

Passion (Palm) Sunday

[At the Procession with Palms: Mark 11:1-10 or John 12:12-16](#)

[First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7](#) [Responsorial Psalm: 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24](#)

[Reading II: Philippians 2:6-11](#) [Gospel: Mark 14:1-15:47 or 15:1-39](#)

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/032424.cfm>



The Sixth Sunday of Lent brings a central focus to Jesus' saving passion and death. This weekend's main service usually has a procession of the whole congregation with palms that help recall Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. It has a gospel reading to invite the assembly to enter the church with Jesus.

Jesus enters Jerusalem to call the people of Jerusalem and the leadership of the Jewish community to change. God's ultimate act of salvation is at hand, and the old must be cleansed. He cleanses the Temple in Jerusalem to symbolize this.

The narrative brings out the humanity of Jesus, who experienced praise and rejection, was misunderstood by many, and serves as an introduction to what will follow in the coming days.

The first reading is the third suffering servant song in Isaiah. Isaiah offers four poetic reflections on the suffering servant of God. Israel understood these songs as reflections on Israel itself. Isaiah offered a message of hope that sought to help the people of Judah a way to find meaning in the suffering that they experienced. The suffering of Israel will be a means for other nations to encounter the true God.

The early church quickly applied these to Jesus, who was the ultimate suffering servant of God. In this third song, Isaiah speaks of how the servant suffers because he has been faithful to what God has asked of him. Jesus experiences the same suffering for his faithfulness. The early church recognized the physical abuse of his back and face in the narrative of Jesus' passion.

The reading from Philippians quotes an ancient Christian hymn. Jesus empties himself of the divine attributes to be fully with humanity and accepts all that being human means, even death and one of the most severe forms of death, death on a cross. Jesus subjects himself to the human experience of evil. Jesus' prayer in the garden, "Father, not my will but yours be done," is reflected in the passage. Jesus sets the example for all of us on how to be a true child of God.

The first part reflects Jesus' pre-existence before becoming human. Jesus was God from all eternity. He consciously laid aside all the divine privileges and attributes and entered fully into the human experience. He experienced everything that is part of being human, growing up, learning to do things, and working. He also experienced a cruel death by crucifixion. God was always with Jesus and raised Jesus above all the rest of creation since he was the faithful servant in all that God asked.

The later part of the hymn highlights God's response to the obedience of Christ. God exalted him and gave the name of above all others so that others may profess that Jesus, the Christ, is Lord. Lord was the common way to address God, the Lord Almighty, in Judaism.

The narratives of the passion and death of Jesus were the first parts of the gospels to take shape. Mark's passage offers a stark picture of Jesus suffering to encourage his audience who may also need to suffer and die. They experienced being persecuted by the Romans

for not worshipping Caesar. Jesus suffered and could have asked God to deliver him, but he did not. He chose to be obedient and faithful. So, each Christian will need to make a choice.

Jesus prepares for it by prayer, and so should each Christian be strengthened by prayer. Mark desires to address two purposes. First, if Jesus was truly the one sent by God, why did he suffer and die? Images from Psalm 22 and the fourth suffering servant song are employed to say that it was part of God's plan. (His garments were divided, and he suffered with criminals.) His followers abandoned him. Even Pilate, who knows that Jesus has been turned over to him out of jealousy, abandons him by letting him be crucified. Yet, Jesus chose to be faithful to God. While he suffered and died, he did not experience everlasting death but entrance into new life.

Secondly, Jesus is presented as confronting the powers of darkness. He is crucified and derided as he suffers, and darkness covers the land. In his last moment, Jesus has great strength to cry out (even as he suffocated), and the curtain in the temple is torn. Darkness does not win. Jesus is the true conqueror.

Abandonment is a key theme in Mark's account of the passion. Religious leaders cannot find grounds to condemn Jesus, so they resort to false testimony. Pilate abandons Jesus to the will of the Jewish leaders. One of his disciples betrays him, another denies him, and the others flee out of fear. The soldiers mock him, and the other two revolutionaries who are crucified abuse him. Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Mark presents Jesus as an example for all disciples who face abandonment, suffering, rejection, or even death. In the powerless of these situations, God's power can be shown. Jesus exemplifies service, humility, and trust as he experiences rejection, suffering, and death. Contemporaries of Mark may also experience abandonment and betrayal as disciples. God will be faithful to them and us. They and we are likewise called to be faithful to God. Each disciple is invited to loving service that draws life, humility in knowing that we do not have the ultimate power and trusting reliance upon God to give us life.

Themes:

Paschal mystery
Salvation

Cost of Discipleship
Redemption

Reflection Questions:

What is your attitude as you gather to enter church each week?

Where or when have you experienced rejection, ridicule, or physical suffering for speaking and holding fast to the truth?

In difficult times, where do you find strength or how does hope manifest in your life??

How are you experiencing laying down your life for others?

Whom do you see as suffering servants today?

Which words or phrases of scripture stand out for you?

Have you ever experienced letting go of a position, a power, or a public face to enter into the suffering or powerlessness of another?

Suggestions for Prayer:

For the Church: that we may commend our lives to God each day and be renewed in spirit by God's faithful presence

For the grace of humility: that we may allow God to empty us of selfish desires and the need to control so that God can raise us to a fuller life

For the grace to accompany others: that like Simon, God will help us to enter the suffering in the lives of those around us and assist them with their burdens

For all who have been abandoned or accused unjustly: that they may know God's presence with them, have the strength to hold to the truth, and find support in the Christian community

For the terminally ill and those who have been condemned to death: that they may have strength and hope in God's mercy and compassion

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