

The Sixth Sunday of Lent (Palm Sunday)
(Year C)

<i>Procession with Palms</i>	Luke 19:28-40
<i>First Reading</i>	Isaiah 50:4-7
<i>Response</i>	My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24
<i>Second Reading</i>	Philippians 2:6-11
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Christ became 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.
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 22:14-23:56

With the 6th Sunday of Lent we come to the climax of our Sunday journey through the Gospel of Luke with the story of Jesus' passion and death. Although this Sunday is popularly known as Palm Sunday, because we begin with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, the technical term (the technical name) for the day is Passion Sunday, because every year on this final Sunday of Lent we not only read the story of Jesus' triumphal entry, we also read the complete passion narrative of one of the three gospels, whether it's Matthew, Mark or Luke. And because this year is year C, we're going to be looking at the triumphal entry account from Luke's gospel, as well as the Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

Now, just a caveat before we begin, for reasons of time and space, I'm not going to be able to read the entirety of Luke's passion narrative, or even the entirety of all the readings for today. What I want to do instead is focus on some key elements of the readings for Passion Sunday in Year C that highlight distinctive aspects of Luke's accounts of Jesus' passion and death on the cross, as well as his triumphal entry, just so that we can get a sense of Luke's distinctive contribution to what we know about the suffering and the death of our Lord as we prepare for his resurrection on Easter Sunday.

So without any further ado, what I'm going to do this week is something a little different. Usually I begin with the gospel and then go back to the Old Testament reading and kind of show how it all connects together. This week, I'd like to actu-

ally begin with the 1st reading, which is the reading for the procession before, or at the beginning of, the mass for Passion Sunday, which is the account of the triumphal entry and then I'll spend a little time on the Old Testament and the psalm before looking in depth at the gospel reading for today.

So let's begin with Luke 19:28-40, which is the account of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. And the reason the Church gives us the triumphal entry account at the beginning of Passion Sunday is because what she wants us to do over the course of Holy Week, is so-to-speak, to put ourselves back into the events of Jesus' final seven days (final six days) of his life, so that we ourselves go back in time in our imagination, as well as in the liturgy itself, we go back to the final week of Jesus' life, and in a sense that final week is made present to us through the liturgical celebration and re-enactment of certain events, like his triumphal entry. So in Luke 19:28 and following, we get Luke's account of the triumphal entry. And this is what it says:

And when he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Beth'phage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village opposite, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat; untie it and bring it here. If any one asks you, `Why are you untying it?' you shall say this, `The Lord has need of it.'" So those who were sent went away and found it as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it." And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their garments on the colt they set Jesus upon it. And as he rode along, they spread their garments on the road. As he was now drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."¹

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

So, several elements of Luke's account of the triumphal entry stand out as important. First, notice his emphasis on the Mount of Olives. Luke really highlights the significance of the Mount of Olives (we're going to come back to this a little bit later when we look at Jesus' Agony in the Garden) – just keep in mind that he's emphasizing the proximity of the Mount of Olives to this event. Secondly, notice that when Jesus rides the colt into Jerusalem, they all start spreading their garments on the road and proclaiming him as king. In other gospels it's going to say "Hosanna in the highest, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord", but Luke makes it very clear: blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. In this case, that quotation is actually an allusion to Psalm 118, which only says "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord". And any Jewish audience would have recognized that that was a Messianic psalm, proclaiming the coming of the king into Jerusalem and his going up to the altar in the city, but most scholars think that Luke is writing primarily (or at least definitely) with a Gentile audience in mind. So you'll frequently see that Luke makes more explicit what is implicit in the other gospel accounts. He's making clear that this is a royal triumphal entry and that the people are greeting Jesus as king who is coming in the name of the Lord.

Now, the third element of this triumphal entry that's really significant to me (it stands out) is the final word. Only Luke tells us that during Jesus' reception in the city (where he's being greeted as a king) that the Pharisees in the crowds tell him to rebuke his disciples, to stop proclaiming him Messiah and King of Jerusalem. And Jesus says these interesting words, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." Now, on the one hand, that's just a kind of (it might just be a kind of) hyperbolic statement, where Jesus is saying "there's no way to keep this quiet, the city is welcoming me as king." However, I can't help but wonder if a 1st century Jew (reading the text) might have had a little different take, because in ancient Jewish writing known as the lives of the prophets (usually dated by scholars to the 1st century A.D.), there's actually a tradition associated with the prophet Jonah, in which Jonah said that when the stones of Jerusalem cried out, it would be a sign that the destruction of the city was at hand, that the end was at hand. And I think that's fascinating because in the context of Luke's gospel, in this very chapter (chapter 19), in the very next verses (they aren't in your lectionary), Jesus begins to weep over the city, crying that it doesn't know the time of its visitation and that it's going to be destroyed as a result. So right after he talks about the stones crying out, he utters a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem.

So you see two dimensions here to Luke's triumphal entry, on the one hand it is joyful because they're welcoming the king (the messiah) into the city, on the other hand, there's also an ominous note here as well because even the words of the Pharisees reflect that some in the city are going to reject Jesus, they're going to crucify Jesus, they're not going to accept him as the king, and the eventual result of that is that the destruction of Jerusalem and the city will take place 40 years after his death. So both joy and an oracle of doom are kind of built in to this triumphal entry. With that in mind, what happens then in the Passion Sunday liturgy, when we read this gospel and when we carry palms in procession into the sanctuary, what we are effectively doing (it's really important) is welcoming the king. We are recapitulating that initial welcome of Jesus into Jerusalem at the beginning of the 1st Holy Week, so that we too can begin our journey to Calvary and to the memorial of Jesus' passion and his death.

The next reading for Passion Sunday is the Old Testament reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah. And in this case, the Church uses the same Old Testament reading and the same responsorial psalm and the same New Testament reading (the 2nd reading) every year for Passion Sunday. So whereas the triumphal entry reading changes and the gospel reading changes, these readings stay the same. So I'm not going to say too much about because I've commented on them in previous years. What I would highlight though is that the Old Testament reading for today, Isaiah 50:4-7, is a description of the famous Suffering Servant, who gives his back to those who smite it, who gives his cheeks to those who pull out his beard, and who doesn't hide his face from shame and from spitting. So this mysterious servant figure in the book of Isaiah is going to be identified by Jesus as himself (as we'll see in a moment), as the Messiah. Some scholars will debate, "Is the servant the Messiah? Is he an anointed prophet? Is he the king?" He's all of these things. He is this king who is going to mysteriously reign and inaugurate the new exodus (in the book of Isaiah), this figure who will inaugurate the new exodus and the good news of salvation precisely through his suffering, through his passion, (and in Isaiah 53) through his death; so he's the servant who both suffers and dies. And so that theme continues as well into Psalm 22 (which is the psalm for today); it is the famous psalm that begins "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" It's the cry of the suffering servant in the voice of David, the psalmist, the king of Israel. Who even though he's king, even though he's Messiah, the anointed one, he undergoes suffering and rejection as well as having his hands and his feet pierced. Which, in David's time (and David was never crucified), but he's using this as an image of his persecution and his experience of suffering that's so great that it's as if he's be-

ing put to death, whereas Jesus is actually going to take those words and actualize them in his passion and death on Calvary.

Ok, so with those three passages in mind, we can now turn to the Gospel of Luke itself. The gospel reading today is one of the longest gospels in the entire liturgical year, where the Church reads aloud the entire passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke's account. Now, because the text is too long for me to read in its entirety and comment on in its entirety (although I'd like to; we don't have two hours though), so what I want to do is just highlight certain passages from Luke that bring out three things: First, those parts of the passion narrative that are unique to Luke, that only Luke tells us about, that we wouldn't know about if we didn't have Luke's gospel. Second, the passages that highlight Jesus' identity as the suffering servant (that we just heard about in Isaiah) and then third, the aspects of Luke's passion narrative that (I think) in particular reveal Jesus' identity as a new Adam, as the one who is coming to undo the effects of the fall of Adam in the book of Genesis. We've seen this theme over and over again as we've journeyed through Luke at the beginning of Lent, Jesus is a new Adam in his temptations, the three temptations in the desert. Now let's look at how Jesus takes up that identity and reveals it even in the midst of his passion and his death on Calvary.

So, to begin with, Luke's passion narrative starts with an account of the coming of the feast of Passover and the account of the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist, much like the gospels of Matthew and Mark. However, Luke tells us something unique about the Last Supper account when he describes Jesus' words to the Apostles about sitting on twelve tribes of Israel and also about his particular prayer for Peter as the leader of the twelve. So let's read that text. In Luke 22:28-34, Luke gives us these words. After instituting the Eucharist, Jesus says to the Apostles:

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

Then Jesus says:

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." And he said to

him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." He said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me."

Okay, so notice here something really significant about Luke's account. First, Luke (and Luke alone) tells us that during the Last Supper, Jesus appoints a share in his royal identity as king to the twelve apostles. Literally in the Greek, what Jesus says here, "As my father covenanted the kingdom for me, so I covenant to you, that you may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." So, effectively what Jesus is doing is constituting (in the figure of the Apostles) a new Israel, where they will rule over this new Israel, sitting on twelve thrones. Secondly, notice also that within these twelve Apostles who are going to reign over the new Israel, Simon Peter has pride of place. And it's easy to miss that if you read it in English, but in Greek it's really clear: when Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded to have you", the Greek word there is "you" in the plural. So if you wanted to translate it into English: "Satan has demanded to have ya'll." (I'm from the South, we have a 2nd person plural, it's called "ya'll", and that's what the Greek word there is.) Satan has demanded to have "you all". "But I have prayed for you (singular) that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen you brethren." So what Jesus is referring to here is two things: First, the unique role that Simon Peter has as leader of the twelve apostles and as the one who strengthens the brethren. And I just bring this up because (obviously) there's a long standing debate about the origins of the papacy and the authority of the bishop of Rome and that kind of thing, but I want to highlight the fact that in Luke's gospel, according to Luke, at the Last Supper Jesus singles Peter out as the one who has a special mission to strengthen the other apostles after he turns back from his fall of denying Jesus, and that Jesus prays a special prayer for Simon (and Simon alone) that his faith may not fail. I bring this up because in the Catholic Church we have the dogma of the infallibility of the pope, and many Catholics actually will point (and not incorrectly), they'll point to the gospel of Matthew 16, where Jesus says, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." They'll point to that passage as the foundation of papal primacy and papal infallibility, but what's interesting is if you actually look at the definition of papal infallibility from Vatican 1 (and various Church Fathers), what you'll see is the language of infallibility in Vatican 1 actually comes from Luke 22, Jesus' prayer that Peter's faith would not fail; the language of "not failing" is something that the Church is drawing on in the language of papal infallibility, with reference to Peter's role as the supreme authority

and doctrinal authority in the Church on earth, but also to his role of strengthening the other Apostles. I just bring this up because this is a really beautiful insight into the fact that Jesus, in the very midst of his passion, everything he's about to face, everything he's about to undergo, he's still looking forward, beyond the cross, to the role that Peter is going to play as the chief of the Apostles and as the one who's faith will not fail, because of the graces obtained for him by Christ in the upper room at the Last Supper. So that's one little element there.

A second element of Luke's gospel has to do with what happens after these words. In Luke 22:35 and following, Luke (and Luke alone) tells us about this exchange that Jesus has with his Apostles over whether any of them has a sword or not. Listen to these words:

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

Alright, pause there. Luke (and Luke alone) tells us about this exchange over the purse and the bag and the sword. So what's going on here? Well, what Jesus is doing is contrasting the time of his passion with the time of his public ministry. During his public ministry he told them not to have a purse (and by the way, that doesn't mean like a lady's purse, it just means like a small money bag) and not to have a sword, but now he says "Let him who has no sword go out and buy one." Some people are puzzled by this, they wonder, "wait, is Jesus who has been non-violent all the way up to this point, all of a sudden encouraging his disciples to take up violence, to defend themselves with the sword?" No. What he's doing here is deliberately invoking them or exhorting them (I should say) to have a sword in order to fulfill the prophecy, because what happens here is the disciples (and this is funny), they reveal to him that they have in fact brought swords. They have two swords. Which is, again, directly contradictory to what he's told them before about loving your enemies and turning the other cheek and not resisting those who do evil to you, so you can see the Apostles haven't quite appropriated his teaching here on not resisting violence done to them, and what he says in response is, "It is enough" because it's going to fulfill the scripture, "he was reckoned among trans-

gressors”. Well what scripture is that? It’s from Isaiah 53:12, the famous prophecy of the Suffering Servant, which says that the servant would be numbered among transgressors. So, in other words, he’d be reckoned among criminals.

So by bringing their swords with them, they have given a sign that Jesus is the Suffering Servant who’s going to be accused (falsely) and who’s going to be reckoned among transgressors and who’s going to be tried and put to death on the cross. So, one reason this is really important is, it’s the most explicit passage in all the gospels where Jesus makes clear that he sees himself as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. There isn’t any other text in the gospels where Jesus explicitly identifies himself as the servant that was prophesied by Isaiah, but Luke 22 reveals to us that in the very midst of his passion, Jesus is deliberately fulfilling all of the details of the Suffering Servant, even the very minor detail of being counted among transgressors by the disciples having two swords with them. Although I could say a lot more about this, just in case anyone’s wondering: the presence of the two swords, what it means is that he would be counted among criminals. In other words, revolutionaries, people who are going to use violence to go against the government. So, the presence of swords is something unique. Fishermen don’t walk around with swords. It means that they are armed in this case. It actually shows you that the Apostles are armed and dangerous, literally. And in a Roman context, for someone carrying around a sword who hasn’t been authorized by the government (like a soldier) to do so, is someone who is plotting revolution, someone who is plotting against the government, like Barabbas or the Sicarii, who are a group of Jewish assassins, who would walk around with short swords in order to kill Roman soldiers as a way of fighting against the Roman oppression of the Jewish people. So what Jesus’ saying here is that the disciples having swords (which is something fishermen would not carry around) is a fulfillment of the prophecy that the servant would be reckoned among transgressors or among criminals.

With that said, the passion narrative of Luke moves immediately into its account of Jesus’ agony in the garden. Now on the one hand, all three gospels tell us about the agony in the garden. On the other hand, Luke’s account has some unique elements, some unique passages about what happened in the garden. So I want to read through that together and highlight them for us. So verses 39 through 46 is Luke’s account, and this is what it says:

And he came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place he said to

them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

There's a lot going on there. This passage is brief but it's really rich. Three elements in particular stand out as significant. First, only Luke tells us about the presence of the angel who appears to give Jesus strength while he's praying. That's a very mysterious passage. On the one hand it reveals the notion of (the very Jewish notion) the angels not just as messengers, but as (also) guardians who are there to support and to strengthen us. And so the idea here that this angel is giving Jesus strength is really powerful because it shows the fullness of his humanity, that as he enters into his passion, as he enters into his agony in the garden, his human weakness is something that is embraced and something which needs assistance even from this guardian angel who comes to strengthen him in this moment of trial. Second, the very terminology of an "agony in the garden", which is so famous (we use it to describe the mystery of the rosary), that comes from Luke. It's Luke that uses the language of an agony and Jesus praying so earnestly that his sweat becomes like drops of blood falling upon the ground. Now when most people talk about the Agony in the Garden and they look at Jesus sweating blood, in modern times, we tend to focus on the physical and emotional and psychological anguish that Jesus was undergoing. That he was in so much pain and so much anguish and so much agony that he not only sweat, but that he actually sweat blood; that the blood vessels in his skin were bursting and he was bleeding through his skin, which I've been told by someone who'd know better than I, that that's actually possible for a person to do that. But from an ancient Jewish perspective, I actually don't think that's the primary meaning that they would have focused on, because in a first century Jewish setting, the idea of a person sweating from his brow would have echoed not just human suffering and anguish in general, but a passage from the Old Testament in particular: Genesis 3.

If you go back to the Old Testament, you recall that after the fall of Adam, whenever Adam receives the curse of the fall, God says to him these words: "Cursed is

the ground because of you. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” So the image there of the sweat of the face or the sweat of the brow, is something that goes back to Adam in the Old Testament. So if you think about it in this way: Adam is cast out of the garden, the ground is cursed because of him, and now he’s going to have to labor so that by the sweat of his brow will he bring forth bread from the earth. Here, in the Gospel of Luke, remember, Luke reveals Jesus as the new Adam. In chapter 3, we have the genealogy that goes all the way back to Adam (the Son of God). In chapter 4, Luke shows that Jesus is recapitulating the three temptations of Adam in the garden, but he’s overcoming those temptations as a new Adam who’s going to conquer where the old Adam failed. So now we see Jesus coming to the hour of his passion and death and what does he do? He, like Adam before him, is going to sweat, but his sweat is going to become like great drops of blood falling down to the ground, because he’s going to undo the effects of the fall through the blood of his passion and death on the cross.

And if you have any doubts about that, it’s really important to know, where is Jesus sweating blood? Where is the agony in the garden taking place? Luke has told us over and over again, it’s taking place on the Mount of Olives. Now why does that matter? Well, it matters because historically that’s where it took place. On the one hand, the Mount of Olives is a mountain, a hill (really), but it’s a small mountain to the east of Jerusalem, right across a valley east of the city of Jerusalem. On the one hand, this is just where Jesus tended to pray, it’s where he went with his disciples to undergo his agony, but on a deeper level it was a mountain covered with olive trees, which in a Jewish mindset had a particular symbolism. Because in ancient Jewish tradition (a lot of people don’t know this), in that book *The Life of Adam and Eve*, which I’ve mentioned in other videos, we learned that in Jewish tradition, the tree of life that was associated with the Garden of Eden was regarded as an olive tree. So listen to this tradition for example from that book I mentioned, *The Life of Adam and Eve*. This is an account of Adam at the end of his life, he’s about to die, and this is what he says to Eve:

And Adam said to Eve, “Rise and go with my son Seth to the regions of *Paradise*... Perhaps [God] will have mercy and send his angel to *the tree of his mercy* [= the Tree of Life], *from which flows the oil of life*, and will give

you a little of it with which to anoint me, that I might have rest from these pains by which I am wasting away.”²

So what that shows is (and there are other texts as well in which) Jewish tradition depicts the tree of life as an olive tree and the oil from the olives as having special powers, healing power, as being used in anointings of people who were sick and dying. So Adam wants to be anointed with the oil from the tree of life. Now, what does that have to do with the Mountain of Olives and the agony of Jesus in the garden? Well, as we know from the other gospels, where is this garden that Jesus is suffering his agony? Well it’s called the “Garden of Gethsemane”. The word *Gethsemane* literally means “an oil press”. So what they would do in Gethsemane is they would collect the olives from the olive trees on the mountain and then they would crush them. They would crush them and draw out of them the oil in an olive press. So what is going on here? At a deeper level, I would suggest to you, that in so far as Luke recognizes that Jesus is the new Adam, he’s highlighting where the passion is beginning. In other words, Jesus is the new Adam, and he is going to go to the new tree of life which is the cross. And there he will be crushed, he’s going to offer his life, and his blood will undo the effects of the fall of the first Adam. And the oil that will flow from the new tree of life is an oil that brings healing and salvation to the whole world. Just as the first tree of life was supposed to give immortality, so the new tree of life (the cross) is going to undo the curse of death and bring everlasting life to the world.

I think this is so powerful to think of his agony in the garden going on on Holy Thursday in the garden of the “oil press” on the Mountain of Olives, because what happens on Holy Thursday? I mean, you might be thinking, “Oh Dr. Pitre, this is kind of elaborate, all these connections here, the olive tree, the tree of life, the new Adam, the Garden of Gethsemane, does that all really go together?” Well, let me ask you this: what do we do on Holy Thursday? You have the sacred mass of the chrism oils. And guess what those oils are? Those are the oils of anointing for baptism, confirmation, anointing of the sick as well as holy orders. And what kind of oil does the Church make all of the holy oils out of? It’s olive oil. Why does she do that? Why is chrism made from olive oil? Because the oil of Holy Thursday doesn’t just have its power because of the apostolic power given to the bishops, but because that power flows from the oil of the tree of life. It flows from Christ who began to be crushed on the Mountain of Olives and in the Garden of Gethsemane,

² *Life of Adam and Eve* 36:1-2; trans. in OTP 2

and who will ultimately give his life on Calvary, the tree of life. The real tree of life is the cross itself. So it's beautiful when you think about it, in the liturgy, all of the elements in the liturgy: the water, the wine, and even the oil itself, all of these things that we use in the sacraments, they all flow from the mystery of Jesus' passion and his death on Calvary, even the oils. Even the anointing oils of Holy Thursday tie us back to the true tree of life, which is the cross itself.

Okay, I'm getting a little ahead of myself here. We haven't gotten to the cross just yet, but I just want to highlight that for you because at least for me, it's really deepened my experience of Holy Thursday and of the Chrism Mass, to think about the connections between the oil, the olives, gethsemane, and the tree of life, which is Calvary and the cross.

So after the account of Jesus' agony in the garden, Luke contains a lot of material that we find in the other gospels: the account of the trial before Caiaphas, Peter's condemnation by the Sanhedrin and my Pontius Pilate, and then Pilate's sentencing him to death on a cross. What I would like to do is fast forward to right after Pilate's condemnation of Jesus and to look at the final part of the passion here, where Luke tells us several things about Jesus' passion and death that are unique to his gospel and are really powerful and important episodes from the passion and death of our Lord. So, we'll start in chapter 23:26, it says this:

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

And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself,

if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

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

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, "Certainly this man was innocent!" And all the multitudes who assembled to see the sight, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance and saw these things.

Then Luke goes on to tell how Joseph of Arimathe'a had a tomb and he took Jesus' body and had it laid in the tomb, and that they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment. And that's how his passion narrative ends.

So let's back up and look at a few elements here of Luke's account. The first thing that strikes me about the passion narrative in Luke is the carrying of the cross. All three gospels tell us about the carrying of the cross, but only Luke tells us about the women who lamented and wailed for Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. And what strikes me as powerful about this particular aspect of the passion is that even when Jesus is in the height of his agony, even after he has been scourged at the pillar and is carrying the cross to Calvary, his heart and his mind are still focused not on his own sufferings, but on the sufferings of others. His concern is for the women of Jerusalem and for their children, because he's already told them that the city is going to be destroyed and the women and the children are going to be caught up in

that suffering and in that destruction. And so he is saying to them, “Don’t weep for me. Weep rather for yourselves and for your children.”

You also see this compassion and this mercy of Jesus in Luke’s account of the passion, in the fact that when Jesus is crucified, he prays a prayer of intercession for the very people who are putting him to death. Only Luke tells us about Jesus’ prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” This prayer of intercession, where he not only speaks about the soldiers who are putting him to death, but in a sense, he cries out on behalf of all humanity, who, through our sins, he has had to suffer as the suffering servant, the righteous servant, the innocent one, who bore our inequities and was crushed for our sins.

A third aspect of the passion narrative in Luke that’s only in Luke (but it’s so powerful) is the dialogue between Jesus and the two criminals. And this is one of my favorite, it’s always been one of the most powerful and poignant parts of the passion narrative for me personally. All three gospels tell us about the two criminals that were hung beside Jesus, but Luke alone tells us that one of them railed at him, saying “save yourself” and “save us”, and that the other thief, who we call “The Good Thief”, rebuked the other criminal and then turns to Jesus and says these words: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And in response, Jesus says something that’s powerful, but also puzzling: “Amen, I say to you, this day you will be with me in paradise.” Now I don’t know about you, but for years when I heard those words, I always kind of mentally translated them into “Today you will be with me in Heaven.” But that’s not actually what Jesus says. He doesn’t say “Today you will be with me in Heaven”, he says “Today you will be with me in paradise”. Now why does that matter? Well, the Greek word there, *Paradeisos*, doesn’t occur very often in the Bible. The first time it occurs, one of the few times it occurs, is in the book of Genesis 2 and 3, when it’s describing the paradise of God. Literally, the word paradise means “a garden” or “an orchard”; in other words, the Garden of Eden.

So one of the things that we’ve seen over the course of Luke’s passion narrative is that Luke is emphasizing Jesus’ identity as the new Adam, who’s going to undo the effects of the fall, who’s going to bear the curse of Adam, who’s going to sweat blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the place on the Mount of Olives where the olive harvest will be pressed down and crushed to make olive oil. All these themes, all these allusions to Genesis are swirling about underneath the passion narrative, and at the climax of it, what does Jesus do? He uses the very word that describes

the Garden of Eden in the book of Genesis. So, what is happening on the cross? Jesus isn't just atoning for the sins of humanity as the Suffering Servant, although he is doing that, he isn't just being put to death so that he can rise again on the third day, he is also opening the gates of paradise, which have been closed since Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve are driven out of paradise, with the tree of life and the garden being guarded and shut so that they can't make their way back in and eat of the fruit of the tree of life. So the language of paradise here is Edenic language, it's the language of Eden. And so what Jesus is doing is saying to the thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise". He's going to open the gates of paradise and undo the fall of Adam.

Finally then, in Luke 23, Jesus' last words on the cross are also unique to Luke's gospel. Matthew and Mark tell us about the so-called "cry of dereliction" (My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?), but only Luke tells us about Jesus' final prayer, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." And with those last words, Jesus ends his life with the words of Psalm 31 on his lips. So, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" is a quotation from Psalm 22, but this final word of Jesus in Luke, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit" is also a quote from the book of Psalms, Psalm 31. So as we've seen over and over again throughout the gospel of Luke, Jesus is a man of prayer. I think it's really important for us to realize here that in his final agony, Jesus dies not just with the words of the Psalter on his lips, but that he dies praying. He offers his life, his suffering, his agony, his passion and his death itself up as a prayer to God the father. He transforms the cross into a prayer, and in consecrating his life, himself, his spirit to the father, he (in a sense) draws all of humanity into himself as the new Adam, and offers himself to God on our behalf as the supreme sacrifice, which will not only atone for the sins of the world, but will open the gates of paradise so that we might be led into the vision of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who appeared to the Apostles on the mountain of transfiguration.

And after his death, in the final allusion to Genesis, Luke tells us that they buried him and they rested according to the commandment. Well what day was that? That day was Holy Saturday. And why did they rest on Holy Saturday? Because that day is the Sabbath. So even in his death (in a sense), Jesus keeps the law. As the new Adam, he's going to rest on the 7th day, as he lays in the tomb dead, waiting to rise on the 1st day of the week: Sunday. The day the world was made. The first day of the Jewish week, the day God says "Let there be light", he will rest in the tomb on Saturday, until his resurrection on Easter Sunday.