

# the Sunday Readings



**Jesus enters Jerusalem**

**Passion (Palm) Sunday (c)**  
**holy week begins**

# Passion Sunday (c)

## *holy week begins*<sup>1</sup>

### introduction

The story of the first Holy Week events in Jerusalem climax our Lenten journey. These events are central to those of us who are deepening our commitment as disciples of Jesus. Of all the stories of Holy Week that offer newness and hope, the story of Jesus' suffering and death in the gospel passages from Luke (*Passion Sunday*) and John (*Good Friday*) climax the Lenten readings about 'outsiders'. Jesus' actions have the capacity to gain life and give life, when the old world offers no life.

The readings during Holy Week focus on how outsiders are called in to cope with the shattering of the old world. For example, Abraham, Sarah, Noah, Moses, the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, and the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus. In each case, its the outsider who turns out to be a bearer of faith, light and new meaning. Such people may lack the proper credentials but stories about their actions are our reason for living in hope, when we are surrounded by darkness.

**first reading: Isaiah 50 : 4 – 7**<sup>2</sup>

[ 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 reinterpret the reality of exile. The prophet plants the seed of an alternative way of visioning reality. He appeals to the power of a new Word from God. Babylonian values and culture had influenced the exiles. They soon forgot the tradition of liberation of Sarah, Noah and Moses. They judged the old stories of the Lord's power, to bring life and end exile, were irrelevant. The exiles may have felt that God had forgotten them (Cf *Is.49:4*), but according to Isaiah, it was they who had forgotten the Lord (*Is.50:2a*). Babylon had been the

<sup>1</sup> Cover Image: Icon – Jesus enters Jerusalem

<sup>2</sup> *Is.50:4-11* is the third of the four "Servant-of-the-Lord" oracles; in vv.4-9 the Servant speaks; in vv.10-11, God reproves the people for not following the Servant.

great enemy and threat in the past. But by the time of *Second Isaiah*, the exiles had been in Babylon for two generations. Going into exile, had turned into a new and seductive 'home'. *The exiles* had begun to enter Babylonian public life. Had begun to enjoy some economic successes. Although their roots were still significant (there was a general longing for Jerusalem), this longing was not easily translated into any concrete measures to return home. In the relative security of well-ordered Babylon, the shabby, risky Judean alternative offered little attraction.

But Isaiah insists on the relevance of the tradition; that the Lord God is the peoples' *power-for-life*. That's the memory that is judged irrelevant and null, revealed in the peoples' reaction to the prophet's word. Isaiah's task is to build an alternative vision of reality, a vision that is outside the control of the empire's managers. He appeals to *a new Word from God*. According to the prophet, God could counter the power of Babylonian. The power of this *new Word from the Lord*, is based on the memory of God's powerful subversive Word in the past, that dared to open up options, practise criticism, and render any empire's power provisional. Isaiah is the mouthpiece of that *new Word*. He is the agent of change that the Babylonian empire had not counted on.

**response: Psalm 22 : 7 – 8, 16 – 20, 22 – 23**

[ ]

*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 shrivelled;(16)  
I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me;(17) . . .  
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. The Lord's Word enables God's faithful servant to imagine a world organised differently. The memory of God's actions in the past causes the speaker's confident trust in the face of present troubles. Trusting from the past forms the basis for the present appeal for God's help (vv.4-5). The bitter experience of exile is endurable in light of the original promise and the hope of a future well-being. For those who yearn for change, but dare not hope, the outcome could be destructive self-hatred, or destructive violence. Yet the speaker carries on the tradition of trusting in the Lord's power to gift new life, and end exile! The speaker addresses the Lord as the guarantor of the process and as the court-of-appeal against the present system. The Lord is addressed that not only that God may change, but that the social system on Earth, which isn't keeping its promise of justice, may change also.

**second reading: Philippians 2 : 6 – 11**<sup>3</sup>

[ imitate Christ's humility ]

*Though he was in the form of God, he 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 that is found in the poetry of Isaiah's *Servant Songs* and in the psalmist's *laments*. The Christian community announces that the One who was of the same stuff as the Supreme Being, became a servant; "*taking the form of a slave – and humbler.*" Because he freely endured such an existence, he was "*exalted!*" The letter speaks of '*the full one*', the person with power, goods and land, being emptied, or sent to exile, only to be enthroned again as ruler over the land. The insight and mystery of the gospel message of Jesus is, '*letting go is to have*' and '*keeping is the way to lose*'. The Scriptures record the history of gift and grasp which concerns the community – "*Kings who grasp, lose*"; but, "*Pilgrims who risk, are given.*"

In referring to Jesus, the apostle affirms what the whole of history is about. The meek – those claiming no home and living with homelessness – do inherit the land. That scandal announces the absurdity of all alternative ways of managing power and property. Jesus' death and resurrection embodies the way it is with social reality in terms of God's reigning. For Paul the human power that exalts Jesus (on Palm Sunday) is a sham! The human power that condemns Jesus (on 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 its 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: Luke 22 : 14 – 23 : 56**

[ the account of the passion and death of Jesus ]

*When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him.(14) He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with*

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps an early Christian hymn quoted here by Paul. The general pattern is of Christ's humiliation and then exaltation. Phrases such as, *even death on a cross* (v.8c) are considered to be additions (by Paul) to the hymn, as are vv.10c, & 11c.

*you before I suffer;(15) for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."(16) Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves;(17) for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."(18) Then he took a loaf of 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."(19) And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.(20) But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table.(21) For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!"(22) Then they began to ask one another, which one of them it could be who would do this.(23)*

The account of Jesus' suffering and death begins with the last meal he was to have with his closest disciples.<sup>4</sup> Earlier the opposition was unable to take advantage of *'the hour'* to arrest him. Now *'the hour'* has arrived (v.14), but its in Jesus' own chosen time. *The Twelve* share a final meal. They are the last of a long group of broken people, who have shared meals with Jesus during his lifetime. In future they will share meals with Jesus again. In future they will share their table with all, *"to the ends of the Earth"*. Jesus' presence with the broken and sinful, is the basis for his disciples' practise everywhere. These final words of instruction, encouragement and warning are delivered to failing disciples ( and they still apply today ). Disciples are instructed and commissioned in the midst of failure (v.16). These apostles will continue his presence, *"to all the nations"*.<sup>5</sup>

*A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest.(24) But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors.(25) But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.(26) For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.(27) "You are those who have stood by me in my trials;(28) and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom,(29) so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel". (30)*

Jesus has been in conflict with a hostile religious establishment. His disciples have loyally remained with him during that time. So Jesus promises they will share in *'the new reigning of God'* about to be established. God, rather than the Israelite people, *'confer'* a royal covenant with Jesus, who in turn *'confers'* the disciples as

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4 The accounts of the passion and the death of Jesus are the oldest in the gospels and they are to be read in the light of the resurrection. This part of Luke's testimony tells us about Jesus' suffering. His suffering and death do not intimidate him or put an end to his mission. The Father is with him.

5 Cf. Lk. 24:47

*chiefs-of-state* at the royal banquet table. Even though Jesus' instructions are delivered to such unpromising material as these first disciples were, it remains valid today. They were to be the ones to continue with what Jesus has left them ( see the following verses ). Disciples are instructed and commissioned in the midst of failure. It is through these very disciples, despite their brokenness, according to Luke, that Israelite royal hopes can be fulfilled – only in Jesus and only on God's terms:

*"Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, (31) but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."(32) And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!"(33) Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me."(34) He said to them, "When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "No, not a thing."(35) He said to them, "But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.(36) For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was counted among the lawless'; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled."(37) They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." He replied, "It is enough."(38)*

Verse 35 echoes Lk.10:4, which is part of the account of the sending of the seventy-two. The Twelve were sent out earlier with different instructions.<sup>6</sup> The question, *'Were you short of anything?'* focuses on the disciples' peaceful and law-abiding intentions. They didn't intend to enrich themselves, yet they did not want for anything. Now the situation has changed. Jesus and the disciples are classed as outlaws. The disciples misunderstand the irony in Jesus' remark unaware that *'the hour of truth'* is about to occur. They think in terms of a minor skirmish, for which two swords should be adequate.<sup>7</sup>

*He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him.(39) When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial."(40) Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed,(41) "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."(42) Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength.(43) In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.(44) When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief,(45) and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."(46)*

<sup>6</sup> Cf.Lk.9:3

<sup>7</sup> Jesus' comment that two swords should make the party look sufficiently like brigands, displays a grim humour which shows his mastery over *the powers of death* now marshalled against him. Theophilus could not miss the point that Luke is making; that this man and his *'army'* pose no political threat.

The evangelist stresses the fact that all the disciples are directed to pray (v.40). Jesus withdraws some distance from them. Ordinarily, prayers were offered in a standing position. The posture of Jesus expresses a profound humility indicating the depth of his inward struggle. Luke wants the reader to know that if Jesus dies, it was the Father's purpose. Without that purpose his death would be the same as anyone else's death. Jesus had renounced an earlier cup,<sup>8</sup> in order to now, "*drink the cup of his death.*" Returning from prayer he finds the disciples asleep, '*in sorrow*' or '*grief*'. He tells them to pray to avoid temptation. They exemplify what happens to those who fail to pray.<sup>9</sup>

*While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him;(47) but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?"(48) When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?"(49) Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.(50) But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him.(51) Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit?(52) 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!"(53)*

Jesus is in control of the situation. Judas' hardening attitude towards Jesus' talk of suffering and powerlessness, led to his impatience with Jesus.<sup>10</sup> He took action to force the issue. But Jesus seems resigned to his fate. He neither responds to Judas' kiss of betrayal, nor to the bystander who draws a sword to strike the ear of the servant of the high priest. If '*the hour*' and '*the cup*' could not pass – as Jesus prayed earlier, then it is to let be what the Father wills.<sup>11</sup>

*Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance.(54) When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.(55) Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, "This man also was with him."(56) But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him."(57) A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!"(58) Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, "Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean."(59) But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock*

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8 Lk.22:17-18

9 Throughout this narrative Luke tells the reader that disciples must pray as Jesus prayed to the Father.

10 Judas' nickname, '*Iscaiot*' (v.47) could have meant '*Zealot*' or '*terrorist fighter*'. He probably was associated with the movement that believed in armed struggle but which held the same religious beliefs as the Pharisees

11 In today's language that is like saying that the laws of evolution and history are being fulfilled. Judas couldn't wait for a leader who seemed to be failing to fulfill the Scriptures.

*crowed.(60) The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times."(61) And he went out and wept bitterly.(62) Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him;(63) they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?"(64) They kept heaping many other insults on him.(65)*

During the night Peter has followed the arresting group into the high priest's house and taken a seat among the servants there. Challenged by them, he denies Jesus three times as Jesus had predicted (vv.56-60). After Jesus had been condemned and led away he catches sight of Peter in the courtyard. One glance and it's painfully clear that Peter misses the opportunity to show a disciple's loyalty and leadership in doing God's will. The cock crows.<sup>12</sup> Peter goes out and weeps bitterly. It's the beginning of a conversion of heart, that will give him the capacity to strengthen his brothers and sisters in the future (v.32).<sup>13</sup>

*When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council.(66) They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us." He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe;(67) and if I question you, you will not answer.(68) But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God."(69) All of them asked, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" He said to them, "You say that I am."(70) Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!"(71)*

Jesus is led before representatives of the religious Supreme Council where he is asked two questions. First, is he the Messiah? (v.67). Admission understood in the political sense in which his interrogators would certainly take, would provide them with the grounds for handing him over to the Roman authorities. Jesus refuses to be drawn into a direct answer, but alludes to the heavenly exaltation that will follow his 'exodus' to the Father.<sup>14</sup> Getting something like the response they were looking for the press the Messianic question in another form. They ask, "Are you the Son of God?"(v.70). Jesus affirms, "I am" and explains that he is not only the anointed Davidic figure expected to establish God's reign; he is the *Human one (Son of man)* who at the end of time will come from God's presence, to judge the world.<sup>15</sup> The religious authorities see only blasphemy in the claim, "to sit

12 There is one kind of friend, who won't stand by you in your day of trouble (cf. *Sirach* 6:10).

13 Cf. *Lk.*5:11

14 Cf. *Lk.*9:31

15 "Son of Man" - refers to a heavenly figure who will function as judge of the world and vindicator of the persecuted faithful before the final establishment of God's reign in the universe. Behind such expectation lies the vision of, 'one like a son of Man' (*Dn.*7:13-14), a collective symbol for the persecuted faithful who are soon to be vindicated, when God confers sovereignty and kingship upon them. Later speculation personified the collective symbol into an individual redeemer-figure from heaven. Christian application of the title to Jesus seems to have fused this 'heavenly redeemer' ideal and the more this-worldly expectation of a Messiah. *Son of David*, also applied to him. Early believers



*at the right hand of the Power."* He is condemned by the religious judges as deserving death. No voice is raised in his defence inside the court.

*Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate.(23:1) They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king."(2) Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so."(3) Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man."(4) But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."(5) When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.(6) And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time.(7) When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign.(8) He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer.(9) The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.(10) Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate.(11) That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.(12)*

Pilate sends Jesus to be judged by Herod. The latter questioned him without getting any reply and returns him to Pilate. The chief priests enjoy success in moving the crowd to ask the death penalty. Pilate yields to the crowd in order to avoid civil disturbance. This trial, like the earlier one in the religious court, ends in mockery. The religious trial ended with the mocking of a prophet. The Roman trial ends with the mocking of a king. Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified:

*Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, (13) and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him.(14) Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death.(15) I will therefore have him flogged and release him."(16) Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!"(18) (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.)(19) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again;(20) but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!"(21) A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him."(22) But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed.(23) So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted.(24) He released the man they asked for,*

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awaited the return of Jesus as, *Son of Man from heaven* to complete his messianic work.

*the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.(25)*

Pilate declares that he finds Jesus innocent and proposes to release him after a flogging. The crowd cry out that he do away with Jesus and release another prisoner, Barabbas, instead. All the Gospels accounts mention Barabbas in connection with the condemnation of Jesus. But Luke underlines this episode by twice noting that Barabbas had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city and for murder. The mention of insurrection, would have reminded the readers in Luke's day, of the failed Jewish revolt that led to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 c.e..<sup>16</sup> Barabbas, represents violence, murder and sedition. The choice of Barabbas over, "*the messianic King*", who would truly bring peace, symbolises a premonition of the fate lying in wait for the city, that has not known or wished to know, the true moment of its, "*visitation*" (Cf. *Lk.19:44*). In the face of the crowd's insistence, Pilate makes a third and last attempt to protest Jesus' innocence (v.23), but against his own better judgement and Roman justice, he gives in to the demands of the crowd and hands Jesus over to them.

*As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus.(26) A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him.(27) But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.(28) For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.'(29) Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.'(30) For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"(31)*

Simon of Cyrene, is pressed into carrying Jesus' cross. Luke makes Simon a model of discipleship; like the "*one who would be a follower of Jesus*",<sup>17</sup> he carries the cross "*behind Jesus*" (v.26). The women who follow the procession, represent the people of Jerusalem who have not followed the leaders in bringing about Jesus' condemnation. Tragically, they will be powerless to avert the fate that is to befall the city as a consequence. Jesus turns their expression of sympathy back upon themselves.<sup>18</sup>

*Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.(32) When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they*

16 The Jewish historian Josephus consistently attributes the revolt and its failure to "*insurrection*", a term encompassing both rebellion (against Rome) and strife between the various factions involved.

17 Cf. *Lk.9:33*

18 In biblical tradition fertility is a blessing, barrenness a curse. To say, "*Blessed are the barren, . . .*" is to make a prophecy of doom in the strongest terms, reinforced by a quotation from Hosea (*Ho.10:8*). If this is what can occur when the city is at peace ("*in the green wood*"), think of what horrors may break out when it is at war and under siege ("*when it is dry*").

*crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.(33) Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing.(34) And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!"(35) The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,(36) and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"(37) There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."(38) One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"(39) But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?(40) And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."(41) Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."(42) He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."(43)*

The leaders of the people become the first to mock Jesus. The mocking that follows focuses on the pretended messianic claims of Jesus and his capacity to “save”, that were he truly the Messiah, he might have been expected to show. The mockery climaxes from one of the criminals crucified with Jesus. The other criminal crucified with Jesus, rebukes him. For his part he accepts his serious evil-doing and declares Jesus’ innocence – and affirms the truth of who Jesus is. The word “save” has been debased in the mocking that has just gone before. At this point, *salvation* can only refer to rescue from the present plight of those being crucified upon the cross. But that’s not the path “*salvation*” is taking now; neither for Jesus nor for the good criminal whose pleas to be remembered. His plea acknowledges that Jesus is King, but recognises as well that his kingdom is not simply identifiable with the messianic kingdom of conventional expectations. It is the one to which Jesus is going even as he is dying upon the cross. He simply asks that Jesus keep him in mind when he comes to allocate places in the kingdom. He’s remembered and held up as hope for change, for us all – no matter what we’ve done.<sup>19</sup>

*It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon,(44) while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two.(45) Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.(46)*

At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry at Nazareth, Jesus experienced rejection from his townspeople. They had sought to kill him by throwing him down from a

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<sup>19</sup> Even should someone be guilty of a diabolically evil act that one continues to be a child of God – not a monster, or a demon – but a person with a capacity to change.

hill. On that occasion he had slipped through their clutches and gone on his way.<sup>20</sup> Now though actually brought to his death following rejection on a much wider scale, he “*passes through*” death to rise and be “*taken up*” to glory at the right hand of God.

*When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent."(47) And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts.(48) But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.(49) Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council,(50) had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.(51) This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.(52) Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid.(53) It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. (54) The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid.(55) Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.(56)*

Luke describes the reaction of those who have witnessed the death of Jesus. First the Roman centurion, representing a pagan, who acknowledges the falsity of the accusations against Jesus. Soon the gospel will go to the Gentile world and this testimony will speak powerfully to other pagans who have undergone conversion and become worshippers of God.<sup>21</sup> There is also a beginning of conversion in the crowds who had witnessed Jesus' death. They return to the homes, “*beating their breasts*”, aware that they have seen not simply a miscarriage of justice, but something of the power and the presence of God. Finally, also watching but at a distance are his “*acquaintances*” and the women who have followed Jesus from Galilee (v.49). Their presence and that of the “*acquaintances*” (male disciples) means that Jesus has not died wholly in the company of strangers.<sup>22</sup>

### prayer

*O God of eternal glory, You anointed Jesus, Your servant,  
to bear our sins, to encourage the weary, to raise up and restore the fallen.  
Keep before our eyes the splendour of the paschal mystery of Christ,  
and, by our sharing in the passion and resurrection,  
seal our lives with the victorious sign of his obedience and exaltation.  
We ask this through Christ. Amen*

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Lk.4:28-30

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ac.10:1-2, 13:12, 43; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7

<sup>22</sup> They form ‘a point of insertion’ into the scene for readers of later generations – an invitation to follow Jesus right up to this moment of his passing to the Father: Brendan Byrne; *The Hospitality of God* p.184.