

Guide to *Lectio Divina*

Choose a word or phrase of the Scriptures you wish to pray. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as you have no set goal of “covering” a certain amount of text. The amount of text covered is in God’s hands, not yours.

Read. Turn to the text and read it slowly, gently. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the “still, small voice” of a word or phrase that somehow says, “I am for you today.” Do not expect lightning or ecstasies. In *lectio divina*, God is teaching us to listen, to seek him in silence. God does not reach out and grab us but gently invites us ever more deeply into his presence.

Ponder. Take the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Do not be afraid of distractions. Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself that, when they rise up during *lectio divina*, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.

Pray. Whether you use words, ideas, or images — or all three — is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Give to God what you have discovered during your experience of meditation. Give to God what you have found within your heart.

It is not necessary to assess the quality of your *lectio divina*, as if you were “performing” or seeking some goal. *Lectio divina* has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures.

Fr. Luke Dysinger

Lectio Devina

Sunday, April 10, 2022

Palm Sunday

Opening Prayer

Holy Spirit,

poured out on the world by the divine Dying, guide us to contemplate and understand the way of the cross of our Savior and the love with which He walked this way. Grant us eyes and hearts of true believers, so that we may perceive the glorious mystery of the cross.

«Thanks to the cross we no longer wander through the desert, because we know the true path; we no longer live outside the house of God, our King, because we have found the entrance to it; we no longer fear the fiery spears of the devil, because we have found a spring of water.

Through him we are no longer alone, because we have found the spouse again; we do not fear the world, because now we have found the Good Shepherd. Thanks to the cross the injustice of the powerful does not frighten us, because we sit at table with the King» (*cfr John Chrisostome*).

Gospel Reading – Luke 22: 14-23: 56

A Key to the Reading:

The liturgical context: the ancient tradition of proclaiming the Gospel of the passion and death of Jesus Christ during the celebration of the Sunday before Easter, goes back to the time when the celebrations of Holy Week were reduced to a minimum. The aim of the reading is to lead the hearers to contemplate the mystery of the death that prepares for the resurrection of the Lord and that, therefore, is the condition by which the believer enters into the “new life” in Christ. The custom of reading this long Gospel passage in parts, not only helps to make the reading less monotonous so as to facilitate an attentive listening, but also in order to involve emotionally the participation of the listeners, almost making them feel present and taking part in the narrative.

The two readings before the Gospel of this Sunday help us with an interpretation that gives a certain perspective to the text: the Servant of JHWH is Jesus, the Christ, a divine Person who, through his ignominious death, comes into the glory of God the Father and communicates his own life to those who listen to him and welcome him.

The Gospel context: it is well known that the literary nucleus around which the Gospels were written was the Pasch of the Lord: his passion, death and resurrection. We have here, therefore, a text that is ancient and homogeneous in its literary composition, even though it was written through a gradual process. However, its importance is paramount: in it we are told the fundamental event of the Christian faith, that which every believer must face and conform to (even though the text of the liturgy of this Sunday ends with the burial of Jesus).

As usual, Luke comes through as an efficient and delicate narrator who pays attention

to details and is capable of letting the reader glimpse something of the feelings and inner motivations of the main characters, above all of Jesus. The terrible and unjust suffering Jesus undergoes is filtered through his unalterable attitude of mercy towards all, even his persecutors and murderers. Some of these are touched by the way he faces suffering and death, so much so that they show signs of faith in him: the torment of the passion is rendered soft by the power of the divine love of Jesus.

In the context of the third Gospel, Jesus goes to the Holy City only once: that decisive moment for the human history of the Christ and for the history of salvation. The whole of Luke's Gospel is like a long preparation for the events of the last days that Jesus passes in Jerusalem, preaching and acting at times even grandiosely (esp. the driving of the merchants from the Temple 19: 45-48), at other times mysteriously or in a provoking manner (esp. the reply concerning the tribute to Caesar, 20: 19-26). It is not by chance that the Evangelist puts together in these last days many events and words that the other Synoptic Gospels place elsewhere in the public life of Jesus. All this takes place while the plot of the chiefs of the nation thickens and becomes ever more concrete, until Judas offers them a perfect and unexpected chance (22: 2-6).

In this last and definitive stage of the life of the Lord, the third Evangelist uses various terms such as a "passing" or an "exodus" (9: 31), a "taking up" (9: 51) and an "attaining of the end" (13: 32). Thus, Luke leads us to understand, before the fact, how to interpret the terrible and scandalous death of the Christ to whom they had entrusted their life: He accomplishes a painful and difficult stage to understand, but one "necessary" in the economy of salvation (9: 22; 13: 33; 17: 35; 22: 37) in order to bring to success ("fulfilment") his journey towards glory (cfr 24: 26; 17: 25). This journey of Jesus is the paradigm of the journey to be achieved by each of his disciples (Acts 14: 22).

A Division of the Text to Help in Its Reading:

- The story of the last supper: from 22: 7 to 22: 38;
- The prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemani: from 22: 39 to 22: 46;
- The arresting and the Jewish process: from 22: 47 to 22: 71
- The civil process before Pilate and Herod: from 23: 1 to 23: 25
- The sentence, crucifixion, and death: from 23: 26 to 23: 49
- Events after the death: from 23: 50 to 23: 56.

The Text:

- **The Story of the Last Supper**

14 And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. 15 And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 20 And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. 21 But behold the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. 22 For the Son of man goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" 23 And they began to question one another, which of them it was that would do this.

24 A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. 25 And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26 But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. 27 For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves.

28 "You are those who have continued with me in my trials; 29 and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, 30 that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." 33 And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." 34 He said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me."

35 And he said to them, "When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing." 36 He said to them, "But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. 37 For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfilment." 38 And they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords." And he said to them, "It is enough."

- **The Prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemani**

39 And he came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. 40 And when he came to the place he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." 45 And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, 46 and he said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

- **The Arresting and the Jewish Process**

47 While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him; 48 but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" 49 And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" 50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? 53 When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

54 Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. Peter followed at a distance; 55 and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. 56 Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said, "This man also was with him." 57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." 58 And a little later some one else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." 59 And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know

what you are saying." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. 61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly. 63 Now the men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him; 64 they also blindfolded him and asked him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" 65 And they spoke many other words against him, reviling him

66 When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away to their council, and they said, 67 "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; 68 and if I ask you, you will not answer. 69 But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." 70 And they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." 71 And they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

- **The Civil Process before Pilate and Herod**

1 Then the whole company of them arose, and brought him before Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king." 3 And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." 4 And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no crime in this man." 5 But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."

6 When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. 7 And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. 8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. 9 So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer. 10 The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. 11 And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then, arraying him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate. 12 And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

13 Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; 15 neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; 16 I will therefore chastise him and release him."

18 But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas" - 19 a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city, and for murder. 20 Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; 21 but they shouted out, "Crucify, crucify him!" 22 A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him." 23 But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. 24 So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.

- **The Sentence, Crucifixion and Death**

26 And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. 27 And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. 28 But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' 31 For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33 And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. 34 And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. 35 And the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar, 37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. 47 Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, "Certainly this man was innocent!" 48 And all the multitudes who assembled to see the sight, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. 49 And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance and saw these things.

- **Events after the Death**

50 Now there was a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, 51 who had not consented to their purpose and deed, and he was looking for the kingdom of God. 52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever yet been laid. 54 It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. 55 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid; 56 then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may enter into our hearts and shed light on our lives.

A Few Questions

to help us in our meditation and prayer.

- At the end of this long reading, what feeling prevails in me: is it relief for having come to the end, admiration for Jesus, pain for his pain, joy for the salvation achieved, or something else?
- I re-read the text and pay special attention to the way the many “powerful” acted: the priests, the Scribes and Pharisees, Pilate, Herod. What do I think of them? How would I have thought, acted, spoken, and decided in their place?
- I read the passion once more and, this time, pay attention to the action of the “little ones”: the disciples, the people, individuals, the women, the soldiers and others. What do I think of them? How would I have acted, thought and spoken in their place?
- Finally, I look at my way of acting in my daily life. With which of the main or lesser characters can I identify myself? With which character would I like to identify myself?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the theme.

A Commentary on the Text with Special Emphasis on Some Key Points:

- **22: 14:** *When the hour came he took his place at table, and the apostles with him:* Although Luke is writing for a Christian community mostly of pagan origin, yet he stresses that the last supper of Jesus is part of the Jewish rite of pesah. Just before the supper he describes the preparations (vv. 7-13).
- **22: 15:** *I have longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer:* this recalls the words in 12: 50: “There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over! (cfr also Jn 12: 32). Luke gives us a ray of light on the interior dimension of Jesus as he prepares to suffer and die: what urges him is, as always for him, the radical choice of conforming to the will of the Father (cfr 2: 49), but in these words we glimpse a very human desire for fraternity, for sharing and for friendship.
- **22: 17:** *Then, taking a cup, he gave thanks:* we have not yet come to the eucharistic chalice strictly speaking, but only to the first of four cups of wine that are drunk at a paschal meal.
- **22: 18:** *From now on, I tell you, I shall not drink wine until the kingdom of God comes:* this is the second explicit reference to his nearing death. It is a repetition of the proclamations concerning the passion (9: 22, 44; 12: 50; 18: 31-32) and, like those, it refers implicitly to the resurrection. However, the proclamation, even in all the seriousness of the moment, contains intimations of hope and of the eschatological expectation, together with the certainty that the Father will not abandon him to death. Jesus is aware of what he has to face, but is quite serene, interiorly free, certain of his final destiny and of the final results of what he is about to experience.

- **22: 19-20:** the story of the Eucharistic institution is quite similar to the one mentioned in Paul (1Cor 11: 23-25) and has a pronounced sacrificial character: Jesus offers himself, not things, as an oblation for those who believe in him.
- **22: 21:** *Here with me on the table is the hand of the man who betrays me:* eating with him, Jesus allows even Judas to enter into communion with him, and yet he knows well that this disciple is about to betray him definitively. The contrast is strident and made so on purpose by the Evangelist, as is true also elsewhere in this passage.
- **22: 28:** *You are the men who have stood by me faithfully in my trials:* unlike Judas, the other disciples have "stood by Jesus in his trials," because they have stayed with him at least up to the present moment. The Lord, then, acknowledges that they have reached a high level of communion with him so that they deserve special honor in the glory of the Father (v. 29).

It is Jesus himself, then, who creates a close parallel between the constant communion of his disciples (those of then and those of today) with his suffering and the final and eternal sharing in his glory ("eat and drink," v. 30).

- **22: 31-37:** Simon, Simon! Satan, you must know, has got his wish to sift you all like wheat; but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail: this passage seems to come from another context. Jesus' reference to Satan and his actions against the disciples recalls what the Evangelist had said concerning the cause of the betrayal of Judas (22: 3) and is almost parallel with Luke's view of the passion as the final assault of Satan against Jesus (cfr 4: 13; 22: 53).

Peter is protected from the snares of the tempter by the prayers of Jesus himself and because he chose firmly to be a disciple of the Lord, also because he has a special mission towards his brothers and sisters in the faith (v. 32b). Jesus hastens to warn him: for him, as for the other disciples too, the terrible passion of Jesus will cost them a hard fight against Satan and many ambushes that, in various forms, will assail the disciples who will be close to Jesus during the various stages of the passion (vv. 35-36) on account of the terrible trial that he will have to endure (v. 37); these last words explicitly refer to the text in Isaiah concerning the "suffering Servant" (Is 53: 12), with whom Jesus is clearly identified.

- **22: 33-34:** Lord... I would be ready to go to prison with you, and to death... I tell you, Peter, by the time the cock crows today you will have denied three times that you know me: Peter is a generous man, also a little impatient, as we see from his words, which seem to force Jesus to tell him about the denials. As in verses 24-27 the chiefs of the Christian community were faced with their responsibility as "servants" of the faith of the brothers and sisters entrusted to them, so now they are reminded of their duty is to be prudent and vigilant towards themselves and towards their weakness.
- **22: 39-46:** the story of the moral-spiritual agony in the garden of Gethsemani follows closely the text of Mark (14: 32-42), except for some details, especially those referring to the consoling appearance of the angel (v. 43).

As the most difficult and insidious moment of his life approaches, Jesus intensifies his prayer. As Luke says, Gethsemani was the "usual" (v. 37) place where Jesus often spent nights in (21: 37).

- **22: 47-53:** The real passion begins with the seizure of Jesus. This passage presents the following events as "the reign of darkness" (v. 53) and shows Jesus as he who overcomes and will overcome violence by patience and the ability to love even his persecutors (v. 51); that is why the sad but loving words he addresses to Judas stand out: "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? (v. 48).

- **22: 54-71:** The Jewish process does not evolve that night. Nothing is said of Jesus as prisoner until morning. This lack of news concerning Jesus immediately after his arrest and until the beginning of the case is typical of Luke.
- **22: 60-62:** “My friend,” said Peter, “I do not know what you are talking about”... the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter and Peter remembered what the Lord had said... And he went outside and wept bitterly: the two looks meeting each other, who knows how they happened in the confusion of that interminable night, mark the moment when Peter becomes aware: notwithstanding his gallant declarations of fidelity, he realizes what Jesus had told him a little earlier. In that look, Peter experiences first-hand the mercy of the Lord of which he had heard Jesus talking: it does not hide the reality of sin, but heals it and brings men and women back to a full awareness of their own condition and of the personal love of God for them.
- **22: 70-71:** So you are the Son of God then? ... It is you who say I am... What need of witness have we now? We have heard it for ourselves from his own lips: the Jewish process begins officially at first dawn of that day (v. 66) and concentrates on seeking proofs (some true, in Luke, but cfr Mk 14: 55-59) to sentence Jesus to death. According to Luke, then, the chiefs of the Jews did not bring forth false witnesses, but – even in their savage aversion towards Jesus – they behaved towards him in a somewhat correct juridical manner.

In replying positively to the question “You are the Son of God then?” Jesus shows that he is fully aware of his divine dignity. Through this awareness, his suffering, death and resurrection are eloquent witness of the benign will of the Father towards humanity. Thus, however, he “signs” his own sentence of death: it is a blasphemy that profanes the Name and the very being of JHWH since he declares himself explicitly to be “son.”

23:3-5: *Are you the king of the Jews? ... It is you who say it... He is inflaming the people with his teaching:* we are passing from a Jewish juridical process to a Roman one: the Jewish chiefs hand over the condemned person to the governor so that he may carry out their sentence and, to give him an acceptable reason, they “domesticate” the movements of their sentence, presenting them in a political light. Thus, Jesus is presented as subverting the people and usurping the royal title of Israel (which by then was but a memory and a purely honorific title).

The means used by Jesus to carry out his crime, as chance would have it, is his preaching: the words of peace and mercy that he spread freely are now used against him!

Jesus confirms the accusation, but it is certain that he is not accused of seeking royal status, only one of the reflections of his divine nature. This, however, neither Pilate nor the others are able to understand.

- **23:6-12:** He passed him over to Herod: Perhaps Pilate intuited that they were trying to play a “dirty trick” on him, so he probably tries to distance himself from the prisoner by invoking respect for jurisdiction: Jesus comes from a district, which at that historical time, did not come under Roman responsibility but that of Herod Antipas.

The latter is presented in the Gospels as someone quite ambiguous: he admires and at the same time is averse to John the Baptist, because the prophet had taken him to task over his matrimonial position, which was irregular and almost incestuous, and finally has him arrested and then put to death so as not to cut a poor figure before his guests (3: 19-20; Mk 6: 17-29). Then he tries to get to know Jesus just out of curiosity, because he had heard of his fame as a worker of miracles, and he concocts a case against him (v. 10), He questions Jesus personally, but then – before the obstinate

silence of Jesus (v. 9) – leaves him to the mockery of the soldiers, as had happened at the end of the religious process (22: 63-65) and as will happen when Jesus is crucified (vv. 35-38). He ends up sending Jesus back to Pilate.

Luke concludes this episode with an interesting footnote: Pilate's gesture begins a new friendship between him and Herod. The circumstances speak clearly as to the purity of the motivation of this friendship.

- **23: 13-25:** You brought this man before me... as a political agitator; ...I have found no case against the man in respect of the charges you bring against him: as he suspected from the first meeting with Jesus (v. 4) and as he will repeat later (v. 22), Pilate pronounces him innocent. He tries to convince the chiefs of the people to let Jesus go, but they have already decided that he should die (vv. 18, 21, 23) and insist on a sentence of death.

What is the substance of the interrogation of the governor? Not much, according to the few phrases that Luke reports (v. 3). And yet, Jesus replied positively to Pilate, declaring himself "king of the Jews"! At this point, it is clear that Pilate does not consider Jesus a dangerous man on the political level, nor for public order, perhaps because the tone of Jesus' declaration left no doubt on these scores.

The intention of the Evangelist is quite clear in that he seeks to attenuate the responsibility of the Roman governor. The latter, however, is known from historical sources as a "man of inflexible nature and, on top of his arrogance, hard, capable only of extortion, violence, robbery, brutality, torture, executions without trial and fearful and unlimited cruelty" (Philo of Alexandria) and that "he liked to provoke the nations entrusted to him, sometimes by being rude and at other times by hard repression (Josephus Flavius).

- **23:16.22:** *I shall have him punished and then let him go...*: the fact that Jesus was held to be innocent would not have spared him a hard "punishment," inflicted solely so as not to let down the expectations of the chiefs of the Jews.
- **23:16.18.25:** Away with him! Give us Barabbas! 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: in the end, Pilate gives in completely to the insistent demands of the chiefs of the people, even though he does not pronounce any formal sentence on Jesus.

Barabbas, a real delinquent and political agitator, thus becomes the first person saved (at least at that moment) by the sacrifice of Jesus.

- **23:26-27:** 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: Simon and the women were not only privileged witnesses of the passion, but, in Luke, they are models of discipleship, people who show in action to the reader how to follow the Lord. Besides, thanks to them and to the crowd Jesus is not alone as he approaches death, but is surrounded by men and women who are deeply and emotionally close to him, even though they need conversion, a matter that he recalls to them in spite of his terrible condition (vv. 28-31).

Simon of Cyrene is "seized," but Luke does not say that he was reluctant to help the Lord (cfr Mk 15: 20-21).

The "large numbers of people" is also quite involved in what is happening to Jesus. This is in strident contrast with the crowd that, a little earlier, was demanding the sentence of death from Pilate.

- **23: 34:** *Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing:* Luke brings out the main concern of the crucified Lord who, in spite of being in atrocious physical pain from the process of crucifixion, prays for them to the Father: he is not concerned with his own condition nor with the historical causes that produced it, but only with the salvation of all humankind. Stephen the martyr will act like Him (Acts 7: 60), to show the paradigmatic character of the life and death of Jesus for the existence of every Christian.

To emphasize this strong orientation of Jesus, Luke omits the anguished cry reported by the other Synoptic Gospels: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

- **23: 33, 39-43:** They crucified him there and the two criminals... Jesus... remember me when you come into your kingdom... Indeed, I promise you... today you will be with me in paradise: the episode of the dialogue with one of his condemned companions is emblematic of the way Luke understands the death of Jesus: an act of self-giving made for love and in love to bring salvation to the greatest number of people in whatever condition or situation they may find themselves.

"Today" (v. 43): the thief had spoken in the future, but Jesus replies using a verb in the present: the salvation He gives is immediate, the "final days" begin with this saving event.

"You will be with me" (v. 43): this expression indicates the full communion in force between God and those he welcomes to himself in eternity (cfr 1 Thes 4: 17). According to some apocryphal writings of the late Judaic period, the Messiah himself had "to open the gates of paradise."

- **23: 44-46:** It was now about the sixth hour... Jesus cried out in a loud voice, he said, Father into your hands I commit my spirit. With these words he breathed his last: Jesus' last words, by their good nature, seem to contrast with the preceding declaration that he cried aloud.

Having come to the end of his human life, Jesus, makes a supreme act of trust in the Father, for whose will He had suffered so much. In these words we can glimpse a hint at the resurrection: the Father will hand him back this life that Jesus now entrusts to him (cfr Ps 16: 10; Acts 2: 27; 13: 35).

Luke writes very concisely of the last moments of Jesus: he is not interested in dwelling on details that would offer satisfaction to some macabre curiosity, like the one that drew and still draws so many spectators at a capital sentence in many squares of the world.

- **23: 47-48:** When the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God: "This was a great and good man." So too the crowds went home beating their breasts: the saving efficacy of the sacrifice of Jesus acts almost immediately simply on the evidence of what had happened: pagans (such as the centurion who commanded the platoon in charge of the execution) the Jews (the people) begin to change. The centurion "glorifies God" and seems to be just a step from becoming a Christian believer. The Jewish people, perhaps without being aware, go back using gestures of repentance as Jesus had asked of the women of Jerusalem (v. 38).
- **23: 49:** *All those who knew him watched from afar.* at a prudent distance, knowing the Roman attitude that forbade excessive gestures of mourning for those condemned to be crucified (on pain of being crucified themselves), the group of disciples is present dumbfounded by the whole scene. Luke gives no hint as to their emotions or attitudes: perhaps the pain and violence dazed them to the point of making them incapable of any outward reaction.

Similarly, the women disciples do not take part in any way in the work done by Joseph of Arimathea for the burial of Jesus: they just watch (v. 55).

- **23: 53:** Joseph took him down from the cross, wrapped him in a sheet and placed him in a tomb dug in the rock: Jesus has really undergone torture. He is really dead, like so many others before and after him, on the cross, in a common body of flesh. This event, without which there would be no salvation or eternal life for anyone, is verified by the fact that it is necessary to bury him. This is so true that Luke expands on some details concerning the speed with which the rite of burial was carried out by Joseph (vv. 52-54).
- **23: 56:** On the Sabbath they observed the day of rest, according to the commandment: as the Creator rested on the seventh day of creation, thus consecrating the Sabbath (Gn 2: 2-3), so now the Lord observes the Sabbath in the tomb.

None of his people, now, seem to be able to hope for anything: Jesus' words concerning the resurrection seem to have been forgotten. The women limit themselves to preparing some oilsto make the burial of the Master a little more dignified.

The Gospel of this "Passion Sunday" concludes here, leaving out the story of the discovery of the empty tomb (24: 1-12) and allowing us to savor the bitter sweet sacrifice of the lamb of God, we are left in a sad and suspended state where we remain immersed, even though we know the final result of the Gospel story. This terrible death of the young Rabbi of Nazareth does not lose its significance in his resurrection, but acquires an entirely new and unexpected value, which does not take away anything from the dimension of having been killed in sacrifice freely accepted because of the "excessively" high respect for our human powers of understanding: it is pure mystery.

Isaiah 50: 4-10

"The Lord God Helps Me"

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he awakens, he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

For the Lord God helps me;

therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary?

Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant, who walks in darkness and has no light,

yet trusts in the name of the Lord and relies upon his God?

Closing Prayer

of the Eucharistic prayer for this Sunday

Almighty and eternal God, you have given the human race Jesus Christ our Savior as a model of humility. He fulfilled your will by becoming man and giving his life on the cross. Help us to bear witness to you by following his example of suffering and make us worthy to share in his resurrection.



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

10 APR 2022 - PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Revealing companions

Today the church follows Luke's narrative of the Passion, where participants are revealed by the company they keep—or avoid. Most of Jesus' followers flee his side, fearing to share their teacher's fate. Meanwhile, the Roman governor Pilate makes a strange alliance with local puppet-king Herod, a man he despises. Both agree on one thing: Holding onto power is their highest priority. Then Simon, a Jew from the African dispersion, finds himself forced to carry Jesus' cross: something the disciples were terrified of doing. Tradition holds this Cyrenian and his family later joined the early church. Whose company are we keeping?

Today's readings:

Procession: Luke 19:28-40 (37); *Mass:* Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Luke 22:14—23:56 (38).

“As they led him away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian . . . laying the cross on him.”

11 APR 2022 - MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK

What's your pet project?

Everyone knows Saint Francis of Assisi loved animals—but so did many other saints. Saint Basil the Great urged Christians to see animals as our brothers. Saint Cuthbert made friends with birds. Saint Giles was a vegetarian. And Saint Gertrude of Nivelles, the patron saint of cats, is known for feeding and loving the strays around her monastery. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “God surrounds animals with His providential care” and Catholic moral theology and ecology have always insisted that it is an act of cruelty to abuse an animal. Today is National Pet Day, a chance to thank God for all creatures—as well as advocate for their welfare.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 42:1-7; John 12:1-11 (257).

“You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

12 APR 2022 - TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

Reoiled and ready to serve

During this Holy Week your diocese will celebrate its annual Chrism Mass. Diocesan priests join their bishop as he mixes and blesses a year's supply of sacred oils to be used across the diocese for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (Oil of Catechumens), the Anointing of the Sick (Oil of the Infirm), and the sanctification of those who receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders (Holy Chrism). We are anointed for a noble purpose and receive a healing balm. Give glory to God who seals us with inherent dignity and makes us whole.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 49:1-6; John 13:21-33, 36-38 (258).

“Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.”

13 APR 2022 - WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

Cinema that inspires

On this day in 1964, Sidney Poitier became the first African American to win the Academy Award for Best Actor for his performance in *Lilies of the Field*. The moment was also notable in that Poitier was an immigrant from the Bahamas and a black Catholic—bringing two marginalized groups together in one historic personage. His role was also unique, that of a handyman who helps a group of nuns—immigrants themselves—with their aging farm property. With its vision of interracial harmony and positive portrait of the church, the film attained legendary status. May we all aspire to live out the call of unity.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Matthew 26:14-25 (259).

"I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame."

14APR2022 - HOLY THURSDAY; EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Lean into the Real Presence

Do we ever plumb the depths of what the Eucharist means in our lives? Christ present. Blood poured out for the world. Unifying meal. The many ways to understand what Jesus gave to us on Holy Thursday may take more than a lifetime to truly grasp. Some of the deepest truths of faith are those that we cannot completely unlock intellectually. Perhaps today is a moment to let go and just relax into Jesus as we receive him at Mass. "He is present for your happiness," Saint Francis de Sales tells us. "Welcome Him as warmly as possible, and behave outwardly in such a way that your actions may give proof to all of His Presence."

Today's readings:

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15 (39).

"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

15APR2022 - FRIDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION (GOOD FRIDAY); DAY OF ABSTINENCE

You were there for the long haul

Good Friday, called "Long Friday" in some cultures, marks the close of the long fast of Lent. The word *Lent*, itself, derives from Old Germanic words for long, or lengthening, days, likely referring to spring. Regardless of what we call this day or the season that brought us here, it has indeed been a long fast. Have you spent these 40 days the way you had intended? Or did you perhaps pass the cup of self-sacrifice early on? Not to worry. In the end, it is more about quality than quantity. As Doctor of the Church Saint John Chrysostom says, "No matter how much time you spend fasting, no matter how much you sleep on a hard floor and eat ashes and sigh continually, if you do no good to others, you do nothing great."

Today's readings:

Isaiah 52:13—53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1—19:42 (40).

"See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted."

16APR2022 - HOLY SATURDAY; EASTER VIGIL

Experience the real absence

Today the church is silent, the altar is bare, the tabernacle is empty. Holy Saturday is observed without ceremony of any kind. The Easter Vigil does not start until the sun goes down. Before the kindling of the Easter fire, Holy Saturday remains a blank spot in the church's calendar signifying the real death of Jesus. Perhaps it is a good time to visit your church and experience our lifeless Lord. If you get there before the hubbub of Easter preparation begins, you can keep vigil in the quietude of a church reflecting on its beloved Christ, crucified.

Today's readings:

Vigil: Genesis 1:1—2:2; Genesis 22:1-18; Exodus 14:15—15:1; Exodus 15:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 17-18; Isaiah 54:5-14; Isaiah 55:1-11; Baruch 3:9-15, 32—4:4; Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28; Romans 6:3-11; Mark 16:1-7 (41).

"Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"