

## *The Bible Page—Mark's Passion Account*

We will in this short page attempt to give you some brief insight into the Passion and Death of Jesus from the Gospel of Mark. Remember to read chap. 14 and 15 of Mark first. Chapter 14 begins with the anointing of Jesus by a woman at Bethany. This is an anticipation of Jesus' anointing after death and before burial, which was the custom of the time. The generous act of the woman is immediately followed by Judas' selfish act of agreeing to betray Jesus for money. The upper room where the Last Supper took place, as well as the Garden of Gethsemane, is described in detail in Mark. A tradition in the Church is that it was owned by the mother of Mark.

There are four passages in the Bible where the words of the Eucharist are recorded: Mark 14:22-25, Matt 26:26-29, Luke 22:17-20, and Paul's 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. They are all very similar but Mark and Matthew are close and Luke, a companion of Paul, resembles Paul's account in some details. It is interesting in Mark 14:22 that the wording "took...bless...broke...gave" is the same wording as the multiplication of loaves in Mark 6:41. We see this multiplication as a prefigurement of the Eucharist. John's Gospel, chap. 6, has a long discourse called the bread of life. It is good to read this along with the Last Supper. That discourse convinces us that Christ really meant what he said when he used the words "This is my body" and "This is my blood." They are not symbols. This is the Real Presence. He meant it! For a complete discussion of this sacrament, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC no. 1374, 1376, 1381 especially).

In the agony in the garden, Peter, James, and John were not able to stay awake. This is the "reverse" of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2-8), when the same three adored the Son of God. We must pray with Jesus and do better than the Apostles. A unique verse in Mark (14:51-52) speaks of a young man who ran away. Some believe this may have been Mark himself, since no other Gospel records this event.

Chap. 15 begins with the trial before Pilate. Jesus cannot answer Pilate's question "Are you the King of the Jews?" If he says yes, they will think he means that he is a political leader. If he says no, he will be renouncing his role as the Messiah. Another thing we should remember about this "trial" is that the Romans and Jews were not responsible for Jesus' Passion and Death. We are by our sins (CCC no. 597-598). In the crown of thorns and purple cloak the soldiers mock Jesus as a king. The striking and spitting is foretold in Isaiah 50:6. On the cross wine with myrrh, a painkiller, is refused by Jesus to suffer more for us. And then Jesus quotes the first verse of Psalm 22. In Aramaic it sounds like Elijah. This first verse almost sounds like desperation. But read the whole Psalm. It ends in praise of God! We must always remember to praise God even when we feel like despairing. As you read this psalm you can also see references to the mocking of Jesus, the nailing of hands and feet, and the soldiers dividing his garments and casting lots. The two robbers on the right and left remind us of James' and John's request to be on the right and left of God in glory (Mark 10:37). The Roman centurion's faith (Mark 15:39) is a wonderful example of what our faith should be: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" Finally, read also Isaiah 52:13-53:12, where we see Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering but triumphant Servant of the Lord.

**For next week, read Matthew, chapters 26-27.**

## *The Bible Page—Matthew's Passion Account*

This page gives a summary of the Passion Account of Matthew (Mt 26-27). Be sure to read these chapters first. Last week we started with Mark's account because Mark is considered by many to be the first Gospel written. Most probably Matthew and Luke had Mark as one of their sources. But we are lucky that we have four Gospels. Each one adds a few scenes that are unique to only one Gospel. Each Gospel author was writing for a certain community, had different sources, and wanted to emphasize different ideas for them. We benefit from all four! Only in Matthew are the following scenes included: the suicide of Judas, Pilate's wife sending Pilate a message of her dream, Pilate washing his hands, the tombs opening after the crucifixion, and the request by the chief priests and Pharisees for a guard at the tomb. There are also many details mentioned by one author that may not be included in other Gospels. Let's take a look at some of the special passages in Matthew.

Matthew gives special attention to the role of Judas. He expands on information that Mark gives. He points out the monetary motive of thirty pieces of silver for the betrayal (Mt 26:15). In Zechariah 11:12 the prophet is a good shepherd of God's flock who is being slaughtered. The service of the good shepherd is valued at thirty pieces of silver. Jesus said he was the Good Shepherd. At the Last Supper Matthew includes Judas' question asking if he is the betrayer (Mt 26:25). Judas addresses Jesus here as Rabbi, a title used of Jesus by some unbelievers, whereas the other Apostles call Jesus Lord (Mt 26:22). In the garden of Gethsemane Judas calls Jesus Rabbi again when he betrays Jesus (Mt 26:49).

Matthew covers the suicide of Judas (Mt 27:3-10). Although Judas regrets his betrayal of Jesus, he does not repent. His regret was not a deep conversion of heart. He hangs himself. The deed reminds us of Ahithophel, betrayer of King David, who hanged himself after his crime (2 Samuel 17:23). Jesus is a Son of David. It is important to note the difference between the denial of Jesus by Peter and the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. Peter repented. After his denial Peter "went out and began to weep bitterly" (Mt 26:75), whereas Judas "went off and hanged himself" (Mt 27:5). Judas despaired.

The choice between Barabbas and Jesus is highlighted in Matthew's Gospel, as seen by the addition of the passage involving Pilate's wife. She is a Gentile but pleads the innocence of Jesus. Dreams play an important role in Matthew going all the way back to his infancy narrative, where Joseph is warned in a dream about the fate of Jesus. Pilate's wife dreams of Jesus' innocence (Mt 27:19) but Pilate does not heed her advice. Matthew records Pilate's hand washing (Mt 27:24) and Pilate's attempt to shift the blame on the crowd, who then shout "His blood be upon us." We all are responsible for his death because of our sins. But like Peter we can repent and be forgiven!

Some of the events following Jesus' death are mentioned only in Matthew. The earthquake, opening of the tombs, and the resurrection of the saints are all types of events prophesied for the end of the age. In the Old Testament earthquakes are signals of God's presence and power. The old world is being shaken and God's kingdom is coming. The resurrection of the dead marks the beginning of this new kingdom begun by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The opening of the graves alludes to a prophecy in Ezekiel 37:13.

Placing the guard at the tomb is found in Matthew. There probably was a controversy in Matthew's community over the explanation of the empty tomb. Matthew assures his readers that Jesus' body could not have been stolen since the Jews themselves sealed the tomb and set a guard over it. Pilate, who allowed the crucifixion only after declaring his own innocence, now tells them to secure it themselves. But no matter how securely the tomb was guarded, they could not prevent the victorious Resurrection of Jesus!

**For next week, read Luke's Passion account, chapters 22 and 23.**

## *The Bible Page—Luke’s Passion Account*

Remember to read Luke 22 and 23 before studying this *Bible Page*. As we mentioned last week for Matthew, each Gospel has some details and scenes that are not in the other Gospels. Given below is a table that lists the more important unique scenes for each Gospel. As one of its sources Luke had Mark’s Gospel.

Gospel	Unique Scenes
Mark	Young man running away in Gethsemane
Matthew	Suicide of Judas Pilate’s wife sending Pilate a message of her dream Pilate washing his hands Tombs opening after the crucifixion Request by chief priests and Pharisees for a guard at the tomb
Luke	Jesus before Herod Jesus meeting the women on the way to Golgotha The good thief asking Jesus to remember him in the kingdom
John	Washing of the feet at the Last Supper Jesus before Annas, former high priest The beloved disciple at the foot of the cross A lance in the side of Jesus on the cross Nicodemus joining Joseph of Arimathea

He does omit many things from Mark but includes other short passages from alternate sources and witnesses. For instance, Luke talks about an enemy of Jesus, Satan. In 22:3 he mentions Satan entering into Judas. He brings in Satan again when Jesus foretells Peter’s denial in 22:31. We shouldn’t forget the reality of Satan either.

At the Last Supper he adds the phrase “Do this in memory of me” (22:19) which is also included in Paul’s letter

to the Corinthians describing the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:24). The Council of Trent in 1562 said that this phrase is linked with the Apostles’ ordination to the priesthood. The prayer of Jesus is a central focus of the Gethsemane scene (22:39-46). Luke throughout his Gospel shows Jesus at prayer many times. He shows the compassion of Jesus because he heals the ear of the high priest’s servant when it is cut off (22:51). So there are many instructive details Luke stresses in his Gospel that are not in the other narratives.

King Herod plays an important role throughout Luke’s Gospel. Luke is the only one that reports Jesus before Herod (23:6-12). This is the first larger unique scene that Luke gives us. Herod wanted to see some miracles of Jesus for entertainment. But faith is needed, and Herod had none. More contempt and mocking by soldiers followed. Both a king and a governor, Pilate, agree on Jesus’ innocence. He is sent back to Pilate.

The second major scene only in Luke occurs on the way to the crucifixion. Jesus meets some women called in the Gospel “Daughters of Jerusalem” (23:27-31). Jesus, always thinking of others, tells them to weep for themselves and their children and warns them about the destruction of Jerusalem, which happens in A.D. 70. Jeremiah also warned the women of Jerusalem in Jer 9:16-20. Luke 21 talks about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. Luke 23:31 is not easy to interpret. The wood may be a symbol for Jerusalem (and us?). When it is fresh and green, there is still time for repentance. When it is dry, it is too late and then it burns easily. Or Jesus may be comparing the people causing his suffering—of a just and innocent person—to green wood and the suffering of Jerusalem—of sinners—to dry wood, easy to kindle and consumed by fire.

The final Luke-only scene in the Passion is the “good thief” talking to Jesus on the cross (23:39-43). Jesus always forgives. He asks the Father to forgive the people in 23:34. He then forgives the good thief. The exchange between Jesus and the good thief gives us much comfort. When we ask forgiveness as the good thief does in 23:42, Jesus will forgive as he says in 23:43. Will we be like the good thief this Lent and ask forgiveness in the sacrament of Reconciliation?

When Jesus says “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,” he is quoting Psalm 31:6(5). It is another psalm like Psalm 22 that proceeds from lamentation to praise. Even in suffering we must continue to trust in God and praise him.

**For next week, read John’s Passion narrative, chapters 18 and 19.**

## *The Bible Page—John’s Passion Account*

It is difficult to decide where in John’s Gospel we should start reading the Passion. His Gospel was the last one written, probably around A.D. 95. He decided to take a different approach in relating the important teachings of Jesus and the story of the Passion. Certainly chapter 6 of John, the “Bread of Life” discourse, is important to understanding the theology of the Eucharist. The anointing by Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, of the feet of Jesus is in John 12, and the Last Supper begins with the washing of the disciples’ feet by Jesus in John 13. There are some long speeches by Jesus at the Last Supper given in John 14-16 and the prayer of Jesus in John 17. If you haven’t read these you might wish to do so; they are very spiritually uplifting.

This week’s *Bible Page* will focus on John 18-19, where we find Jesus in the garden. Jesus uses the words “I AM” to describe himself. This is the actual name of God revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 3:14. Jesus expresses his divinity by using this title. John also mentions the details that it was Peter who cut off the ear of the high priest’s slave – Malchus was his name. John is the only evangelist to include the scene of Jesus with Annas, the high priest before Caiaphas, who still had much of the power of the office.

In Jn 18:15 he mentions “another disciple” besides Peter. This unnamed disciple is seen a few times during John’s Passion and Resurrection narratives. He is called at times “the one whom Jesus loved.” Tradition says that the disciple is John himself. Some scholars say that the “Beloved Disciple” is one who stands as an ideal for us to follow, since he is usually shown as a model disciple. Both may be correct.

The trial before Pilate is detailed in John, filled with many levels of theological meaning. We can’t cover everything here, but as an example we see the Jews not entering Pilate’s place so they are not defiled, so they could still eat the Passover lamb; but it is ironic that they are putting to death the true Passover Lamb. The result of the trial is the same as the other Gospels. Pilate says “I find no guilt in him” (Jn 18:38). In John, Jesus is taken away at the same time as the Passover lambs begin to be slaughtered in the Temple of Jerusalem. The Lamb of God is taken to be offered for our sins on the cross.

John includes a fuller description of the “sign on the cross,” which he says was given in three languages: Hebrew (local), Latin (the empire), and Greek (the world). Jesus is Lord and King of the whole world. John also refers to Psalm 22:19(18) and differentiates the clothes divided into four shares from the tunic that was seamless and was not torn, but for which soldiers cast lots. The four parts may represent the Church spreading to the “four corners” of the earth. The undivided tunic refers to the unity of his Church.

John relates a most touching scene when his Mother Mary is at the foot of the cross with John, the Beloved Disciple. He tells Mary, “Behold your son.” Then he tells John, “Behold your Mother.” John is to take her into his home and care for Mary for the remainder of her life on earth. This close union of the Blessed Mother is not meant only for John, but for all of us as Christ’s Beloved Disciples. She is to be with us and we are to pray to her so that she can intercede with her Son to help us. There is a large spiritual meaning in that passage. A new spiritual family is formed.

John adds a few other details to the Passion account. The hyssop plant used in order to give wine to Jesus is the same type of branch used to sprinkle the blood of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12:22. Christ is our saving Passover Lamb. Furthermore, Exodus 12:46 and Psalm 34:21(20) say that none of the bones of the Passover lamb are to be broken. That is why the soldier thrusts a lance into the side of Jesus to make sure he is dead, instead of the usual way of breaking the legs of those crucified. The blood and water coming from the side of Jesus represent the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism so integral to our salvation. As you can see, it is necessary to refer to key passages in the Old Testament in order to fully appreciate the meaning of some New Testament verses.

**For next week, read the Resurrection narratives of Mark 16 and Matthew 28.**