

Good Friday

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 52.13 — 53.12	Fourth song of the servant of the Lord
Psalms 22 [or 22.1-11 or 22.1-21]	Prayer for deliverance from suffering
Hebrews 10.16-25	Confidence in the blood of Christ
or Hebrews 4.14-16; 5.7-9	Jesus the compassionate high priest
John 18.1 — 19.42	The passion of Jesus

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The Passion of Jesus

After they had eaten the supper, ¹Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ²Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' ⁵They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶When Jesus said to them, 'I am he,' they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' ⁸Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' ⁹This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' ¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

¹²So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

¹⁵Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' ¹⁸Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

¹⁹Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' ²²When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' ²³Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' ²⁴Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.'

²⁶One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' ²⁷Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

²⁸Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' ³⁰They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' ³¹Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' ³²(This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

³³Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' ³⁴Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' ³⁵Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' ³⁶Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' ³⁷Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to

the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’ ³⁸Pilate asked him, ‘What is truth?’

After he had said this, he went out to the Jewish leaders again and told them, ‘I find no case against him. ³⁹But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?’ ⁴⁰They shouted in reply, ‘Not this man, but Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas was a bandit.

¹Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ and striking him on the face. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.’ ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man!’ ⁶When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.’ ⁷The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.’

⁸Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. ⁹He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, ‘Where are you from?’ But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰Pilate therefore said to him, ‘Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?’ ¹¹Jesus answered him, ‘You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.’ ¹²From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, ‘If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.’

¹³When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. ¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, ‘Here is your King!’ ¹⁵They cried out, ‘Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!’ Pilate asked them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but the emperor.’ ¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; ¹⁷and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’ ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹Then the chief priests

of the Jews said to Pilate, ‘Do not write, “The King of the Jews,” but, “This man said, I am King of the Jews.”’²² Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written.’²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top.²⁴ So they said to one another, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.’ This was to fulfil what the scripture says,

‘They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.’

²⁵And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), ‘I am thirsty.’²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed.³² Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him.³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.³⁵ (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.)³⁶ These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, ‘None of his bones shall be broken.’³⁷ And again another passage of scripture says, ‘They will look on the one whom they have pierced.’

³⁸After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.³⁹ Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.⁴⁰ They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.⁴¹ Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.⁴² And so, because it was the Jewish day of

Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

John 18.1—19.42 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

John's passion narrative is proclaimed every Good Friday (whereas on Palm Sunday the synoptics are read). Other chapters of John leading up to the passion are used during Holy Week. The first section of the gospel reading is generally entitled 'the arrest', but Jesus isn't actually arrested until v.12. As he goes to the garden and Judas, the soldiers, and religious leaders gather, Jesus steps forward, in control. He identifies himself and those who are enquiring fall back. He tells his opponents that they should let his supporters go free, and the narrator recalls the words of Jesus; prayer: 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me' (v.9; cf. 17.12; 6.69; 10.28). Perhaps this gospel doesn't give a final judgement about Judas.

Peter fails to understand the significance of what lies ahead and draws a sword, attempting to change the course of events, misunderstanding the nature of Jesus' kingship, and is rebuked. Peter is thwarting God's designs. The prophecies of 13.1-17, 21-38 are now being fulfilled. Whereas in the other gospels Jesus is portrayed alone, in John's gospel he is with his disciples. Jesus is ready for what the Father has in store (v.11).

Only now is Jesus seized, and led to the house of Annas. His son-in-law, Caiaphas, had counselled that it was expedient that one man should die for the people (cf. 11.49-52). Simon Peter and an unnamed disciple enter the courtyard with Jesus. When challenged, Peter denies knowing Jesus. Jesus is questioned by the high priest, and speaks of his preaching to the Jews: 'I have always taught I synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together' (v.20b). Now that is in the past and he will teach there no longer. Jesus insists, he has spoken openly, and never in secret. Now that has come to an end, how can he answer the question about what he said? Ask those who heard, is Jesus' reply. The teaching of Jesus is to be found among his disciples.

Jesus' reply provokes one of the temple police into striking Jesus. If the slap is punishment for blasphemous speech then witnesses must be brought; but if Jesus is proclaiming what is right, then the officer

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

stands condemned by his own actions. Jesus is not only guiltless, but has revealed the truth, but the truth has been rejected. Peter again denies knowing Jesus, when challenged, and this is followed by the cock crowing (v.27b), fulfilling what Jesus said would happen (13.38).

Next, Jesus is led to the praetorium, to appear before the Roman governor. Pilate is reluctant to deal with him, and seeks to send him back to the religious authorities. The theme of kingship is brought out, and it can be seen in the exchanges between Jesus, Pilate and the Jewish leaders that there is an issue about power. The seven carefully drawn trial scenes conclude with the soldiers mocking Jesus as 'the King of the Jews' (19.3). Pilate asks: 'What is truth?' Is he being cynical, or perhaps dismissive?

Challenged by Pilate, the Jewish leaders have to admit that Jesus is not a revolutionary, but that his real crime is blasphemy (19.7). Jesus breaks his silence to tell Pilate that power comes 'from above' (19.11). Pilate tries to get Jesus off the hook, but the Jewish leaders are insistent that he must be put to death. They now claim: 'We have no king but Caesar' (19.15).

Jesus is taken away to be executed. Pilate has an inscription written in three languages, Hebrew, the language of the Jewish faith, Greek, the language of culture, and Latin, the official political language: 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'. Responding to complaints about the wording of the inscription, Pilate responds obdurately, 'what I have written I have written' (19.22).

The soldiers finish crucifying Jesus and share out his clothes. There is nothing now but to wait for the end. John's focus moves to the foot of the cross, where there are four women, including the mother of Jesus. Jesus sees his mother and the unnamed disciple, 'whom he loved' (19.26). Jesus is still in control, even from the cross, as he ensures that his mother and his beloved disciple are entrusted to each other (19.26-27).

Jesus says, 'I thirst' (19.28), to fulfil scriptures like Psalm 69.21. Hyssop was used to put the lamb's blood on the door frame so the angel would 'pass over' the people (Exodus 12.22-23). Now Jesus knows that 'all was now finished' (19.28), and he says his final words: 'It is finished' (19.30). On the surface it looks like it is all over, a failure, but at another level the word finished can mean 'completed' or

‘accomplished’. Jesus then bows his head, and gives up his spirit – still in control.

Jesus is taken down from the cross with reverence. Contrast this with scenes from the other gospels, which record cataclysmic events at this time. John make sure that the burial befits a king; there is plenty of myrrh and oil. Nicodemus, formerly a reluctant disciple, now becomes a disciple in full view.

Quotations

1

Today sees our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross; we celebrate, so that we may understand that the cross is a celebration, a solemn, spiritual feast. Before, the cross was synonymous with condemnation; now it is an object of honour. Before, a symbol of death; now, the means of salvation. It has been the source of countless blessings for us: it has delivered us from error, it has shone on us when we were in darkness. We were vanquished, yet it reconciles us with God. We were foes, yet it has regained God’s friendship for us. We were estranged, yet it has brought us back to him ... We have discovered a wellspring.

St John Chrysostom, c. 350–407

2

The dripping blood our only drink,
The bloody flesh our only food:
In spite of which we like to think
That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood –
Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.

T.S. Eliot, 1888–1965

3

Good Friday is not about us trying to ‘get right with God’. It is about us entering the difference between God and humanity and just touching it for a moment. Touching the shimmering sadness of humanity’s insistence that we can be our own gods, that we can be pure and all-powerful.

Accidental saints: finding God in all the wrong people / Nadia Bolz-Weber. 2015

Related topics

For further study:

Cross, redemptive suffering, paschal mystery, christology

Closing Prayer

Lord,
send down your abundant blessing
upon your people who have recalled the death of your Son
in the hope of the resurrection.
Grant them pardon; bring them comfort.
Make their faith grow stronger
and their eternal salvation be assured.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

The Sacramentary · Good Friday · Prayer over the people