

Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50:4-7

This reading gives us a rare view into the personal life and struggles of Isaiah.³

4The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue, The prophet acknowledges God as the source of his “well trained tongue.” Isaiah may well have been the greatest master of the Hebrew language; his writings are regarded as of the highest caliber.³ **that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them.** The people felt that God had abandoned and forgotten them. They had come to doubt and they needed a word that would ROUSE them. The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference. **Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear;** Sr. Lucia, the seer from Fatima, wrote that we should “moderate ourselves at the table of Creation.” She suggests turning off the TV, shutting off the radio and instead, spending time in prayer and small constant acts of penance. She says that we should let things pass as if we were blind, deaf and dumb so that we may in fact see better, speak better, speak with greater certainty and HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD!¹⁷ This verse emphasizes the servant’s docility to the word of God. He is not depicted as a self-taught teacher with original ideas, but as an obedient disciple.¹⁷ The servant must first be a disciple, prayerfully receiving God’s word, before he can presume to teach others.¹⁸ **5and I have not rebelled, have not turned back.** This is in contrast to his generation in Israel who had both rebelled and turned away from God. Isaiah was faithful and for this faithfulness he suffered.³

6I 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. His suffering was very intense and painful. He tells of having been beaten. He describes his beard being plucked, a sign of dishonor for the Jews. Yet in all of his suffering, Isaiah puts up no resistance. He tells us, “I gave my back,” and that he did not shield his face from “buffets and spitting.” His suffering was freely and nobly accepted.³

7The 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. Despite suffering, Isaiah endures in faithfulness. Again he acknowledges the Lord’s help as the cause of his ability to endure. In utmost humility, all of Isaiah’s successes are attributed to the work of God, all is for His glory. Although he is to suffer much, he is confident and trusts that God will take care of him.³ Isaiah’s ministry and life are a prefigurement of Jesus Christ. As a prophet and servant of God, Isaiah prophesies-- not only by his words but by his very life--the future Man-God. The faithfulness and suffering of Isaiah point to a similar pattern in the life of Christ.³

Philippians 2:6-11

6Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, Jesus Christ is God and was God before the Incarnation. As the Nicene Creed says: “the only begotten Son of God, born of the

Father before time began, light from light, true God from true God.”⁴ **did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.** Instead of “grasped”, recent scholars say that a better translation would be “taken advantage of.” Rather than the idea that Jesus did not grasp at equality with God (since He always had equality), it makes more sense to say “though in the form of God, He did not deem equality with God something to be taken advantage of.” The attitude of Christ, then, was that of not taking advantage of His great powers and privileges as God. Instead, Jesus accepts the humble condition of a slave. Thus His attitude is one of selfless surrender and great generosity. This is the attitude that St. Paul would have us imitate.³

7Rather, he emptied himself, Christ did not empty himself of his divine nature, but rather of the GLORY, which was his by rights and would be restored. He became a real man, like other men in all things but sin. From all eternity he exists as God and from the moment of the Incarnation he began to be man.⁴ **taking the form of a slave,** This refers to the condition of a slave and it is interesting to note the contrast for he is then recognized as “Lord” in verse 11.⁵ **coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance,** **he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.** That obedience was not ordinary, it was heroic! The devil tempted Adam, a mere man, to be like God. Jesus Christ, on the contrary, who enjoyed divine glory from all eternity “emptied himself”; he chose the way of humility, the opposite of Adam. St. Thomas tells us that, “obedience is the sign of true humility.” St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote that “Christ did not experience death due to the fact of being born; rather, he took birth upon himself in order to die.”⁴ Crucifixion, the form of execution reserved for slaves and those who had totally forfeited all civil rights, marked the extremity of human abasement.¹⁸

9Because of this, God greatly exalted him The Greek compounds the notion of exaltation to indicate the immensity of his glorification.⁴ **and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,** For the Jews, the name which is above every name is the name of God (Yahweh), which the Mosaic Law required to be held in particular awe. This means that the adoration given to Yahweh is also to be given to Jesus Christ and his name is to be worshipped by the entire universe.^{4,5}

10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, This is the universal adoration paid to a sovereign.⁵ **of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,** Scripture usually speaks of “heaven and earth” when referring to the entire created universe. By mentioning here the underworld it is emphasizing that nothing escapes his dominion.⁴

11and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ “Jesus” means “Yahweh is salvation”. “Christ” means “the anointed one” and by this name Christians confessed their belief that Jesus was the Messiah.⁶ **is Lord,** St Paul uses the word Kyrios which was used to translate the name of God (Yahweh). This sentence was written to mean that “Jesus Christ is God!”⁴ **to the glory of God the Father.** Whatever honors Jesus also honors the Father.⁵ The Catholic Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Name on January 3.

Matthew 26:14-27:66

14One of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, Judas was the only Judean among the Apostles as the rest seemed to have hailed from Galilee. We know that he was the treasurer of the group and he secretly embezzled funds. Luke mentions that Satan took possession of him and John quotes Jesus as saying that one of the Twelve was a devil. At both the Last Supper and in the garden, Judas called Jesus “Rabbi” rather than “Master” as the other apostles did which would seem to indicate that he did not believe in Jesus.⁸ Judas’ name is always listed last when the apostles are named in scripture.¹⁸ **went to the chief priests**
15and said, “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” They paid him **thirty pieces of silver**, This was the price of a slave.¹ It was not an impressive sum.⁸ The thirty pieces of silver were paid for out of the temple money which was destined for the purchase of sacrifices.¹⁰

16and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over.

17On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, This begins with the day of Passover. During this feast, the Jews ate only unleavened bread for seven days.¹ This was one of the three annual feasts when all men were expected to come to the Temple. The city’s normal population of 30,000 swelled to 130,000.¹⁸ **the disciples approached Jesus and said, “Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?”**

18He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, “The teacher says, “My appointed time draws near; in your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples.” This house may have belonged to the parents of Mark the Evangelist.¹²

19The disciples then did as Jesus had ordered, and prepared the Passover.

20When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve. They actually reclined around the table on couches.⁵

21And while they were eating, he said, “Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”

22Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, “Surely it is not I, Lord?” In the presence of Divinity, no one can be sure of his innocence. One of them could be sure that he was the traitor, and yet no one could be sure that he was not.¹⁰

23He said in reply, “He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me. The dinner was served in large bowls set in the center of the group. Each reached into the bowl for a morsel.⁵ The giving of a morsel to a table neighbor was a mark of favor.¹⁰

24The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born.”

25Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” He answered, “You have said so.”

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Jesus identifies the unleavened bread and the cup with his body and blood. Through his spoken words the mystery of transubstantiation takes place: his body and blood replace the entire substance of the bread and wine. Although his presence remains undetected by the senses, the Church’s faith rests entirely on Jesus’ solemn words.¹

27 Then he took a cup, This was the third cup of the ritual meal where four cups are part of the service.¹⁸ gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, There are several reasons why Jesus used bread and wine for this Memorial: First, because no two substances in nature better symbolize unity than bread and wine. As bread is made from a multiplicity of grains of wheat and wine is made from a multiplicity of grapes, so the many who believe are one in Christ. Second, no two substances in nature have to suffer more to become what they are than bread and wine. Wheat has to pass through the rigors of winter, be ground beneath the mill and then subjected to purging fire before it can become bread. Grapes in turn must be subjected to the wine press and have their life crushed from them to become wine. Thus they symbolize the Passion and Sufferings of Christ for Our Lord said unless we die to ourselves we cannot live in him. A third reason is that there are no two substances in nature which have more traditionally nourished man than bread and wine. When bread and wine are consumed, they are changed into man’s body and blood. But when Christ took bread and wine, he changed them into Himself.¹⁰

28 for this is my blood of the covenant, This phrase is drawn from Ex 24:8 where God entered a covenant of love and communion with Israel through sacrifice. The consumption of blood –always forbidden under the Old Covenant– is now enjoined in the New, since it communicates Christ’s divine life to the believer.¹ As Moses ratified the Old Testament with the blood of animals, so Christ now ratified the New Testament with his own blood.¹⁰ which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus links the Eucharist with his coming sacrifice on the Cross.¹

29 I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father.” The Eucharist is a pledge of the life to come.² At this point they should have drunk the fourth cup of the Passover meal.¹⁴ Jesus didn’t finish the Passover until Calvary, where he fulfilled it. Calvary began with the Eucharist while the Eucharist ended with Calvary. They are one and the same sacrifice!¹⁶

30 Then, after singing a hymn, This is the only time that Jesus sang that is recorded.¹⁰ they went out to the Mount of Olives. They didn’t finish the Passover liturgy as the cup of completion (the 4th cup) has not been drunk.¹⁸

31 Then Jesus said to them, “This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed; This is a citation from Zech 13:7. Its fulfillment unfolds when the disciples flee from Gethsemane.¹

³²but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee.” Jesus’ assurance of a later appearance in Galilee implies that the apostles will abandon him only temporarily. They will be regathered. This prediction is fulfilled in Mt. 28:16-20.

³³Peter said to him in reply, “Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be.”

³⁴Jesus said to him, “Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows, Possibly the bugle call that signaled the end of the third watch of the night. The Romans referred to this watch (midnight to 3 AM) as the “cockcrow”.¹ you will deny me three times.” Three is the number of completion in Hebrew numerology, thus it will be a complete denial.¹⁸

³⁵Peter said to him, “Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you.” And all the disciples spoke likewise.

³⁶Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, This is a Hebrew word meaning “oil press”. It is a garden traditionally located near the foot of the Mount of Olives, facing Jerusalem.^{1d} and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

³⁷He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them,

³⁸“My soul is sorrowful even to death. Two elements are bound together: sin-bearing and sinless obedience.¹⁰ Remain here and keep watch with me.”

³⁹He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup Here he is referring to the fourth cup which would have completed the Old Covenant memorial meal.¹⁴ pass from me; As a man, Jesus has a natural aversion to suffering that is both physical (crucifixion) and spiritual (bearing the sins of the world). As God’s Son, he could have suppressed these human passions by divine effort, but he chose to embrace the Father’s plan even in agony. This ordeal in the garden is traditionally viewed as Satan’s most aggressive assault on Jesus.¹ yet, not as I will, but as you will.” Note that his human will is in perfect harmony with the divine will.²

⁴⁰When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter, “So you could not keep watch with me for one hour?”

⁴¹Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The prayer of Jesus in the Garden has many similarities to the “Our Father” including this phrase which is so like “lead us not into temptation.” The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴²Withdrawing a second time, he prayed again, “My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!”

⁴³Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open.

⁴⁴He left them and withdrew again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing again.

⁴⁵Then he returned to his disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand when the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners. The

privilege of the disciples to be present with Jesus at his time of distress was wasted by their lack of attention and prayer.¹

46Get up, let us go. Look, my betrayer is at hand.”

47While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a large crowd, with swords and clubs, who had come from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

48His betrayer had arranged a sign with them, saying, “The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him.”

49Immediately he went over to Jesus and said, “Hail, Rabbi!” and he kissed him.

50Jesus answered him, “Friend, do what you have come for.” Then stepping forward they laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.

51And behold, one of those who accompanied Jesus put his hand to his sword, This disciple is named in John 18:10 as Peter. drew it, and struck the high priest’s servant, John also gives us the name of the slave — Malchus. cutting off his ear.

52Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Jesus rebukes Peter for responding with violence, not wanting any attempt at frustrating the Father’s plan.¹ In the Garden of Eden, a sword was drawn to prevent Adam and Eve from re-entering the garden; in Gethsemane, the sword is sheathed.¹⁰

53Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels? In the Roman army, a “legion” consisted of nearly 6,000 soldiers. Here it is not the Father’s will to dispatch angelic armies to deliver Jesus from sinners; his betrayal and Crucifixion are essential to God’s plan of redemption.¹

54But then how would the Scriptures be fulfilled which say that it must come to pass in this way?”

55At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to seize me? Day after day I sat teaching in the temple area, yet you did not arrest me.

56But all this has come to pass that the writings of the prophets may be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled. Jesus, who is both high priest and victim, had to go to sacrifice alone. The Old Testament ordered that the high priest must be alone when he offered sacrifice. Later on the Apostles would suffer and die for him: Matthew suffered martyrdom by the sword in Ethiopia, Mark was dragged to death through the streets of Alexandria, Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece, Peter was crucified in Rome with his head downward, James was beheaded in Jerusalem, James the Less was thrown from a pinnacle of the temple and beaten to death below, Philip was hanged against a pillar in Phrygia, Bartholomew was flayed alive, Andrew was bound to a cross where he preached to his persecutors till he died, Thomas had his body pierced in India, Jude was shot to death with arrows, and Mathias was first stoned and then beheaded.¹⁰

57Those who had arrested Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. Caiaphas was the Jerusalem high priest and representative head of Israel who presided over the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews, during Jesus' trial.¹ The Old Law ordained that each animal sacrificed for the sins of the people be led before the priest.¹⁰

58Peter was following him at a distance as far as the high priest's courtyard, and going inside he sat down with the servants to see the outcome.

59The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin (71 members) kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, The primary function of this council was to regulate and judge the internal affairs of Judaism. Their attempts to procure "false witnesses" underscores the extreme measures taken by them to condemn Jesus.¹

60but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward who stated,

61"This man said, 'I can destroy the temple of God and within three days rebuild it.'" This was a distortion of Jesus' words when he was predicting his bodily Resurrection, not announcing a plan to reconstruct a fallen building.¹

62The high priest rose and addressed him, "Have you no answer? What are these men testifying against you?"

63But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I order you to tell us under oath before the living God The invocation of the "living God" would damn the soul forever if he lied because it would break the Second Commandment.¹⁸ whether you are the Christ, the Son of God."

64Jesus said to him in reply, "You have said so. But I tell you: From now on you will see 'the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power' and "coming on the clouds of heaven." Jesus appears to be the victim, but he claims to be the victor. Drawing from Ps. 110 and Dan 7, Jesus anticipates his vindication by God. Both of these scriptures share common images where they envision a heavenly throne room in God's presence; both depict a royal Messiah who reigns with God, and both present this figure triumphing over his enemies. Jesus here weaves these texts into a self-portrait: he is the royal Son of man soon to be vindicated over his enemies and enthroned at God's right hand.¹ In Daniel's dream, four dreadful beasts waged war on the Jewish people when a mysterious human figure appeared who was one like a "Son of man." When Jesus claims to be this "Son of man," he implies that the leaders of Jerusalem have assumed the role of the beasts who persecute the Son of man. Now *they* are the enemies because *they* are opposing the one whom God has sent to free his people!⁹

65Then the high priest tore his robes In tearing off his garments, Caiaphas was actually stripping off his priesthood, putting an end to the priesthood of Aaron and opening the way to the priesthood of Melchisedech.¹⁰ and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need have we of witnesses?"

⁶⁶You have now heard the blasphemy; what is your opinion?" They said in reply, "He deserves to die!" The council charges Jesus with "blaspheming" the name of God and issues a death sentence. The Romans, however, have reserved for themselves the sole authority to administer capital punishment in NT Palestine. For this reason, the council delivers Jesus to the Roman governor, Pilate, in hopes that he will enforce their judgment. To increase the chances of the death penalty, they change the charge to "political revolt".²

⁶⁷Then they spat in his face and struck him, while some slapped him, saying,

⁶⁸"Prophecy for us, Christ: who is it that struck you?"

⁶⁹Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. One of the maids came over to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean."

⁷⁰But he denied it in front of everyone, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about!"

⁷¹As he went out to the gate, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazorean."

⁷²Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man!"

⁷³A little later the bystanders came over and said to Peter, "Surely you too are one of them; even your speech gives you away." Peter's provincial accent showed that he was from Galilee for the people from the north lacked the polished dialect of Judea and Jerusalem. There were certain guttural letters which the Galileans could not pronounce.¹⁰

⁷⁴At that he began to curse and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately a cock crowed.

⁷⁵Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had spoken: "Before the cock crows you will deny me three times." He went out and began to weep bitterly. Years later, when men saw deep furrows on his cheeks, they said they had been worn by the tears he had never ceased to shed for that moment.¹²

¹When it was morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus This fulfilled Ps 2:2 where David describes rulers who "take council together against the Lord and his anointed (Messiah)."¹ to put him to death.

²They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. Pontius Pilate was the Roman procurator for the area. He is known to have been a harsh tyrant. Although he considers Jesus innocent of a capital crime, he lacks the integrity to release him by his own authority. He is now immortalized in the Apostles' Creed as responsible for the suffering and Crucifixion of Christ.¹

³Then Judas, his betrayer, seeing that Jesus had been condemned, deeply regretted what he had done. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying,

⁴"I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? Look to it yourself."

⁵Flinging the money into the temple, he departed and went off and hanged himself. The suicide of Judas is difficult to interpret. Acts suggests his death involved a headlong fall whereby his "bowels gushed out". Since both the hanging and the fall seem to involve some

height or elevation related to the incident, the two accounts should be considered complementary, although the precise course of events is unknown.¹

⁶The chief priests gathered up the money, but said, "It is not lawful to deposit this in the temple treasury for it is the price of blood." The priests deem it inappropriate to use Judas' betrayal money as a religious donation to the Temple.¹

⁷After consultation, they used it to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.

⁸That is why that field even today is called the Field of Blood.

⁹Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet, *And they took the thirty pieces of silver; the value of a man with a price on his head, a price set by some of the Israelites,*

¹⁰*and they paid it out for the potter's field just as the Lord had commanded me.* Jeremiah also smashed a potter's vessel in the valley of Hinnom as a sign that Jerusalem and Judea would be destroyed for shedding innocent blood. Ancient tradition locates Judas' burial site in this same valley of Hinnom, precisely where Jeremiah smashed the pot and foretold its destiny as a future graveyard.¹

¹¹Now Jesus stood before the governor, who questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" The religious leaders give Jesus a title with obvious political overtones. This would appear to threaten Rome and give legal cause for the governor to execute Jesus for treason.¹ Jesus said, "You say so."

¹²And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer.

¹³Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?"

¹⁴But he did not answer him one word, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

¹⁵Now on the occasion of the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the crowd one prisoner whom they wished.

¹⁶And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. He was a revolutionary and a murderer and a bandit.⁶ This was a choice of two different ways of being Israel.

Which road would the people follow? The path of bitter nationalism or the path of welcoming in all the outcasts and Gentiles? The way of war, vengeance, and military action, or the way of peace, forgiveness, and the patient enduring of suffering?⁹

¹⁷So when they had assembled, Pilate said to them, "Which one do you want me to release to you, Barabbas, or Jesus called Christ?"

¹⁸For he knew that it was out of envy that they had handed him over.

¹⁹While 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."

²⁰The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas but to destroy Jesus.

²¹The governor said to them in reply, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They answered, "Barabbas!"

22 Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!”

23 But he said, “Why? What evil has he done?” They only shouted the louder, “Let him be crucified!”

24 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.” Pilate wanted to release Jesus but he could not withstand the pressure from the crowds who had been stirred up by the chief priests. Afraid of a riot and fearing for his own job, Pilate caved in and handed Jesus over to be crucified.⁹

25 And the whole people said in reply, “His blood be upon us and upon our children.” The mob invokes a curse upon itself, staking their lives to their decision. Sadly, their oath was rash and inappropriate; they did not take seriously the responsibilities attached to crucifying Jesus. Their guilt eventually brought judgment on the Holy City.¹

26 Then he released Barabbas to them, but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified. Prisoners were flogged to weaken them so as to shorten their agony on the cross.¹⁸

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium. This was the residence for the Roman official, in this case, Pilate.¹ and gathered the whole cohort. A cohort consisted of 600 soldiers.¹³ around him.

28 They stripped off his clothes. Part of the humiliation of crucifixion was that the person was put on the cross naked. and threw a scarlet military cloak about him.

29 Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. The reed simulates a scepter.¹⁸ And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” The soldiers use the term of the official charge against Jesus. As is the case throughout the passion story, the irony is that Jesus really is “King of the Jews,” that is, the Messiah, even though the soldiers fail to perceive this and use the term in mockery.¹³

30 They spat upon him and took the reed and kept striking him on the head.

31 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.

32 As they were going out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon; this man they pressed into service to carry his cross. Simon was from Cyrene, a town on the northern coast of Africa. He may have been black, judging by his native locality and the fact that he was forced to help our Lord carry his Cross.¹⁰ We are not told that a single word was exchanged between Jesus and Simon, but later Scriptural references make it almost certain that Simon of Cyrene and his sons, Alexander and Rufus, most fittingly, became Christians.¹²

33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha—which means Place of the Skull— Legend has it that this was the burial place of Adam. Representations of the Crucifixion

often show a skull at the foot of the Cross to indicate that the new Adam was dying for the old Adam.¹⁰

³⁴they gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall. This was a mixture of herbs and myrrh used as a narcotic.¹ But when he had tasted it, he refused to drink.

³⁵After they had crucified him, Crucifixion was designed for a slow and torturous death. Victims died from a combination of blood loss and asphyxiation.¹ they divided his garments by casting lots; This fulfills Ps 22:19, "They divide my garments among them and for my vesture they cast lots." The condemned man's clothing became the property of the executioners.¹³ John tells us that his linen tunic was seamless which fits the description of what the priest was to wear and it then becomes a sign that Jesus was the priest for the sacrifice.

³⁶then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

³⁷And they placed over his head the written charge against him: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

³⁸Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left.

³⁹Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying,

⁴⁰"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!" In Matthew's perspective the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70 was caused by the death of Jesus (Mt 21:41, 43).¹³

⁴¹Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said,

⁴²"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.

⁴³He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

⁴⁴The revolutionaries who were crucified with him also kept abusing him in the same way.

⁴⁵From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. Amos prophesied the day of the Lord when the land would "tremble", the sun would "go down at noon", and there would be "lamentation like the mourning for an only son."¹

⁴⁶And 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?" This is the opening line of Ps 22, where the righteous sufferer's humiliation gives way to his vindication. Thus Jesus does not consider his Passion meaningless or a mark of failure, still less does he succumb to a sin of despair. Rather, he "trusts in God" and surrenders his spirit to the Father. Like the innocent sufferer of Ps. 22, he is confident that God will turn his misery into victory.¹

⁴⁷Some of the bystanders who heard it said, "This one is calling for Elijah."

⁴⁸Immediately 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. This is the fourth cup. In John's Gospel (19:30) he says, "It is finished." The Old Covenant is over. The price has been paid.¹⁴

⁴⁹But the rest said, "Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to save him."

50But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit. "Spirit" here means "life breath."¹³

51And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. This was a huge, ornate curtain that was actually a Babylonian carpet in white, purple, blue, and red, 82 feet by 24 feet.¹² The very fact that it was torn from top to bottom was to indicate that it was not done by the hand of man, but by the miraculous Hand of God Himself. Only one man, once a year, could enter into that old Holy of Holies; now that the veil was rent, which separated holiness from the people, and separated the Jew from the Gentile, both would have access to the new Temple, Christ the Lord.¹⁰

52The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened,
53and 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.
54The 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!"

55There were many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him.

56Among them were *Mary Magdalene* There are at least a dozen references to Mary from Magdala in the four Gospels. She suffered from demonic possession and from her Jesus expelled seven demons. She is one of the women who accompanied Jesus in his ministry. She was a witness to the crucifixion, the burial and the empty tomb. After his Resurrection, Jesus appeared to her alone at the tomb. Those are the scriptural facts. In the Western tradition she eventually became identified with the "sinful woman" who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. In Luke that passage immediately precedes the description of "Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out" and it became traditional to say that she was a reformed prostitute. Another woman was also identified with her: Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. However, in the Eastern Church these three women were identified separately with separate feastdays. One thing that is certain is that the Mary Magdalene from *The Da Vinci Code* is not even occasionally the Mary Magdalene depicted in the Gospels, revealed in history and celebrated by the Church.¹⁵ and *Mary the mother of James and Joseph*, This Mary is the wife of Cleopas, the brother of St. Joseph and therefore, the sister-in-law of the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁸ and *the mother of the sons of Zebedee*. Mark names this lady as Salome and John identifies her as Jesus' mother's sister (which would make her a sister of the Blessed Mother.)⁸

57When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. Joseph was also a member of the Sanhedrin, but who, according to Luke, had not been associated with the plan and the action against Jesus.(Luke 23: 50)

58He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over.

⁵⁹Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen On January 21 of this year, Barrie Schwartz, Editor and Publisher of *The Shroud of Turin*, announced that the Shroud, which is kept in Turin, the single most studied artifact in human history, may well be the Shroud of Jesus Christ. The carbon dating done in 1988 used a rewoven sample that was not part of the original material. This latest evidence now eliminates the only serious science that opposed the Shroud's authenticity. While many popes and ecclesiastics have voiced the opinion that the image of the Shroud is that of Jesus Christ, the Roman Catholic Church has never advanced this opinion in an official manner. The Shroud does not contradict the Gospels on any fact. This linen cloth is discussed in the book, *Relics*, which tells us that the man of the Shroud is well built and muscular, between 30 and 35 years of age, about 5' 11" tall and weighed about 175 pounds. The face is covered with bruises. Swellings are about both eyes, both cheeks and chin. A fracture of the nose is possible. The wounds around and atop the head indicate that the Crown of Thorns was really in the shape of a cap. There are nail marks in both wrists and both feet. The wound of the lance, which pierced the heart was measured at one and three quarters of an inch and was made after death. The knees are bruised and cut while the bruises and abrasions on the upper back indicate that a heavy object was carried—this after the scourging. One examiner numbered the scourging wounds between 90 and 120 while another counted 220. Two men inflicted the wounds, the one on the right being taller, more aggressive and sadistic than his companion on the left.¹¹

⁶⁰and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Jesus was born in a stranger's cave and buried in a cave belonging to another.¹⁰ Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed.

⁶¹But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb.

⁶²The next day, the one following the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said,

⁶³"Sir, we remember that this impostor while still alive said, 'After three days I will be raised up.'

⁶⁴Give orders, then, that the grave be secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal him and say to the people, 'He has been raised from the dead.' This last imposture would be worse than the first."

⁶⁵Pilate said to them, "The guard is yours; go, secure it as best you can."

⁶⁶So they went and secured the tomb by fixing a seal to the stone and setting the guard. The watch was to prevent violence; the seal was to prevent fraud. The most astounding fact about this spectacle of vigilance over the dead was that the enemies of Christ expected the resurrection but his friends did not.¹⁰

Some of the material for this commentary is taken from: (1) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew," (2) "Catechism of the Catholic Church," (3) Commentary Notes of Tim Gray, (4) "The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles," (5) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (6) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (7) "Calls" by Sr. Lucia, (8) "The Twelve: The Lives of the Apostles After Calvary" by

C. Bernard Ruffin, (9) "Mystery Of The Kingdom," by Edward P. Sri, (10) "Life of Christ" by Fulton J. Sheen, (11) "Relics" by Joan Carroll Cruz, (12) "The Founding of Christendom" by Warren H. Carroll, (13) "The Gospel of Matthew" by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. (14) "The Fourth Cup" by Scott Hahn, (15) "The DA VINCI HOAX" by Carl E. Olson and Sandra Miesel, (16) "A Father Who Keeps His Promises" by Scott Hahn, and (17) St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn.

REMEMBER TO START YOUR CHAPLET OF MERCY NOVENA ON GOOD FRIDAY. OUR LORD TOLD SISTER FAUSTINA THAT "BY THIS NOVENA I WILL GRANT EVERY POSSIBLE GRACE TO SOULS."

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.