



LIVING THE GOSPEL

Palm Sunday of The Lord's Passion March 29, 2026

Theme: "Save yourself, if you are the Son of God, and come down from the cross!"

Gathering Prayer

Facilitator: Almighty ever-living God, who as an example of humility for the human race to follow caused our Savior to take flesh and submit to the Cross, graciously grant that we may heed his lesson of patient suffering and so merit a share in his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Matthew 27:11-54

^{27:11} Jesus, then, was brought before the governor, and the governor put to him this question, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus replied, 'It is you who say it'. ¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders he refused to answer at all. ¹³ Pilate then said to him, 'Do you not hear how any charges they have brought against you?' ¹⁴ But to the governor's complete amazement, he offered no reply to any of the charges.

¹⁵ At festival time it was the governor's practice to release a prisoner for the people, anyone they chose. ¹⁶ Now there was at that time a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when the crowd gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?' ¹⁸ For Pilate knew it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

¹⁹ Now as he was seated in the chair of judgment, his wife sent him a message, 'Have nothing to do with that man; I have been upset all day by a dream I had about him'.

²⁰ The chief priests and the elders however, had persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. ²¹ So when the governor spoke and asked them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' they said, 'Barabbas'. ²² But in that case, 'Pilate said to them 'what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified!' ²³ 'Why?' he asked 'What harm has he done?' But they shouted all the louder, 'Let him be crucified!' ²⁴ Then Pilate saw that he was making no impression, that in fact a riot was imminent. So he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your concern.' ²⁵ And the people, to a man, shouted back, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' ²⁶ Then he released Barabbas for them. He ordered Jesus to be first scourged and then handed over to be crucified.

²⁷ The governor's soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium and collected the whole cohort round him. ²⁸ Then they stripped him and made him wear a scarlet cloak,

²⁹ and having twisted some thorns into a crown they put this on his head and placed a reed in his right hand. To make fun of him they knelt to him saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' ³⁰ And they spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head with it. ³¹ And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the cloak and dressed him in his own clothes and led him away to crucify him.

³² On their way out, they came across a man from Cyrene, Simon by name, and enlisted him to carry his cross. ³³ When they had reached a place called Golgotha, that is, the place of the skull, ³⁴ they gave him wine to drink mixed with gall, which he tasted but refused to drink. ³⁵ When they had finished crucifying him they shared out his clothing by casting lots, ³⁶ and then sat down and stayed there keeping guard over him.

³⁷ Above his head was placed the charge against him; it read: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews'. ³⁸ At the same time two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

³⁹ The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads ⁴⁰ and said, 'So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself! If you are God's son, come down from the cross!' ⁴¹ The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way. ⁴² 'He saved other;' they said 'he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He puts his trust in God; now let God rescue him if he wants him. For he did say, "I am the son of God". ⁴⁴ Even the robbers who were crucified with him taunted him in the same way.

⁴⁵ From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?' ⁴⁷ When some of those who stood there heard this, they said, 'The man is calling on Elijah', ⁴⁸ and one of them quickly ran to get a sponge which he dipped in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it him to drink. ⁴⁹ 'Wait' said the rest of them 'and see if Elijah will come to save him.' ⁵⁰ But Jesus, again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up his spirit.

⁵¹ At that, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked; the rocks were split; ⁵² the tombs opened and the bodies of many holy men rose from the dead, ⁵³ and these, after his resurrection, came out of the tombs, entered the Holy City and appeared to a number of people. ⁵⁴ Meanwhile the centurion, together with the others guarding Jesus, had seen the earthquake and all that was taking place, and they were terrified and said 'In truth this was a son of God.'

Gospel Focus

The passion narratives on Palm Sunday and Good Friday are unique in that, in many places, the congregation also proclaims the gospel readings. The twist, of course, is that the scripted parts the congregation is to speak are also the parts they'd rather not-the bystanders' accusation of Peter, the crowd's demand for Barrabas, and the onlookers derision of Jesus on the cross. Whether the congregation participates in this way or whether these gospel lines are left to a single reader, they can be some of the most impactful in this passage. In the actions of this people in the Scriptures, we see the ways in which we fall short-the ways in which we, like those at the time of Jesus, fail to recognize him for who he is. They cannot fathom a messiah and a God who would suffer, who would identify himself with the least rather than the greatest, and who would show humility rather than bravado-instead, they envision God as they themselves are. In this gospel reading, we are invited to recognize our own inadequacy and imperfection, so that we can appreciate God's love all the more.

Gospel Reflection

Ask any Christian why Jesus died, and most will respond. "to save us from our sins." There are, in fact, a great many differing theological explanations for the death of Jesus in the New Testament. The Gospel of Matthew is the only one in which Jesus, with his words over the cup at the Last Supper, interprets his death in terms of forgiveness of sins. (26:28).

There is a particular emphasis in Matthew's Gospel on the shedding of blood and its consequences, which reaches a climax in the passion narrative. Previously, Jesus had exposed the refusal of the religious leaders to recognize their complicity in the shedding of the blood of the prophets (23:30), just as Pilate tries to do when he washes his hands, declaring, "I am innocent of this man's blood" (27:24).

In contrast, the crowd responds with recognition that the effects of Jesus' execution will continue to redound not only upon them but also upon their children (27:25). This verse is most often read as an acceptance of responsibility or guilt for the death of Jesus. However, there is no verb in the sentence, making it possible to read it as a statement: His death is upon us and upon our children. It is a recognition that the effects of violence committed by leaders reverberate onto the people as a whole and continue to affect future generations. At the same time, with Jesus' words over the cup, Matthew asserts that the forgiving effects of the shedding of Jesus' blood also redound to them.

Jesus invitation to drink from the cup of his "blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins"(26:28), brings together two powerful symbols: blood and cup. Blood signifies the life force over which only God has power (Deut 12:23). The sup connotes suffering, as in Jesus' plea in Gethsemane. "let this cup pass from me" (26:39). By accepting Jesus' invitation to drink from the cup, disciples accept the suffering that befalls them as a consequence of living the gospel.

At the same time, partaking of the blood signifies acceptance of the life force of God, which empowers disciples to endure and overcome suffering and evil. In the Gospel of Matthew this power is explicitly linked with forgiveness, Jesus has lived and taught forgiveness as a means of breaking cycles of violence. He has accepted "the cup" of opposition that such a life has engendered, which will culminate in his death. His own blood seals again God's covenant with God's people, just as Moses did with blood sprinkled on the people (Exod 24:8). The pouring out of Jesus' blood "for many" leaves no one out, as the Greek word *pollon* reflects a Semitic expression where many is the opposite of one, thus the equivalent of "all." When the angel announces to Joseph, "he will save his people from their sins (Matt1:21), it is not by a single sacrificial act but by an entire way of life into which his followers are invited.

Old and New Testament links

First Reading — Isaiah 50:4-7

⁴ The Lord Yahweh 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. ⁵ The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear. For my part, I made no resistance, neither did I turn away. ⁶ 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. ⁷ The Lord Yahweh 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.

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 22:7-8, 16-19, 22-23

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

All who see deride me;
They curl their lips, they toss their heads:
He trusted in the Lord, let him save him;
Let him release him, for in him he delights. **(R)**

For dogs have surrounded me;
a band of the wicked besets me.
They tear holes in my hands and my feet;
I can count every one of my bones. **(R)**

They divide my clothing among them,
they cast lots for my robe.
But you, O LORD, do not stay afar off,
my strength, make haste to help me! **(R)**

I will tell of your name to my kin,
And praise you in the midst of the assembly:
'You who fear the LORD, give him praise;
All you descendants of Jacob, give him glory;
revere him, all you descendants of Israel.' **(R)**

Second Reading — Philippians 2:6-11

Christ Jesus, ⁶ though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Sharing and Discussion

1. How were you moved through this account of Jesus' last days?
2. Where can you find yourself within the passion narrative? As Pilate? Peter? Simon the Cyrenian? Mary Magdalene? One of the soldiers or bystanders?

Closing Prayer

Facilitator: Loving God, hear our prayers as we enter into your paschal mystery in a special way this week, allowing us to grow closer to you through all we do. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Facilitator: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen