

GOSPEL

Luke 23:1-49

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

The elders of the people and the chief priests and scribes rose, and they brought Jesus before Pilate.

They began their accusation by saying, 'We found this man inciting our people to revolt, opposing payment of tribute to Caesar, and claiming to be Christ, a king.' Pilate put to him this question, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'It is you who say it' he replied. Pilate then said to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no case against this man.' But they persisted, 'He is inflaming the people with his teaching all over Judaea; it has come all the way from Galilee, where he started, down to here.' When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man were a Galilean; and finding that he came under Herod's jurisdiction he passed him over to Herod who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

Herod was delighted to see Jesus; he had heard about him and had been wanting for a long time to set eyes on him; moreover, he was hoping to see some miracle worked by him. So he questioned him at some length; but without getting any reply. Meanwhile the chief priests and the scribes were there, violently pressing their accusations. Then Herod, together with his guards, treated him with contempt and made fun of him; he put a rich cloak on him and sent him back to Pilate. And though Herod and Pilate had been enemies before, they were reconciled that same day.

Pilate then summoned the chief priests and the leading men and the people. 'You brought this man before me' he said 'as a political agitator. Now I have gone into the matter myself in your presence and found no case against the man in respect of all the charges you bring against him. Nor has Herod either, since he has sent him back to us. As you can see, the man has done nothing that deserves death, so I shall have him flogged and then let him go.' But as one man they howled, 'Away with him! Give us Barabbas!' (This man had been thrown into prison for causing a riot in the city and for murder.)

Pilate was anxious to set Jesus free and addressed them again, but they shouted back, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' And for the third time he spoke to them, 'Why? What harm has this man done? I have found no case against him that deserves death, so I shall have him punished and then let him go.' But they kept on shouting at the top of their voices, demanding that he should be crucified. And their shouts were growing louder.

Pilate then gave his verdict: their demand was to be granted. He released the man they asked for, who had been imprisoned for rioting and murder, and handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they pleased.

As they were leading him away they seized on a man, Simon from Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus. Large numbers of people followed him, and of women too, who mourned and lamented for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children. For the days will surely come when people will say, "Happy are those who are barren, the wombs that have never borne, the breasts that have never suckled!" Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!"; to the hills, "Cover us!" For if men use the green wood like this, what will happen when it is dry?' Now with him they were also leading out two other criminals to be executed.

When they reached the place called The Skull, they crucified him there and the two criminals also, one on the right, the other on the left. Jesus said, 'Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.' Then they cast lots to share out his clothing.

The people stayed there watching him. As for the leaders, they jeered at him. 'He saved others,' they said 'let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.' The soldiers mocked him too and when they approached to offer him vinegar they said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.' Above him there was an inscription 'This is the King of the Jews.'

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One of the criminals hanging there abused him. 'Are you not the Christ?' he said. 'Save yourself and us as well.' But the other spoke up and rebuked him. 'Have you no fear of God at all?' he said. 'You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it; we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus,' he said 'remember me when you come into your kingdom.' 'Indeed, I promise you,' he replied 'today you will be with me in paradise.'

It was now about the sixth hour and, with the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. The veil of the Temple was torn right down the middle; and when Jesus had cried out in a loud voice, he said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' With these words he breathed his last.

All kneel and pause a moment.

When the centurion saw what had taken place, he gave praise to God and said, 'This was a great and good man.' And when all the people who had gathered for the spectacle saw what had happened, they went home beating their breasts.

All his friends stood at a distance; so also did the women who had accompanied him from Galilee, and they saw all this happen.

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

14 April 2019 (Excerpt)

Joyful acclamations at Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, followed by his humiliation. Festive cries followed by brutal torture. This twofold mystery accompanies our entrance into Holy Week each year, as reflected in the two characteristic moments of today's celebration: the initial procession with palm branches and the solemn reading of the Passion.

Let us enter into this movement, guided by the Holy Spirit, and thus obtain the grace we sought in our opening prayer: to follow in faith our Saviour's example of humility, to heed his lesson of patient suffering, and thus to merit a share in his victory over the spirit of evil.

Jesus shows us how to face moments of difficulty and the most insidious of temptations by preserving in our hearts a peace that is neither detachment nor superhuman impassivity, but confident abandonment to the Father and to his saving will, which bestows life and mercy. He shows us this kind of abandonment by spurning, at every point in his earthly ministry, the temptation to do things his way and not in complete obedience to the Father. From the experience of his

forty days in the desert to the culmination of his Passion, Jesus rejects this temptation by his obedient trust in the Father.

Today, too, by his entrance into Jerusalem, he shows us the way. For in that event, the evil one, the prince of this world, had a card up his sleeve: the card of triumphalism. Yet the Lord responded by holding fast to his own way, the way of humility.

Triumphalism tries to make it to the goal by shortcuts and false compromises. It wants to jump onto the carriage of the winner. It lives off gestures and words that are not forged in the crucible of the cross; it grows by looking askance at others and constantly judging them inferior, wanting, failures... One subtle form of triumphalism is spiritual worldliness, which represents the greatest danger, the most treacherous temptation threatening the Church (De Lubac). Jesus destroyed triumphalism by his Passion.

The Lord truly rejoiced with the people, with those young people who shouted out his name and acclaimed him as King and Messiah. His heart was gladdened to see the enthusiasm and excitement of the poor of Israel. So much so, that, to those Pharisees who asked him to rebuke his disciples for their scandalous acclamations, he replied: "If these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Lk 19:40). Humility does not mean denying reality: Jesus really is the Messiah, the King.

Yet at the same time the heart of Jesus was moving on another track, on the sacred path known to him and the Father alone: the path that leads from "the form of God" to "the form of a servant", the path of self-abasement born of obedience "unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-8). He knows that true triumph involves making room for God and that the only way to do that is by stripping oneself, by self-emptying. To remain silent, to pray, to accept humiliation. There is no negotiating with the cross: one either embraces it or rejects it. By his self-abasement, Jesus wanted to open up to us the path of faith and to precede us on that path.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What is the difference between detachment, superhuman impassivity (not showing emotion), and "confident abandonment to the Father"?



Heart: How often do you "make room for God" in your life? What does it look like to you to "self-empty"?



Hands: What are some practical ways we can avoid "triumphalism" and embrace "the way of humility"?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be.'