

Good Friday (Celebration of the Lord's Passion)

Gospel text (*Jn* 18,1—19,42): When Jesus had finished speaking, He went with his disciples to the other side of the Kidron Valley. There was a garden there where Jesus entered with his disciples. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place since Jesus had often met there with his disciples. He led soldiers of the Roman battalion and guards from the chief priests and Pharisees, who went there with lanterns, torches and weapons. Jesus knew all that was going to happen to him; He stepped forward and asked, «Who are you looking for?». They answered, «Jesus the Nazarene». Jesus said, «I am he». Judas, who betrayed him, stood there with them. When Jesus said, «I am he», they moved back and fell to the ground. He then asked a second time, «Who are you looking for?» and they answered, «Jesus the Nazarene». Jesus replied, «I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, let these others go». So what Jesus had said came true: «I have not lost one of those you gave me». Simon Peter had a sword; he drew it and struck Malchus, the High Priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus said to Peter, «Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?».

The guards and the soldiers, with their commander, seized Jesus and bound him; and they took him first to Annas. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the High Priest that year; and it was Caiaphas who had told the Jews: «It is better that one man should die for the people». Simon Peter with another disciple followed Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the High Priest, they let him enter the courtyard of the High Priest along with Jesus, but Peter had to stay outside at the door. The other disciple, who

was known to the High Priest went out and spoke to the maidservant at the gate and brought Peter in. Then, this servant on duty at the door said to Peter, «So you also are one of his disciples?». But he answered, «I am not». Now the servants and the guards had made a charcoal fire and were standing and warming themselves, because it was cold. Peter was also with them warming himself. The High Priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, «I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in places where the Jews meet together, either at the assemblies in synagogues or in the Temple. I did not teach secretly. Why then do you ask me? Ask those who heard me, they know what I said». At this reply one of the guards standing by gave Jesus a blow on the face, saying, «Is that the way to answer the High Priest?». Jesus said to him, «If I have spoken wrongly, point it out; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?». Then Annas sent him, bound, to Caiaphas, the High Priest. Now Simon Peter stood there warming himself. They said to him, «Surely you also are one of his disciples». He denied it and answered, «I am not». One of the High Priest's servants, a kinsman of the one whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, «Did I not see you with him in the garden?». Again Peter denied it, and at once the cock crowed.

Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the court of the Roman governor. It was now morning. The Jews didn't enter lest they be made unclean (by coming into the house of a pagan) and be unable to eat the Passover meal. So Pilate went out and asked, «What charge do you bring against this man?». They answered, «If He were not a criminal, we would not be handing him over to you». Pilate said, «Take him yourselves and judge him according to your own law». But they replied, «We ourselves are not allowed to put anyone to death». It was clear from this what kind of death Jesus

was to die, according to what Jesus himself had foretold. Pilate then entered the court again, called Jesus and asked him, «Are you the King of the Jews?». Jesus replied, «Does this word come from you, or did you hear it from others?». Pilate answered, «Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?». Jesus answered, «My kingship does not come from this world. If I were king like those of this world, my guards would have fought to save me from being handed over to the Jews. But my kingship is not from here». Pilate asked him, «So you are a king?». And Jesus answered, «Just as you say, I am a king. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is on the side of truth hears my voice». Pilate said, «What is truth?». Pilate then went out to the Jews again and said, «I find no crime in this man. Now, according to a custom, I must release a prisoner of yours at the Passover. With your agreement I will release for you the King of the Jews». But they insisted and cried out, «Not this man, but Barabbas!». Now Barabbas was a robber.

Then Pilate had Jesus taken away and scourged. The soldiers also twisted thorns into a crown and put it on his head. They threw a cloak of royal purple around his shoulders and began coming up to him and saluting him, «Hail, king of the Jews», and they struck him on the face. Pilate went outside yet another time and said to the Jews, «Look, I am bringing him out and I want you to know that I find no crime in him». Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak and Pilate pointed to him saying, «Here is the man!». On seeing him the chief priests and the guards cried out, «Crucify him! Crucify him!». Pilate replied, «Take him yourselves and have him crucified, for I find no case against him». The Jews then said, «We have a Law, and according to the Law this

man must die because He made himself Son of God». When Pilate heard this he was more afraid. And coming back into the court he asked Jesus, «Where are you from?». But Jesus gave him no answer. Then Pilate said to him, «You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you just as I have power to crucify you?». Jesus replied, «You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is more guilty». From that moment Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, «If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who makes himself king is defying Caesar». When Pilate heard this, he had Jesus brought outside to the place called the Stone Floor—in Hebrew Gabbatha—and there he had him seated in the tribune. It was the Preparation Day for the Passover, about noon. So Pilate said to the Jews, «Here is your king». But they cried out, «Away! Take him away! Crucify him!». Pilate replied, «Shall I crucify your king?». And the chief priests answered, «We have no king but Caesar». Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

They took charge of him. Bearing his own cross, Jesus went out of the city to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew: Golgotha. There He was crucified and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus was in the middle. Pilate had a notice written and fastened to the cross that read: Jesus the Nazorean, King of the Jews. Many Jewish people saw this title, because the place where Jesus was crucified was very close to the city. It was, moreover, written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. The chief priests said to Pilate, «Do not write: ‘The king of the Jews’; but: ‘This man claimed to be king of the Jews’». Pilate answered them, «What I have written, I have written». When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one part for each of them.

But as the tunic was woven in one piece from top to bottom, they said, «Let us not tear it, but cast lots to decide who will get it». This fulfilled the words of Scripture: They divided my clothing among them; they cast lots for my garment. This was what the soldiers did. Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister Mary, who was the wife of Cleophas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw the Mother, and the disciple whom He loved, He said to the Mother, «Woman, this is your son». Then He said to the disciple, «There is your mother». And from that moment the disciple took her to his own home.

With that Jesus knew all was now finished and He said, «I am thirsty», to fulfil what was written in Scripture. A jar full of bitter wine stood there; so, putting a sponge soaked in the wine on a twig of hyssop, they raised it to his lips. Jesus took the wine and said, «It is accomplished». Then He bowed his head and gave up the spirit.

As it was Preparation Day, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the cross during the Sabbath, for this Sabbath was a very solemn day. They asked Pilate to have the legs of the condemned men broken, so they might take away the bodies. The soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who had been crucified with Jesus. When they came to Jesus, they saw that He was already dead; so they did not break his legs. One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a lance and immediately there came out blood and water. The one who has seen here gives his witness so that you may believe: his witness is true and he knows that he speaks the truth. All this happened to fulfill the words of Scripture, «Not one of his bones shall be broken». Another text says: «They shall look on him whom they have pierced».

disciple of Jesus, though secretly, for fear of the Jews. And he asked Pilate to let him remove the body of Jesus. Pilate agreed, so he came and took away the body. Nicodemus, the man who earlier had come to Jesus by night, also came and brought a jar of myrrh mixed with aloes, about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices, following the burial custom of the Jews. There was a garden in the place where Jesus had been crucified, and, in the garden, a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. As the tomb was very near, they buried Jesus there because they had no time left before the Jewish Preparation Day.

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Today we celebrate the first day of the Paschal Triduum. It is therefore the day of the victorious Cross, where Jesus Christ left the best of Him: the Virgin Mary as his mother, the forgiveness—for the slayers, too—and total trust in God Father.

We have heard it in the reading of the Passion, transmitting us saint John's testimony, witness in the Calvary with Mary, our Lord's mother, and the other women. It is a narration rich in symbology where every little detail counts. But today, the silence and austerity of the Church help us also to live in an environment of prayer, fully attentive to the gift we celebrate.

In front of this great mystery, we are called—first of all—to see. Christian faith is not the reverential relationship to a distant and even abstract God, we know nothing about, but the adhesion to a Person, true man like us and, at the same time, true God. The Invisible one became flesh of our flesh and assumed to be a man until death, a death on the Cross. But, it was a death accepted as a ransom for us all, redeeming death, death that brings us life. Those who were there and saw it, are those who now transmit these feats while simultaneously revealing the significance of Christ's death.

In front of this, we feel grateful and admiring. We know the price of love: «Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends» (Jn 15:13). Christian prayer is not meant to beg only, but —first of all— to gratefully admire.

Jesus, is the model to imitate, that is, for us to reproduce his attitudes. We must be persons that can love all the way and trust the Father in the face of adversity.

This contrasts with the indifferent atmosphere of our society; that is why we must bear a bolder testimony than ever before, as the gift is for all of us. As saint Meliton of Sardis says «He made us go from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life. He is the Paschal mystery of our salvation».