

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place a palm branch, crucifix, and small container of oil at the center of your group. Read the shortened gospel below, which describes people welcoming Jesus when he enters Jerusalem.

NARRATOR: When they were approaching Jerusalem at Bethphage and Bethany... Jesus' disciples brought a colt to him and threw their cloaks on it; Jesus sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

ALL: Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in highest heaven!

Mark 11.1-10



Palm/Passion Sunday begins Holy Week. The palm procession leads to the story of Jesus' suffering and death. This year we hear the passion narrative according to Mark. It begins two days before Passover. The chief priests and scribes are plotting to put Jesus to death. Jesus is at table in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper.

A woman breaks open an alabaster jar of costly ointment and pours the oil on Jesus' head. Israel anointed its kings by pouring oil on their heads. The woman's gesture is a prophetic act that, like the words of blessing that welcome Jesus to Jerusalem, identifies him as the messiah.

Jesus affirms that "wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world what she has done will be told in memory of her." Her action anticipates the reason the high priest

condemns Jesus. It contrasts starkly with Judas Iscariot's act of betrayal, which happens next as he goes to the chief priests and arranges to hand Jesus over.

The officials' plotting, the woman's anointing, and Judas's betraying form a literary sandwich. The middle story is key, the meat of the sandwich; in this case, the prophetic anointing that marks Jesus as the messiah and readies him for death.

Jesus and his disciples then plan and celebrate Passover. At this meal he blesses and shares a cup of wine, identifying the cup of wine with his lifeblood. His prophetic words and gestures anticipate and interpret his death on the cross. Sharing the cup signifies a new covenant, a new agreement about our relationship with



Ade Bethune

he welcome echoes Psalm 118, a ritual procession into the temple to express praise and gratitude for God's saving help. At every Eucharist in the "Holy, Holy, Holy," we proclaim the same psalm verses the people shout in the gospel. Jesus is the one who comes in the name of the Lord and inherits God's promises to David. He is the messiah, who comes not in victory but in peace, riding humbly on a colt.

● What Holy Week liturgies affect you most?

● What in these liturgies expresses who Jesus is for you?

God. Ancient Israel ratified its covenant in blood, signifying that the people pledged with their lives to keep the ten commandments. The community that tells Jesus' story understands his gestures at the last supper as a new covenant that expresses his willingness to love them unto death.

● **What do you promise with your life?**

The evangelist carefully constructs the plot so Jesus is nearly silent during his passion. As Jesus and his disciples move from the meal to the garden, he prophesies that one of his own will betray him; his disciples will scatter and desert him; Peter will deny him. We hear the passion today as insiders, who unlike Jesus' first disciples, know how the plot unfolds.

Judas's kiss fulfills Jesus' prophecy that one of his own will betray him. When Jesus' followers flee, they fulfill his prediction the sheep will scatter. The plot of the narrative has readied us for Jesus to say little during his passion as all that he anticipates happens.

GOSPEL

Last supper

NARRATOR: Jesus sent two disciples ahead to prepare a Passover meal. As the sun set, Jesus and the twelve arrived and reclined at the table.

JESUS: One of you is about to betray me.

DISCIPLES: Not I. Not I.

JESUS: It is one of you who is dipping in the same dish with me.

NARRATOR: During the meal Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it,

and gave it to his disciples.

JESUS: Take this; this is my body.

NARRATOR: In the same way he took a cup, gave thanks and passed it to them, and all drank from it.

JESUS: This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many. I will never drink again of the fruit of the vine until the day I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

Garden, arrest

NARRATOR: They sang songs of praise, then walked out to the Mount of Olives.

JESUS: Your faith in me will be shaken. The scriptures say, "I will strike down the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered." But after I am raised up, I will go to Galilee ahead of you.

PETER: My faith in you will never be shaken.

JESUS: Tonight before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.

PETER: If I have to die with you, I will not deny you.

NARRATOR: Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a garden place called Gethsemani.

JESUS: My heart is full of sorrow. Sit here and stay awake.

NARRATOR: He went aside to pray.

JESUS: Abba, you have power to do all things. Take this cup from me. But let it be according to your will, not mine.

NARRATOR: After he prayed, Jesus found his friends asleep.

JESUS: Peter, you couldn't stay awake for an hour? Pray that you are not put to the test.

NARRATOR: Judas and a crowd with swords and clubs found Jesus. The chief priests and some of the other religious leaders sent them. Judas had arranged to point Jesus out by kissing him. He kissed Jesus and greeted him.

JUDAS: Teacher.

NARRATOR: The crowd arrested Jesus and led him to the high priest's house. All Jesus' disciples fled—except Peter, who followed at a distance to the high priest's courtyard.



- What do you learn about Jesus from his feelings and prayer in the garden?
- What is the cup he wants taken away but accepts?

Artfully the narrative creates an inside and outside scene during Jesus' trial. Outside in the courtyard of the high priest's house, Peter denies he knows Jesus. Inside the house Jesus acknowledges he is the messiah. The high priest asks, "Are you the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus says, "I am." These words translate the name of God in the Old Testament—*I Am Who Am*.

We readers and hearers of the story know what the characters in the narrative don't yet recognize. Jesus is the messiah, whose suffering God will vindicate by raising him up. Jesus is *I am*, not a blasphemer.

Pilate asks essentially the same question as the high priest, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answers, "You say so." His terse answer underscores the charge against him—his claim to be the messiah.

Trial

NARRATOR: The chief priests and many leaders who were part of the religious council called the Sanhedrin together to hear witnesses against Jesus.

HIGH PRIEST: Have you an answer to these witnesses?

NARRATOR: Jesus remained silent.

HIGH PRIEST: Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?

JESUS: I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right

hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.

HIGH PRIEST: You have heard this blasphemy. What is your verdict?

SANHEDRIN: Guilty.

NARRATOR: Some spit on him. They blindfolded him and hit him, asking him to play the prophet and tell who did it. Meanwhile in the courtyard outside, a servant girl noticed Peter.

SERVANT: You have been with Jesus of Nazareth.

PETER: I don't know what you are talking about.

NARRATOR: A cock crowed. A servant spoke to a bystander.

SERVANT: That man is one of them.

PETER: No, I am not.

BYSTANDER: You are, too, one of them. You're from Galilee, aren't you?

PETER: I don't even know the man you are talking about.

NARRATOR: At that moment a cock crowed a second time. Peter heard it, remembered Jesus' prediction, and began to weep. At daybreak, the Sanhedrin bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the chief Roman official in Israel.

PILATE: Are you the king of the Jews?

JESUS: You are the one who is saying it.

NARRATOR: The chief priests accused Jesus of plots against the government.

PILATE: Surely you have an answer to these accusations.

NARRATOR: Jesus made no further answer. Pilate wanted to honor the custom of releasing a prisoner on the Passover feast. He spoke to the crowd.

PILATE: Do you want me to release the king of the Jews?

CROWD: We want Barabbas.

PILATE: What shall I do with the king of the Jews?

CROWD: Crucify him.

NARRATOR: Pilate released the rebel Barabbas and ordered Jesus to be scourged and crucified. Roman soldiers took him inside their fortress, dressed him in purple, wove a crown of thorns, and put it on him.

SOLDIERS: Hail, king of the Jews.

NARRATOR: They hit his head with reeds, spit at him, and genuflected before him. When they finished mocking him, they led him away to crucify him.

- How does the playing out of Jesus' predictions affect you?
- What is the power for you of Jesus' saying so few words?

In Mark's gospel Jesus endures flogging, mocking, and crucifixion without speaking. As he is dying on the cross, he prays Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We experience desolation in his few words.

Jesus is not alone as he dies on the cross. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome, and other women disciples stand with him at a distance. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses witness him buried.

The passion narrative gospel leaves us in desolation. Who are we like—the betrayer; the disciples who flee; Peter, who denies Jesus; the women who stand with him but cannot ease his suffering and anguish; Joseph of Arimathea, who shows up to bury him?

Crucifixion

NARRATOR: The soldiers made a man named Simon from Cyrene in Africa carry Jesus' cross. They walked Jesus outside the city to the hill called Golgotha. They offered him drugged wine, but he refused. They crucified him and rolled dice for his garments. The inscription proclaiming his offense read: "The King of the Jews." They crucified two rebels, one on either side of him. It was about nine in the morning.

PEOPLE: Save yourself by coming down from that cross.

CHIEF PRIESTS: He saved others, but he cannot save himself.

SCRIBES: Let the Messiah and King of Israel come down from that cross, so that we can see it and believe in him.

NARRATOR: At noon darkness fell on the countryside.

JESUS: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

BYSTANDERS: He's calling Elijah. Let's see if Elijah comes and takes him down.

NARRATOR: Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the temple tore from top to bottom.

CENTURION: Surely this man was the Son of God.

NARRATOR: Many women watched at a distance. Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joses; and Salome were among them. They had followed Jesus from Galilee and served him.

NARRATOR: Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, who believed in Jesus, asked Pilate for his body and buried him before the sun set and Sabbath began. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where he had been laid.

Mark 14.12—15.47



- With which disciples do you identify?
- Which of Jesus' predictions has not come true at this point?
- What insights do you gain from having a post-Easter point of view of the passion narrative?

FIRST READING

God is faithful.

The verses of Sunday's first reading, spoken initially to exiles in Babylon, highlight a theme familiar in the psalms: those who commit their causes to God often experience humiliation and ridicule. Prophets dare such things because they trust God will not allow the righteous to be put to shame.

Jesus' death tests God's faithfulness. He is slapped, spit upon, humiliated publicly, and abandoned by God in death. Because of Easter, we dare still to commit our causes to God.

God's servant speaks.

The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue that I might know

how to speak to the weary
a word that will rouse them.
Morning after morning
God opens
my ear that I may hear:
And I have not rebelled
nor turned back.
I gave my back to those
who beat me,
my cheeks to those
who plucked my beard;
my face I did not shield
from buffets and spitting.
The Lord God is my help;
therefore, I am not disgraced;
I have set my face like flint,
knowing that I shall not be
put to shame.

Isaiah 50.4-7

- What causes do I entrust to God?

PRAY

LEADER: Let us pray from the Second Reading. Our attitude must be Christ's

ALL: Who though he was in the form of God—

LEADER: Did not regard equality with God something to be grasped at.

ALL: But humbled himself accepting even death on a cross.

LEADER: Let us anoint one another with oil on the forehead, using Jesus' sign—the cross. *Pause.*

LEADER: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

ALL: Let every voice confess Jesus Christ is Lord.



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