

CHAPTER 23

THE WAY OF THE CROSS



The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus is the core gospel message. All the stories of Jesus, his preaching, miracles, healing and teachings find their home in Jesus' way to the cross. This is the heart of the apostolic preaching in the earliest Christian communities. This is the soul of the Church's life and mission today.

Jesus' suffering and death sums up his entire life. It is poured out for our life and salvation.



Fr. Judge emphasizes the power of the cross in his preaching.

"The cross is a sign that provokes us to love, to worship, to gratitude, to thanksgiving, to service. But for the cross, our destiny would be too hideous to think about. The cross is our hope, our joy, our peace and consolation. It is a blessed pledge of a happy future, a happy eternity. We cannot look upon that cross without knowing that thereupon was paid the price of our salvation...."

In The cross there is power, in the cross there is help, in the cross there is blessing, in the cross there is deliverance, in the cross there is a pledge of the favor of Him who one day with His cross is coming in one day with His cross is coming in Glory (Missionary Cenacle Meditations, p105)

DAY ONE: Jesus' trial before Pilate and Herod. (Read Lk 23:1-25)

23:1 Then ¹ the whole group of them rose up and brought Jesus ² before Pilate. ³ **23:2** They ⁴ began to accuse ⁵ him, saying, "We found this man subverting ⁶ our nation, forbidding ⁷ us to pay the tribute tax ⁸ to Caesar ⁹ and claiming that he himself is Christ, ¹⁰ a king." **23:3** So ¹¹ Pilate asked Jesus, ¹² "Are you the king ¹³ of the Jews?" He replied, "You say so." ¹⁴ **23:4** Then ¹⁵ Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation ¹⁶ against this man." **23:5** But they persisted ¹⁷ in saying, "He incites ¹⁸ the people by teaching throughout all Judea. It started in Galilee and ended up here!" ¹⁹ **Jesus Brought Before Herod****23:6** Now when Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. **23:7** When ²⁰ he learned that he was from Herod's jurisdiction, ²¹ he sent him over to Herod, ²² who also happened to be in Jerusalem ²³ at that time. **23:8** When ²⁴ Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform ²⁵ some miraculous sign. ²⁶ **23:9** So ²⁷ Herod ²⁸ questioned him at considerable length; Jesus ²⁹ gave him no answer. **23:10** The chief priests and the experts in the law ³⁰ were there, vehemently accusing him. ³¹ **23:11** Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, ³² dressing him in elegant clothes, ³³ Herod ³⁴ sent him back to Pilate. **23:12** That very day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other, ³⁵ for prior to this they had been enemies. ³⁶ **Jesus Brought Before the Crowd****23:13** Then ³⁷ Pilate called together the chief priests, the ³⁸ rulers, and the people, **23:14** and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading ³⁹ the people. When I examined him before you, I ⁴⁰ did not find this man guilty ⁴¹ of anything you accused him of doing. **23:15** Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, he has done nothing ⁴² deserving death. ⁴³ **23:16** I will therefore have him flogged ⁴⁴ and release him." ⁴⁵ **23:17** **[[OMITTED]]** **23:18** But they all shouted out together, ⁴⁶ "Take this man ⁴⁷ away! Release

Barabbas for us!” 23:19 (This ⁴⁸ was a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection ⁴⁹ started in the city, and for murder.) ⁵⁰ 23:20 Pilate addressed them once again because he wanted ⁵¹ to release Jesus. 23:21 But they kept on shouting, ⁵² “Crucify, crucify ⁵³ him!” 23:22 A third time he said to them, “Why? What wrong has he done? I have found him guilty ⁵⁴ of no crime deserving death. ⁵⁵ I will therefore flog ⁵⁶ him and release him.” 23:23 But they were insistent, ⁵⁷ demanding with loud shouts that he be crucified. And their shouts prevailed. 23:24 So ⁵⁸ Pilate ⁵⁹ decided ⁶⁰ that their demand should be granted. 23:25 He released the man they asked for, who had *been* thrown in prison for insurrection and murder. But he handed Jesus over ⁶¹ to their will. ⁶²

1. Notice how the elders accused Jesus before the Roman Governor, Pilate (Lk 23:1-5). Were their charges just? How do you know? (See Luke 20:20-26 and 22:49-52).

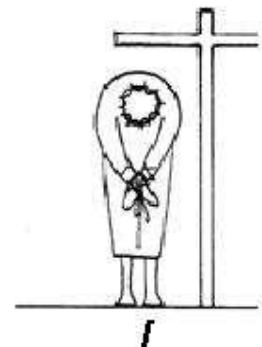
2. Throughout his trial, Jesus was seen as innocent by the authorities; yet He allowed himself to be sentenced. Why do you think He did not contest these proceedings?

Jesus before Pilate (Lk 23:1-7)

The entire Jewish Sanhedrin brought Jesus to Pilate. Pilate was the Roman authority over the Jewish nation. The Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus of blasphemy. However, this was not a crime in Roman law. So the Jewish elders accused Jesus of political crimes.

1. Subverting a nation.
2. Opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar.
3. Claiming to be a king (messiah).

Pilate was a shrewd politician. He sent Jesus and his accusers to the Jewish authorities, Herod the Tetrarch.



Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from A. D. 26 to 37. During his rule he made himself very unpopular with the Jews. He had provoked a riot by parading his soldiers with a portrait of Caesar on a Jewish holy day. The Jews regarded the portrait as an idol. Pilate was also cruel with carrying out his sentences (see Lk 13:1). But he knew Rome would punish him if he his Jewish subjects caused a riot for Religious reason. It is not surprising that Pilate allowed himself to be pressured by the Jewish leaders and crowd and crucify Jesus.

Jesus before Herod. Lk. 23:8-12

Because of the Jewish holy days of Passover, both Pilate and Herod were in Jerusalem. These enemies will form an evil friendship.

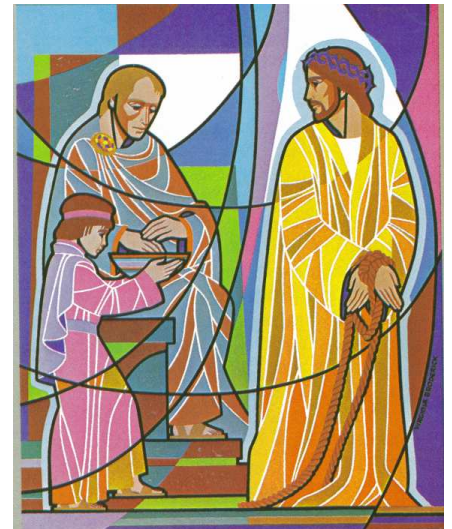
Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. This Herod was one of the sons of Herod the Great who spend a fortune remodeling the Temple in Jerusalem. Herod was a tetrarch. The title *tetrarch* designated one who ruled over a fourth part of a territory. By the time of Jesus, a tetrarch was nothing but a puppet of the Roman Empire and considered a petty prince with little influence. Herod was Jewish by birth but observed little of his religious heritage. He is the one who imprisoned and murdered John the Baptist.

Herod would have been flattered that the Roman governor would recognize his jurisdiction. Pilate does this by sending him Jesus. Jesus, on the other hand does not even reply to Herod. Herod was fascinated at first by John the Baptist. But was easily manipulated into killing him. His fascination with Jesus is quickly turned to cruel mockery. He likewise makes no decision about Jesus. Instead he returns him to Pilate. He does not find any prove against him. Luke states that on that day Herod and Pilate became friends. Their friendship is bonded by Jesus' suffering and death.

Jesus again before Pilate. Lk. 23:13-25.

Two authorities; the Roman governor, Pilate and the Jewish tetrarch, Herod, found Jesus innocent of the charges brought against him. Three times Pilate announces Jesus as innocent. But because of religious hatred, mob pressure and political expediency they sent Jesus to his death. Luke makes it very clear that Jesus was not a political revolutionary or a criminal. He was an innocent man who was martyred.

Pilate wanted to release Jesus. Instead Jesus' opponents preferred the release of a convicted murderer and violent revolutionary, Barabbas.

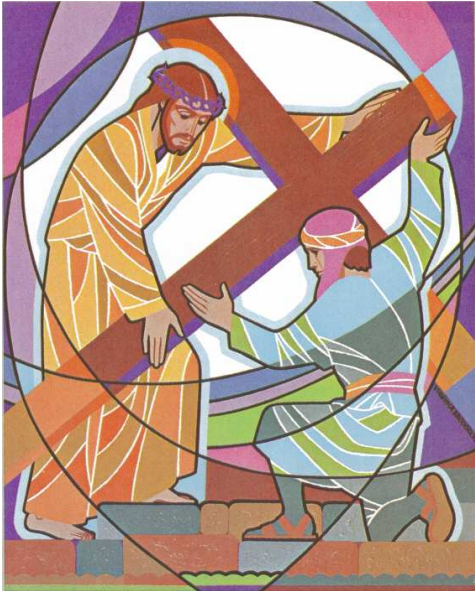


Day Two: The Way of the Cross. (Read Lk 23:26-31)

23:26 As ⁶³ they led him away, they seized Simon of Cyrene, ⁶⁴ who was coming in from the country. ⁶⁵ They placed the cross on his back and made him carry it behind Jesus. ⁶⁶
23:27 A great number of the people followed him, among them women ⁶⁷ who were mourning ⁶⁸ and wailing for him. **23:28** But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, ⁶⁹ do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves ⁷⁰ and for your children. **23:29** For this is certain: ⁷¹ The days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore children, and the breasts that never nursed!’ ⁷² **23:30** Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ⁷³ ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ ⁷⁴
23:31 For if such things are done ⁷⁵ when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” ⁷⁶ **23:32** Two other criminals ⁷⁷ were also led away to be executed with him.

1. Why do you think Simon of Cyrene is acknowledged as a model for disciples?

2. In what way do we share in the Cross of Jesus?



Jesus was led away from Pilate to the place of execution. Evidence reveals that Jewish leaders sentenced Jesus out of hatred. Roman Authorities murdered Jesus out of political expediency. Jesus is a martyr, not a criminal.

On the way to the execution Simon of Cyrene was commanded by the Romans to carry Jesus' cross. A victim normally carried his own cross. Jesus must have been too weak from his beatings to carry a beam. His enemies feared Jesus might die before being crucified. It was vital to them that He die upon the cross as an example and a warning.

Luke tells us what it means to carry a cross. . The trials, misunderstanding and sufferings that a follower endures for the sake of Jesus identifies him/her as his disciple. Simon of Cyrene is a model for all true followers of Jesus. He was the first person to take up the cross and follow Jesus.

Day Three The Crucifixion (Read Lk 23:32-42)

23:33 So ⁷⁸ when they came to the place that is called "The Skull," ⁷⁹ they crucified ⁸⁰ him there, along with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. **23:34** [But Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."] ⁸¹ Then ⁸² they threw dice ⁸³ to divide his clothes. ⁸⁴ **23:35** The people also stood there watching, but the rulers ridiculed ⁸⁵ him, saying, "He saved others. Let him save ⁸⁶ himself if ⁸⁷ he is the Christ ⁸⁸ of God, his chosen one!" **23:36** The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ⁸⁹ **23:37** and saying, "If ⁹⁰ you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!" **23:38** There was also an inscription ⁹¹ over him, "This is the king of the Jews." **23:39** One of the criminals who was hanging there railed at him, saying, "Aren't ⁹² you the Christ? ⁹³ Save yourself and us!" **23:40** But the other rebuked him, saying, ⁹⁴ "Don't ⁹⁵ you fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁹⁶ **23:41** And we rightly so, for we are getting what we deserve for what we did, but this man has done nothing ⁹⁷ wrong." **23:42** Then ⁹⁸ he said, "Jesus, remember me ⁹⁹ when you come in ¹⁰⁰ your kingdom."

1. Describe Jesus' attitude towards His executioners?

2. Describe the second criminal's attitude towards Jesus. What did he believe about;

Himself? _____

Mercy? _____

Salvation? _____

Jesus' identity? _____

Death by crucifixion: Crucifixion was the method the Romans used to executing Jesus. The Romans reserved the honors of crucifixion for hardened criminals and slaves. It was the most painful and degrading form of capital punishment in the ancient world.

A person crucified in Jesus' day was first beaten with a whip consisting of leather thongs with pieces of metal attached to the end. This scourging was designed to hasten death. After the scourging, the victim carried the crossbeam to signify that life was over and to break his will to live. A tablet detailing the crime was often placed around the criminal's neck. At the site, the prisoner was tied or nail to the cross. The nail would be pounded through the wrist, rather than the palm, since the smaller bones of the hand could not support the weight of the body. A small wooden block was placed halfway up the cross to provide a seat or at the base of the feet lest the nails tear open the wounds. It was a slow and agonizing form of capital punishment. The Romans executioners were experts in torture.

Crucifixion was a method of execution designed to torture and humiliate the victim. The Gospels do not focus on the torment Jesus endured, but on the significance of his death. His death ushers in a new reign of God. It graces humanity with forgiveness, salvation and a new way of life.

Even though crucifixion was designed to break the spirit of its victim and humiliate him, Jesus responds with forgiveness and complete dignity. He was mocked as being the "King of the Jews," (INRI - Latin abbreviation for Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews). Two criminals were crucified next to him as his attendants. Jesus was enthroned on the cross in this cruel gesture. The soldiers and the crowd taunted him.

Jesus proclaimed his mission in two statements from the cross.

- 1) "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing."
- 2) "I ensure you this day you will be with me in paradise."

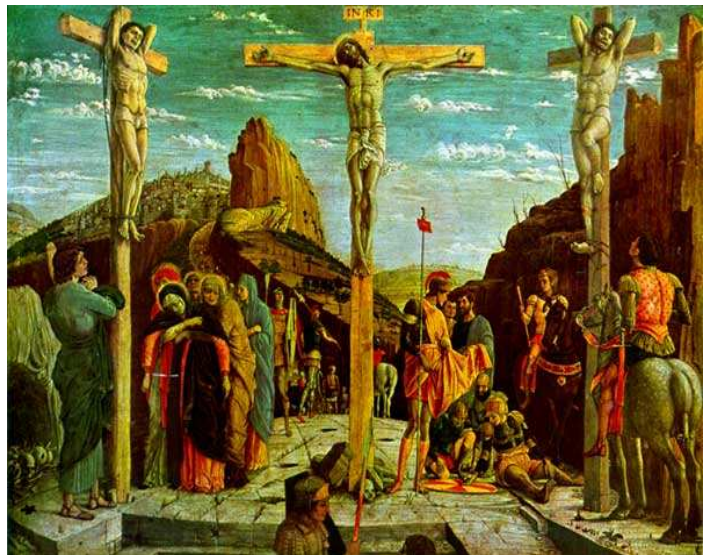
The two criminals. (Lk 23: 39-43)

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23:41 And we rightly so, for we are getting what we deserve for what we did, but this man has done nothing ⁹⁷ wrong.” 23:42 Then ⁹⁸ he said, “Jesus, remember me ⁹⁹ when you come in ¹⁰⁰ your kingdom.” 23:43 And Jesus ¹⁰¹ said to him, “I tell you the truth, ¹⁰²

today ¹⁰³ you will be with me in paradise.”



The two criminals crucified with Jesus fulfill the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah 53:12, "The suffering servant was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sins of many."

The incident of the two criminals highlights the entire message of Luke's gospel. Jesus has come to save the lost sinners. Instead of saving himself from the cross he chose to save sinners instead. To do this, he identified with them and died for them.

The response of the criminals portrays our choices. The second criminal acknowledged his sinfulness, demonstrated repentance and placed his faith and hope in Jesus "Jesus response is immediate and amazing. "This day you will be with me in paradise."

Day Four. Jesus dies on the cross. (Read Lk 23:44-49)

104 23:44 It was now **105** about noon, **106** and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, **107 23:45** because the sun's light failed. **108** The temple curtain **109** was torn in two. **23:46** Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" **110** And after he said this he breathed his last. **23:47** Now when the centurion **111** saw what had happened, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent!" **112 23:48** And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. **113 23:49** And all those who knew Jesus **114** stood at a distance, and the women who had followed him from Galilee saw **115** these things

1. What does Jesus' death on the cross mean to you?

2. Why do you think that the Roman centurion's statement was so important in this passage?

Luke concisely and powerfully portrays the death of Jesus.

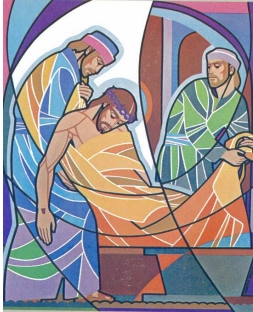
- Being crucified between two criminals reveals that Jesus forgives the sinners of the world.
- The bizarre darkness that came upon the whole land pointed to the cosmic significance of Jesus dying
- Jesus' final words, which were uttered as a prayer, proclaimed the victory he had won. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."
- The tearing of the Temple curtain signified that the death of Jesus had opened the way for all people to come into the presence of God.

The curtain in the sanctuary: It represented the holy place in the temple of Jerusalem. This is where the priests entered daily to offer prayers. From a more sacred place, the Holy of Holies, only the high priest entered once a year to offer sacrifice for the sins of the people. The tearing of the curtain by Jesus' death permanently opened the way to God. There no longer exists any barrier for all humanity to enter God's presence.



Even in his crucifixion Jesus is confident in his father and his mission. All was happening in fulfillment of the scripture. No one took his life from him. He gave it freely. This is expressed by his final words on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." He returns to his father having fulfilled his mission. The kingdom of God has been initiated on earth.

Day Five. The Burial of Jesus. (Read Lk 23:50-56)



23:50 Now ¹¹⁶ there was a man named Joseph who was a member of the council, ¹¹⁷ a good and righteous man. **23:51** (He ¹¹⁸ had not consented ¹¹⁹ to their plan and action.) He ¹²⁰ was from the Judean town ¹²¹ of Arimathea, and was looking forward to ¹²² the kingdom of God. ¹²³ **23:52** He went to Pilate and asked for the body ¹²⁴ of Jesus. **23:53** Then ¹²⁵ he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, ¹²⁶ and placed it ¹²⁷ in a tomb cut out of the rock, ¹²⁸ where no one had yet been buried. ¹²⁹ **23:54** It was the day of preparation ¹³⁰ and the Sabbath was beginning. ¹³¹ **23:55** The ¹³² women who had accompanied Jesus ¹³³ from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. **23:56** Then ¹³⁴ they returned and prepared aromatic spices ¹³⁵ and perfumes. ¹³⁶ On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. ¹³⁷

- 1. What do you think was going through the apostles' minds and hearts at this time?

- 2. Why is Joseph the Arimathea's act seen as a great sign of hope?

- 3. What role do the women play in Jesus' burial?

Though Jesus was crucified like a criminal he is not buried like one. Executed criminals were buried in a common, unmarked grave. Jesus is giving and honorable and reverential burial. Joseph of Arimathea came forward to honor Jesus. His act was a sign of great hope. As a member of the Sanhedrin, he opposed what his fellow religious leaders had done. He acted with great faith and courage to face Pontius Pilate and provide a tomb for the body of Jesus. The life and death of Jesus has greatly touched this man and has changed him forever.

The women disciples have accompanied Jesus through his suffering and death. They witnessed his burial. They left his body to prepare the burial spices and perfumes in order to honor him. They also, left him in the tomb because they were faithful Jews. At sunset they had to be home to observe the Sabbath rest.

However the death of Jesus on the cross has shook the very foundation of faith in his apostles. None were present at his burial. Not even the beloved disciple. Jesus will mend their shattered faith through his resurrected presence. It will take more than an empty tomb and reports of visions to restore their faith.