

Passion (Palm) Sunday, Year C

GOSPEL

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... When they reached the place called The Skull, they crucified him and the two criminals also, one on the right, the other on the left. Jesus said, 'Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.' Then they cast lots to share out his clothing.

The people stayed there watching him. As for the leaders, they jeered at him. 'He saved others,' they said 'let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.' The soldiers mocked him too and when they approached to offer him vinegar they said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.' Above him there was an inscription: 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals hanging there abused him. 'Are you not the Christ?' he said. 'Save yourself and us as well.' But the other spoke up and rebuked him. 'Have you no fear of God at all?' he said. 'You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it; we are paying for what we did. But this man has done no wrong. Jesus,' he said, 'remember me when you come into your kingdom.' 'Indeed, I promise you,' he replied, 'today you will be with me in paradise.'

It was now about the sixth hour and, with the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. The veil of the Temple was torn right down the middle; and when Jesus had cried out in a loud voice, he said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' With these words he breathed his last ...

(Luke 22:14–23:56 heavily abridged)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper is reported in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke but not in John. In John (6:1–15), the setting is the multiplication miracle of the loaves. Instead, in John's Gospel, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper (13:1–11) in an act of service.
- All four gospels report the trials of Jesus before the Sanhedrin or governing council of the Jews and before Pilate, but only Luke tells of Jesus being sent to Herod.
- Luke's Gospel emphasises the mercy and forgiveness of the Lord towards those who repent. Even on the cross, Jesus continues in this. He assures the repentant thief of his place in paradise. This incident is only reported in Luke's Gospel.
- Jesus is crucified at Calvary, a Latin translation of the Semitic word *Golgotha*, which means 'skull'.
- Since the fourth century, the site now marked by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been revered as the site of Calvary.

EXPLORING THE WORD

So much of what is at the heart of Christianity is present in today's long gospel reading:

- The institution of the Lord's Supper: 'This is my body which will be given for you; do this in memorial of me ... This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you'. It is in the Eucharist that we find the source and summit of our faith. Explore what that means.
- The ministry of service: 'I am among you as one who serves.' The Church and all its members are at the service of the world.
- Peter's denials: Like Peter, we so often fail, but we too can repent and reorient our lives.
- The centrality of the cross: The cross reveals that God, in Jesus, entered into human suffering and death and overcame the darkness. This death revealed for all time that God is in solidarity with all the pain of human beings, and that nothing can separate us from the love of God.
- Read the three statements that Jesus made from the cross: the plea for forgiveness for those who harm him, the invitation into paradise for the repentant thief, and the prayer of utter faith as he gives his spirit to God—forgiveness, hospitality and faithfulness. What is being asked of you in this gospel?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' Are you ready for this commitment? What will it mean for your life in the future?
- In our society, the idea of being 'selfless' is constantly challenged. Our culture of individualism emphasises the 'I' rather than the 'other'. But it is in self-giving and self-emptying that we find life. Discuss this dichotomy. How does individualism manifest itself? How can we live selflessly in our daily lives?
- Die with Christ a little this week. Fast from food, TV or entertainment. Try to be less distracted as you prepare for Easter.
- 'Lord, into your hands I commit my spirit.' Reflect on these words and what they mean for you as you prepare for the Easter sacraments this week.

