

# **Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion**

(Year B)

<i>Procession with Palms</i>	Mark 11:1-10
<i>First Reading</i>	Isaiah 50:4-7
<i>Response</i>	My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalms 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>	Mark 14:1 — 15:47

Today we celebrate one of the most solemn and important Sundays of the entire liturgical year. It's commonly known as Palm Sunday, but the official title is actually Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord. And, the reason you have both of those things together — Palm Sunday and the passion — is because every year on this Sunday the Church celebrates both the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, when they laid palms on the road as he went into the city, and the passion and death of Jesus that takes place on Good Friday of Holy Week. So, it's kind of like a dual Sunday. It's dedicated to two major moments that encapsulate, like bookends, the beginning and the climax of Holy Week with the death of Christ. One of the reasons the Church does this — if you're wondering — is because in the three-year cycle of readings she gives us the passion narrative from Matthew in Year A, Mark in Year B, and then Luke in Year C on Palm Sunday. And, then if you go to mass on Good Friday — which is not required although obviously it's recommended — if you go to the service on Good Friday then you're going to hear the passion narrative from the Gospel of St. John every single year on Good Friday. So, for those of you who go to mass on Sunday and then go to Church on Friday as well, you're going to get two different accounts of the passion of the Lord.

So, this is one of the longest readings of the liturgical year as well, with the exception of the Easter Vigil where you have all those readings in the Old Testament. So, in order to make it manageable, what we're going to be doing today is looking first at the triumphal entry of Jesus. And, then I'm going to pass rather quickly over the Old Testament reading and the Psalm for this week, primarily also because they're the same every year on Palm Sunday. What changes on Palm Sunday is the account of the triumphal entry in each of the Synoptics and then the account of the passion and death of Jesus in each of the Synoptics. So I'm going to focus our attention on those two moments: on the triumphal entry on Sunday, and then on the passion and death of Jesus. And, when we get to the passion, I'm not going to read the entire account. If you've stood — which is what we do — through the gospel on Palm Sunday you'll realize this is a very very long reading. But, what I want to do is highlight some ... both *important* and *distinctive* elements of Mark's account of the passion of Jesus, which is going to be different from Matthew and Luke. So I'm going to bring out some of those differences in our discussion and in our explanation. So, let's begin with the procession of Jesus — the triumphal entry into the Temple. This is the First Reading for Palm Sunday, which sometimes can be read outside the church before you process in with the palms, it is from Mark 11:1-9. It's Mark's account of the triumphal entry. And, like many of Mark's accounts in his Gospel, although his overall gospel is shorter, his actual account of the event is longer and more detailed than Matthew or Luke.

So, let's read this one together - Mark 11:1-9 says this:

And when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Beth'phage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it. If any one says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" And they went away, and found a colt tied at the door out in the open street; and they untied it. And those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said; and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it. And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had

cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!"<sup>1</sup>

Okay, so there is Mark's account of the triumphal entry. And, I think for most people if you are familiar with Palm Sunday, you are familiar with the triumphal entry — or even that very term being used for this event — you understand that what's happening here is that Jesus is being welcomed into Jerusalem as the king, as the Messiah. It's kind of like a messianic procession into the city of Jerusalem at the time of his final Passover. And, this book takes place on the Sunday that kind of inaugurates Holy Week and the last seven days of Jesus' life. However, with Mark's account there are a couple of elements that really stick out as distinctive that I'd like to call our attention to.

The first one is that Mark highlights this detail of the fact that Jesus sits on a colt on which no one has ever sat, right. So, you might recall from the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew tells us about the fact that Jesus' action here is fulfilling the prophecy in the book of Zechariah 9, which says that when the Messiah one day comes to Jerusalem, he's going to ride into Jerusalem on a colt, on the foal of a donkey. So, Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is fulfilling that messianic prophecy in his account. But, Mark emphasizes something different; he doesn't quote the Old Testament background. What he emphasizes is the fact that no one has ever sat on this particular donkey. Now, why does he tell us that? I mean, it seems almost like an irrelevant detail. But, I don't think it is because if you recall at the beginning of Mark's gospel when Jesus goes out into the desert to be tempted by Satan, one of the things that Mark tells us that no one else tells us is that he was among the wild beasts, right? So, that Jesus is a kind of new Adam figure who, although he's out in the wilderness, is not at enmity with the beasts. They don't pose any threat to him; he doesn't have any conflict with them; he's like Adam who had mastery over the beasts before The Fall, before the first sin takes place. So I think there is a little bit of that going on here as well. It's showing that Jesus is the true master, not just of

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

the fact that he is able to call the donkey and then the people give it to him without any resistance, but that he's able to sit on a colt that has not been broken in. And, if you've ever tried to sit on a donkey that hasn't actually been broken in yet, you're going to know this is not something you want to do. It's not something you would advise someone to do. Because what they're going to do is buck you off. They're going to throw you off, right? Usually, a donkey needs to be tamed; it needs to be broken and needs to be ridden by someone before you would be able to just — a stranger in particular — climb onto the donkey and then ride it in to Jerusalem.

So, that little detail there, I think, is another image of this new Adam theme that Mark likes to highlight in his gospel - that Jesus is the Lord not just of human beings but of the creatures as well. He has power and dominion and mastery over it. It also suggests -- it kind of points forward to his passion and death, because after he dies he's going to be laid in a tomb in which no one has ever been laid. It's like a virgin tomb, the Church Fathers will call it. That way there's going to be no mistake that it's someone else's body that's been brought out of the tomb because no one was ever buried there before Jesus was buried there. A similar thing here - it shows his uniqueness, his unprecedented status, and the fact that he is a king. He gets to sit on this colt that no one else has ever ridden. So, it's a little detail but I think it's interesting.

A second element here is just the fact that Mark highlights the leafy branches that are spread onto the road along with their garments when they welcome him into Jerusalem. I don't know about you, but growing up Catholic this was one of my favorite Sundays of the year because as we process into the church as a boy I'd be given this giant palm that was both big and dangerous cause you could poke somebody's eye out with it. And, I was encouraged to waive it around in mass at the opening procession and I always liked that. It was always something that was very palpable or concrete - a symbol bringing me back to that event of welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem ...and it made mass fun as well.

In this case, though, in the first century A.D. the symbolism of the palms, of taking... cutting leafy branches and then waving them or spreading them was that of a royal procession, so I just want to make that clear. In the book of 2 Kings 9:13, for example, branches are used as part of a King's coronation ceremony, right? So, as the King would proceed into the city he would then mount the steps of his throne;

he would ascend to his throne; and the branches were meant to show that he was being welcomed as a king. The same thing is true — slightly different emphasis — in the book of Maccabees 13:51. They use branches — palm branches in particular — as a victory procession, as a sign of Israel's victory over its enemies. So, when you take those two combined symbolisms: a royal procession and a victory procession then you get the deeper meaning of what's going on here. It's not just that Jerusalem is welcoming Jesus into the city or saying, “Hey, this guy is the Messiah!” They're doing that but they're doing more than that. They're welcoming him as a victorious King, right? And, what would usually take place in the welcome of a victorious king would be that he would enter into the city in procession and then he would mount the steps up to his throne. He would go into the castle or to the throne room and he would sit on the throne, triumphant as a king who maybe had come back from battle or won a victory over the enemies or what not. Jesus does the first part of that - he processes triumphantly into the city. But, the second part he doesn't do. He doesn't go into the palace — there isn't a palace to go into at this point — he doesn't mount the steps of the throne. What he does is he goes into the Temple, right? And, then he exits the city to await his passion and death on Good Friday. And, so ancient Christian interpreters, like the early Church Fathers, saw the procession as a kind of entryway into Holy Week, in which Jesus would mount the steps of a very different throne. He would mount the wood of the cross, and he would reign from the cross on Good Friday as the crucified king, as the crucified son of David, as the crucified Lord of all. So, this is - it's almost like another one of Jesus' parables. It's another one of his riddles. Where he starts to do something expected and then he twists it, and the twist reveals to you the kind of king that he is. He's going to be a crucified king. He is going to bring the kingdom of David, but it's not going to be the way they expect.

And, that kind of adds the third element here of the triumphal entry in Mark that's worth highlighting; it is when they say Hosanna, which means give salvation or save us Lord, they also add, “Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming.” And, that's only in Mark. So, they recognize the coming of the kingdom of God but they interpret it as the kingdom of David, which it is, but it's going to be radically different than what David's kingdom was. It's not going to be an earthly kingdom; it's going to be a heavenly kingdom. So, whenever all of this takes place on Palm Sunday, I would just encourage you to think about that fact that on Palm Sunday in a special way as we enter into the liturgy of Holy Week, we're

welcoming Christ as our victorious king; we're welcoming him into our midst in the very liturgy itself, and especially on Palm Sunday because we have a mass and we have the Eucharistic liturgy. And, in the Eucharistic liturgy itself we take up the words of the triumphal entry, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" during communion. And, at that moment we welcome Christ coming triumphant and victorious on to the throne of the altar itself. So, there's a liturgical mystery that's being re-enacted here as well. We're going back in time to Palm Sunday but we're also preparing for what's about to happen in the mass itself. A very solemn and very important mass.

Okay, so that's the first reading outside of the church often read. Then you get to the Old Testament reading for the day - it's Isaiah 50. All I want to say about it is just that it's a prophecy of the Suffering Servant. It describes how the servant in Isaiah gives his back to the smiters; he turns his face to shame and spitting. We're going to see all that played out in Jesus' passion narratives as well. So it's a prophecy and fulfillment Old Testament reading there. Psalm 22 for the day is the same thing. It's the famous Psalm, "My God my God why have you forsaken me?" which, in its original context, speaks of David being persecuted and betrayed and pursued unto death, but then is going to be fulfilled perfectly in Jesus and in his passion and death when he'll take the words of the Psalm onto his own mouth in the passion narrative itself when he dies as we will see in just a bit. So, those two Old Testament texts are really clear for the day. So, what I want to do now is move forward to the passion narrative itself and this is the day of course where we stand for the longest Gospel reading in the entire liturgical year. I probably said this before but I'll say it again: if you have small children this is the day where you want to not lock your knees because you're going to be holding them for a while. I remember when my kids were little on Palm Sunday's, you know, toughing it out through the long reading because as they get older they get heavier and you're standing there listening trying to participate but it's a long reading. So, I'm not going to read the entire thing here and try to comment on it. It would just be too much. What I want to do is I want to focus on some aspects that are distinctive of Mark's passion narrative so that hopefully this Sunday as you're listening to the entire passion of our Lord read in the sanctuary -- that some of those elements might leap out at you and you might be able to call them to mind with more understanding.

So, the passion narrative for this week — the gospel for this week is all of Mark 14 and 15. So it's two full chapters of the gospel: Mark 14:1 all the way to Mark 15:47 with the burial of Jesus. I'd like to begin our discussion — I want to highlight four elements here: first, I want to look at the agony in the garden; second, I want to look at the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin; third, I want to look at the actual sentencing of Jesus to death by Pilate; and then fourth and finally, I just want to focus in on Mark's account of the death of Christ and what happens — in particular how Mark calls attention to the timing of Jesus' death. So, let's look at those four things. Let's begin with the agony in the garden. After recounting the betrayal of Jesus by Judas and the Last Supper in Mark 14:32 to 51, we read about the agony in the garden. And, this is what Mark says,

And they went to a place which was called Gethsem'ane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I pray." And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.

Notice there that Jesus repeats himself in his prayers. There's nothing wrong with that. It's something that we Catholics do; Jesus did it too.

And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer him. And he came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him and lead him away under guard." And when he came,

he went up to him at once, and said, "Master!" And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." And they all forsook him, and fled.

And then Mark adds this last element here, which is only in *his* Gospel:

And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

Okay, so a couple of elements here I want to highlight about Mark's account of the agony in the garden. First, notice who Jesus brings with him up the mountain: it's Peter, James, and John. It's the same triad that he brought up Mount Tabor — well, it's not called Mount Tabor — but... the Mount of Transfiguration which is traditionally associated with Mount Tabor. So, we see this parallelism between the mountain of Transfiguration and the mountain of Gethsemane and the agony of Jesus in the garden. Another element of Mark that's only in Mark is Jesus' use of the phrase, "Abba," right? Now, many people will say that Jesus prayed "Abba" all the time and that was his standard method of prayer and that's how he spoke with God. And, that's certainly a reasonable deduction, but it's actually important to notice that this is the only verse in all the Gospels where Jesus calls God "Abba". Abba was the Aramaic word for "father." And although people sometimes say that it meant "daddy" — that it was like a childlike version — it really is just an Aramaic expression for "father." One of my professors, James Barr, did a famous article on this called, "Abba Isn't Daddy," where he just went through all the evidence for how the term is used. And it really is an Aramaic word - it means the same thing as father means in Greek. But, here what you might see is Jesus, in a sense, lapsing into his mother tongue, so to speak, of Aramaic in the prayer of the Hebrew people at his time which most scholars think is primarily Aramaic — using this expression of intimacy — "Abba" — as he prays to God in his agony in the garden.

Another element of Mark's account that's worth highlighting is the constant theme "watch," "watch," "watch." The Greek word here, *grēgoreo*, actually means "keep awake" or "keep vigil." And, so what Jesus is expecting his disciples to do is stay



awake and pray. And, this is something the Jews would've done on Passover night. It was customary after the Passover meal was completed to keep watch, to do a vigil. In the same way the people fast from food and drink during the Lenten season, for example, ancient Jews would also fast from sleep through prayer vigils where you stay awake at night with a particular focus on praying. And, that's what he is asking the apostles to do, but apparently the multiple cups of wine that they drank at the Passover meal have gotten to them and they are sleepy; they can't keep their eyes open. So, he's calling them to watch but they fail. And they're going to fail even more gravely in just a moment. So, in that context Judas brings the soldiers from the chief priests and the scribes. [He] gives a sign to them that he's going to kiss Jesus and betrays him with a kiss. And, then they seize Jesus; they arrest him. You'll notice something in the last verses - it says, "They all forsook him and fled," but Mark adds that there was a young man following him with nothing but a linen cloth and they seize him and he runs away naked or "naked" as you're probably going to hear from people reading the lectionary in the South.

In any case — so what's with the "naked" or naked young man? Who is this person? And, more importantly, if Mark is writing such a short gospel -- I mean think about it, it's only 16 short chapters, half as long almost as the Gospel of Matthew — why does he take pains to make sure you know about this young man who runs away naked from the garden of Gethsemane? Who is this man? Well, the answer is we don't know, okay. It's a mystery. It really is something that's puzzled scholars for centuries and there've been various theories about the identity of the young man so I just wanted to give you a couple of those that go back to ancient times. So, one of the most ancient theories is that this young man is the apostle John. St. Ambrose and Thomas Aquinas and others said that this figure was St. John who ran away. And, their argument in favor of that was based on the tradition that John the Apostle was the youngest of the 12 disciples. And, so because this man's called a young man maybe this was the apostle John running away. The problem with that interpretation is if you look back at the previous verse when it says they all forsook him and fled, that appears to contain the disciples who'd been referred to previously, which would be Peter, James, and John. John was one of the 12 who was with Jesus on the mountain. So, another theory that has been propounded since ancient times is that this is James, the "brother" of Jesus. And — I forget who gave this one. It's a lesser-known Church Father ... Theophylact. And, what he said was James was known for his asceticism — like he would wear just a single garment.

So people said, “Ah! Well maybe it's James who runs away.” Obviously there's nothing in the text that's suggesting that this is James, the future Bishop of Jerusalem.

A third ancient option, which is the one that I find most interesting, is the suggestion that the young man involved here was someone from the upper room, okay, which modern scholars actually built on that to suggest that it wasn't just someone from the upper room but that it was actually John Mark himself. In other words, the author of the Gospel. How would that work? Well, according to this theory — Victor of Antioch is the first person to propound this — and what he suggests is that this young man was in the place where Jesus and the disciples had celebrated the Passover - The Upper Room — and that when Judas went out to get the soldiers the first place Judas would've brought them would've been to where he just left, namely The Upper Room where they had been celebrating Passover. And, then once they discovered that Jesus and the disciples weren't there, they then would've taken the soldiers out to the place of prayer that Judas knew, namely the garden of Gethsemane. And, that in that context, a young man who lived in the upper room would've been sleeping; it would've been late, but would've been awoken by Judas and the soldiers and then followed them out in his night clothes, in just his night clothes out to the garden to see what happens out of curiosity. And, then once they arrest Jesus and they start grabbing after his disciples, they attempt to arrest this young man, pull his garment off, and then he runs away without any clothes because he was just in a single garment for his nightgown so to speak. That there is interesting to me because you can actually combine it with a modern theory that the young man in question is St. John Mark -- in other words, is Mark the evangelist, because in the Book of Acts 12, it actually tells us that John Mark was a resident of Jerusalem. And, that his mother was close friends with Peter. And, that when Peter escaped from prison the first place he went was to the house of John Mark's mother in Jerusalem. So, some scholars like the Augustinian 20th century scholar Giuseppe Richiuti — he's a Catholic Biblical scholar in the 20th century — have suggested that the best explanation is actually John Mark himself playing a kind of cameo role here — where he does a kind of authorial side where he adds this detail because this is where he comes into the story. Although he wasn't a disciple of Jesus, his mother provided the lodging for the housing of the Last Supper and was a friend of the family and this was kind of his first entry in the story of the life of Christ. And, so he tells you about this young man in the third

person as a kind of cameo, which ancient authors would do in biographies. They would list cameo appearances. It's kind of like if any of you remember the old Alfred Hitchcock's films where if Hitchcock was the director he would step into the film for just a moment and then he would step out or he would play some minor role so you knew who the author of the film was or who the director was. And, some ancient authors do the same kind of thing. John does this in his gospel as well, where he'll talk about himself as the beloved disciple in the third person on a couple of key occasions. In any case, it's not the most important question in the universe but it's one I get asked about all the time by students. You know, "Who's the naked young man in Mark's Gospel?" Well, those are our best bets: either John the apostle, James the Bishop of Jerusalem, or, for my money, the best... the one that makes best sense is John Mark himself, the evangelist, the author. But you're free to take any opinion you want. The Church has no official teaching on this and it may just be a case that we just don't know who they are. In any case, what the young man illustrates, especially if it is Mark himself, is the fact that Jesus is abandoned by everyone. And, he's completely abandoned in Gethsemane. That kind of brings his agony to a climax.

Alright, with that said, the second element I want to highlight is from the trial of Jesus in Mark's gospel. And, here I don't want to read through the entire account of the trial, I just want to highlight one element which is this: In Mark's account, the reason for Jesus' execution is blasphemy. The charge is the charge of blasphemy. You can see this if you look at Mark 14:16 and following, where the high priest stands up and adjures Jesus to answer his question. It says:

And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But he was silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments, and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death.

Alright, so pause there. Notice what's going on here in Mark's Gospel from a Jewish perspective. In order to put someone to death, Jewish law required at least two witnesses. In Deuteronomy 17, it says you cannot put someone to death on the testimony of one witness. So they're trying to get the witnesses to bring a charge against Jesus that would lead to a just sentence of capital punishment, like he threatened to destroy the temple or something like that. But, they can't get any of the witnesses to agree. So, finally the high priest stands up and he just says, "Look, just tell us if you are the Christ, the son of the blessed." Because that's the real issue driving the trial, which is Jesus' identity. And, Jesus says, "I am and you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven," which, in a first century Jewish context, they would've all known that in the Old Testament God himself is the one who comes on the clouds of heaven. God rides on the clouds of heaven; the Lord does that. So, for Jesus to say I am and you'll see me coming on the clouds of heaven — it's to make a divine claim. He's not just claiming to be the Christ; he's claiming to be the son of the blessed one; he's claiming to be divine; he's claiming to share authority with God when he says you will see me seated at the right hand of power. What he means is seated at the right hand of God, and as Joel Marcus, a Jewish New Testament scholar, points out, when you sit on someone's throne it means you have equal authority with them, okay, in an ancient context. So for Jesus to sit on the throne of God means he is equal with God and that's the root of the charge of blasphemy.

So, once Caiaphas hears Jesus make that claim about sitting on God's throne and coming on the clouds, he says we've all heard the blasphemy; we don't need to get to get two witnesses anymore. We have the whole Sanhedrin to witness to his blasphemy. And, so therefore they charge him with death which was the punishment for blasphemy in the book of Leviticus 24. So, I just bring this up here — I want to highlight it — because one of the things some scholars will sometimes claim about Mark's Gospel is that it has a very low Christology. In other words, in Mark's gospel, unlike the Gospel of John, Jesus is just human, he's just a man, right. But, in John's Gospel he's divine. Well, that's just a false dichotomy; it's not true. In both Mark and John, Jesus is fully human, but he's also fully divine. And, that's what's going on here. If Jesus isn't making a divine claim then why are they charging him with blasphemy? It was not blasphemy in first century Judaism to claim to be the Messiah. All Messiah was was the long-awaited king of Israel. You can't be charged with blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah. But, to

claim to have divine power, to be equal to God, well now that's different. And, that's what he gets charged for in the gospel of Mark. So, all four Gospels present us with a divine Jesus, with a Jesus who was claiming to be divine. And, not only claiming it but being executed for that claim in his trial before the Sanhedrin.

Okay, the third element of Mark's gospel I want to highlight is just the nature of the crucifixion and Jesus being sentenced to death by Pilate, right. In previous videos we've looked at the whole exchange for Barabbas, but I just want to emphasize here what's taking place with regard to the Roman sentencing. It's in Mark 15:1ff, the whole exchange with Pilate. So let's look at that for a moment. And, this is Friday morning; so, this is Good Friday morning:

And as soon as it was morning the chief priests, with the elders and scribes, and the whole council held a consultation; and they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Notice there Pilate is translating the Jewish idea of the Messiah into Roman terms: "Are you the king?"

And he answered him, "You have said so." And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate wondered. Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barab'bas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he was wont to do for them. And he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barab'bas instead. And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man whom you call the King of the Jews?" And they cried out again, "Crucify him." And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barab'bas; and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the praetorium)...

Notice there Mark uses a Latin word, “praetorium,” which leads some scholars to think he is writing for people in Rome because he’s using Roman terms.

...and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

That’s the fourth time - notice that. “King of the Jews,” “King of the Jews,” “King of the Jews,” “King of the Jews.”

And they struck his head with a reed, and spat upon him, and they knelt down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

Alright, pause there. So, so much we could say about this. What I just want to highlight here is the Roman nature of what's being described here in a few ways. First, the emphasis on the title, “King of the Jews.” They’re mocking the messianic claim. They don’t call him mashiach; that’s a Hebrew term. They don’t call him Christos; that's a Greek translation of the Hebrew term. They call him “King of the Jews” because that's really under Roman law where the penalty lies. It's basically a charge of treason that’s being levied against him. Because if he's claiming to be the king of the Jews than what he’s saying is that Caesar is not the king, right. Because that was Caesar's title, “basileus.” He was the king or even better the Emperor - it’s really what it means. So, when they are saying, “King of the Jews,” they’re obviously mocking him. A second element here is the method of execution which is crucifixion, preceded by scourging. So you’ll notice although many movies about Jesus’ passion and death will emphasize the scourging at the pillar, notice how Mark passes over it really quickly: “Having scourged him they led him out to be crucified.” He doesn't put as much focus on it because the scourging -- well, we don’t know exactly why — but some scholars have suggested precisely because the scourging was so violent and so brutal the evangelists aren’t dwelling on that. Everyone knew what that meant. But sometimes we don't know what it means. So, one of the things I’ve done is, in my book, *Jesus the Bridegroom*, I just kind of gave you some actual first-hand accounts of Roman scourgings in order to give you a better idea of what it involved. And, what was involved was this: it wasn't just being whipped before being crucified. It was being whipped with a

leather thong that would be fitted with pieces of bone or iron spikes in order to lacerate the body as much as possible to make the blood flow in streams, so that the crucified person would be a visible horror to everyone else. In other words, crucifixion is meant to scare other people into submission to the Roman Empire. And, the scourging is what precedes the crucifixion in order to make it as bloody of a death as possible. Because if you crucify someone without scourging them what happens is the slow death by asphyxiation, which is terrible but it's even more horrifying if you lacerate their bodies beforehand. And, that was the Roman custom. So, for example, Josephus. who was a first century Jewish historian who fought in the war against Rome as a general. describes scourgings by Romans. And, this is what he says in his book, *The Jewish War*:

[The Romans] had them *scourged until their entrails were visible*... The men [were then] dismissed, *all covered in blood*, a spectacle that struck such terror into their menacing foes that they dropped their arms and fled.

That's from his *Jewish War*. So, notice what Josephus is telling us: that the scourgings were so violent and brutal that they could take the skin off a man even to where his entrails were exposed. So this is obviously being done with hooks and spikes and that kind of thing. It's not just a whipping or a caning. The other thing is that it's meant to produce fear in the enemies of Rome. So that's what they're going to do to Jesus here. They're going to take him out; they're going to scourge him until he's covered in blood, until skin is lacerated; and, then they're going to parade him out as an example of what happens to people who engage in treason against Rome. Along the way they have some fun with it though. Because they crown him with thorns and then they put a purple robe on him. Now, why do they do that? Some translations say scarlet or purple. In either case it's the color of royalty. That's the meaning of the term because purple was a color that was meant for the Emperor; it was something that the Emperor would wear. So, what they're doing is they're mocking Jesus' claim not just to be a king but to be royalty, to be an Emperor who's, you know, in a sense pitting himself against Caesar. And, then notice what else they do: it says — Mark says this, this is really important — they knelt down in homage before him. Literally, what they're doing there is they're worshiping him as divine, right. Not because they believe it but because they're mocking his royal claim — because remember Caesar, starting with Augustus Caesar, was worshiped not just as a man but also as a God. He was called the

divine Caesar. So the homage paid to Caesar, on the one hand it's the homage paid to a king, and on the other hand it could become the homage paid to a God. And, given that Mark has just told you Jesus made a divine claim in the preceding chapter, it takes on a certain irony here, right. It's Jesus versus Caesar, right. On the one hand you have Caesar who dresses in purple, who wears a crown, before whom people kneel and eventually who will be worshiped as a God; versus Jesus who's covered in blood, but he's wearing a crown, and he's got his purple robe and people are kneeling before him. Why? What Mark knows and you know is that Jesus is the true divine son of God; he is the true king of the world; he's the true emperor. But, he's the Emperor who's going to reign not from a throne of gold but from the wood of cross, which is where they take him now. So, in conclusion we'll just look at the death of Christ in Mark chapter 15:21ff, he narrates his death as follows:

And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

Sorry, pause there - one second I just have to note this. Notice Mark assumes you're going to know who Alexander and Rufus are because that's how he identifies Simon of Cyrene. And, some scholars have pointed out that Rufus is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Romans as well as one of the prominent figures in the early Church. So, some have speculated that this is another clue that Mark was written for Christians in Rome because Simon of Cyrene's sons — one of them at least, Rufus — went to Rome and was a prominent Christian there in the early church. And, that's how Simon gets identified. That's only in Mark; it's not in the other gospels. In any case, it continues:

And they brought him to the place called Gol'gotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour, when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews."

There it is a fifth time.



And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

And then Mark says this and watch what he says:

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "E'lo-i, E'lo-i, la'ma sabach-tha'ni?" which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Eli'jah." And one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Eli'jah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Then Mark goes on to narrate the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea before the sun sets on Friday evening. Alright, what can we say about Mark's crucifixion? Well, there's lots that we could talk about. For our purposes here I want to end by just focusing on one element that you probably missed, but it's really important, which is the timing of the crucifixion. So, Mark tells us there - and notice he's emphatic about it, he emphasizes it — is that the passion of Jesus' crucifixion begins at 9 AM, the third hour which would be basically three hours after sunrise. Sunrise is about 6 AM, so the third hour would be about 9 AM. And, then the ninth hour which would be around 3 o'clock, right. And, twice he tells you Jesus dies at the ninth hour. Now, why does he highlight those two hours? Well, if you go back and look at Jewish tradition you can find the answer. Because according to the Old

Testament and ancient Jewish tradition, 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock in the afternoon were the two hours of the Tamid sacrifice.

In the Book of Exodus 28, it says that God commanded Israel to offer a sacrifice of a lamb with bread and wine every single day as a sign of the everlasting covenant. At nine in the morning you'd offer one and then at three in the afternoon you'd offer another. And, it was called the Tamid, which means “perpetual,” because it was always being offered day in day out, day in day out as a sign of the everlasting covenant. And, so what Mark is doing here is he's cueing you into the fact that Jesus dies — his passion begins and ends at the very time when the Jews would be in the Temple offering the perpetual sacrifice of the Lamb along with bread and wine. And, we know this practice was in place at the time of Christ because in the Book of Acts, it tells us in Acts 2 and 4 that Peter and James go up to the Temple at the third hour — 9 AM — and at the ninth hour — 3 PM — for the hours of prayer. Because when those sacrifices would be being offered, the Jews will be gathering in the temple to pray in union with the sacrifice, just like we do in the Mass. The priest offers a sacrifice, but we pray in union with the sacrifice of the Mass. So, as Jewish scholars and others have pointed out to us, according to Jewish tradition at those times the sacrifice is being offered at 3 PM, they would also engage in a series of prayers called the 18 Benedictions. Let me just give you one of these prayers that they would've been praying according to Jewish tradition at 3 PM. This is what the 15th benediction says — so imagine Jesus on the cross outside the city, the priests in the Temple offering the lamb with bread and wine, the people gathered praying these words:

Blessed are you O God, cause the shoot of David [meaning the Messiah],  
to shoot forth quickly, and raise up his horn by your salvation. For we wait  
on your salvation all the day.

So think about that for a second. According to Jewish tradition, at 3 PM every day the Jews would gather in the Temple to pray for the coming of the Messiah and the giving of salvation. And, that's what they're praying for at the very hour when Jesus bows his head and gives up his spirit, thereby fulfilling not just Passover or the Tamid sacrifice, but truly answering the prayer of his people in the Temple at that hour. And, I just think that's something for us to ponder this Holy Week as we prepare especially for many of the services on Good Friday will be tied to 3 PM, to

the hour of Jesus' death. And, I would just encourage you, whether you pray the divine mercy chaplet, or whatever you might do, to try remember that hour, the ninth hour, 3 o'clock. The hour of the true perpetual sacrifice that begins on Calvary and then comes to us every time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist.