

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

At the center of your group, place symbols of Holy Week, such as palm, a water pitcher and towel, a crucifix, and a cup of wine or grape juice.

LEADER: This holy week we accompany Jesus as he pours out his life for his friends.

ALL: Jesus, you pour out your love upon us.

LEADER: May the gospel we break open speak to us.

ALL: May we find a word to the weary that will rouse us.

Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday. We process into church with blessed palms, imitating the people who welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem. On Holy Thursday we remember the meal that institutes the most daily and most significant of Christian rituals—Eucharist. On Good Friday we listen to the passion narrative, accompanying Jesus step by step through his suffering and death on the cross.

Our liturgical life today grows out of early Christians breaking bread together and visiting the sites along the way Jesus walked to the cross in Jerusalem. A pilgrim named Egeria journeyed to Jerusalem in A.D. 381-384. Her journals tell of crowds praying psalms, singing hymns, and spending the night visiting the places familiar from the passion narrative.

For many Central and Latin American countries Holy Week rituals become civic events. In San Antonio thousands of people gather in the square

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in front of the cathedral for an enactment of Jesus' passion.

Some parishes make the Stations of the Cross outdoors with people taking turns carrying a cross. These rituals draw us physically into the story, reflecting as we walk in our own time and space.

On Holy Saturday my grandniece Maya and her mom helped make a mandala for the parish children's Mass on Easter morning. The tradition of sand-painting comes from Guatemala, the country from which Maya is adopted. In Guatemala the people in villages create elaborate sand-paintings on their streets that mark the way for Holy Week processions.

Maya helped make the words "bridges not walls" on the colorful mandala for the sidewalk in front



of the church. The St. Joan of Arc parish community invites the Heart of the Beast Puppet Theater to join in the Easter celebration. In the second photo a Jesus puppet leads children dressed as animal puppets in the joyful, sunny Easter procession.

● What memory of Holy Week holds special meaning and insight for you?



GOSPEL



Jesus suffers and dies.

Take parts; proclaim this short version of the passion gospel.

NARRATOR: Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pilate.

PILATE: Are you the king of the Jews?

JESUS: As you say.

PILATE: Surely you hear how many charges they bring against you?

NARRATOR: Jesus did not answer him, not on a single count, much to Pilate's amazement. Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release one prisoner for the crowd, anyone they wanted. At the time they had a notorious prisoner named Barabbas. When the crowd gathered, Pilate asked —

PILATE: Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus, who is called the Messiah?

NARRATOR: Pilate realized it was out of jealousy that the chief priests and elders had handed Jesus over. As he was presiding, his wife sent him a message.

WIFE: Have nothing to do with that innocent man. I had a dream about him today which has greatly upset me.

NARRATOR: Meanwhile the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and have Jesus put to death.

PILATE: Which of the two do you wish me to release for you?

CROWD: Barabbas.

PILATE: Then what should I do with Jesus, called the Messiah?

CROWD: Crucify him!

PILATE: Why? What crime has he committed?

NARRATOR: They shouted all the louder.

CROWD: Crucify him!

NARRATOR: When Pilate realized he could do nothing but rather a riot was breaking out, he called for water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.

PILATE: I am innocent of the blood of this just man. You see to it.

CROWD: Let his blood be on us and on our children.

NARRATOR: Pilate released Barabbas to them. After having Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified. The governor's soldiers took Jesus inside their headquarters and gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet cloak on him. Weaving a crown of thorns, they fixed it on his head and stuck a reed in his right hand. They knelt before him and mocked him.

SOLDIERS: All hail, King of the Jews!

NARRATOR: They spat at him, took the reed, and kept striking him on the head. Finally, when they had finished making a fool of him, they stripped him of the cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him off to crucifixion.

On their way out they met a man from Cyrene named Simon. They forced him to help carry the cross. When they arrived at a site called Golgotha, a name which means Skull Place, they gave Jesus a drink of wine flavored with gall, which he tasted but refused to drink. When they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among them by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him. Above his head they put the charge against him: *This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.*

Two insurgents were crucified along with him, one at his right and one at his left. Passersby insulted him, shaking their heads.

CROWD: So you are the one who was going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Save yourself, why don't you? Come down off that cross if you are God's Son.

NARRATOR: The chief priest, the scribes, and the elders also joined in the jeering.

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

SCRIBES: So he is the king of Israel. Let's see him come down from that cross, then we will believe in him.

ELDERS: He relied on God; let God rescue him now. After all, he claimed, "I am God's Son."

NARRATOR: Even the insurgents crucified with him kept taunting him the same way. From noon on, darkness came over the whole land

until midafternoon. About three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud tone.

JESUS: Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?

NARRATOR: This means, "My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?"

BYSTANDER: He is invoking Elijah!

NARRATOR: Immediately one of them ran off, got a sponge, soaked it in cheap wine, and putting it on a stick, gave it to him to drink.

CROWD: Wait, let's see whether Elijah comes to his rescue.

NARRATOR: Jesus cried out again in a loud voice and gave up his spirit. Suddenly the curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, boulders split, tombs opened. Many bodies of saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After Jesus' resurrection they came forth from their tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. The centurion and his men who were keeping watch over Jesus were terror-stricken at seeing the earthquake and all that was happening.

CENTURION: Clearly this was the Son of God.

Matthew 27.11-54

Jesus pours out his life for us.

Palm/Passion Sunday celebrates two events. Liturgy begins with the gospel recalling Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It moves quickly to Jesus' passion. The mockery of Roman soldiers who braid a crown of thorns for the royal pretender, bow before him, and spit in his face takes center stage away from the palm-waving crowd that gives Jesus a kingly welcome to Jerusalem.

Jesus' passion is the reverse of the kingly life to which the devil tempted him early in Matthew's gospel. Jesus does not jump off the temple to be caught by angels; on the contrary temple representatives and religious leaders successfully seek his death. Jesus does not rule the world, rather he is subject to the representative of Caesar, the Roman governor who knows he is innocent but allows him to be put to death.

The events of the passion test and manifest Jesus' love for God, for the world, for his friends, and for the community that still gathers in his name. Jesus endures not only the pain and shame of crucifixion but one friend's betrayal, another's denial, and God's seeming abandonment.

● What in your life has demanded more than you thought you had to give?

● What has Jesus' passion meant to you? When have you found Jesus with you in times of betrayal or suffering or seeming abandonment?

The full passion narrative begins around a table of festivity and friendship that Jesus shares with his disciples. Jesus pledges the cup of wine he blesses at the meal as a sign of his life blood. It foreshadows all that will happen to him and later to his disciples. "Drink from it, all of you," he says, "for this is my blood...to be poured out on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." Later in prayer Jesus begs God to let the cup pass by without his drinking from it.

Many of Jesus' own disciples betray and forsake him. Judas hands him over to the authorities, using words of respect and a gesture of intimacy to identify him. Peter, who at supper claims he would die with Jesus rather than disown him, publicly denies ever knowing him.

The leaders of Jesus' own religious community and nation hand him over to Pilate, the foreigner who allows him to be crucified. The crowd that calls for Jesus' blood must include people who have followed him, listened to him teach, and watched him heal. They, too, turn against him.

● Who in our world is living Jesus' crucifixion?

At the supper Jesus identifies the cup not only as his blood that will be poured out but as the blood of the new covenant. Communion in Jesus' blood becomes the bond that unites him with those who follow him in faith. To drink this cup is to





pledge one's life, to commit to friendship with Jesus and fidelity to God, even unto death.

Those who witness the full outpouring of Jesus' love in his life and in his death come to share his commitment to self-giving. Jesus' death and resurrection reveal self-giving love as the creative life-giving power at the heart of all that is.

Baptism into Jesus' self-giving death and life-giving resurrection makes us Jesus' kin, his blood. In Eucharist we drink from his cup. We claim his life commitment as our own.

- Who invites you to give yourself more fully?
- What commitment will you make this Sunday when you drink the cup that signifies Jesus giving his lifeblood?

FIRST READING

God is sure help.

In Sunday's first reading, the prophet Second Isaiah writes in the voice of an individual who is God's servant. This servant represents all the exiled Israelites whom the Babylonians took captive after destroying Jerusalem. They are weary of exile. God is their only help in this long testing at the hands of their enemies.

Isaiah's poetry describes the mission of God's servants. The prophet calls us to open ourselves to God's call as an everyday task. "Morning after morning God opens my ear that I may hear." Isaiah warns that speaking God's word and sustaining faith in God may not lead to popularity or even to a fair hearing, but rather to struggle, betrayal, and physical suffering.

God's faithful servant

The Holy One has given me a well-trained tongue that I might 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, have not 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 insults and spitting.

Fully Alive! An Easter Retreat

You will walk with six Christians who have poured out their lives in love—Dorothy Day, Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, Teilhard de Chardin, Julian of Norwich, and Paul the Apostle.

Go to goodgroundpress.com and click on Online Retreats.

The Holy One helps me;
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

- Who are the weary in your own family or among your coworkers?
- What is a word from God that sustains you?
- Who in your community of faith awaits a word from God that will sustain them?
- What words do you speak that rouse the weary in your life?

PRAY

LEADER: Let us find encouragement in Jesus Christ.

ALL: We share his compassion and Spirit.

LEADER: May we have the same mind and the same love.

ALL: Let our attitude be that of Christ's.

LEADER: Let us identify in our hearts the weary who need our word or friendship. We will pass around the cup and each drink as a sign of our commitments.

ALL: May our love give life.

Exchange a sign of peace.



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