



Palm Sunday 2020 Mass Readings & Reflections

First Reading – Isaiah 50: 4-7

This passage is part of Second Isaiah, written at the height of the Babylonian Captivity. Hopelessness and resignation were the common attitudes. Anyone who preached hope and faithfulness to God would have been ridiculed. The prophet knows that, when he speaks the Word of God, he faces scorn and torment. Yet, he persists because of his faith and love of God.

The Lord GOD has given me
a well-trained tongue,
that I might know how to speak to the weary
a word that will rouse them.
Morning after morning
he opens my ear that I may hear;
and I have not rebelled,
have not turned back.
I gave my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who plucked my beard;
my face I did not shield
from buffets and spitting.

The Lord GOD is my help,
therefore I am not disgraced;
I have set my face like flint,
knowing that I shall not be put to shame

Reflection: Think of a time you have felt hopeless.

- *How did your faith hold you up?*
- *How did God assist you?*

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 22: 8-9, 17-20, 23-24

The psalm that begins, “Oh, God, why have you forsaken me?” is both one of the best known and most often-prayed psalms. We often associate it with Jesus calling out in despair from the cross. However, it is essential that we read the entire psalm. The prayer begins in despair but moves to an acknowledgement that God is always with me and that, with God, I will find victory.

Reflection: Are you willing to put your pain, your doubts, your agony in God’s hands?

Second Reading - Philippians 2: 6-11

This passage centers upon one of the most critical temptations in human existence: our desire to be God! It was the root of the fall of Adam and Eve. How often are our sins rooted in an attitude that we know better than God? The reality is, when we strive to be God, we reject our humanity. In contrast, Jesus, who is God, embraced his humanity and thus was “exalted by God.”

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;

and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Reflection: Think of a time you forgot your humanity in pursuit of godhood.

- *What were the results?*
- *How does the name of Jesus inspire you to more deeply love and honor God?*

Gospel – Matthew 27: 11-54

Listen to Matthew's account of the Passion and try to imagine it is the first time you have heard it. Put aside the other accounts of Jesus' Passion and Death. Matthew is writing for a Jewish audience that would have known the significance of the rituals and symbols.

Jesus stood before the governor, Pontius Pilate, who questioned him,
“Are you the king of the Jews?”
Jesus said, “You say so.”
And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders,
he made no answer.
Then Pilate said to him,
“Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?”
But he did not answer him one word,
so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now on the occasion of the feast
the governor was accustomed to release to the crowd
one prisoner whom they wished.
And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.
So when they had assembled, Pilate said to them,
“Which one do you want me to release to you,
Barabbas, or Jesus called Christ?”
For he knew that it was out of envy
that they had handed him over.
While he was still seated on the bench,
his wife sent him a message,
“Have nothing to do with that righteous man.
I suffered much in a dream today because of him.”
The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds
to ask for Barabbas but to destroy Jesus.
The governor said to them in reply,
“Which of the two do you want me to release to you?”
They answered, “Barabbas!”
Pilate said to them,
“Then what shall I do with Jesus called Christ?”
They all said,

“Let him be crucified!”
But he said,
“Why? What evil has he done?”
They only shouted the louder,
“Let him be crucified!”
When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all,
but that a riot was breaking out instead,
he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd,
saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood.
Look to it yourselves.”
And the whole people said in reply,
“His blood be upon us and upon our children.”
Then he released Barabbas to them,
but after he had Jesus scourged,
he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium
and gathered the whole cohort around him.
They stripped off his clothes
and threw a scarlet military cloak about him.
Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head,
and a reed in his right hand.
And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying,
“Hail, King of the Jews!”
They spat upon him and took the reed
and kept striking him on the head.
And when they had mocked him,
they stripped him of the cloak,
dressed him in his own clothes,
and led him off to crucify him.

As they were going out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon;
this man they pressed into service
to carry his cross.

And when they came to a place called Golgotha
— which means Place of the Skull —,
they gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall.
But when he had tasted it, he refused to drink.
After they had crucified him,
they divided his garments by casting lots;
then they sat down and kept watch over him there.
And they placed over his head the written charge against him:
This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.
Two revolutionaries were crucified with him,
one on his right and the other on his left.
Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying,
“You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,
save yourself, if you are the Son of God,
and come down from the cross!”
Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said,
“He saved others; he cannot save himself.
So he is the king of Israel!

Let him come down from the cross now,
and we will believe in him.
He trusted in God;
let him deliver him now if he wants him.
For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'
The revolutionaries who were crucified with him
also kept abusing him in the same way.

From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land
until three in the afternoon.
And about three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice,
"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"
which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
Some of the bystanders who heard it said,
"This one is calling for Elijah."
Immediately one of them ran to get a sponge;
he soaked it in wine, and putting it on a reed,
gave it to him to drink.
But the rest said,
'Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to save him.'
But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice,
and gave up his spirit.

And behold, the veil of the sanctuary
was torn in two from top to bottom.
The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened,
and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised.
And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection,
they entered the holy city and appeared to many.
The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus
feared greatly when they saw the earthquake
and all that was happening, and they said,
"Truly, this was the Son of God!"

Pause, then reflect:

- *Before the Passion begins, Jesus asks the disciples: "Who do you say I am?" How do you answer that question today?*
- *Peter's place in the Passion is critical: Peter stands in for us – we profess love and belief, but human frailties keep us from fully realizing that belief. What challenges do we face today that tempt us to deny Christ?*
- *Judas also regrets his betrayal/denial, but his response is very different. How do you respond when you realize you have turned away in sin?*

If you are so inspired, please share your reflections on Facebook or the Website.