

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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PALM SUNDAY

29th March 2026

Text: Matthew 26:14-27:66 (Shorter version 27:11-54) (See text from page 3 on)

Thought for the day

Official memorial celebrations are familiar to us, marking wars or national events. Often, these are coloured by a mixture of sadness and gratitude. The Christian memorial of the last week of Jesus' life is entirely different.

First of all, we tell the whole story again because he is risen from the dead.

Secondly: this memorial is an effective one: as we do this in memory of him, the very same gifts of compassion, forgiveness, love and healing are offered again to all present, precisely because Jesus is risen from the dead.

Our Christian memory is not a dead remembering but an effective bringing into the present of the great events that gave us new life in Christ

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

Holy Week, which is the high point of the Christian year, begins with two important rituals. One is the blessing of palms to recall the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the other is the reading of the passion of Our Lord. They are linked because in each the identity of Jesus is acknowledged. He is the long awaited Messiah and our crucified Lord whose death on the cross shows us the lengths our loving God was prepared to go to in order to change our minds and hearts.

This year we read the account of the passion according to Matthew. While the four gospels tell the story of Jesus' death in a similar way, each evangelist highlights particular scenes that are consistent with his presentation of Jesus' whole life and public ministry. So for Matthew Jesus has been presented as the fulfilment of the Jewish scriptures who is at one and the same time the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and the faithful Messiah and Son of God. At the moment of Jesus' death an earthquake occurs and the tombs of the dead are opened. These events symbolise the fact that by his death and resurrection (when another earthquake occurs) Jesus inaugurates the final period of human history.

REFLECTION

Suffering is part and parcel of being human and while we must readily acknowledge this fact it is also true that we usually do all in our power to avoid it. The readings for today are an invitation to reflect on how it is that the passion of Jesus can change our outlook on suffering. Our Saviour is portrayed in these texts as a model of patient endurance and of faithfulness. We are not asked to believe that suffering is good in itself but we are challenged to see that good can come out of it and to recognise in Jesus God's solidarity with all those who endure suffering for doing what is right.

SEAN GOAN - *Let the Reader Understand* - Year A

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

The account of the Passion is a vivid story with a variety of characters and much action. To enter into the passage we can read the story slowly and see if we can identify with different characters in the story. Also any one scene within the story can provide us with much food for reflection and prayer. Keep in mind that one of the aims in reflecting on the passage is to discover the GOOD NEWS the story has for us. Here are just a few general pointers for prayer.

1. The identity of Jesus is revealed as the Messiah and the Son of God, not with a display of human power, but as one who was prepared to suffer unto death to show us how our God loves us. How does the Passion story speak to you as a revelation of how God loves you? When has the willingness of another person to go to great lengths on your behalf been an eyeopener of his/her love for you?
2. Jesus gives us an example of patient endurance and faithfulness in suffering. Suffering is something we all encounter. It is not something that anyone likes but sometimes we cope with it better than others. What have you found helps you to cope better with suffering?
3. As you read through the narrative of the Passion where do you find yourself resonating with a character in the action? Is there any message there for you that is life-giving?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - *Intercom*

What makes us Christian is to follow Jesus. That's all. This following of Jesus is not theoretical or abstract. It means following in his footsteps, committing ourselves to humanising life and contributing little by little to making a reality of his project of a world in which God and his justice reign. This means that we, the followers of Jesus, are sent to bring truth where there is deceit and lies, justice where there is injustice and cruelty to the weakest, and to bring back compassion where there is indifference and passivity at the sight of those who suffer. This entails building communities that unite on the basis of the project of Jesus while living his spirit and attitudes.

Following Jesus sooner or later brings with it conflicts, problems and suffering. One must be ready to face reactions from those who for one reason or another do not want a more human world such as the kind that God wants as revealed by Jesus. They want something else.

To follow Jesus is an all-consuming task. It is difficult to imagine a life more noble or dignified. But there's a price to be paid. To follow Jesus it is important to 'do': to make the world more just; to create a Church more faithful to the Gospels. Yet it is as important or more so to 'suffer' in bringing about a more just world, to suffer building a church more faithful to the Gospels.

At the end of his life the theologian, Karl Rahner, wrote: "I believe that being a Christian is the most simple task; the most simple and at the same time it is the heavy *light burden* of which the Gospels speak. When one lifts it, it lifts you, and the longer you live, the heavier and lighter it becomes. At the end only the mystery remains, but it is the mystery of Jesus."

JOSÉ A PAGOLA- *Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus*

When Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022, the world looked on in horror at the death and destruction inflicted on innocent people, but we also saw the outpouring of love and solidarity offered to the millions of refugees created by this war. The helpers were out in force: parents who left buggies at train stations, aid convoys from all over Europe, millions of euros raised. The American TV host Fred Rogers, once said, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." The many small acts of kindness shown in the aftermath of terrible events add up to a greater movement. Yes, we sit with the horrors of the cross this week, but we can also look for the helpers, and we can be helpers too.

Africans believe in something that is difficult to render in English. We call it Ubuntu... You know when it is there and when it is absent. It speaks about humaneness, gentleness, hospitality, putting yourself out on behalf of others, being vulnerable. It embraces compassion and toughness. It recognises that my humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together. (Desmond Tutu)

In Gethsemane, Jesus models for believers what the disciples were unable to do, 'stay awake and pray'. When faced with moments of great agony and trial, how do we respond?

As this Holy Week unfolds, spend time with Matthew's Passion account. Notice the various characters and the roles they play. A good question to ask is 'Where do I stand?' Choose a character in the story to be with and see where it leads you.

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT— *Going Deeper*

Matthew 26:14-27:66 The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

Key: N. Narrator. ✕ Jesus. O. Other single speaker. C. Crowd, or more than one speaker.

N. One of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said,

O. What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you?

N. They paid him thirty silver pieces, and from that moment he looked for an opportunity to betray him.

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus to say,

C. Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the passover?

N. He replied:

✕ Go to so-and-so in the city and say to him, 'The Master says: My time is near. It is at your house that I am keeping Passover with my disciples.'

N. The disciples did what Jesus told them and prepared the Passover.

When evening came he was at table with the twelve disciples. And while they were eating he said:

✕ I tell you solemnly, one of you is about to betray me.

N. They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn,

C. Not I, Lord, surely?

N. He answered,

✕ Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man is going to his fate, as the scriptures say he will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born!

N. Judas, who was to betray him, asked in his turn,

O. Not I, Rabbi, surely?

N. Jesus answered:

✕ They are your own words.

N. Now as they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples and said:

✕ Take it and eat; this is my body.

N. Then he took a cup, and when he had returned thanks he gave it to them, saying:

✕ Drink, all of you, from this, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. From now on, I tell you, I shall not drink wine until the day I drink the new wine with you in the kingdom of my Father.

N. After psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them,

✕ You will all lose faith in me this night, for the scripture says: *I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered*, but after my resurrection I shall go before you to Galilee.

N. At this, Peter said,

O. Though all lose faith in you, I will never lose faith.

N. Jesus answered him,

✕ I tell you solemnly, this very night, before the cock crows, you will have disowned me three times.

N. Peter said to him,

O. Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.

N. And all the disciples said the same.

Then Jesus came with them to a small estate called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples,

✕ Stay here while I go over there to pray.

N. He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him. And sadness came over him, and great distress. Then he said to them,

✕ My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here and keep awake with me.

N. And going on a little further he fell on his face and prayed:

✕ My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. Nevertheless, let it be as you, not I, would have it.

N. He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter:

✕ So you had not the strength to keep awake with me one hour? You should be awake, and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

N. Again, a second time, he went away and prayed:

✘ My Father, if this cup cannot pass by without my drinking it, your will be done!

N. And he came back again and found them sleeping, their eyes were so heavy. Leaving them there, he went away again and prayed for the third time, repeating the same words. Then he came back to the disciples and said to them,

✘ You can sleep on now and take your rest. Now the hour has come when the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up! Let us go! My betrayer is already close at hand.

N. He was still speaking when Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared, and with him a large number of men armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. Now the traitor had arranged a sign with them. He had said,

O. 'The one I kiss, he is the man. Take him in charge.'

N. So he went straight up to Jesus and said,

O. Greetings, Rabbi.

N. and kissed him. Jesus said to him,

✘ My friend, do what you are here for.

N. Then they came forward, seized Jesus and took him in charge. At that, one of the followers of Jesus grasped his sword and drew it; he struck out at the high priest's servant, and cut off his ear. Jesus then said,

✘ Put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father who would promptly send more than twelve legions of angels to my defence? But then, how would the scriptures be fulfilled that say this is the way it must be?

N. It was at this time that Jesus said to the crowds,

✘ Am I a brigand, that you had to set out to capture me with swords and clubs? I sat teaching in the Temple day after day and you never laid hands on me.

N. Now all this happened to fulfil the prophecies in scripture. Then all the disciples deserted him and ran away.

The men who had arrested Jesus led him off to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. Peter followed him at a distance, and when he reached the high priest's palace, he went in and sat down with the attendants to see what the end would be.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus, however false, on which they might pass the death sentence. But they could not find any, though several lying witnesses came forward. Eventually two stepped forward and made a statement,

O. This man said: 'I have power to destroy the Temple of God and in three days build it up.'

N. The high priest then stood up and said to him,

O. Have you no answer to that? What is this evidence these men are bringing against you?

N. But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to him,

O. I put you on oath by the living God to tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.

N. Jesus answered:

✘ The words are your own. Moreover, I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

N. At this, the high priest tore his clothes and said,

O. He has blasphemed. What need of witnesses have we now? There! You have just heard the blasphemy. What is your opinion?

N. They answered,

C. He deserves to die.

N. Then they spat in his face and hit him with their fists; others said as they struck him,

C. Play the prophet, Christ! Who hit you then?

N. Meanwhile Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came up to him and said,

O. You too were with Jesus the Galilean.

N. But he denied it in front of them all, saying:

O. I do not know what you are talking about.

N. When he went out to the gateway another servant-girl saw him and said to the people there,

O. This man was with Jesus the Nazarene.

N. And again, with an oath, he denied it:

O. I do not know the man.

N. A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter,

C. You are one of them for sure! Why, your accent gives you away.

Then he started calling down curses on himself and swearing:

O. I do not know the man.

N. At that moment the cock crew, and Peter remembered what Jesus had said, 'Before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly.

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people met in council to bring about the death of Jesus. They had him bound, and led him away to hand him over to Pilate, the governor.

When he found that Jesus had been condemned, Judas his betrayer was filled with remorse and took the thirty silver pieces back to the chief priests and elders, saying:

O. I have sinned. I have betrayed innocent blood.

N. They replied:

C. What is that to us? That is your concern.

N. And flinging down the silver pieces in the sanctuary he made off and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the silver pieces and said,

C. It is against the Law to put this into the treasury: it is blood-money.

N. So they discussed the matter and bought the potter's field with it as a graveyard for foreigners, and this is why the field is called the Field of Blood today. The words of the prophet Jeremiah were then fulfilled: *And they took the thirty silver pieces, the sum at which the precious One was priced by children of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, just as the Lord directed me.*

Jesus, then, was brought before the governor, and the governor put to him this question:

O. Are you the king of the Jews?

N. Jesus replied,

X It is you who say it.

N. But when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders he refused to answer at all. Pilate then said to him,

O. Do you not hear how many charges they have brought against you?

N. But to the governor's complete amazement, he offered no reply to any of the charges.

At festival time it was the governor's practice to release a prisoner for the people, anyone they chose. Now there was at that time a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. So when the crowd gathered, Pilate said to them,

O. Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?

N. For Pilate knew it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. Now as he was seated in the chair of judgement, his wife sent him a message,

O. Have nothing to do with that man; I have been upset all day by a dream I had about him.

N. The chief priests and the elders, however, had persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. So when the governor spoke and asked them,

O. Which of the two do you want me to release for you?

N. they said,

C. Barabbas.

N. Pilate said to them:

O. But in that case, what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?

N. They all said:

C. Let him be crucified!

N. Pilate asked:

O. Why? What harm has he done?

N. But they shouted all the louder,

C. Let him be crucified!

N. Then Pilate saw that he was making no impression, that in fact a riot was imminent. So he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said,

O. I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your concern.

N. And the people, to a man, shouted back,

C. His blood be on us and on our children!

N. Then he released Barabbas for them. He ordered Jesus to be first scourged and then handed over to be crucified.

The governor's soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium and collected the whole cohort round him. Then they stripped him and made him wear a scarlet cloak, and having twisted some

thorns into a crown they put this on his head and placed a reed in his right hand. To make fun of him they knelt to him saying,

C. Hail, king of the Jews!

N. And they spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head with it. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the cloak and dressed him in his own clothes and led him away to crucify him.

On their way out, they came across a man from Cyrene, Simon by name, and enlisted him to carry his cross. When they had reached a place called Golgotha, that is, the place of the skull, they gave him wine to drink mixed with gall, which he tasted but refused to drink. When they had finished crucifying him they shared out his clothing by casting lots, and then sat down and stayed there keeping guard over him.

Above his head was placed the charge against him; it read: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' At the same time two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said,

C. So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself! If you are God's son, come down from the cross!

N. The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way, saying:

C. He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He puts his trust in God; now let God rescue him if he wants him. For he did say, 'I am the son of God.'

N. Even the robbers who were crucified with him taunted him in the same way.

From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice,

✠ Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?

N. That is, 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?' When some of those who stood there heard this, they said,

C. The man is calling on Elijah.

N. and one of them quickly ran to get a sponge which he dipped in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it him to drink. The rest of them said:

C. Wait! See if Elijah will come to save him.

N. But Jesus, again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up his spirit.

Here all kneel and pause for a short time.

At that, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked; the rocks were split; the tombs opened and the bodies of many holy men rose from the dead, and these, after his resurrection, came out of the tombs, entered the Holy City and appeared to a number of people. Meanwhile the centurion, together with the others guarding Jesus, had seen the earthquake and all that was taking place, and they were terrified and said,

C. In truth this was a son of God.

N. And many women were there, watching from a distance, the same women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and looked after him. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

When it was evening, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, called Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate thereupon ordered it to be handed over. So Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean shroud and put it in his own new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a large stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away. Now Mary of Magdala and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre.

Next day, that is, when Preparation Day was over, the chief priests and the Pharisees went in a body to Pilate and said to him,

C. Your Excellency, we recall that this impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I shall rise again.' Therefore give the order to have the sepulchre kept secure until the third day, for fear his disciples come and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' This last piece of fraud would be worse than what went before.

N. Pilate said to them:

O. You may have your guard. Go and make all as secure as you know how.

N. So they went and made the sepulchre secure, putting seals on the stone and mounting a guard.