

GOSPEL

Matthew 27:11-54 (Shorter form)

Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate, the governor, and the governor put to him this question, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus replied, 'It is you who say it.' But when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders he refused to answer at all. Pilate then said to him, 'Do you not hear how many charges they have brought against you?' But to the governor's complete amazement, he offered no reply to any of the charges.

At festival time it was the governor's practice to release a prisoner for the people, anyone they chose. Now there was at that time a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. So when the crowd gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?' For Pilate knew it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

Now as he was seated in the chair of judgement, his wife sent him a message, 'Have nothing to do with that man; I have been upset all day by a dream I had about him.'

The chief priests and the elders, however, had persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. So when the governor spoke and asked them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' they said 'Barabbas.' 'But in that case,' Pilate said to them 'what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified!' 'Why?' he asked 'What harm has he done?' But they shouted all the louder, 'Let him be crucified!' Then Pilate saw that he was making no impression, that in fact a riot was imminent. So he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your concern.' And the people, to a man, shouted back, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' Then he released Barabbas for them. He ordered Jesus to be first scourged and then handed over to be crucified.

The governor's soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium and collected the whole cohort around him. Then they stripped him and made him wear a scarlet cloak, and having twisted some thorns into a crown they put this on his head and placed a reed in his right hand. To make fun of him they knelt to him saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' And they spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head with it. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the cloak and dressed him in his own clothes and led him away to crucify him.

On their way out, they came across a man from Cyrene, Simon by name, and enlisted him to carry his cross. When they had reached a place called Golgotha, that is, the

place of the skull, they gave him wine to drink mixed with gall, which he tasted but refused to drink. When they had finished crucifying him they shared out his clothing by casting lots, and then sat down and stayed there keeping guard over him.

Above his head was placed the charge against him; it read: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' At the same time two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said 'So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself! If you are God's son, come down from the cross!' The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way. 'He saved others,' they said 'he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He put his trust in God; now let God rescue him if he wants him. For he did say, "I am the son of God."' Even the robbers who were crucified with him taunted him in the same way.

From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?' When some of those who stood there heard this, they said, 'The man is calling on Elijah,' and one of them quickly ran to get a sponge which he dipped in vinegar and putting it on a reed, gave it him to drink. 'Wait!' said the rest of them 'and see if Elijah will come to save him.' But Jesus again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up his spirit.

At that, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked; the rocks were split; the tombs opened and the bodies of many holy men rose from the dead, and these, after his resurrection, came out of the tombs, entered the Holy City and appeared to a number of people. Meanwhile the centurion, together with the others guarding Jesus, had seen the earthquake and all that was taking place, and they were terrified and said, 'In truth this was a son of God.'

REFLECTION OF POPE LEO XIV

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As Jesus walks the Way of the Cross, we place ourselves behind him, following in his footsteps. As we walk with him, we contemplate his passion for the sake of humanity, his broken heart, and his life as a gift of love.

We turn our gaze to Jesus, who reveals himself as King of Peace, even as war looms arounds him. He remains steadfast in meekness, while others are stirring up violence. He offers himself to embrace humanity, even as

others raise swords and clubs. He is the light of the world, though darkness is about to engulf the earth. He came to bring life, even as plans unfold to condemn him to death.

King of Peace. Jesus' desire is to bring the world into the Father's arms, tearing down every barrier that separates us from God and from our neighbor, for "He is our peace" (Eph 2:14).

King of Peace. Jesus enters into Jerusalem not upon a horse, but upon a donkey, fulfilling the ancient prophecy that calls for rejoicing at the arrival of the Messiah: "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations" (Zech 9:9–10).

King of Peace. When one of his disciples drew his sword to defend him and struck the high priest's servant, Jesus immediately stopped him, saying: "Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Mt 26:52).

King of Peace. While he was burdened with our sufferings and pierced for our sins, Jesus "did not open his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent" (Is 53:7). He did not arm himself, or defend himself, or fight any war. He revealed the gentle face of God, who always rejects violence. Rather than saving himself, he allowed himself to be nailed to the cross, embracing every cross borne in every time and place throughout human history.

Brothers and sisters, this is our God: Jesus, King of Peace, who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war. He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them, saying: "Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen: your hands are full of blood" (Is 1:15).

As we set our gaze upon him who was crucified for us, we can see a crucified humanity. In his wounds, we see the hurts of so many women and men today. In his last cry to the Father, we hear the weeping of those who are crushed, who have no hope, who are sick and who are alone. Above all, we hear the painful groans of all those who are oppressed by violence and are victims of war.

Christ, King of Peace, cries out again from his cross: God is love! Have mercy! Lay down your weapons! Remember that you are brothers and sisters!

In the words of the Servant of God, Bishop Tonino Bello, I would like to entrust this cry to Mary Most Holy, who stands beneath the cross of her Son and weeps also at the feet of those who are crucified today:

"Holy Mary, woman of the third day, grant us the certainty that, in spite of all, death will no longer hold sway over us; that the injustices of peoples are numbered; that the flashes of war are fading into the twilight; that the sufferings of the poor are breathing their last. And grant, finally, that the tears of all the victims of violence and pain will soon be dried up like frost beneath the spring sun" (Maria, donna dei nostri giorni).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/Homily?



Head: In the Passion, Jesus is called "King," yet he refuses power, violence, and self-defence. What kind of kingship is revealed here, and how is it different from the way power usually works in the world?



Heart: As the crowd chooses Barabbas and rejects Jesus, what influences shape your own choices — fear, pressure, comfort, or truth? Where do you recognise yourself in this scene?



Hands: Jesus responds to violence with silence, mercy, and self-gift. What would it look like, in a concrete situation this week, to choose peace, restraint, or love instead of defensiveness or control?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.