

## **Palm Sunday (A)**

**Gospel text (Mt 26,14—27,66): One of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went off to the chief priests and said, «How much will you give me if I hand him over to you?». They promised to give him thirty pieces of silver, and from then on he kept looking for the best way to hand him over to them.**

**On the first day of the Festival of the Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and said to him, «Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?». Jesus answered, «Go into the city, to the house of a certain man, and tell him: ‘The Master says: My hour is near, and I will celebrate the Passover with my disciples in your house’». The disciples did as Jesus had ordered and prepared the Passover meal.**

**When it was evening, Jesus sat at table with the Twelve. While they were eating, Jesus said, «Truly, I say to you: one of you will betray me». They were deeply distressed and asked him in turn, «You do not mean me, do you, Lord?». He answered, «He who will betray me is one of those who dips his bread in the dish with me. The Son of Man is going as the Scriptures say He will. But alas for that one who betrays the Son of Man; better for him not to have been born». Judas, who was betraying him, also asked, «You do not mean me, Master, do you?». Jesus replied, «You have said it».**

**While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said a blessing and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, «Take and eat; this is my body». Then He took a cup and gave thanks, and passed it to them saying, «Drink this, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.**

**Yes, I say to you: I will not taste the fruit of the vine from now until the day I drink new wine with you in my Father's kingdom».**

**After singing psalms of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, «You will falter tonight because of me, and all will fall. For the Scripture says: I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. But after my resurrection I will go ahead of you to Galilee». Peter responded, «Even though all doubt you and fall, I will never fall». Jesus replied, «Truly, I say to you: this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times». Peter said, «Though I have to die with you, I will never deny you». And all the disciples said the same.**

**Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, «Sit here while I go over to pray». He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and He began to be filled with anguish and distress. And He said to them, «My soul is filled with sorrow even to death. Remain here and stay awake with me». He went a little farther and fell to the ground, with his face touching the earth, and prayed, «Father, if it is possible, take this cup away from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want». He went back to his disciples and found them asleep, and He said to Peter, «Could you not stay awake with me for even an hour? Stay awake and pray, so that you may not slip into temptation. The spirit indeed is eager, but human nature is weak». He again went away and prayed, «Father, if this cup cannot be taken away from me without my drinking it, let your will be done». When He came back to his disciples, He again found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open. He left them and again went to pray the third time, saying the same words. Then He came back to his disciples and said to them, «You can sleep on now and take your rest! The hour has**

**come and the Son of Man is now given over into the power of sinners. Get up, let us go. Look: the betrayer is here».**

**Jesus was still speaking when Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, who had been sent by the chief priests and the Jewish authorities. The traitor had arranged a signal for them: «The one I kiss, He is the man; arrest him». And he went directly to Jesus and said, «Good evening, Master», and he gave him a kiss. But Jesus said to him, «Friend, do what you came for». Then they laid hold of Jesus and arrested him. One of those who were with Jesus drew his sword and struck at the servant of the High Priest, cutting off his ear. So Jesus said to him, «Put your sword back into its place, for he who uses the sword will perish by the sword. Do you not know that I could call on my Father, and He would at once send me more than twelve legions of angels. If Scripture says that this has to be, should it not be fulfilled?». At that moment, Jesus said to the crowd, «Why do you come to arrest me with swords and clubs, as if I were a robber? Day after day I was seated among you teaching in the Temple, yet you did not arrest me. But all this has come about in fulfillment of what the Prophets said». Then all his disciples deserted him and fled.**

**Those who had arrested Jesus brought him to the house of the High Priest Caiaphas, where the teachers of the Law and the Jewish authorities were assembled. Peter followed him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the High Priest; he entered and sat with the guards, waiting to see the end. The chief priests and the whole Supreme Council needed some false evidence against Jesus, so that they might put him to death. But they were unable to find any, even though false witnesses came forward. At last, two men came up and**

declared, «This man said: I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days».

The High Priest then stood up and asked Jesus, «Have you no answer at all? What is this evidence against you?». But Jesus kept silent. So the High Priest said to him, «In the name of the living God, I command you to tell us: Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?». Jesus answered, «It is just as you say. I tell you more: from now on, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Most Powerful God and coming on the clouds of heaven». Then the High Priest tore his clothes, saying, «He has blasphemed. What more evidence do we need? You have just heard these blasphemous words. What is your decision?». They answered, «He must die!». Then they began to spit on Jesus and slap him while others hit him with their fists, saying, «Messiah, prophesy! Who hit you?».

Meanwhile, as Peter sat outside in the courtyard, a young servant-girl of the house said to him, «You also were with Jesus of Galilee». But he denied it before everyone, saying, «I do not know what you are talking about». And as Peter was going out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and told the bystanders, «This man was with Jesus of Nazareth». Peter denied it again with an oath, swearing, «I do not know that man». After a little while, those who were standing there approached Peter and said to him, «Of course you are one of the Galileans; your accent gives you away». Peter began justifying himself with curses and oaths protesting that he did not know the man. Just then a cock crowed. And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, «Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times». And he went away weeping bitterly.

Early in the morning all the chief priests and the Jewish

authorities met to look for ways of putting Jesus to death. They had him bound and led him away to be handed over to Pilate, the governor.

When Judas, the traitor, realized that Jesus had been condemned, he was filled with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, «I have sinned by betraying an innocent man to death». They answered, «What does it matter to us? That is your concern». So, throwing the money into the Temple, he went away and hanged himself. The priests picked up the money, and said, «This money cannot be put into the Temple treasury, for this is the price of blood». So they met together and decided to buy the “Potter's Field” with the money and make it a cemetery for foreigners. This is why that place has been called Field of Blood to this day. So what the prophet Jeremiah said was fulfilled: «They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price the sons of Israel set on him. And they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord commanded me».

Jesus stood before the governor who questioned him, «Are you the King of the Jews?». Jesus answered, «You say so». The chief priests and the Elders accused him, but he made no answer. Pilate said to him, «Do you hear all the charges they bring against you?». But he did not answer even a single question, so that the governor wondered.

It was customary for the governor to release any prisoner the people asked for on the occasion of the Passover. Now there was a well-known prisoner called Barabbas. As the people had gathered, Pilate asked them, «Whom do you want me to set free: Barabbas, or Jesus called the Messiah?». For he realized that Jesus had been

handed over to him out of envy. As Pilate was sitting in court, his wife sent him this message, «Have nothing to do with that holy man. Because of him I had a dream last night that disturbed me greatly».

But the chief priests and the Elders stirred the crowds to ask for the release of Barabbas and the death of Jesus. When the governor asked them again, «Which of the two do you want me to set free?» they answered, «Barabbas». Pilate said to them, «And what shall I do with Jesus called the Messiah?». All answered, «Crucify him!». Pilate insisted, «What evil has He done?». But they shouted louder, «Crucify him!». Pilate realized that he was getting nowhere and that instead there could be a riot. He then asked for water and washed his hands before the people, saying, «I am not responsible for his blood. It is your doing». And all the people answered, «Let his blood be upon us and upon our children». Then Pilate set Barabbas free, but had Jesus scourged, and handed him over to be crucified.

The Roman soldiers took Jesus into the palace of the governor and the whole troop gathered around him. They stripped him and dressed him in a purple military cloak. Then, twisting a crown of thorns, they forced it onto his head, and placed a reed in his right hand. They knelt before Jesus and mocked him, saying, «Long life to the King of the Jews!». They spat on him, took the reed from his hand and struck him on the head with it. When they had finished mocking him, they pulled off the purple cloak and dressed him in his own clothes again, and led him out to be crucified.

On the way they met a man from Cyrene called Simon, and forced him to carry the cross of Jesus. When they reached the place called Golgotha (or Calvary) which means the Skull, they offered him wine mixed with gall. Jesus tasted it but would not take it. There they

crucified him and divided his clothes among themselves, casting lots to decide what each should take. Then they sat down to guard him. The statement of his offense was displayed above his head and it read, «This is Jesus, the King of the Jews». They also crucified two bandits with him, one on his right and one on his left. People passing by shook their heads and insulted him, saying, «Aha! So you will destroy the Temple and build it up again in three days. Now save yourself and come down from the cross, if you are Son of God». In the same way the chief priests, the Elders and the teachers of the Law mocked him. They said, «The man who saved others cannot save himself. Let the King of Israel now come down from his cross and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let God rescue him if God wants to, since He himself said: I am the Son of God». Even the robbers who were crucified with him insulted him.

From midday darkness fell over the whole land until mid-afternoon. At about three o'clock, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, «Eloi, Eloi, lamma Sabbacthani?», which means: «My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?». As soon as they heard this, some of the bystanders said, «He is calling for Elijah». And one of them went quickly, took a sponge and soaked it in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave him to drink. Others said, «Leave him alone, let us see whether Elijah comes to his rescue». Then Jesus cried out again in a loud voice and gave up his spirit.

Just then the curtain of the Temple sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and several holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after the resurrection of Jesus, entered the Holy City and appeared to many. The captain and the soldiers who guarded Jesus were greatly terrified when they saw the

earthquake and all that had happened, and said, «Truly, this man was a Son of God». There were also some women there who watched from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and saw to his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

It was now evening and there arrived a wealthy man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, and the governor ordered that the body be given him. So Joseph took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in a clean linen sheet and laid it in his own new tomb which had been cut out of the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance of the tomb and left. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there in front of the tomb.

On the following day (the day after the Preparation for the Passover), the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate and said to him, «Sir, we remember that when that impostor was still alive, He said: I will rise after three days. Therefore, have his tomb secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal the body and say to the people: He was raised from the dead. This would be a worse lie than the first». Pilate answered them, «You have soldiers, go and take all the necessary precautions». So they went to the tomb and secured it, sealing the stone and placing it under guard.

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*«Are you the King of the Jews?»*

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Today, we are asked to contemplate the royal style of Christ, our savior. Jesus is a king, and —precisely— the last Sunday of our liturgical year we will celebrate Our Lord Jesus Christ the King of the world. Yes, He is King, but his kingdom is «a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace» (Preface of the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King). Amazing royalty! We men, with our terrene mentality, are not used to it.

A good king, a gentle king, who cares for the well-being of our souls: «My kingdom is not of this world» (Jn 18:36). He lets them do. With a derogatory and mocking tone, «the governor questioned him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’. Jesus answered, ‘You say so’» (Mt 27:11). And even more mockery: Jesus is equated to Barabbas, and the crowds are to choose who is to be released: «‘Which one do you want me to release to you, Barabbas, or Jesus called Messiah?’» (Mt 27:17). And... They preferred, «Barabbas!» (cf. Mt 27:21). And... Jesus remains silent and He offers himself as a holocaust for us, who are judging him!

When He arrived in Jerusalem, early before, enthused and with simplicity, «the very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road. The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest’» (Mt 21:9-9). Yet, now, the very same ones are shouting: «Crucify him!». «But the governor said, ‘Why? What evil has he done?’. They only shouted the louder, ‘Let him be crucified!’» (Mt 27:22-23). «Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your king?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar’» (Jn 19:15).

This King is not obtruding himself on us, He is offering himself. His royalty is full of the spirit of service. «He is not coming to achieve glory, with pomp and splendor: He does not argue nor raises his voice, He is not noticed in the street, for He is gentle and humble (...). They do not spread before Him neither olive branches, nor tapestries or cloaks; let us offer ourselves the maximum possible» (St. Andrew of Crete, bishop).