**Readings for April 2, 2023 – Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion**

‘He emptied himself’

*As we prepare for Holy Week, the readings help us enter into the experience of Jesus during these days. It is the suffering Messiah we meet in this drama. Although the suffering we experience doesn’t usually come close to this, it is in suffering that we can meet on common ground. The end of Jesus’ life shows us how to face our own suffering.*

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**Opening Prayer:** Heavenly Father, you sent us your Son, Jesus, who suffered greatly so that we would never be alone. Help us in our own suffering to be one with him, to always lean on his strength, and believe with hopeful hearts. Be with us this week,Lord Jesus, as we strive to grow closer to you and to fully understand all that gave us. Amen.

**At The Mass- Reading 1** [**IS 50:4-7**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/50:4)

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 he 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 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.

**Responsorial Psalm**[**PS 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/psalms/22:8)**.**

R. (2a) **My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**  
All who see me scoff at me;  
they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads:  
“He relied on the LORD; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, if he loves him.”  
R. **My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**  
Indeed, many dogs surround me, a pack of evildoers closes in upon me;  
They have pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones.  
R. **My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**  
They divide my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots.  
But you, O LORD, be not far from me; O my help, hasten to aid me.  
R. **My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**  
I will proclaim your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise you:  
“You who fear the LORD, praise him; all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him;  
revere him, all you descendants of Israel!”  
R. **My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**

**Reading 2** [**PHIL 2:6-11**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2philippians/2:6)

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.  
Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness;  
and found human in appearance, he humbled himself,  
becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.  
Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name  
which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,  
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that  
Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Gospel –**[**MT 26:14—27:66 OR 27:11-54**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/matthew/26:14)

One of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said,   
“What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver,  
and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples approached Jesus and said,  
“Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?” He said,  
“Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The teacher says, “My appointed time draws near;   
in your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples.”’”  
The disciples then did as Jesus had ordered, and prepared the Passover. When it was evening,  
he reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said,   
“Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” Deeply distressed at this,  
they began to say to him one after another, “Surely it is not I, Lord?” He said in reply,  
“He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me.  
The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed.  
It would be better for that man if he had never been born.” Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply,  
“Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” He answered, “You have said so.”  
While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said,  
“Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying,  
“Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many  
for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine   
until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father.” Then, after singing a hymn,  
they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, “This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written: *I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed;*  
but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee.” Peter said to him in reply,   
“Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be.” Jesus said to him,  
“Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”  
Peter said to him, “Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you.”  
And all the disciples spoke likewise. Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee,   
and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, “My soul is sorrowful even to death.  
Remain here and keep watch with me.” He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying,   
“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.”  
When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter,   
“So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test.  
The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Withdrawing a second time, he prayed again,   
“My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!”  
Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open.  
He left them and withdrew again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing again.  
Then he returned to his disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?  
Behold, the hour is at hand when the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners.  
Get up, let us go. Look, my betrayer is at hand.”  
While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a large crowd, with swords and clubs, who had come from the chief priests and the elders of the people.  
His betrayer had arranged a sign with them, saying, “The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him.”  
Immediately he went over to Jesus and said, “Hail, Rabbi!” and he kissed him.  
Jesus answered him, “Friend, do what you have come for.”  
Then stepping forward they laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.  
And behold, one of those who accompanied Jesus put his hand to his sword, drew it,   
and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him,  
“Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.  
Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment   
with more than twelve legions of angels? But then how would the Scriptures be fulfilled   
which say that it must come to pass in this way?” At that hour Jesus said to the crowds,   
“Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to seize me?  
Day after day I sat teaching in the temple area, yet you did not arrest me. But all this has come to pass   
that the writings of the prophets may be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.  
  
Those who had arrested Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest,  
where the scribes and the elders were assembled. Peter was following him at a distance   
as far as the high priest’s courtyard, and going inside he sat down with the servants to see the outcome.  
The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus   
in order to put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward.  
Finally two came forward who stated, “This man said, ‘I can destroy the temple of God   
and within three days rebuild it.’” The high priest rose and addressed him, “Have you no answer?  
What are these men testifying against you?” But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him,   
“I order you to tell us under oath before the living God whether you are the Christ, the Son of God.”  
Jesus said to him in reply, “You have said so. But I tell you: From now on you will see ‘the Son of Man  
seated at the right hand of the Power’ and ‘coming on the clouds of heaven.’”  
Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has blasphemed! What further need have we of witnesses?  
You have now heard the blasphemy; what is your opinion?” They said in reply, “He deserves to die!”  
Then they spat in his face and struck him, while some slapped him, saying,   
“Prophesy for us, Christ: who is it that struck you?” Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard.  
One of the maids came over to him and said, “You too were with Jesus the Galilean.”  
But he denied it in front of everyone, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about!”  
As he went out to the gate, another girl saw him and said to those who were there,   
“This man was with Jesus the Nazorean.” Again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man!”  
A little later the bystanders came over and said to Peter, “Surely you too are one of them;  
even your speech gives you away.” At that he began to curse and to swear, “I do not know the man.”  
And immediately a cock crowed. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had spoken:   
“Before the cock crows you will deny me three times.” He went out and began to weep bitterly.  
When it was morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. Then Judas, his betrayer, seeing that Jesus had been condemned, deeply regretted what he had done. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? Look to it yourself.” Flinging the money into the temple, he departed and went off and hanged himself. The chief priests gathered up the money, but said, “It is not lawful to deposit this in the temple treasury, for it is the price of blood.” After consultation, they used it to buy the potter’s field  
as a burial place for foreigners. That is why that field even today is called the Field of Blood.  
Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet, *And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of a man with a price on his head, a price set by some of the Israelites, and they paid it out for the potter’s field just as the Lord had commanded me.*  
Now Jesus stood before the governor, and he questioned him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”  
Jesus said, “You say so.” And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer.  
Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?”  
But he did not answer him one word, so that the governor was greatly amazed.  
Now on the occasion of the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the crowd   
one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.  
So when they had assembled, Pilate said to them, “Which one do you want me to release to you,   
Barabbas, or Jesus called Christ?” For he knew that it was out of envy that they had handed him over.  
While he was still seated on the bench, his wife sent him a message, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man. I suffered much in a dream today because of him.”  
The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas but to destroy Jesus.  
The governor said to them in reply, “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?”  
They answered, Barabbas!” Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus called Christ?”  
They all said, “Let him be crucified!” But he said, “Why? What evil has he done?”  
They only shouted the louder, “Let him be crucified!” When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all,   
but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd,  
saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. Look to it yourselves.” And the whole people said in reply,   
“His blood be upon us and upon our children.” Then he released Barabbas to them,   
but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified.  
Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around him.  
They stripped off his clothes and threw a scarlet military cloak about him.  
Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head, and a reed in his right hand.  
And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”  
They spat upon him and took the reed and kept striking him on the head. And when they had mocked him,  
they stripped him of the cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him off to crucify him.

As they were going out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon; this man they pressed into service  
to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha —which means Place of the Skull —  
they gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall. But when he had tasted it, he refused to drink.  
After they had crucified him, they divided his garments by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And they placed over his head the written charge against him: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left. Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God, and come down from the cross!” Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the king of Israel! Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” The revolutionaries who were crucified with him  
also kept abusing him in the same way. From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o’clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, *“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?”*  
which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Some of the bystanders who heard it said, “This one is calling for Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran to get a sponge; he soaked it in wine, and putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink. But the rest said, “Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to save him.” But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit. And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many. The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus  
feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said,  
“Truly, this was the Son of God!” There were many women there, looking on from a distance,   
who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him. Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen   
and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock.  
Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed.  
But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb.  
The next day, the one following the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees   
gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember that this impostor while still alive said,  
‘After three days I will be raised up.’ Give orders, then, that the grave be secured until the third day,  
lest his disciples come and steal him and say to the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead.’ This last imposture would be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “The guard is yours; go, secure it as best you can.”  
So they went and secured the tomb by fixing a seal to the stone and setting the guard.

Related Reflections

As we begin Holy Week, our focus is not only on what *happened* to Jesus but also, and more importantly, on what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *did* for our salvation.

The Passion draws our attention to Jesus’ willingness to empty himself out for others. In the First Reading today, the prophet Isaiah proclaims the confidence of God’s servant who, knowing how to speak the truth to the weary, does not falter even in the face of suffering. He trusts that “the Lord God is my help; therefore, I am not disgraced, [and] I shall not be put to shame.” Isaiah’s servant song helps us to understand the way Jesus did not resist his fate but accepted the certainty of his mission and relied on the strength he received from God. Jesus manifested the attitude of Isaiah’s suffering servant, and his passion fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy.

The Gospel account draws our attention to Jesus’ willingness to engage the way of the cross. Jesus does not resist his fate but accepts it as the inevitable result of aligning himself with a God who invites all who follow him to heed his Son's humility. Jesus shows us that adversity and difficulty do not deter a true disciple and that it is possible to accept the Father’s will and live the active, faith-filled lives that God desires of us.

By enduring his suffering and death and in his experience of the loneliness of suffering, Jesus shows us that he sustains and supports all those who suffer unjustly. Jesus did not give up. He continued to trust, turning to God for strength in the midst of suffering. His trust in God unshaken, even as he died, drew the attention of the Gentile centurion who affirmed that “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

God assured our Lord, and he assures us, that death does not have the last word for those who empty themselves out for the sake of others. Saint Paul knew that as he wrote to the Philippians a generation later and encouraged them to have the attitude of Christ. Though Christ was in the form of God, he emptied himself and freely took on the human form of a powerless slave, “becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Because he humbled himself, God exalted him in name and in glory.

Christ’s acceptance of his passion and crucifixion is a witness to the extent of God’s love for humanity, for all humanity for all time. Jesus’ suffering was harsh, but he took on the suffering for us in service to us, and he continues to serve us out of tremendous love for us. Like Christ, we are called to humble ourselves in service to one another.

As Holy Week unfolds, we want to reflect upon and pray about Jesus’ courageous commitment to God’s plan, on the trust he had in his heavenly Father, and on the love that he carried for all of us as he approached the cross.

***Rev. Stephen E. Salocks, Rector of Saint John's Seminary - https://www.sjs.edu/news/palmsunday2021***

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In a way the real key to Holy Week is given in today’s Second Reading, which seems to be a hymn, incorporated by Paul in his letter to the Christians at Philippi, in northern Greece. It expresses the “mind,” the which Paul urges us to have also if we want to identify fully with Jesus as disciples. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

The key word in the passage is “emptied.” This kenosis, or emptying, is at the heart of Jesus’ experience during his Passion. In spite of Jesus’ identity with the nature of God, he did not insist on his status. He first of all took on himself in the fullest sense our human nature – “like us in all things, but sin.” But, even more, he reached down to the lowest level, the lowest class – the servant, the slave.

That was still not the end. He let go of all human dignity, all human rights, let go of life itself to die, not any “respectable” form of death, but the death of a convicted criminal in shame and nakedness and total abandonment. To understand the sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus one must fully grasp what Paul is saying here and, not only grasp it, but totally appropriate it into one’s own thinking so that one would be prepared, with God’s help, to go exactly the same way. Our normal sensitivities even over trifling hurts just show us how far we have to go to have the “mind of Jesus.”

**So much to reflect on: T**here really is too much to be fully digested as we stand listening to the Passion. Through it all there is Jesus. His enemies humiliate him, strike him, scourge him. Soldiers make a crown with thorns, a crown for the “King of the Jews” (an element of contemptuous racism here?), Herod mocks him. Pilate, Roman-trained, makes a half-hearted attempt at justice but fear for his career prevails.

Jesus, for his part, does not strike back, he does not scold, he does not accuse or blame. He begs his Father to forgive those who “do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Jesus seems to be the victim although he is, in fact, the master. He is master of the situation because he is master of himself.

So, as we go through this day and this week, let us look very carefully at Jesus our Savior. We watch, not just to admire, but also to learn, to penetrate the mind, the thinking, the attitudes and the values of Jesus so that we, in the very different circumstances of our own lives, may walk in his footsteps. If we are to be his disciples, he invites us to walk his way, to share his sufferings, to imitate his attitudes, to “empty” ourselves, to live in service of others – in short, to love others as he loves us. This is not at all a call to a life of pain and misery. Quite the contrary, it is an invitation to a life of deep freedom, peace and happiness. If it were anything else, it would not be worth considering.

From the Irish Jesuits: <https://livingspace.sacredspace.ie/lc061/>

***One more thought on this:***

*“Do you think it’s some small matter to have a friend like this at your side? As we begin to grow in union with Christ, he begins to commune with the soul in so intimate a friendship that he not only gives it back its own will, but gives it his.” – St. Teresa of Avila*

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From the beginning, it was the cross that was the symbol of Christianity. It was never an empty tomb, a blossoming lily, a glorious sunrise, or any other possible symbol of new life. It was the cross. It was the symbol of a life cruelly taken, an ignominious death of a prophet, an abject rejection of a righteous man by his own people that became the common sign of Christians.

In Luke's account of the Last Supper, it is crucial to remember that the bread and wine that Jesus blessed became a body *broken* and blood *shed* for others. The cross on Golgotha was the culmination of a process of self-emptying that had already begun earlier in the life of Jesus. During his entire journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, Jesus is engaged in a sort of peripatetic seminar with his disciples, teaching them about the meaning of discipleship.

This continues right up through the Passion. At the Last Supper, he teaches the disciples about servanthood. Along the path to Golgotha, he stops to address the women who are mourning his fate; in his final words on the cross, he teaches us how to die in hope.

This story in all its versions can help us face all the other stories that come our way, all those other terrible narratives of loss, pain, and grief both personal and communal. And so, across the globe, we gather as a community of disciples to listen one more time to this story. May it give us courage, calm, conviction, and confidence in the one who sent Jesus. May it bring us closer to the Father who did not abandon Jesus and who will not abandon us.

* Excerpts from a reflection in the Boston College Alumni & Friends magazine -

*https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/offices/alumni/connect/spirituality/reflections/Lenten-reflections/2019/passion-sunday-reflection.html*

Discussion Questions

Look at the statement from the Boston College reflection (From the beginning it was the cross…) Talk a little about this idea. Why isn’t our symbol something more like a lily or an empty tomb? Why do you think Catholics emphasize the crucifix (a cross with the body of Jesus on it), rather than an empty cross as other Christian traditions do?

How does the end of Jesus’ life on earth show us how to face our own suffering? What does Jesus show us?

Is it easier for me to let go of my fears because I know that Christ conquered all things, even death?

It takes an earthquake to shake up the Centurion and others who witness the crucifixion. Do I often look for signs to shake up my faith? What will it take for me to make a similar proclamation, to recognize that Jesus is the Lord of my heart and the center of my life?

**Closing Prayer:**

*Jesus, may all that is you flow into me. May your body and blood be my food and drink. May your passion and death be my strength and life. Jesus, with you by my side, enough has been given. May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross. Let me not run from the love which you offer, but hold me safe from the forces of evil. On each of my dyings shed your light and your love. Keep calling to me until that day comes, when with your saints, I may praise you forever. Amen.*

***“Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.”***

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**Thoughts for the coming week:**

Jesus knows what it feels like to be abandoned, to be cast out by friends, to be left alone to pick up the pieces. We worship a God who knows our suffering beyond understanding.

What does this mean for me? How do I feel knowing we have a God who understands us in our moments of pain and abandonment because he has been there? What do I want to say to a God who was willing to “empty himself” completely with this kind of humility?

Suggestion: Sometime this week, find and pray with the hymn, “Abide with Me.” Share with God the places in your life where you feel alone, or abandoned by others, and welcome God into that space.

Remember that we are called to celebrate Lent with the Resurrection in mind. Spend a moment pondering that death is not the last word here. Remember that Jesus conquered sin and death and walks with us each day in our own paschal mystery (our dying and risings in life).

**Prayer:** To Christ who was abandoned by his friends:  
As I find myself in this place of fear, of feeling alone, with no one around me,  
Lord, I ask that you make yourself known to me.  
In this space, in this fear, make yourself known to me.  
Abide with me, abide with me, abide with me,  
Lord, who knows the pain of abandonment.  
Amen. <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/pausepray/youll-never-leave-me/>