

Passion (Palm) Sunday



I gave my back to those who struck me and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. (Isaiah 50: 6)

HOLY WEEK begins

PASSION (Palm) SUNDAY

*the core of our faith*¹

introduction

The first Holy Week events in Jerusalem, climax our own Lenten journey. Reflecting on the gospels of Holy Week helps us to deepen our commitment as disciples of Jesus. The supporting texts focus how outsiders must be called in to cope with the shattering of the old world. There are the examples of Abraham and Sarah, Noah, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, John the Baptist and the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus in the gospel of John. In each case, it is the outsider who turns out to be a person of faith. Although such people lack the proper credentials, the accounts of their actions form the basis for new life and hope for us, when our present world is dominated by a culture of death and hopelessness.

first reading: Isaiah 50 : 4 – 7²

[the Servant's humiliation and vindication]

The LORD GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.(4) The LORD GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward.(5) I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.(6) The LORD GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.(7)

The prophet's task is to interpret the people's experience of exile by planting the seed of an alternative way of looking at the reality of what has happened to them. He appeals to the power of a new WORD from GOD. Babylonian values and culture had deeply influenced the exiles. So much so, that they had forgotten the tradition of liberation of Abraham and Sarah, Noah and Moses. They may have thought that these old stories of GOD's life-giving grace ending exile, were irrelevant. They may have thought also, that The LORD had forgotten them.³ But according to the prophet it was they who had forgotten GOD (v.2a).

By the time of *Second Isaiah*, the exiles had been in Babylon for two generations. Their catastrophic place of exile had turned into a seductively attractive home place. The exiles had entered Babylonian public life with some economic success. Their roots were still important to them. There was a lingering nostalgia for Jerusalem. But this vague longing wasn't easily translated into the concrete act of returning to their true home. In the relative security of a well-ordered Babylon, the risky Judean alternative, held little appeal.

1 Cover Image: Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns – the 6th Station of the Cross at St. Mary's Church, Wellsford, written by the Studio of St. John the Baptist, Takapuna, Auckland, NZ.

2 The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

3 *Is.49:4*

The prophet insists on the relevance of their tradition. He reminds exiles that the LORD GOD is their true Source of Life. That's the judgement they regard as irrelevant and null by their current attitude as revealed in their reaction to the prophet's WORD. Isaiah's task is to build an alternative view of their reality. It's a vision outside the control of the managers of the Babylonian Empire. So the prophet appeals to *a new WORD from GOD* (vv.4-7). It is GOD who could counter the power of the Empire. The power of *the new WORD from GOD* is based on the memory of GOD's powerful and subversive WORD in the past – that dared to open up options and which practised criticism to render the Empire's power provisional. Isaiah is now the mouthpiece of that *new WORD*. The prophet is the agent of change that the Babylonian Empire hadn't reckoned on.

response: Psalm 22 : 7 – 8, 16 – 19, 22 – 23

[a plea for deliverance from suffering and hostility]

*All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me,
they shake their heads;(7)
"Commit your cause to the LORD;
let him deliver – let him rescue the one
in whom he delights!"(8) . . .
For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;(16)
I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;(17)
they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.(18)
But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!(19) . . .
I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:(22)
You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob,
glorify him; stand in awe of him,
all you offspring of Israel!(23)*

The psalmist yearns for change. GOD's WORD enables faithful servants to imagine their world organised differently. The memory of GOD's past actions is the reason for the speaker's confidence in the face of present troubles. The bitter experience of exile is endurable, in the light of GOD's original promise and the hope of future well-being. For those who yearn for change, but dare not hope, the outcome could be either destructive self-hatred, or destructive violence. The psalmist carries forward the tradition of trusting in GOD's power to gift new life and end exile. The speaker addresses GOD as the guarantor of social change and as the court of appeal against the present system. The LORD GOD is addressed

not only that GOD may change but that the social system on Earth, which isn't keeping it's promise of justice, may change also.

second reading: Philippians 2 : 6 – 11

[about imitating Christ's humility]

Who, though he was in the form of GOD, did not regard equality with GOD as something to be exploited,(6) but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,(7) he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.(8) Therefore GOD also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,(9) so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,(10) and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of GOD the Father.(11)

For Paul, Jesus' death and resurrection extend the tradition of life in the shape of death and power in the form of suffering, found in the poetry of Isaiah's *Servant Songs* and in the psalmist's laments. *The One (Jesus)* who was of the same stuff as the Supreme Being, became a servant; "*taking the form of a slave and humbler*". Thus, Paul announces that Jesus freely endured such an existence and was '*exalted*'. He speaks of '*the full one*' – the person with power and goods and land, being emptied, or sent to exile – only to be enthroned again as ruler over the land. The central insight and mystery of the good news of Jesus is – '*letting go is to have*' – and '*keeping is the way to lose*'. The Israelite and Christian Scriptures record the history of gift and grasp which concerns the community: '*Kings who grasp lose*' and '*Pilgrims who risk, are given*'.

Paul affirms what the whole of history is about the meek – those claiming no home and living with homelessness – do in fact inherit the land. That scandal announces the absurdity of all alternative ways of managing power and property. Jesus' death and resurrection shows the way it is with social reality in terms of GOD's reigning. For Paul, the '*human power*' that seems to exalt Jesus (cf. Passion/Palm Sunday) is a sham power. The '*human power*' that condemns Jesus (Good Friday) is also shown to be a sham. The only one who can exalt or condemn is also the One who gives and sustains life; namely, GOD. At GOD's final triumph, all of creation will, '*bend the knee to Jesus Christ*'. But that submission occurs only as part of a final triumph willed and brought about by GOD. The reading reveals, not the good judgement of humankind, but it's foolishness. Jesus is presented as *the LORDLY One*, emptied to death and raised to full authority. Jesus moved to life's lowest point; to obedient death on the cross; and was raised to new life as, "*LORD of the covenant community*."

gospel reading: Matthew 26 : 14 – 27 : 66

[the passion and death of Jesus]

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests(14) and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They

paid him thirty pieces of silver.(15) And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.(16)

The Psalmist's reflection is echoed in Matthew's crucifixion report. How could the righteous, innocent, servant of GOD suffer a type of execution reserved for the worst criminals? Matthew's answer tallies with the picture of the righteous servant of GOD in *Psalm 22*. Judas' nickname, '*Iscaiot*', could have meant '*Zealot*', or '*terrorist fighter*'. He was probably associated with the movement that believed in armed struggle and which held the same religious beliefs as the Pharisees. The fact is, that one of Jesus' trusted inner-circle of disciples, grows impatient with Jesus' talk of suffering and powerlessness and acts to force the issue.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?"(17) He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'"(18) So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.(19) When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve;(20) and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."(21) And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, LORD?"(22) He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.(23) The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."(24) Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."(25) While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."(26) Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;(27) for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.(28) I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."(29) When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.(30) Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'(31) But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."(32) Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you."(33) Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."(34) Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.(35)

The Passover was a very ancient feast of renewal of life in springtime. It was something like our holy Week. The Israelites celebrated it each year in Egypt, where they were slaves. And their leader, Moses, received from the LORD GOD the inspiration that they should go to the desert to celebrate Passover. They went out

and did not return. *Passover* is a word that means, *passage*, or *flight* in Hebrew; that is, *a liberation*. It was the passage to a new land of liberty. And GOD made a pact with the people in which they promise to keep their faith in GOD, who was their freedom, to keep themselves free. And GOD ordered them to celebrate the feast every year but in a different way – as the feast of their freedom. (*'that day will be for you a remembrance'*). Each Israelite was expected to feel as though he or she personally came out of Egypt. But this feast was not to be a mere remembrance of the past. Rather it was so they would keep in mind the same power that freed them in the past, would go on freeing them into the future from other imperialisms and internal oppressions.

Above all, at Passover, they announced *the coming of a Messiah, the new Moses*, who would definitively free the people from all oppression. This supper was to sustain the people with its living consciousness of their devotion to freedom. And this is the supper that Jesus had just celebrated secretly in Jerusalem. Afterwards he stayed in hiding. But Judas will reveal his hiding-place to the soldiers with a traitorous embrace (v.48). The account says that the ones who ordered his capture were the priests and the elders of the people (vv.3-5).

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."(36) He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated.(37) Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me."(38) And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."(39)

The gospel of Mark says Jesus used the word '*Abba*' which in Aramaic means '*Papa*', the name used by children who are beginning to talk. In the Scriptures the LORD GOD is never called '*father*'; yet it is the only name Jesus called the LORD. On one occasion Jesus told his disciples that they shouldn't call anyone '*Papa*' except GOD.

Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?(40) Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."(41) Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."(42) Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.(43) So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.(44) Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.(45) Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."(46) While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.(47) Now the

betrayed them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him."(48) At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.(49) Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.(50)

Jesus may have called Judas 'friend' out of affection or he may have said it with irony. A few hours later Judas hanged himself. Maybe the irony struck home. Judas' betrayal wasn't for money. The gospel is referring to a text of Zechariah, where it said that the prophet's price is thirty silver coins which at that time was the price of a slave. Judas must have received more for the account goes on to say that with the money that he later returned to them, they bought a plot of land near Jerusalem to make a cemetery.

Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.(51) Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.(52) Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?(53) But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?"(54)

Teilhard de Chardin reasoned there's grief in the world because there is evolution; that GOD couldn't have created a universe without suffering and without death, since GOD chose to make the world by means of evolution. Karl Marx also said that humanity was forced to pass through various stages of oppression in its evolution from slavery, feudalism and then capitalism. Now Christ is saying the same. The angels could have come at the beginning but then the Scriptures wouldn't have been fulfilled. In today's language that's like saying that the laws of evolution and history wouldn't have been fulfilled. Jesus knows he has to die so the Scriptures would be fulfilled. It will continue to be necessary for some time yet for others to have to die until the Scriptures are finally fulfilled. But what is really important is the Scriptures have also said that the world will have a definite liberation from all oppression:

At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me.(55) But all this has taken place, so that the Scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.(56) Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered.(57) But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end.(58) Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death,(59) but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward(60) . . .

Jesus spoke the truth (vv.59-60a), even though it was against the scribes and the elders. He was speaking in the same vein as the prophets. The whole of Scripture was subversive. That's why they couldn't condemn him for being on the side of the poor or against the rich. So they had to invent something. They were judging him in their religious council and they couldn't accuse him of something that was in agreement with the Scriptures. They had to accuse him of being a criminal.

... and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of GOD and to build it in three days.'"(61)

They accuse Jesus on account of the temple (vv.60b-61). Jesus had driven merchants out of there by quoting the prophets. They couldn't accuse him for purifying the temple of these corruptions. So they accuse him of trying to destroy the temple. His accusers were like many today, who give more importance to a building than to people. Jesus wasn't going to destroy the building but he was opposed to the idea of giving more importance to buildings than to people. He was against the temple because its value was misunderstood. Where his accusers were wrong was their assumption that he was going to destroy the building like a terrorist. Jesus put an end to the temple without any need to set it on fire. He really came to destroy 'religion'. When the Samaritan woman asked him which of the two temples was the true one; that of Israel (in Jerusalem), or that of Samaria (at Gerizim); he told her, neither. He said GOD would be adored, '*in Spirit and Truth*'. People were going to truly love GOD in a society of love. GOD is love among people. GOD is no longer the image held by religion:

The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?"(62) But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living GOD, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of GOD."(63) Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."(64) Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy.(65) What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death."(66)

The people made two accusations. The religious accusation before the religious court and the political accusation before the court of Pilate. It was really the same accusation: that Jesus was proclaiming himself, '*Messiah*'. For the Israelites this was a religious crime. Also, such a claim was a political crime because *the Messiah* had to be a king.

Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him,(67) saying, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?"(68) Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean."(69) But he denied it before

all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about."(70) When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."(71) Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man."(72) After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you."(73) Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed.(74) Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.(75)

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death.(27:1) They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.(2) When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders.(3) He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."(4) Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.(5) But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money."(6) After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners.(7) For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.(8) Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price,(9) and they gave them for the potter's field, as the LORD commanded me."(10) Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so."(11) But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer.(12) Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?"(13) But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.(14) Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted.(15) At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas.(16) So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"(17) For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.(18) While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him."(19) Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.(20) The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."(21) Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!"(22) Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"(23) So when Pilate saw that

he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."(24) Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"(25) So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.(26)

The trial reaches a climax when Pilate is forced to act to prevent the threat of a riot. He washes his hands in front of the crowd. It is a gesture that reflects a ritual for turning aside the guilt of innocent blood.⁴ Three parties are complicit in the fate of Jesus: Judas; the chief priests and elders; and Pilate. They all try to shift the guilt of shedding innocent blood away from themselves and place it on others. Matthew speaks of, '*the cry of the crowd*', meaning the nation as a whole. Writing in the last decade before the end of the first century of the Christian era, Matthew is conscious of two facts. First, that for two generations, most of the Israelite people have said an emphatic, '*No*', to the Christian missionary message of the Messiahship of Jesus. Second, that the Temple and much of Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans in response to the Jewish revolt. In the light of these realities, the evangelist seems to make the cry of '*the whole people*', a symbolic anticipation of that sustained, '*No*' to the Messiah Jesus and with Luke and the author of the gospel of John, sees the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 e.c., as divine punishment for that rejection.

Historical interpretation fanned by anti-Semitism has gone beyond the intention of this account. Historical interpretation also goes counter to the basic direction of Matthew's gospel as a whole. Why should Matthew have held the Israelites exempt from Jesus' command that his disciples should, "*Love your enemies?*"⁵ Acceptance of responsibility in *verse 25*, ceases with the immediately following generation. In biblical tradition, GOD's punitive actions are always followed by renewed offers of salvation. Paul's hope confirms the possibility of this latter-day inclusion of Israel within the scheme of salvation.⁶

Matthew's account continues with Jesus' crucifixion and burial. The evangelist brings out the meaning of the events. Jesus, the Son of GOD, dies a human death. There's no divine help or making light of his suffering. Before he dies, Jesus voices abandonment by GOD. Matthew sees in this many echoes of the Scriptures; especially *Psalms 22* and *69* that show that Jesus continues at this extreme moment, to fulfill the divine purpose set out in the Scriptures for the Messiah's saving work. GOD lets Jesus die. But, Jesus in dying, doesn't cease to be what he has been throughout the gospel: *Emmanuel*, '*GOD-with-us*'. Jesus' death is no less a revelation of GOD than the other scenes in his life.

4 Dt.21:6-8

5 Mt.6:43-45a

6 Rm.11:25-32

for sharing:⁷

- *The WORD from the prophet makes an alternative world available. Like the servant, the modern Christian community prays and meditates upon the Scriptures, to receive from the holy One, the alternative WORD which will sustain, 'those who are weary'. Comment on Isaiah 50 : 4 – 7.*
- *The central insight of the Christian good news is: 'letting go' is 'to have' and 'keeping', is the way 'to lose'. Comment on Philippians 2 : 6 - 11.*
- *Jesus entered into 'glory' at his resurrection but reflection on his passion still has great value for us. Comment on the Passion account in Matthew (Mt. 26 : 14 – 27 : 66).*

prayer:⁸

*Almighty and eternal GOD,
when You sent our Saviour into the world,
You gave us all an example to follow:
in humble obedience
He took upon himself a body like ours
and gave himself up to death on the cross.
In Your mercy, grant us the grace
to learn from the example of his passion
and to share in the glory of his resurrection.
We ask this through
our LORD Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
GOD for ever and ever. Amen.*

7 Lectio Divina: reading GOD's WORD in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us: The practise of *lectio divina* requires a quiet space, a passage of scripture and the willingness to give time to the project. The passage used should be short. For the purpose of this leaflet, we suggest using the gospel reading of the up-coming Sunday. There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don't have to have the following order: *lectio* (reading) – read the passage of Scripture read slowly - more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down. *meditatio* (reflection) – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in GOD's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words. *oratio* (prayer) – allow your heart to speak to GOD, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it. *contemplatio* (rest) – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of GOD, in simple and wordless contemplation. This leaflet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday's liturgy. Familiarity with the texts and the commentary beforehand, can better prepare our hearing and understanding the passages in our worship. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: *'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'*

8 The prayer that concludes the Lectio Divina is ICEL's 1998 opening prayer from the Proper of the Day. These prayers draw upon the concrete and vivid images of Scripture and conclude with a clearly focused petition inspired by the readings.

review:⁹

Our attitude to death lies in not under-playing Jesus' apprehensions. It lies in emphasising the importance of the power for life-giving in our world, so that the power of death can be seen as a distortion rather than as a welcome deliverance. Death as an enemy. But because of Jesus' victory, death can't win. Death is an enemy, nonetheless! The obedience that Jesus showed to GOD's will and the trust that this obedience demanded of him, are all the more impressive when it is realised how powerful an enemy he was encountering. Being alive is not the same as not wanting to die. If we are ever to live we need to be rescued from our fear of dying and more immediately, we need to be rescued from the endless precautions we take against death. Jesus shows us that acceptance of GOD's will in the face of this sort of vulnerability, is transformative.

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⁹ The review – at the end of each reflection the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, and provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the WORD and Eucharist that we have previously heard and experienced.