

**GOSPEL***Matthew 27:11-54 (Shorter form)*

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

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.'

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## HOMILY OF ST JOHN PAUL II

24 March 2002 (Excerpt)

17th World Youth Day

The Cross is the focus of the liturgy today. Dear young people, with your attentive and enthusiastic participation in this solemn celebration, you show that you are not ashamed of the Cross. You do not fear the Cross of Christ. Indeed, you love and venerate it because it is the sign of the Redeemer who died and rose again for us. Those who believe in Jesus, crucified and risen, carry the Cross in triumph as an indisputable proof that God is love. With the total gift of himself on the Cross, our Saviour decisively conquered sin and death. Therefore we joyfully proclaim: "Glory and praise to you, O Christ who has redeemed the world with your Cross".

"Christ became obedient for us even to death, death on the Cross. Therefore God raised him on high and gave him a name above every other name" (Gospel acclamation). We have used these words of the Apostle Paul, just heard in the Second Reading, as our acclamation before we begin the reading of the Passion. They express our faith: the faith of the Church.

However, faith in Christ can never be taken for granted. The reading of his Passion sets us before Christ, living in his Church. The Easter Mystery that we will relive during the days of Holy Week is always present. Today we are contemporaries of the Lord and, like the multitude in Jerusalem, like the disciples and the women, we are called to decide if we are to be with him, or flee, or just be spectators at his death.

Every year in Holy Week the curtain rises once again on the great scene in which the definitive drama is decided, not only for one generation, but for all humanity and for each one.

The Passion narrative points out the fidelity of Christ, contrasted with human infidelity. In the hour of his trial, while the disciples and even Peter abandon Jesus (cf. Mt 26,56), He remains faithful, willing to pour out his blood to bring to fulfilment the mission the Father has entrusted to him. Beside him is Mary, silent and suffering.

Dear young people! Learn from Jesus and from his and our Mother. The real strength of a man lies in the fidelity of his witness to the truth and in his resisting flattery, threats, misunderstandings, blackmail, even harsh and relentless persecution. This is the path on which our Redeemer calls us to follow him.

Only if you are ready to do this, will you become what Jesus expects of you, that is, "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Mt 5,13-14). As you know, this is the theme for the coming World Youth Day. The image of salt "reminds us that, through Baptism, our whole

being has been profoundly changed, because it has been "seasoned" with the new life which comes from Christ (cf. Rom 6,4)" (Message for the 17th World Youth Day, n. 2).

Dear young people, do not lose your flavour as Christians, the flavour of the Gospel! Keep it alive by meditating constantly on the Easter Mystery: may the Cross be your school of wisdom. Boast of nothing else save this sublime throne of truth and love.

The liturgy invites us to climb towards Jerusalem with Jesus, hailed by the young Jews. In a little while he "will have to suffer and on the third day rise from the dead" (Lk 24,46). St Paul has reminded us that Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2,7) to obtain for us the grace of divine sonship. From him springs the true spring of peace and joy for each one of us! Here is the secret of the Easter joy that is born from the hardship of the Passion.

I hope that each one of you will share in this joy, dear young friends. The One you have chosen as Teacher is not a merchant of deceptions, not a powerful one of this world, not a ready and skilled debater. You know who it is you have chosen to follow: the Crucified is risen! The Crucified is risen! Christ died for you, Christ rose for you.

The Church assures you that you will not be disillusioned. Indeed, no one else other than he can give you that love, peace, and eternal life for which your heart so deeply yearns. Blessed are you young people if you will be faithful disciples of Christ! Blessed are you who are ready to witness on every occasion that this man is truly the Son of God (cf. Mt 27,39).

May Mary, Mother of the incarnate Word guide and go with you, ready to intercede for everyone who comes into the world.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



**Head:** As the Passion unfolds, almost everyone must choose a position — judge, crowd, disciple, etc. What strikes you most about the different responses to Jesus in this Gospel?



**Heart:** If I look honestly at my choices rather than my intentions, where do my actions show that I usually stand when following Jesus becomes demanding?



**Hands:** What would it look like for me, concretely and personally, to stay faithful to Christ this week — especially when it is uncomfortable or costs me something?