

incongruity that often exists between the faith we profess on our lips and the faith we profess in our lives.

The Gospel calls us to take on what Paul calls the “attitude of Christ Jesus” (Reading 1) in his passion and death: to “empty” ourselves of our own interests, fears and needs for the sake of others; to realise how our actions affect them and how our moral and ethical decisions impact the common good; to reach out to heal the hurt and comfort the despairing around us despite our own betrayal; to carry on, with joy and in hope, despite rejection, humiliation and suffering.

Matthew portrays a Jesus who has been totally abandoned by his disciples and friends. There is no one to defend him, to support him, to speak for him. He endures such a cruel and unjust death alone. Yet, amid the darkness, a light glimmers: The prophecy of a new temple “not made by human hands” is fulfilled in the shreds of the temple curtain; a pagan centurion confesses his new-found realisation that this crucified Jesus is indeed the “Son of God”; and a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea, is embolden to break with his fellow councillors and request of Pilate the body of Jesus. The Passion of Jesus should be a reason for hope and a moment of grace for all us as we seek the reign of God in our own lives – however lonely and painful our search may be.

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Please pray for: Paul; Colleen & Ted; Marge; Lynne; Frances; Rowan; Isla; Hieko; Brad; Peter; Lois; Albert; Ivan; Suzie; Jan; Dan; Stuart; Jean; Jennifer; Tony & Trish; Gordon; Serena; Colin;



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Welcome to Worship

Passion/Palm Sunday

5th April 2020

We are a warm-hearted community who are delighted to have you worshipping with us today ...

Our Mission is to

- **Know God personally**
- **Love and respect one another deeply**
- **Disciple and serve those around us**

Sentence: At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bend, 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.

Philippians 2:10-11

Collect of the Day

Everlasting God,
in your tender love for the human race
you sent your Son to take our nature,
and to suffer death upon the cross:
in your mercy

enable us to share in his obedience to your will
and in the glorious victory of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy
Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Today's readings:

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 31:9-18

Philippians 2:5-11

Matthew 26:14-27:66

Next Week:

Acts 10:34-43

Hymn to the Risen
Christ

Colossians 3:1-4

Matthew 28:1-10



Blessing and Procession of Palms: Matthew 28:1-11

Matthew's account of Jesus' entry into the city of Jerusalem is framed by the prophecy of Zechariah (9:9). The Messiah will come, not as a conquering warrior astride a noble steed, but in lowliness and peace, riding on an ass. The Messiah-king is one with God's just: the poor and lowly of the world. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in such a public and deeply symbolic way (which is followed immediately in Matthew's text by the routing of the money changers from the temple) sets up the final confrontation between Jesus and the chief priests and scribes.

The Passion: Matthew 26:14 - 27:66

While the Blessing and Procession of Palms commemorates Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the Liturgy of the Word focuses on the passion and death of the Messiah. In his Passion narrative, Matthew frames his account in the context of the First Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Matthew portrays a Jesus who is totally alone, abandoned by everyone, but who is finally vindicated by God (the portrait of the Messiah depicted in Isaiah and Psalm 22).

Scripture scholars believe Matthew (and Luke) adapted their material from the evangelist Mark, whose Gospel is generally believed to be the first to be written. Almost 80 percent of Matthew's Passion account is identical in vocabulary and content with Mark. Matthew, however, adds several details not found in Mark's Gospel, including the death of Judas, Pilate's washing his hands of responsibility for Jesus' death, Pilate's wife's dream (in Matthew's

Gospel, divine guidance is often revealed in dreams – Joseph's dream to take the child and his mother to Egypt, the magi's dream to flee Bethlehem), the posting of guards at the tomb after Jesus' burial.

Matthew is writing his Gospel for Jewish Christians who themselves have suffered at the hands of the Jewish establishment. Many have been expelled from their synagogues and the temple for their insistent belief in Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin (the most controversial aspect of the Passion narratives historically) is pivotal in Matthew. Matthew is the only Gospel writer who names Caiaphas as high priest during the proceedings and describes in great detail the chief priests' manipulation of Pilate and the crowds. Matthew presents to his Jewish Christian community Jesus as a model of suffering at the hands of the Jews (it is Matthew's Passion account that includes the troubling line spoken by the crowds, "Let his blood be upon us and our children"). The tearing of the sanctuary veil symbolises for Matthew's community a break with their Jewish past.

As is the case throughout Matthew's Gospel, Gentiles and not the people of Israel first recognise the truth about Jesus: only Pilate and his wife recognize the innocence of the condemned Jesus.

Reading 1: Isaiah 50: 4-7

Reading 1 is taken from Deutero-Isaiah's "Servant songs," the prophet's foretelling of the "servant of God" who will come to redeem Israel. In this third song, Isaiah portrays the servant as a devoted teacher of God's Word who is ridiculed and abused by those who are threatened by his teaching.

Reading 2: Philippians 2: 6-11

In his letter to the Christian community at Philippi (in north-eastern Greece), Paul quotes what many scholars believe is an early Christian hymn (Reading 2). As Christ totally and unselfishly "emptied himself" to accept crucifixion for our sakes, so we must "empty" ourselves for others.

There is a certain incongruity about today's Palm Sunday liturgy. We begin with a sense of celebration: we carry palm branches and echo the Hosannas (from the Hebrew "God save [us]") shouted by the people of Jerusalem as Jesus enters the city. But Matthew's account of the Passion confronts us with the cruelty, injustice and selfishness that lead to the crucifixion of Jesus. We welcome the Christ of victory, the Christ of Palm Sunday – but we turn away from the Christ of suffering and of the poor, the Christ of Good Friday. These branches of palm are symbols of that