

Palm (Passion) Sunday - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

Introduction

Passion week ends our celebration of Lent. Our lenten preparations have been focused on improving our response to God's call so that we, His children, will be ready to come home and live for all eternity. Jesus, our eldest brother, has showed us how to live His life so that we can gain eternal life. Our readings today show us how Jesus freely became the eternal perfect sacrifice – the one sacrifice which could open the gates of heaven so that we could have our sins forgiven and forgotten. The sacrifice instituted the New Covenant with God; the covenant in which we are no longer God's slaves but His children. As with all covenants, this covenant is sealed with a meal, a meal in which all parties partake and which is offered to God. The offering to God is described in Revelation 5:6 by John: "*Then I saw standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and the elders a Lamb that seemed to have been slain.*" The meal in which we partake is the Holy Eucharist promised by Jesus at Capernaum "*Unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink His blood you have no life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.*" (John 6:53-54). This meal was provided for us by Jesus at the Last Supper.

Procession Gospel - Luke 19:28-40

Jesus is completing His journey to Jerusalem; the place He knows that He must go for His passion. Our Mass this Sunday opens with Luke's account of Jesus' Messianic entry into the city.

²⁸ After he had said this, he proceeded on his journey up to Jerusalem.

This is truly a journey "up" to Jerusalem. The Gospel writer is referring to the geography of the area; Jerusalem is on the top of a mountain.

²⁹ As he drew near to Bethphage

The name Bethphage means "House of the unripe fig." It seems to have been located some 2/3 mile from Jerusalem.

and Bethany

The name Bethany means "house of figs." It is about 3 miles east of Jerusalem on the road to Jericho. It was the home of Lazarus and his three sisters and contained about twenty families. The fig tree was the symbol of Jerusalem and the author shows progression from "figs" to "unripe figs" to "no figs" because Jesus considered Jerusalem to have ceased to be fruitful (recall the cursing of the fig tree).

at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples.

Luke never does things singly.

³⁰ He said, “Go into the village opposite you, and as you enter it you will find a colt tethered on which no one has ever sat.

The ass was historically the mount of a prince who entered a town peacefully and joyfully; the warrior would enter on a horse.

Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ And if anyone should ask you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you will answer, ‘The Master has need of it.’” ³² So those who had been sent went off and found everything just as he had told them. ³³ And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying this colt?” ³⁴ They answered, “The Master has need of it.”

Notice the foreknowledge which Jesus has of events; there is no resistance to His appropriating this valuable animal.

³⁵ So they brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks over the colt, and helped Jesus to mount.

There is a miracle here; the unbroken animal doesn't resist Jesus as a rider. Jesus makes use of a donkey for His entry into Jerusalem, thereby fulfilling the ancient prophecy: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass” (Zechariah 9:9). The people, and particularly the Pharisees, were quite aware of this prophecy. By fulfilling the prophecy our Lord was showing everyone that He was the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament.

³⁶ As he rode along, the people were spreading their cloaks on the road;

Saint Luke omits the palm branches.

³⁷ and now as he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to praise God aloud with joy for all the mighty deeds they had seen.

The Gospel according Saint Luke recounts seven miracles performed by Jesus.

³⁸ They proclaimed: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Psalm 118:26, “Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord” but the people also acclaim Him as king. This is a great messianic demonstration, which infuriates the Pharisees.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.”

Their shouts echo the announcement made by the angel to the shepherds on Christmas night (Luke 2:14).

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” ⁴⁰ He said in reply, “I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out!”

To the reproaches of the Pharisees, who are scandalized by the people’s shouts, our Lord replies in a phrase which sounds like a proverb; so obvious is His Messiahship that if men refused to recognize it, nature would proclaim it. In fact, when His friends were cowed on the hill of Calvary the earth trembled and the rocks split (Matthew 27:51). At other times our Lord imposed silence on those who want to proclaim Him King or Messiah; but now He adopts a different attitude: the moment has come for His divinity and His mission to be made public.

1st Reading - Isaiah 50:4-7

Our first reading is from the third suffering servant song of the prophet Isaiah. This song tells how the Messiah will be treated when He comes.

⁴ The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue,

A disciple’s tongue.

That I might know how to speak to the weary

The Israelites.

a word that will rouse them. Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear;

The servant must first be a disciple, prayerfully receiving God’s word, before he can presume to teach others. The suffering people are deaf to the saving Word of God that is being spoken (or fulfilled) through their suffering. Within the Israelite community there are saintly men who obediently listen to God’s word and yearn to speak it to others (these are called the prophets). Jesus said: *“The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The father who dwells in me is doing his works”* (John 14:10).

⁵ And I have not rebelled, have not turned back. ⁶ I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; My face I did not shield from buffets and spitting.

Like the prophets before him, the servant is ignored and even maltreated.

⁷ The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced;

The word in the Hebrew for “disgraced” has the same root as “buffet” in the preceding verse and provides strong contrast.

I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

A phrase which is frequent in prophetic preaching to denote steadfastness. It is all the more effective here in describing a face covered with spittle.

The Responsorial Psalm is one of the seven last words of Jesus on the cross and shows that He was praying the Psalms during His crucifixion and not despairing.

2nd Reading - Philippians 2:6-11

Our second reading has been called “The Christ Hymn” because of the distinctive qualities of this passage. It has a rhythmic character and a use of parallelism which have led to the view that Paul is quoting a hymn composed independently of Philippians (possibly originally in Aramaic). The hymn has a basic twofold structure: verses 6-8 describe Christ’s abasement; while verses 9-11, His exaltation.

⁶ Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

Christ, who existed from before the creation of the world, did not exploit His divinity for selfish gain. In Jewish tradition being like God meant immunity to death (Wisdom 2:23).

⁷ Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,

In emptying Himself He rendered Himself powerless – exactly as a slave is powerless. He did not empty Himself of divinity, but of the status of glory to which He had a right and which would be restored at His exaltation.

coming in human likeness;

What is translated here as “human likeness” can mean “identical copy” or “mere resemblance”. Identical copy is most likely it brings out the contrast of the fully divine becoming fully human as well.

and found human in appearance,

By being “human in appearance, He came in human form.

⁸ he humbled himself,

The selfless attitude of Christ, shown in His original disposition to take on the slavlike, mortal human condition, continues throughout His human history.

becoming obedient to death,

Throughout His whole life, Christ lived out perfectly the demands of human existence before God.

Death was not simply the terminal point of His obedience; it was the inevitable consequence of being both fully human and totally obedient in a world alienated from God.

even death on a cross.

Crucifixion, the form of execution reserved for slaves and those who had totally forfeited all civil rights, marked the extremity of human abasement.

⁹ Because of this, God greatly exalted him

The self-denying act of Christ is matched by the active response of God. His obedience is rewarded, not in the sense that it forced God's hand but that God in His fidelity moved to vindicate (justify) the one who had placed himself so totally at the divine disposition. Beyond the exaltation of all the just, Christ is given the unique status of lordship over the universe. Notice that in this hymn there is no mention of the resurrection.

and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

Explicit mention of the name is held back until the end of the hymn, but the name is *Kyrios* (Lord) which came to be substituted for YHWH in Christian copies of the Septuagint Old Testament. If God has bestowed the name on him, Jesus bears it without cost to strict monotheism – there is only one God.

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus

Mention of Jesus now connotes the title and authority of universal Lord.

every knee should bend,

Isaiah 45:23. This hymn transfers to Christ the homage given to God alone.

of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

The three levels of the universe according to ancient thought.

¹¹ and every tongue confess

See Isaiah 45:23.

that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The climax of the hymn is the early Christian confession of faith (see 1 Corinthians 12:3; Romans 10:9). He who in selfless obedience took on the powerlessness of a slave now through divine commission and investiture holds universal lordship (see 1 Corinthians 3:21-23; Romans 14:9).

Gospel - Luke 22:14 - 23:56

Saint Luke combines here two traditions: one, a farewell discourse to his disciples and the Church and the institution of the Eucharist (22:14-38); and second, Jesus' passion, death, and burial (22:39-23:56).

The Eucharist was instituted at a Passover meal. At the Passover meal it was the custom for the youngest boy to ask the head of the household four times "What does this mean?" about the meal, the lamb, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs (see Exodus 12:26; 13:8-14). The father would answer in turn with the following texts of Scripture: Deuteronomy 26; Exodus 13; Exodus 12:29; Exodus 1:14. John was the youngest at the Last Supper.

^{22:14} When the hour came,

Here Saint Luke approaches Saint John's understanding of "hour" as the completion of Jesus' exodus and return to God.

he took his place at table with the apostles.

The Passover was eaten in a family setting; the apostles are Jesus' family, just as we are His brothers and sisters who share in the common meal of the Eucharist.

¹⁵ He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, ¹⁶ for, I tell you, I shall not eat it (again) until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

These verses (15 and 16) occur only in Saint Luke's account.

¹⁷ Then he took a cup,

The second cup of the Passover meal. The sequence of a first century Palestinian Passover meal will help illuminate the verses which follow:

- 1) Preliminary course, during which one cup of wine (the cup of thanksgiving) was drunk and a second cup was poured;
- 2) The Passover liturgy itself, in which the head of the family retold the story of the exodus, the unleavened bread was broken with half left on the plate and the other half (the *afikomen*) was taken away to be eaten at the end of the meal. The second cup of wine was drunk.
- 3) The meal proper. After the meal proper, the *afikomen* was broken, distributed to all present, and eaten. Then the third cup of wine (the cup of blessing) was poured and drunk, and the fourth cup was poured.
- 4) The conclusion. The great *hallel* was sung (Psalms 114-118) and the fourth cup (the cup of consummation) was drunk.

gave thanks, and said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I tell you (that) from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” ¹⁹ Then he took the bread,

The *afikomen*. In the Passover liturgy the head of the house took the bread for distribution as a symbol of how he provided for his own. Jesus now provides not bread, but His own body to sustain his family.

said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body,

The bread of eternal life promised at Capernaum a year earlier.

which will be given for you; do this

Do what Jesus has just done; transubstantiate the bread into His body. This is the institution of the ordained priesthood.

in memory of me.”

To the Jews, this was not recalling fond memories, but offering a memorial sacrifice, a sacrifice which makes the event present again. The Passover meal was a memorial sacrifice which made the participants present at the original Passover meal in Egypt.

²⁰ **And likewise the cup after they had eaten,**

The third cup, the cup of blessing.

saying, “This cup is the new covenant

The only time in the New Testament where Jesus refers to “covenant” is at the Last Supper, at the institution of the Eucharist.

in my blood, which will be shed for you.

Covenants were solemnized with a sacrificial meal which was shared among the members of the enlarged family.

²¹ **“And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me is with me on the table;**

This perhaps is a reference to Psalm 41:9 (41:10 in the New American Bible) “*even my friend who had my trust and partook of my bread, has raised his heel against me.*” Judas’ name is not specifically mentioned; perhaps as a reminder to all that every sin is like Judas’, in that in effect it uses the hand that is with Christ on the Eucharistic table to strike against him.

²² **for the Son of Man indeed goes as it has been determined;**

What is to be done by Judas effects what God knows must be done for our salvation.

but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed.”²³ And they began to debate among themselves who among them would do such a deed.

In contrast to Mark 14:19, the disciples do not question Jesus about betrayal, but one another.

²⁴ Then an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest.

What Saint Mark places during Jesus’ journey (Mark 10:42-45), Saint Luke places at the Last Supper.

²⁵ He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as ‘Benefactors’;

Perhaps a reference to church officials (see Acts 15:22; Hebrews 13:7,17,24).

²⁶ but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. ²⁷ For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves?

This recalls John 13:1-21 where Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. Leaders are to adopt Jesus’ lifestyle of leadership.

Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves. ²⁸ It is you who have stood by me in my trials;

Not in His temptation the desert, but the opposition and questions He has encountered throughout His public life. His disciples have stood and continue to stand steadfastly by Him.

²⁹ and I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me,

The word translated as “confer” comes from the same Greek word as “covenant.” This has the language of a last will and testament (“I bequeath to . . .”). The Christology implied in this imagery is profound: Jesus, the king, has gone through death and has been vindicated by His Father with the gift of heavenly rule. In the conferral of the kingdom on the apostles we see that the Church participates in the kingdom through Jesus’ death – the sacrifice which opened heaven for us.

³⁰ that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The apostles especially, as Acts shows, Peter and John will have authority over the reconstituted Israel; that authority is rooted in Jesus’ farewell gift to the Church.

³¹ “Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded

Saint Luke now contrasts the effects of Satan's attacks will have on Judas and Peter.

to sift all of you like wheat,

Notice that He is speaking in the plural here, all the apostles will be attacked.

³² but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail;

Here, the address is in the singular – Peter.

and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.”

Your fellow Christians who form the Church, the family of God.

³³ He said to him, “Lord, I am prepared to go to prison and to die with you.” ³⁴ But he replied, “I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows this day,

The third Roman watch extended from midnight to 3 AM. The cockcrow can be a semi-official way of referring to 3 AM.

you will deny three times that you know me.”

In verses 24-27 there was much ado about who was the greatest. Now we see how the greatest is tested and fails. The Lucan Jesus is making it clear to the reader of the gospel that no disciple, not even the one for whom Jesus has prayed, will be safe from a test to his/her loyalty and fidelity.

³⁵ He said to them, “When I sent you forth without a money bag or a sack or sandals, were you in need of anything?”

The actual reference is not to the sending out of the apostles in Luke 9:3, but to the sending out of the 70 (72) disciples in Luke 10:4.

“No, nothing,” they replied. ³⁶ He said to them, “But now one who has a money bag should take it, and likewise a sack, and one who does not have a sword should sell his cloak and buy one. ³⁷ For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, namely, ‘He was counted among the wicked’;

Isaiah 53:12. Jesus refers to Himself as the suffering servant as portrayed in the suffering servant songs. What Jesus is about is in God's plan.

and indeed what is written about me is coming to fulfillment.” ³⁸ Then they said, “Lord, look, there are two swords here.”

Luke doesn't do things singly. The disciples take Jesus literally and fail to grasp the hidden depth of meaning about opposition from others and service to them throughout the long period of time until

the parousia.

But he replied, “It is enough!”

Enough of this. It seems that Jesus speaks the word with a sign of frustration and sadness, almost failure.

³⁹ Then going out he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives,

Jesus stayed on the Mount of Olives but went into Jerusalem to preach and teach.

and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ When he arrived at the place he said to them, “Pray that you may not undergo the test.”

Be tempted, sifted. What is involved is entry into Satan’s field of force with the result of apostasy.

⁴¹ After withdrawing about a stone’s throw from them and kneeling, he prayed,

Jesus does not use the normal Jewish posture for prayer, standing; rather, He assumes the posture of humility and kneels.

⁴² saying, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me;

The fourth cup of the Passover liturgy, the cup of consummation. Jesus knows that as soon as He drinks this cup He will become the sacrifice which institutes the New Covenant.

still, not my will but yours be done.”

Perfect submission to God’s plan.

⁴³ (And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. ⁴⁴ He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.)

These two verses are missing in the most important manuscripts. However, the angel is seen as strengthening Jesus in His acceptance of His mission and the sweat is seen as that of an athlete who gives his everything to achieve the moral victory.

⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief.

Crippling fear in the face of impending conflict which leads to loss of strength, shrinking to the ground, and contraction in sleep.

⁴⁶ He said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test.” ⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, a crowd approached and in front was one of the Twelve, a man named Judas.

An implicit contrast is drawn between Peter the leader and Judas the leader.

He went up to Jesus to kiss him.

The oriental form of greeting becomes the sign of treachery.

⁴⁸ Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” ⁴⁹ His disciples realized what was about to happen, and they asked, “Lord, shall we strike with a sword?”

A reference to the two swords of verse 38.

⁵⁰ And one of them

Peter, according to John 18:10.

struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said in reply, “Stop, no more of this!”

“Enough!” The same response as to the two swords. Jesus does not succumb to the temptation of abandoning His nonviolent ministry and using violence.

Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him.

This is the only miracle in the passion and demonstrates that Jesus is not only the Savior in His pre-Jerusalem ministry, but also during His passion. He heals even an enemy! Such is the nature of the compassionate God proclaimed by Jesus.

⁵² And Jesus said to the chief priests and temple guards and elders who had come for him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs?”

Nonviolence is overcome, for the moment, by violence.

⁵³ Day after day I was with you in the temple area, and you did not seize me; but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness.”

Jesus is the truth, the light of the world. Satan is the prince of darkness.

⁵⁴ After arresting him they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest; Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it,

John 18:18 tells us this was a charcoal fire beside which Peter denied Christ three times. The only other mention of a charcoal fire is on the beach in John 21:9 where Peter affirms his loyalty three times.

and Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶ When a maid saw him seated in the light, she looked intently

at him and said, “This man too was with him.” ⁵⁷ But he denied it saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” ⁵⁸ A short while later someone else saw him and said, “You too are one of them”; but Peter answered, “My friend, I am not.” ⁵⁹ About an hour later, still another insisted, “Assuredly, this man too was with him, for he also is a Galilean.” ⁶⁰ But Peter said, “My friend, I do not know what you are talking about.” Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed,

Jesus’ prophecy of verse 34 is fulfilled.

⁶¹ and the Lord turned and looked at Peter;

A look of compassion.

and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” ⁶² He went out and began to weep bitterly.

Jesus’ prayer has been effective by preserving Peter in his sifting. There is an implicit contrast with Judas – Peter repented of his deed, Judas did not.

⁶³ The men who held Jesus in custody were ridiculing and beating him.

What Jesus had predicted (Mark 10:34) now comes to pass; He is mocked.

⁶⁴ They blindfolded him and questioned him, saying, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?”

Luke plays on his theme of Jesus, the rejected prophet. Luke’s irony is supreme: Jesus is mocked as a prophet just after one of His prophecies, Peter’s denial, has been fulfilled.

⁶⁵ And they reviled him in saying many other things against him. ⁶⁶ When day came the council of elders of the people met, both chief priests and scribes, and they brought him before their Sanhedrin.

The Lucan account of the trial differs markedly from Mark’s: Luke’s is a morning trial, there are no false witnesses, there is no claim that Jesus claimed to destroy the temple, the entire Sanhedrin handles Jesus’ trial in contrast to Mark’s singling out the High Priest as spokesman. Jewish custom forbade night trials on serious charges; such charges had no legal validity. Luke’s purpose is to describe a solemn, valid, and formal trial of Jesus by Israel. Jesus’ witness at His trial becomes the model for the witness of Peter (Acts 4-5), Stephen (Acts 6-7), and of Paul (Acts 21-26) at their trials; trials which were predicted by Jesus.

⁶⁷ They said, “If you are the Messiah, tell us,”

The title of “Messiah” stresses the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.

but he replied to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe, ⁶⁸ and if I question, you will not respond. ⁶⁹ But from this time on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power

of God.”

The fulfillment of Psalm 110:1.

⁷⁰ They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?”

The Sanhedrin meant no more by this title than it signified in the Old Testament: the specially chosen one, the Davidic king. In the Sanhedrin’s eyes, that Jesus should claim such a privilege insulted God; for this humiliated, rejected man to presume to reveal and mediate the Lord’s glory to Israel was the supreme irreverence to God.

He replied to them, “You say that I am.” ⁷¹ Then they said, “What further need have we for testimony? We have heard it from his own mouth.”

Deuteronomy 17:6 requires the testimony two or more witnesses to put a person to death; here, they believe that they have a confession..

^{23:1} Then the whole assembly of them arose and brought him before Pilate.

Pontius Pilate was prefect of Judea from A.D. 26 to A.D. 36. The Roman prefect has the authority to pronounce a sentence of death by crucifixion upon a criminal.

² They brought charges against him, saying, “We found this man misleading our people; he opposes the payment of taxes to Caesar and maintains that he is the Messiah, a king.”

The charges against Jesus are not based on reality. Jesus did not forbid payment of the imperial tax (see Luke 20:20-25). His kingship (see Luke 19:38; 22:24-35; 23:35,37,39) is not a political one.

³ Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He said to him in reply, “You say so.”

Pilate must have understood Jesus’ answer as a denial; Jesus certainly was not the kind of messiah or king Pilate imagined.

⁴ Pilate then addressed the chief priests and the crowds, “I find this man not guilty.”

Pilate pronounces acquittal for Jesus.

⁵ But they were adamant and said, “He is inciting the people with his teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here.” ⁶ On hearing this Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean; ⁷ and upon learning that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod who was in Jerusalem at that time.

Herod Antipas normally went up to Jerusalem for the Passover, staying in his own palace in the center of the city. By sending Jesus to Herod, Pilate is trying to rid himself of a troublesome case and build up a friendship useful to his own political career.

⁸ Herod was very glad to see Jesus; he had been wanting to see him for a long time, for he had heard about him and had been hoping to see him perform some sign.

The “seeing” Herod brings to Jesus contrasts with the “seeing” of faith.

⁹ He questioned him at length, but he gave him no answer.

Jesus remains silent. It is the silence of the innocently suffering righteous servant of Isaiah 53:7; it is the silence born of profound trust in a faithful God.

¹⁰ The chief priests and scribes, meanwhile, stood by accusing him harshly. ¹¹ (Even) Herod and his soldiers treated him contemptuously and mocked him, and after clothing him in resplendent garb, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹² Herod and Pilate became friends that very day, even though they had been enemies formerly.

Even when He seems powerless, Jesus is able to effect a saving work; that of reconciliation between enemies.

¹³ Pilate then summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people

All Israel is present.

¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought this man to me and accused him of inciting the people to revolt. I have conducted my investigation in your presence and have not found this man guilty of the charges you have brought against him, ¹⁵ nor did Herod, for he sent him back to us. So no capital crime has been committed by him. ¹⁶ Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him.”

The fullness of the judicial procedure engaged in by Pilate is manifest; arrest, charges, examination, verdict of innocent, supporting verdict of Herod, acquittal of Jesus, judicial warning. Luke has taken considerable pains to present Jesus’ hearings before Pilate as forensic trials, legally correct in all aspects, and readily recognizable as such.

¹⁷ This verse “He was obliged to release one prisoner for them at the festival,” is not believed to be part of the original text of Luke. It seems to be an explanatory gloss from Mark 15:6 and Matthew 27:15 and is not found in many early and important Greek manuscripts. Outside of the gospels there is no direct attestation of the practice.

¹⁸ But all together they shouted out, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us.” ¹⁹ (Now Barabbas had been imprisoned for a rebellion that had taken place in the city and for murder.)

The name “Barabbas” means “Son of the Father.” It is probably a nickname. The crowd calls for his release and rejects He who is really The Father’s Son.

²⁰ Again Pilate addressed them, still wishing to release Jesus, ²¹ but they continued their

shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” ²² Pilate addressed them a third time, “What evil has this man done? I found him guilty of no capital crime. Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him.”

For the last time Pilate pronounces Jesus innocent.

²³ With loud shouts, however, they persisted in calling for his crucifixion,

This is the third time (verses 18 and 21) that the entire Israel will demand Jesus’ death.

and their voices prevailed. ²⁴ The verdict of Pilate was that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ So he released the man who had been imprisoned for rebellion and murder, for whom they asked, and he handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they wished.

This is not a judicial sentence. The Lucan Pilate had already pronounced Jesus innocent. Thus, Saint Luke lessens Roman involvement in Jesus’ condemnation and crucifixion.

²⁶ As they led him away

The grammatical antecedent to “they” is “the high priests, leaders, and the people.” Unlike Mark, who has the Roman soldiers doing this, Saint Luke again softens Roman involvement.

they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country;

The Greek word translated here can mean “to compel” or “lay friendly hands on” as for healing or recommendation. No one is compelled to become a disciple; the call is free. As in Simon of Cyrene’s case, it can come quite unexpectedly.

and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus.

This is discipleship terminology; they are to become followers.

²⁷ A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him.

The piety of these women shows that Jesus had friends as well as enemies. If we bear in mind that Jewish traditions, as recorded in the Talmud, forbade wailing for people condemned to death, we will appreciate the value of these women’s gesture.

²⁸ Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children,

Jesus issues a stern warning that Jerusalemites repent of their rejection of Him, the innocent and righteous one, God’s prophet. Otherwise God’s punishment will visit them.

²⁹ for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.’

Luke expresses the punishment in language which startles those who consider bearing children a singular blessing.

³⁰ At that time people will say to the mountains, ‘Fall upon us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’

Language of Hosea 10:8 for the chastisement of the sin of Israel.

³¹ for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?”

A proverb: If they have done this to Jesus, one who is life giving, what will happen to the dead, unrepentant Jerusalem?

³² Now two others, both criminals, were led away with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull,

The Aramaic name is Golgotha. From the Latin for skull, *calvaria*, comes the English word “Calvary.” Hebrew legend has it that Adam’s skull was buried there:

“On a nearby hill, Shem, the son of Noah, interred the skull of Adam, which he had taken with him into the ark and guarded during the flood. Since then the hill is called Golgotha – the Skull” (*Legends of Jerusalem* by Zev Vilnay, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1973, page 70).

That this place was outside the city walls depends upon such texts as Hebrews 13:12f and Luke 20:15.

they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ (Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”)

Although He had sternly warned the Jerusalemites to repent in verse 28, Jesus asks for their forgiveness because of ignorance.

They divided his garments by casting lots.

What happens to Jesus is in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, one of the psalms of the innocently suffering righteous one. Jesus was stripped naked. Persons whose liberty had been definitively taken away lost the capacity to wear clothing. Such people were prisoners and slaves (see Deuteronomy 28:48; Isaiah 20:2-4), prostitutes (Ezekiel 16:38-40), demented people (1 Samuel 19:23-24), and damned folks (1 Samuel 28:14). To be deprived of one’s clothing was to lose one’s identity. There does not seem to be any evidence that the Romans allowed a loincloth on the Jewish crucified lest Jewish sensitivities be offended.

³⁵ The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him

Luke draws a contrast between the people, who contemplate the last events of Jesus' life, and the religious rulers who scoff at Jesus.

and said, "He saved others, let him save himself

See Psalm 22:7-8; Wisdom 2:18. Jesus is tempted to save His life not by giving it away but by holding on to it. The only thing which kept Jesus on the cross was His love for us; the nails did not keep Him there.

if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God."

A true statement.

³⁶ Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine

We are told elsewhere that this was sour wine, vinegar. The soldier's actions are in accord with another of the psalms of the innocently suffering righteous one, Psalm 69:21.

³⁷ they called out, "If you are King of the Jews,

Another true statement. Luke ironically places the Christian confession of faith on the lips of Jesus' mockers.

save yourself." ³⁸ **Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews."**
³⁹ Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." ⁴⁰ **The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation?"**

The "good" thief initiates the positive responses to Jesus.

⁴¹ And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal."

Again, the theme of Jesus' innocence is sounded.

⁴² Then he said, "Jesus,

Luke continues his confession, via titles, of the meaning of Jesus crucified; only in the name of Jesus is there salvation (see Acts 4:12).

remember me when you come into your kingdom."

The only deathbed conversion in Scripture. Jesus' kingly rule is begun by His death and resurrection. The thief has deep faith that the dying Jesus is truly a king and can dispense the pardon and mercy which only a king can.

⁴³ He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me

An acquittal uttered by Him who is the one ordained by God to be the judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42) reveals that He is God: He has power over man’s eternal destiny.

in Paradise.”

Return to original creation, the eating of the fruit of the tree of life, fellowship with the righteous. The gates of paradise have been reopened by the obedience of the New Adam.

**⁴⁴ It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon
⁴⁵ because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle.**

God’s creation and the Jewish temple give their response to the meaning of Jesus’ death. In Amos 8:9 the day of judgement comes with darkness at noon. God’s judgement against evil occurs in Jesus’ death. The curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. The Holy of Holies was the abode of God and only the High Priest could enter and then only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. In Jesus, all now have access to God.

⁴⁶ Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”;

He quotes Psalm 31:5 (31:6 in the New American Bible).

and when he had said this he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ The centurion

Literally, “over 100 men.” It is interesting to note that each of these Roman professional soldiers who is mentioned in the New Testament appears as an honest and kindly man.

who witnessed what had happened

With the free gift of faith this Gentile sees the inner significance of Jesus’ forgiveness of His enemies, His fidelity to God during temptation, and His mercy to a repentant thief.

glorified God and said, “This man was innocent beyond doubt.”

Righteous. Through His righteous conduct Jesus has shown He is God’s Son.

⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered for this spectacle saw what had happened, they returned home beating their breasts;

The people repent of their action against Jesus, whereas the religious leaders remain firm in their decision.

⁴⁹ but all his acquaintances stood at a distance,

In contrast to Mark (14:50) the disciples do not abandon Jesus. They are present at His cross.

including the women who had followed him from Galilee and saw these events.

The mention of Galilee is not just a geographical reference but a notation of discipleship; Jesus public ministry started in Galilee.

⁵⁰ Now there was a virtuous and righteous man named Joseph who, though he was a member of the council, ⁵¹ had not consented to their plan of action.

Joseph, a member of the Jewish ruling body, despite inferences earlier (23:1) did not make the decision to put Jesus to death unanimous.

He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea and was awaiting the kingdom of God.

Kingdom of God. The theme which flows throughout this gospel. Jesus, by His death, brings us God's kingdom.

⁵² He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ After he had taken the body down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth

The symbol of immortality; it came from flax, which came from the life giving earth. In the hope of the resurrection Joseph clothes Jesus in linen.

and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried.

The crucified innocent and righteous Jesus is not tossed into a common grave, but is given a burial fitting one who is God's Messiah, Chosen One, and King of the Jews.

⁵⁴ It was the day of preparation, and the sabbath was about to begin.

The Passover occurred on 14 Nisan, at sunset after the slaughtering of the lambs; the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on 15 Nisan and lasted for a week. The day of preparation was Friday, the day to prepare for the Sabbath day in addition to being the first day of the feast of unleavened bread. Rabbinical law allowed on that day the care of a dead body, but not the digging of a grave. In caring for the corpse of Jesus, Joseph became unclean for taking part in sacred ceremonies.

⁵⁵ The women who had come from Galilee with him followed behind, and when they had seen the tomb and the way in which his body was laid in it, ⁵⁶ they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils. Then they rested on the sabbath according to the commandment.

These holy women, who were familiar with the material poverty of our Lord, do not skimp in showing veneration for the body of the Lord.