

THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO JOHN

All participate in a dramatic reading of the Passion. Everyone reads the parts of the Crowd.

The Congregation may remain seated for the first part of the Gospel.

In the original Greek text St. John uses the term Iudeans — or Judeans — to describe the people of Jerusalem. In his Gospel John distinguishes between Judeans, Galileans and Israelites based on the region from which the individuals came. Because of the often troubling history between Christians and Jews, we have been careful to modify the literal text of this reading, translating "Jews" into either "Judeans" or "authorities" as appropriate to the meaning of the text.

Narrator After he had said all this, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron valley where there was a garden into which he went with his disciples. Judas the traitor knew the place also, since Jesus had often met his disciples there, so Judas brought the cohort to this place together with guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees, all with lanterns and torches and weapons. Knowing everything that was to happen to him, Jesus came forward and said,

Jesus "Who are you looking for?"

Narrator They answered,

Crowd "Jesus the Nazarene."

Narrator He said,

Jesus "I am he."

Narrator Now Judas the traitor was standing among them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they moved back and fell on the ground. He asked them a second time,

Jesus "Who are you looking for?"

Narrator They said,

Crowd "Jesus the Nazarene."

Narrator Jesus replied,

Jesus "I have told you that I am he. If I am the one you are looking for, let these others go."

Narrator This was to fulfill the words he had spoken, "Not one of those you gave me have I lost." Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter,

Jesus "Put your sword back in its scabbard; am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Narrator The cohort and its tribune and the Jewish guards seized Jesus and bound him. They took him first to Annas, because Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had counseled the authorities,

High Priest "It is better for one man to die for the people."

Narrator Simon Peter, with another disciple, followed Jesus. This disciple, who was known to the high priest, went with Jesus into the high priest's palace, but Peter stayed outside the door. So the other disciple, the one known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the door-keeper and brought Peter in. The girl on duty at the door said to Peter,

Doorkeeper "Aren't you another of that man's disciples?"

Narrator He answered,

Peter "I am not."

Narrator Now it was cold, and the servants and guards had lit a charcoal fire and were standing there warming themselves; so Peter stood there too, warming himself with the others. The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered,

Jesus "I have spoken openly for all the world to hear; I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple where all the people meet together; I have said nothing in secret. Why ask me? Ask my hearers what I taught; they know what I said."

- Narrator* At these words, one of the guards standing by gave Jesus a slap in the face, saying,
- Guard* "Is that the way you answer the high priest?"
- Narrator* Jesus replied,
- Jesus* "If there is some offense in what I said, point it out; but if not, why do you strike me?"
- Narrator* Then Annas sent him, bound, to Caiaphas the high priest. As Simon Peter stood there warming himself, someone said to him,
- Servant 1* "Aren't you another of his disciples?"
- Narrator* He denied it saying,
- Peter* "I am not."
- Narrator* One of the high priest's servants, a relation of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said,
- Servant 2* "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?"
- Narrator* Again Peter denied it; and at once a cock crowed.

Gospel Meditation

Jesus was betrayed and deserted by his closest friends and followers in his darkest hour including by Simon Peter. Betrayal is one of the most painful of human experiences. The disciples fled because of fear...fear of what might happen to them if they stayed true to Jesus in that moment. I was once given a tapestry of the crucifixion scene with the three women at Jesus' feet which read: "The women stayed." Tradition holds that the three Marys-Mary Jesus' mother, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene as well as John the Beloved stayed by Jesus' side. Everyone else deserted him. These 4 put themselves at risk for being associated with Jesus, now a condemned criminal. And they did it out of love. **Who are you willing to stand beside regardless of the risk? And who are the people that God has given you to stand by your side regardless of the cost or difficulty to them?**

Narrator They then led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium. It was now morning. They did not go into the Praetorium themselves to avoid becoming defiled and unable to eat the Passover. So Pilate came outside to them and said,

Pilate "What charge do you bring against this man?"

Narrator They replied,

High Priest "If he were not a criminal, we should not have handed him over to you."

Narrator Pilate said,

Pilate "Take him yourselves, and try him by your own Law."

Narrator The Judeans answered,

High Priest "We are not allowed to put anyone to death."

Narrator This was to fulfill the words Jesus had spoken indicating the way he was going to die. So Pilate went back into the Praetorium and called Jesus to him and asked him,

Pilate "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Narrator Jesus replied,

Jesus "Do you ask this of your own accord, or have others said it to you about me?"

Narrator Pilate answered,

Pilate "Am I a Jew? It is your own people and the chief priests who have handed you over to me: what have you done?"

Narrator Jesus replied,

Jesus "Mine is not a kingdom of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought to prevent my being surrendered to the authorities. As it is, my kingdom does not belong here."

Narrator Pilate said,

Pilate "So, then you are a king?"

Narrator Jesus answered,
Jesus “It is you who say that I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.”
Pilate “Truth? What is that?”
Narrator said Pilate. And so saying he went out again to the Judeans and said,
Pilate “I find no case against him. But according to a custom of yours I should release one prisoner at the Passover; would you like me, then, to release for you the king of the Jews?”
Narrator At this they shouted,
Crowd “Not this man, but Barabbas.”
Narrator Barabbas was a bandit. Pilate then had Jesus taken away and scourged; and after this, the soldiers twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on his head and dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him and saying,
Soldiers “Hail, king of the Jews!”
Narrator and slapping him in the face. Pilate came outside again and said to them,
Pilate “Look, I am going to bring him out to you to let you see that I find no case against him.”
Narrator Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said,
Pilate “Here is the man.”
Narrator When they saw him, the chief priests and the guards shouted,
Crowd “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Gospel Meditation

Pilate, though he had been given power and authority, did not use it. Instead, he deferred, again out of fear, to the angry mob. What would have happened if Pilate had used his power to stand up for Jesus and oppose the crowd, denying them of their call to violence? Might Pilate have lost his

position? Or even been made a martyr himself? Whatever the risk, he wasn't willing to take it. We too, you and I, have power and authority, often more than we realize. How do we handle it? **Do we stand up for the rights of others when the occasion calls for it? Or do we, out of fear, remain silent, acquiesce, and do nothing?**

Narrator Pilate said,

Pilate "Take him yourselves and crucify him: I find no case against him."

Narrator The Judeans replied,

High Priest "We have a Law, and according to that Law he ought to be put to death, because he has claimed to be Son of God."

Narrator When Pilate heard them say this his fears increased. Reentering the Praetorium, he said to Jesus,

Pilate "Where do you come from?"

Narrator But Jesus made no answer. Pilate then said to him,

Pilate "Are you refusing to speak to me? Surely you know I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?"

Narrator Jesus replied,

Jesus "You would have no power over me at all if it had not been given you from above; that is why the man who handed me over to you has the greater guilt."

Narrator From that moment Pilate was anxious to set him free, but the Judeans shouted,

High Priest "If you set him free you are no friend of Caesar's; anyone who makes himself king is defying Caesar."

Narrator Hearing these words, Pilate had Jesus brought out, and seated him on the chair of judgment at a place called the Pavement, in Hebrew Gabbatha. It was the Day of Preparation, about the sixth hour.

Pilate "Here is your king,"

Narrator said Pilate to the Judeans. But they shouted,
Crowd "Away with him, away with him, crucify him."
Narrator Pilate said,
Pilate "Shall I crucify your king?"
Narrator The chief priests answered,
High Priest "We have no king except Caesar."
Narrator So at that Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

Gospel Meditation

Nothing was left to Jesus, absolutely nothing...not even his clothing. All he had was stripped away from him that day and he was left without his dignity, naked and suffering in agony and vulnerability on the cross while people scoffed. Whatever we may suffer, whatever loss we may endure, we are reminded that Jesus has walked this path too: he knows our pain and suffering and what it means to lose everything. And yet Jesus told us that, ironically, to lose one's life, is to gain one's life. **We are not alone, we are not misunderstood in God's eyes....how might our losses find renewal in the arms of God?**

All who are able, stand.

Narrator They then took charge of Jesus, and carrying his own cross he went out to the Place of the Skull or, as it is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified him with two others, one on either side, Jesus being in the middle. Pilate wrote out a notice and had it fixed to the cross; it ran: "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews".

This notice was read by many of the Judeans, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the writing was in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. So the Jewish chief priests said to Pilate,

High Priest "You should not write "King of the Jews", but that the man said, "I am King of the Jews"."

Narrator Pilate answered,
Pilate "What I have written, I have written."
Narrator When the soldiers had finished crucifying Jesus they took his clothing and divided it into four shares, one for each soldier. His undergarment was seamless, woven in one piece from neck to hem; so they said to one another,
Guard "Instead of tearing it, let's throw dice to decide who is to have it."
Narrator In this way the words of scripture were fulfilled: They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothes. That is what the soldiers did. Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother,
Jesus "Woman, this is your son."
Narrator Then to the disciple he said,
Jesus "This is your mother."
Narrator And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. After this, Jesus knew that everything had now been completed and, so that the scripture should be completely fulfilled, he said:
Jesus "I am thirsty."
Narrator A jar full of sour wine stood there; so, putting a sponge soaked in the wine on a hyssop stick, they held it up to his mouth. After Jesus had taken the wine he said,
Jesus "It is fulfilled."
Narrator and bowing his head he gave up his spirit.

The Congregation may sit or kneel.

Gospel Meditation

Frederich Nietzsche is known for having said, "God is dead." What does it mean for us that God did die...that he died on the cross...died by torture in a terrible crucifixion? He died the death of a common, despicable criminal.

The mocking, the persecution, the beating...it culminated in death. Why did God allow it? Why does God allow suffering at all? While it is a deep mystery on one level, we also know that God used suffering and death to bring about redemption and resurrection, to reveal God's vast love, and to rescue us from the power of sin and death. God in Christ died willingly for us – he gave himself for us –for the sake of love. **What in our lives must die in order to be redeemed so that we can experience new life?**

Narrator It was the Day of Preparation, and to avoid the bodies remaining on the cross during the Sabbath – since that Sabbath was a day of special solemnity – the authorities asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away. Consequently the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with him and then of the other. When they came to Jesus, they saw he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water. This is the evidence of one who saw it – true evidence, and he knows that what he says is true – and he gives it so that you may believe as well. Because all this happened to fulfill the words of scripture: Not one bone of his will be broken; and again, in another place scripture says: They will look to the one whom they have pierced. After this, Joseph of Arimathaea, who was a disciple of Jesus – though a secret one because he was afraid of the authorities – asked Pilate to let him remove the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission, so they came and took it away. Nicodemus came as well – the same one who had first come to Jesus at night-time – and he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, following the Jewish burial custom. At the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in this garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been buried. Since it was the Jewish Day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid

Jesus there.

Gospel Meditation

I have witnessed the loving care that family members have given their loved ones upon their death. It is both touching and beautiful and terribly heart breaking. Having been present when a parishioner has died many times over the last 15 years of my ordained ministry, I can attest to the fact that God is present in that moment. It is a holy and sacred experience even while being filled with grief and sorrow. The irony that strikes me about the Passion story is the knowledge that God is present at our birth and at our death, and in the case of Jesus, we are called and have been invited to be present to God at his death...both literally when Jesus was laid in the tomb and figuratively, as we commemorate Jesus' death today, Good Friday. We are asked to be present with Christ, even as Christ has been present and is always present to us. **How might we live our lives being present to Christ, seeing Christ in others, more fully today and every day?**