

## FIRST READING – C PASSION [PALM] SUNDAY

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The servant of the Lord said:

“The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher,  
that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens –  
wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

The Lord God has opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious,  
I did not turn backward.

I gave my back to those who struck me,  
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;

I did not hide my face  
from insult and spitting.

The Lord God helps me;  
therefore I have not been disgraced;  
therefore I have set my face like flint,  
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.”



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – C PASSION [PALM] SUNDAY

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death –  
even death on a cross.

Therefore God highly exalted him  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Pause for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

*The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke is printed separately.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

### **At the Procession with the Palms: Luke 19:28-40**

Our Lord entered Jerusalem to go to his passion. That is how it turned out.

Historically speaking, his motive was probably to lay down the final challenge to his people to accept the message and coming of the kingdom of God with full knowledge that his action would almost certainly cost him his life. They rejected his message and brought him to the cross.

As John's Gospel reminds us (Jn 12:16), the true meaning of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem did not dawn upon his disciples until after Easter. Then they came to see that the entry was paradoxically the procession of a king to his coronation (his crown would be of thorns, and his throne a cross).

Like Mark (contrast Matthew and John), Luke does not recall the prophecy of Zechariah ("Tell the daughter of Zion ..."), but Luke's readers, who know their Greek Old Testament, are surely meant to recall that prophecy as they hear of Jesus riding on a "colt."

A peculiarity of Luke's version is his paraphrase of Hosanna: "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." This not only explains the Hebrew word for his Greek readers but also deliberately recalls the song of the angels at the nativity.

Peace and glory were there proclaimed as a future promise that would become a reality only through the cross. Christmas cannot be detached from Good Friday and Easter except at the cost of trivializing and sentimentalizing it.

### **Reading I: Isaiah 50:4-7**

This is the third servant song of Second Isaiah. The situation presupposed is that Israel in exile is rejecting the prophet's message. The people are "weary" (of his constant predictions of deliverance despite the continuation of the exile?).

But the prophet is undeterred.

God has given him the word and he must deliver it, even at the cost of personal suffering. And he is confident that God will eventually prove him right.

In exactly the same way, Jesus' passion was the outcome of his obedient delivery of the message of the kingdom despite his people's rejection, and his constant reliance that God would prove him right.

The passion and death of Christ are not isolated events but of a piece with his whole ministry. The early Church was right in seeing that the servant songs came to rest in the passion and death of its Lord.

### **Responsorial Psalm: 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6**

Psalm 22 is the passion psalm par excellence. It was probably the first Old Testament passage to be adopted in the "passion apologetic" (the term of B. Lindars) of the early community.

After Easter the early Christians had to reconcile, both for their own faith and for their hoped-for converts from Judaism, their conviction that Jesus was indeed the expected deliverer with the scandalous events of his passion.

They found their earliest answer in Psalm 22.

This psalm can serve thus because it describes the sufferings of the righteous in language that astoundingly anticipates the events of the past—not so much through mechanical prediction as through the psalmist’s profound insight into the nature of innocent suffering.

But more, it goes on to speak of the vindication of the righteous one (note Ps 22:22-23ab, the fourth stanza in the arrangement of the Psalm as used in today’s liturgy\*).

---

\* Psalm 22 has especially colored the way Mark and Matthew tell the passion story (less so Luke). The question inevitably arises whether some of the details of the narration have been taken from the psalm rather from historical memory.

This may have happened in some of the peripheral details, for example the division of the garments, but the main facts of the passion stand because of their scandalous nature.

It was this scandalous nature that sent the early Christians to their Old Testaments, not their reading of the Old Testament that led them to gratuitously invent fresh scandalous events.

## **Reading II: Philippians 2:6-11**

Modern New Testament scholars are widely agreed that this a hymn composed prior to Paul’s time. It is often called Carmen Christi, from Pliny’s description of Christian worship. There is much dispute about its proper division into stanzas, but the following reconstruction has much to commend it.

I.

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,  
did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a servant,

II.

being born in the likeness of men,  
and being found in human form he humbled himself  
and became obedient unto death  
[even death on a cross: added by Paul].

III.

Therefore God has highly exalted him  
and bestowed on him the name  
which is above every name,

IV.

that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bow [in heaven and on earth  
and under the earth: may be a later  
though pre-Pauline, addition]

and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
[to the glory of God the Father: perhaps  
added by Paul].

The first stanza will refer to the pre-incarnate existence of the Christ: he was of equal status with the Father (see the Old Testament speculations about the divine wisdom).

This status he voluntarily surrendered and became subject to human bondage to the powers of evil (“the form of a servant”: some refer this to the suffering servant, but at this point the hymn refers to what is common between Christ and all human beings, not to what distinguishes him from them).

The last line of the second stanza refers to what is unique: he “became obedient unto death” (Paul emphasizes that that was the scandal—the death on the cross).

The third stanza marks the turning point of the Redeemer’s way—his exaltation—while the last stanza speaks of his ultimate triumph over the whole created universe.

The Carmen Christi sets the death of Christ in its total context. It is at once the nadir of the divine condescension begun in the incarnation and the ground of Christ’s exaltation and final triumph.

### **Gospel: Luke 22:14-23:56**

The passion narratives, we are told by modern New Testament scholars, differ in form from the rest of the Gospel materials. Everything prior to the passion consists of “pericopes,” that is, short units that were handed down in oral tradition as isolated units before they were combined in our written Gospels.

The passion story, however, was from the start a continuous narrative.

The Church has always understood the difference by redividing the Gospels into pericopes in its Lectionary and by reading the passion as a continuous narrative.

One would hope that at least at the principal Mass today the long form of the passion narrative will be used intact. When read by three different persons, as the rubric suggests, the long form can sustain interest without boredom and accords more with the literary and pre-literary form of the material.

Each of the four evangelists has his own distinctive perspective on the passion. Mark emphasizes the isolation of Christ: betrayed, forsaken and denied by the disciples, mocked and tortured by his enemies, railed at by the brigands crucified with him, and, finally, bereft of the presence of his Father.

Matthew brings out the royalty of Christ, but it is a paradoxical royalty, manifesting itself precisely in humiliation. John is also concerned with Christ’s royalty, but it is a royalty visibly present. Luke takes a different line.

It has been well said that he transposes the passion from the key of tragedy to the key of pathos. It is the story of a martyrdom (note the parallels with Stephen’s martyrdom in Acts), of one who goes out in sympathy to others (for example, the “daughters of Jerusalem”; “Father, forgive them”; “Today you will be with me”). Note also the serenity of Christ’s death (“Father, into thy hands ...”) in each of the Gospels.

The passion story is intended not merely to narrate what happened but to interpret it as good news.