

Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday) (6th Sunday of Lent, Year A)

Procession: Matthew 21:1-11—Jesus’ Triumphal Entry

1. Jesus Fulfills Prophecy: coming of Messiah to Jerusalem on a donkey (Zech 9:9)
2. Welcoming the King: the crowd sings Psalm 118 (“Blessed is He Who Comes...!”)

Isaiah 50:4-7—The Suffering Servant

1. Servant: gives his “back” to the smiters; hides not his “face” from shame and spitting

Psalm 22—My God, my God, Why have You Forsaken Me?

1. Begins with “forsakenness” by God (22:1); ends with conversion of Gentiles! (22:27)

Matthew 26:14-27:66—The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ

1. The New Passover (26:14-29)
 - a. Old Passover: begins in Egypt, ends in Jerusalem (earthly Promised Land)
 - b. New Passover: begins in Jerusalem, ends in heavenly Promised Land
2. The New Tree of Life (26:30-56)
 - a. Gethsemane: Hebrew for “oil press”; Mount of Olives
 - b. Jewish Tradition: Tree of Life an *olive* tree! (*Life of Adam and Eve* 36, 40-42)
 - c. 12 Legions of Angels = 72,000 angels! (6,000 soldiers per Roman Legion)
3. The Suffering Servant (26:57-27:2)
 - a. Jesus is crucified for “blasphemy”
 - b. Suffering Servant: “they spat in his face” (27:67)
4. The New Joseph (compare Genesis 38:25-28)
 - a. Suicide of Judas: unique to Matthew’s Passion account (27:3-10)
 - b. Jesus sold by Judas (30 silver pieces); Joseph sold by Judah (20 silver pieces)!
5. The Son of the Father (27:11-26)
 - a. Barabbas: Aramaic “son” (*bar*) of the “Father” (*abba*)
 - b. Some Manuscripts: *Jesus* Barabbas vs. Jesus “Son of the Father”
 - c. The Crowd: “His blood be on us and on our children”
 - d. CCC 597: “Jews are *not* collectively responsible for Jesus’ death”
 - e. CCC 598: “*All* sinners are the authors of Christ’s passion.”
6. The New David (27:27-54)
 - a. Jesus fulfills Psalm 22: “My God, my God...” (cf. Responsorial Psalm)
 - b. Conversion of the (Gentile) centurion: “Truly this was the Son of God!”
 - c. After the Resurrection: “many bodies of the saints” are raised in Jerusalem!?

Catechism: All the troubles, for all time, of humanity enslaved by sin and death, all the petitions and intercessions of salvation history, are summed up in this cry of the incarnate Word. Here the Father accepts them, and, beyond all hope, answers them by raising his Son. (CCC 2606)

7. The Burial of Jesus (27:55-66)

- a. The women knew the place of his burial (no mistaken location)
- b. Roman Guard: publically validates that Jesus’ body was not stolen by disciples!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (Passion Sunday, Year A)

1. In the Triumphal Entry, the crowds sang Psalm 118 to welcome Jesus as messianic king into Jerusalem. Prayerfully reread Psalm 118 as a whole. What connections do you see between it and palm Sunday?

2. Have you ever struggled with Jesus’ cry from the Cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”? It can sound to some like Jesus is despairing. Some non-Catholics even claim that God “turned his back” on Jesus on the Cross. How can reading Psalm 22 as the background to Jesus’ words shed light on their meaning? (Hint: read *all* of Psalm 22, including Psalm 22:24, 27-28). Be sure to read *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 603, 2605-2606.

3. Why does the Church read the *entire* Passion Narrative every year on Palm Sunday? What has been your experience of standing to hear it read aloud? Are there any particular moments during the Passion reading that you find particularly powerful or moving? Why?

For Further Study

- 1. CCC 571-630: This section of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* contains the Church’s official teaching the meaning of the Jesus’ passion, death, and burial. It is extremely rich and can serve as food for meditation.
- 2. Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus*, pp. 155-72. An explanation of why Jesus was crucified and what it meant in the first-century A.D.