



Repent and Believe

Journey through Lent 2012 | Year B

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Sixth Week of Lent: Palm Sunday | Year B | April 1, 2012 A Time To Be Standing At The Cross

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between paragraphs. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

Opening Ritual and Prayer



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Light a candle. Open your Bible and set it beside the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer, even if you are alone. Quiet music can help to settle yourself and others after a hectic day.

Leader: As we gather today, we remember how Jesus died for us.

All: Praise God for sending us his Son.

Leader: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.

All: All praise and glory are yours, Lord Jesus Christ.

Leader: Abba, Father, we entrust ourselves to your loving care today.

All: Amen



Find it in Scripture

Explore the Bible together

Read aloud to yourself or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture readings for the Sixth Sunday of Lent: Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

Here is some insight on these readings

- ▶ First Reading (Isaiah 50:4-7)
 - The speaker in this passage is a prophet, one who hears God's word and proclaims it.
 - God has both appointed the speaker to a particular ministry and provided him with what is essential if the ministry is to be effective: ears to hear God's word and a well-trained tongue to speak that word to others.
- ▶ Second Reading (Philippians 2:6-11)
 - This passage is a reflection on the nature and mission of Jesus. He did not cling to the identity that was rightfully his but rather emptied himself and took on the human condition.
 - In turn, God has exalted him, and all will praise Christ, whose exaltation gives glory to God.
- ▶ Gospel (Mark 14:1-15:47)
 - This is the passion according to Mark, with its key elements of the anointing at Bethany, the last supper, the agony in the garden, the trials of Jesus before Jewish and Roman authorities, his crucifixion and death.



Going a bit deeper

Exploring our Catholic faith and life

Reflection on the Gospel Reading: A Time to be Standing at The Cross

This Sunday we read and hear the Passion story from the Gospel of Mark. It is the shortest in length, the first one written and at times quite stark. Nonetheless, we always need to ask ourselves when reading a Passion narrative from the Gospels just how we would have acted in relation to the agony in the garden, arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. With which character in the story would we most identify? Could we have been among the disciples who fled from danger, abandoning Jesus? Are there not moments in our own lives when we play the role of Peter, denying Jesus, or even Judas, betraying him? Have we not found ourselves at times like Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross of Jesus or like Pontius Pilate in John's Gospel, trying to avoid making a decision and washing our hands of the whole affair? Could we have stood among the religious leaders who condemned Jesus or the soldiers who mocked him? Or are there times when we are sheepish about our commitment to Jesus, like Joseph of Arimathea, and need courage to witness to Jesus? In sum, while reading or hearing the Passion

narrative, we are constantly asked the question of the hymn: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

The Passion Story in Mark and Jewish Festivals

The Passion story in the Gospel of Mark begins during two Jewish festivals: Passover and Unleavened Bread. Passover commemorated the Israelites’ deliverance by God from slavery in Egypt. Egypt symbolized the dominant culture. The feast of Unleavened Bread served as an offering of thanks and praise to God for all God had done in the past and will do in the future.

By placing Jesus’ own sacrifice during the festival of Passover, Mark links the meaning of Jesus’ death to the liberation by God of the exiled Israelites in Egypt. Jesus is the new Passover lamb who is innocently sacrificed so that his people might go free. Were you there when Jesus set us free from the choke hold of the dominant culture, of sin and of no meaning after death?

The Anointing at Bethany

We move now to Bethany and the house of Simon the leper and a banquet. In Jesus’ time banquets were only for men. The unnamed woman who anoints Jesus must have had great courage to violate the male-dominated meal. Her perfumed oil was worth about a year’s wages, showing that her action was both extravagant and generous. In Jesus’ time it was a common act of hospitality for male hosts to anoint the heads of their guests, a gesture of welcome. Simon did not do this to Jesus his guest. Jesus defends the woman’s actions, and this attests that she both welcomes him and is correct in recognizing who he is, namely the anointed one of God. Because of her actions, the woman will be remembered wherever and whenever the Gospel is proclaimed. Will we also be remembered for the actions we perform as disciples of Jesus?

When Mark shows Jesus saying, “She has anointed my body beforehand for its burial” (14:8b), we are forced to consider the different meanings of “anointing.” Jesus speaks of anointing here in the context of consecrating the body for death. At the same time, Mark’s readers would have been aware that Jesus was referred to as “messiah,” a Hebrew word that means “the anointed one.” The ancients believed that just as the olive oil used in anointing penetrated the skin of the one being anointed, so did God’s Spirit enter into the person being anointed. In the Bible and other Jewish writings of the time, the term “messiah” generally referred to someone who was sent to do God’s work, and so it was a title associated with glory. Earlier in his Gospel, Mark shows Jesus rebuking Peter for making that association (8:29-33). Mark shows Jesus consistently teaching that God’s anointed one should be associated with suffering and even death. In this episode in chapter 14, Mark dramatizes that meaning. Jesus becomes “the anointed one” in the context of death because of the action of this unnamed woman in anointing his body in preparation for burial.

Jesus at Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane

The story continues with Jesus predicting Judas' betrayal, the last supper scene, and then the scene of Jesus at prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus takes with him Peter, James, and John, those who were with him at the raising of Jairus' daughter and the transfiguration. The only thing Jesus asks of his disciples is to sit and wait and keep watch while he prays. An anguish-ridden Jesus prays: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me." Jesus' faith in God and his love for all of us are such powerful forces within him that he concludes his prayer by submitting his will to God's: "yet not what I want but what you want." In our own prayer life, do we pray for what God wants of us as Jesus did?

Three times Jesus discovers the disciples sleeping. Even Peter, who said he would die with Jesus if he had to, was sleeping. Through prayer, Jesus is now prepared to face betrayal, arrest, suffering and death. The disciples, on the other hand, who failed to keep vigil and presumably did not pray, will flee in fear and abandon Jesus.

Mark's Jesus is abused and completely abandoned during his passion. From the moment in Gethsemane when he resigns himself to arrest, his abandonment grows more complete. The betrayal of Judas, his arrest, and the disciples abandoning him are all part of the symphony of sadness that only Jesus hears.

Then there is Peter, Jesus' closest associate who had earlier in the Gospel of Mark proclaimed: "You are the Messiah!" (Mark 8:29). Hours before, Peter had boasted: "Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you." Now, when questioned by a servant girl, Peter denies any knowledge of Jesus. "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about."

Jesus faces his accusers all alone: the chief priests and the Sanhedrin at night, Pilate and the soldiers by day. Nowhere to be seen are those who once followed him. When Pilate brings Jesus and Barabbas before the crowd, the people choose for release the rebel-murderer. Ironically, the name Barabbas means "son of the father," and the people fail to see the real Son of the Father who is Jesus. Only Simon of Cyrene, a passerby, gives a helping hand, and he is coerced into doing it.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

On the cross, Jesus is mocked by an entire entourage. First by people passing by, then by priests and scribes, and finally by others who are being crucified with him. Beneath this experience is Jesus' numbing sense of total abandonment by God. Now we meet the moment of Jesus' greatest anguish as Mark's Jesus speaks only once from the cross. It is a final piercing cry and a last breath: "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" ("My God, my God, why have you

abandoned me?”). The death of Jesus, abandoned and alone, is a horrifying death, a terrible end.

Yet within this story of abandonment runs another story line about abuse: the abuse of power. In Mark’s passion account we see the power of both religion and state perverted. Jesus is subjected to religious authorities in a trial that is a farce, laced with false witnesses and fraudulent accusations. The religious leaders and their minions spit on him, blindfold him and strike him. Then there is Pontius Pilate. He represented an empire that prided itself on its alleged system of impartial justice, but here he betrays that ideal beyond question. Knowing Jesus to be innocent, Pilate caves in to a rabid, rabble-rousing crowd whose preference for a rebel (Barabbas) leads him to hand off Jesus to a brutal scourging. Then he surrenders Jesus to a style of death so terrible that Rome would not allow its own citizens to die in this manner.

In Mark’s Gospel no one gets off the hook: betrayers, disciples, deniers, religious leaders, political leaders, the crowds. All alike fail to protect the innocent one. Such abandonment of the innocent and abuse of the powerless continues today. The question for the modern reader or listener to the passion is: What are we doing to protect the abandoned, the abused, the innocent, and the powerless?

Jesus totally entered into this powerlessness and abandonment. We are to do likewise. In Jesus’ passion we are reminded that no matter how black the darkness, or how strong the forces of death, or how desperate are our cries, or even if death seems to have won out, there is a power stronger than death.

Even in this profoundly sad story of the passion we see signs of hope. Hope springs up in a veil being torn in two from top to bottom, that veil in the Temple that restricted access to God. And who was the first to step through that opening? A Roman centurion, an outsider, a Gentile was the one who spoke the first true words to all who would listen: “Truly this man was the Son of God.” This is the ultimate profession of our Lenten faith.



Talk it over

Share what's on your mind

Reflection Questions

- ▶ Were you there when Jesus was crucified?
- ▶ Have you ever betrayed, denied, or abandoned Jesus?
- ▶ With which character(s) in the passion narrative do you most identify? Why?
- ▶ Do you believe Jesus was the son of God?



Do something about it!

Put your hands to work on what your heart believes.

Activities for the Sixth Week of Lent

For Youth & Adults

Holding a crucifix in your hands, look at it and reflect on how you have helped Christ carry his cross and on how the risen Jesus has helped you carry your cross. (This activity can also be done at the dinner table by having each person hold the crucifix, share their reflections, and then pass it on to the next person.)

Since this is Holy Week, make every effort to celebrate the Sacred Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday at your parish. If your schedule does not permit this, then meditate on Holy Thursday as to the meaning of the Eucharist for you, on Good Friday on the meaning of Jesus' death for you, on Holy Saturday on the meaning of the resurrection for you.

For Children

With Easter just around the corner, rather than just color Easter eggs, think of all the people and things that you are thankful for in your life. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to God, and pray it out loud in the presence of your family on Easter Sunday morning before you hunt for Easter eggs.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Were you there when they crucified the Lord?

All: Yes, we were.

Leader: Did you help him carry the cross?

All: Yes, we did freely.

Leader: Are you willing to take up your own cross daily and follow Jesus?

All: Yes, we are.

As a closing gesture, trace the sign of the cross on your own forehead and on the foreheads of others who are present, then exchange a gesture of peace with everyone.