

Passion Sunday Year A

Matthew 27:27-55

Opening Prayer

Caught between joy and despair,
we yearn for the fulfillment of God's desire
beyond the brokenness and neediness of this life.
We offer thanksgiving for God's presence with us
and our prayers for the church and the world.

Prayers offered in a moment of silence

Life-giver, Pain-bearer, Love itself,
day by day you sustain the weary with your word
and gently encourage us to place our trust in you.
give us grace to share one another's burdens in humble service. Amen.

Adapted - Revised Common Lectionary Prayers © 2002

Hymn: The Broken Heart

*Have you heard the story of the cross,
Where Jesus bled and died,
When your doubt was paid by his precious blood
That gushed from his wounded side.*

*Refrain:
He died of a broken heart for thee,
He died of a broken heart;
O wondrous love! it was for thee,
He died of a broken heart.*

*Have you heard that he looked to heav'n and said,
"Tis finished"—all for thee?
Have you ever said, "I thank thee, Lord,
For giving thy life for me?" [Refrain]*

Thomas Dennis (1907)

*Have you heard how they placed the crown of thorns
Upon his lovely brow,
When he prayed, "forgive them, O forgive,
They know not what they do?" [Refrain]*

Window of Wonder

"... Jesus said, wait with me. And maybe the stars did, maybe the wind wound itself into a silver tree, and didn't move, maybe the lake far away, where once he walked as on a blue pavement, lay still and waited, wild awake.

Oh the dear bodies, slumped and eye-shut, that could not keep that vigil, how they must have wept, so utterly human, knowing this too must be a part of the story
— Excerpt from 'Gethsemane' by Mary Oliver

Creative response: Lenten Refreshing

You may like to spend some time in or with some elements of nature and reflect on Jesus in the garden this Holy week.

Closing Prayer - Lord's Prayer Paraphrase: Beloved (inspired by Matthew 6: 9-13, Luke 11: 2-4)

Beloved, in whom is heaven,
hallowed be your name,
followed be your royal way,
done be your will and rule,
throughout the whole creation.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
Now and forever.
Amen.

Adapted
- Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild (Mowbray,1998).

Devotion - The Death of Christ

At this sacred time of the year, we reflect upon the passion and death of Jesus Christ. And as we come to reflect on Matthew's version of the Cross, we discover distinctive insights that open up new thoughts and blessings for us. First Matthew begins with Judas as one who finally realized that he had made a terrible mistake in betraying Jesus to the Jewish authorities for thirty pieces of silver. But his sin could not be undone. Next, Jesus stood before Pilate the Roman governor, who gave the people a choice between the release of Barabbas, an insurrectionist, whose name means "a son of his father", or Jesus the Messiah, as son of his father, God.

In spite of a warning from Pilate's wife through a dream, to have nothing to do with this "righteous" man Jesus, thus making everyone involved in his arrest and conviction, guilty of sin, Pilate finally gave into the crowd, by symbolically washing his hands, and verbally distancing himself from any responsibility for Jesus' death. Then Pilate released Barabbas, and had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Next Pilate's soldiers mocked Jesus by dressing him up as a king, and put a robe of royal scarlet on him, and placed a crown of cruel thorns on his head as a further form of torture, and gave him a staff as a sceptre, with the words, "Hail, king of the Jews!" After further abuse and mockery, they took off the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

In a culture of honour and shame, the indignity of the mock allegiance to Jesus as king only added psychological torture to the physical abuse. As they proceeded to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull, Simon of Cyrene was commissioned to carry the cross. This may have been a life-changing experience for Simon, for Mark's Gospel also names his sons, suggesting that they were known as Christian followers as well (Mark 15:21).

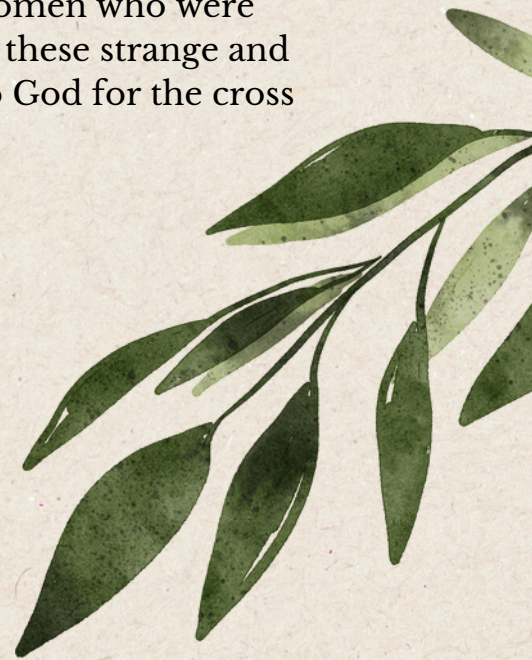
The Gospel of Matthew presents the cross where Jesus Christ died as a royal throne. This idea is suggested by the actions of Pontius Pilate's soldiers before the crucifixion and by the sign on the cross that said, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

From the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is shown as the promised king—the greater Son of David and the Son of God. But mockery and insult continued toward Jesus even on the cross, and after a period of three hours of darkness over all the land, possibly symbolising the darkness of sin, and its separation from God, Jesus cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani", echoing the words of Psalm 22:1, which means, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Many thought that this was a call to Elijah to come and save him. But finally when Jesus cried out again, he gave up his spirit, and at that point the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom, indicating that access to God would now take a different path and direction.

The earth is shaken, the rocks split, and the tombs broke open, anticipating Jesus' resurrection on the third day. What a scene!

In the Gospel of Matthew, the cross is shown as the turning point that leads to the resurrection of the dead. When Jesus died on the cross, he defeated sin and death. Because of this, the cross led to the empty tombs and the torn temple curtain, opening a new way for people to come into God's presence. When the Roman Centurion and those with him saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God." They had never witnessed the likes of this before, and therefore they could only come to one conclusion, that Jesus was the Son of God, the true Immanuel, or God with us. Like the many faithful women who were watching these things from a distance, let us also treasure these strange and wonderful things in our hearts today, as we give thanks to God for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Rev Dr Ted Woods.



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