



Chapter 21

The Cup of Consummation

"Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will."

Mark 14: 36

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Read

Matthew
26:17 - 56

John
18:25 - 19:30

Psalms 22

It was no accident that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. Jesus is the perfect Passover Lamb. Everything that happened after that meal will be clearer to us when we understand how the Passover was celebrated, and what was unusual about the way Jesus celebrated it.

By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus' passing over to his father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom. (CCC 1340)

The Missing Cup

In the time of Jesus, the Passover was celebrated with four "cups": that is, the guests drank wine four times.

1. After a solemn blessing, the first cup was drunk, followed by bitter herbs that symbolized the bitterness of captivity in Egypt.
2. Then someone read the Passover story from Exodus 12, Psalm 113 (the "Little Hallel") was sung, and the second cup was drunk.
3. Then came the main meal of lamb and unleavened bread, after which the third cup, the "cup of blessing," was drunk.
4. Finally, Psalms 114-118 (the "Great Hallel") were sung, and the Passover came to its climax when the fourth cup, the "cup of consummation," was drunk.



“I tell you I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day...” (Mt 26: 29)

This is the way Jesus and his disciples would have been celebrating the Passover. And it seems to have gone just as the disciples expected until the main meal. Then Jesus did something that was hard for them to understand at the time:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (Mt 26: 26-29)

Here was the third cup, the “cup of blessing,” but Jesus said that the bread and wine were his body and blood. What could he mean by that? “Blood of the covenant” was a quotation from Exodus 24: 8, a passage that all the disciples would have recognized: it referred to the ratification of the covenant between God and Israel. Jesus talks as though he’s introducing a new covenant, one that will be ratified with his own blood.

Next in the liturgy was the singing of a hymn, and then should come the “cup of consummation.” But Jesus said that he would not drink wine again, so we read that “when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”¹ Any reader who knew what the Passover was like would have been shocked and amazed. They had abandoned their Passover before the most important part! Jesus left the Passover before it was finished. For some reason, he had decided that it was not yet time to drink the “cup of consummation.”

Not all the disciples went with Jesus, though. One of them had left early: Judas Iscariot was on his way through the darkness to the chief priests.

In Gethsemane

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus told his disciples what was about to happen.

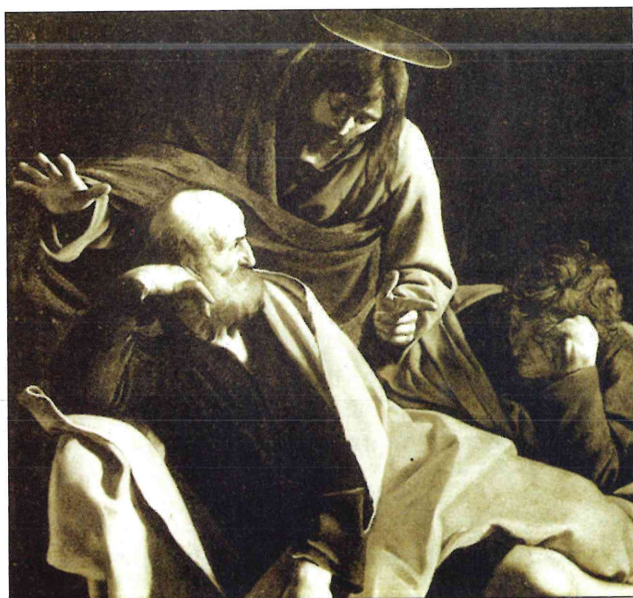
And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” Peter said to him, “Even though they all fall away, I will not.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” But he said vehemently, “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And they all said the same. (Mk 14: 27-31)

Then Jesus took them to a place called Gethsemane (which means “olive press”), where he told them to wait while he went off to pray. But he took aside Peter, James, and John—his closest friends, the same disciples who had seen his Transfiguration.

And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death; remain here, and watch.” And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mk 14: 35-36)

That word “cup” should catch our attention. Jesus had cut the Passover short before it was finished. He still had one cup to drink—the “cup of consummation.” Now he was praying to his Father (“Abba” is a familiar Aramaic word for “Father”) to take away “this cup.”

The cup of the New Covenant, which Jesus anticipated when he offered himself at the Last Supper, is afterwards accepted by him from his Father’s hands in his agony in the garden at Gethsemani (cf. Mt 26: 42; Lk 22: 20), making himself “obedient unto death.” Jesus prays: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me...” (Phil 2: 8; Mt 26: 39; cf. Heb 5: 7-8). Thus he expresses the horror that death represented for his human nature. Like ours, his human nature is destined for eternal life; but unlike ours, it is perfectly exempt from sin, the cause of death (cf. Rom 5: 12; Heb 4: 15). Above all, his human nature has been assumed by the divine person of the “Author of life,” the “Living One” (cf. Acts 3: 15; Rv 1: 17; Jn 1: 4; 5: 26). By accepting in his human will that the Father’s will be done, he accepts his death as redemptive, for “he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pt 2: 24; cf. Mt 26: 42). (CCC 612)



When Jesus came back to his three friends, they were all asleep. It was very late, and they had eaten a big meal. Jesus woke them up and went off to pray again, and again he came back to find them asleep.

The third time he found them asleep, he said, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”²

“Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” (Mt 26: 45)



*“Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed,
‘My father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done.’” (Mt 26: 42)*



*"And he came up to Jesus at once and said, 'Hail, Master!' And he kissed him."
(Mt 26: 49)*

Jesus Arrested In Gethsemane

Immediately Judas appeared, leading a band of soldiers with swords and clubs to Gethsemane. "The one I shall kiss is the man," Judas had told them; "seize him and lead him away safely."³ Judas greeted the Master with a kiss—the ordinary way a disciple would greet his master. But there was no disguising what he was doing.

The soldiers had come expecting a fight. But there was no battle—only one incident. The disciples asked, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" Peter, who always let his heart run away with him, did not wait for an answer. He struck at the high priest's slave, cutting off his ear. But Jesus said, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the chalice which the Father has given me?"⁴ And he touched the slave's ear and healed him.⁵ It would be his last miraculous healing on earth. Jesus was ready to drink the fourth cup.

Then Jesus went peacefully with the soldiers. Peter followed at a distance, and so did John.

They took Jesus to Annas, who was the father-in-law of the current high priest. Annas had been deposed by the Romans years before, but most Jews still considered him the rightful high priest. His son-in-law Caiaphas seems to have deferred to Annas, allowing him to interrogate Jesus first.⁶



“This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ And again he denied it with an oath, ‘I do not know the man.’” (Mt 26: 71-72)

Peter’s Denial

Meanwhile, the soldiers and servants who had brought Jesus waited outside for their instructions. Since it was a chilly night, they built a fire to warm themselves. John noticed specifically that Peter was warming himself beside a “charcoal fire”—a term that occurs only one other place in the New Testament, as we’ll soon see.⁷ Peter, too, stood outside and waited where he could see the interrogation from a distance, hoping no one would recognize him.

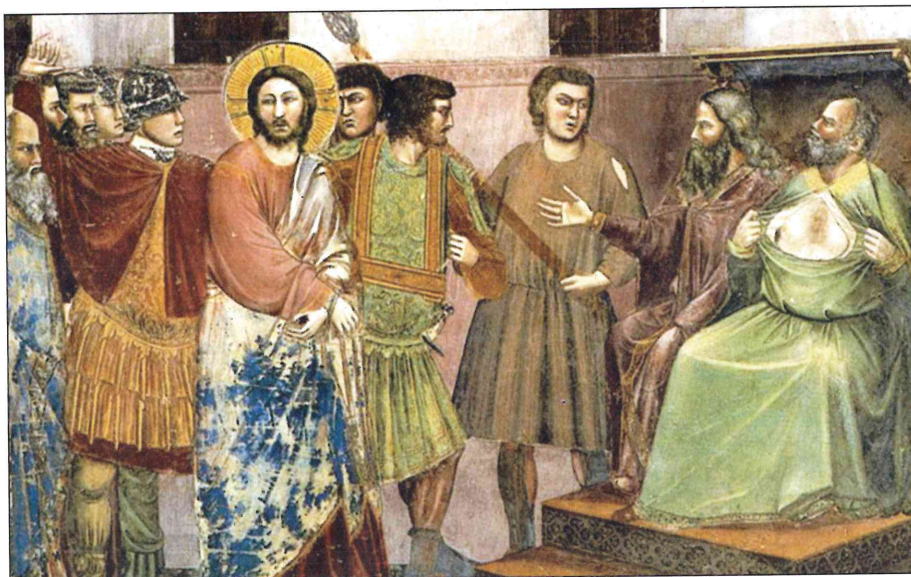
One of the maids recognized Peter in the light of the fire. “You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus,” she said. Peter reacted immediately: “I neither know nor understand what you mean.” A little while later someone else recognized him, and Peter gave the same response. Then a third one picked him out by his Galilean accent: “Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” Then Peter swore he didn’t know Jesus. Immediately he heard the cock crow, and he saw Jesus turn and look at him. He remembered what Jesus had said: “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” “And he went out and wept bitterly,” the Gospel writers tell us.⁸ He must have felt that he, too, had betrayed Jesus. But unlike Judas, he was capable of true repentance. Judas, as we’ll soon see, would react with anger and despair; Peter wept out of love. He would have a chance to restore himself.

Blasphemy!

Annas sent Jesus off to the house of his son-in-law Caiaphas,⁹ where the Sanhedrin had gathered in an emergency session. The leaders in Jerusalem must have considered Jesus an extraordinary threat if they gathered in the middle of the night to condemn him.

They were taking no chances. They bribed false witnesses to lie about Jesus, but even the bribed witnesses' stories didn't agree. Finally the high priest put a direct question to Jesus: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

Jesus answered, "I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."



"He has uttered blasphemy. Why do we still need witnesses?" (Mt 26: 65)

That was what Caiaphas wanted to hear. He tore his robes—a gesture of furious protest, and also an explicit violation of the Law of Moses. ("The priest who is chief among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil is poured, and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not let the hair of his head hang loose, nor rend his clothes," says Lv 21:10.) In his desperate eagerness to condemn the innocent Jesus, the high priest himself disregarded the laws he accused Jesus of breaking.

"Why do we still need witnesses?" Caiaphas demanded. "You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?"¹⁰

Caiaphas had a point. Jesus' calling himself the Son of God would certainly be blasphemy—unless it were true. The Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death.

Now the men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and asked him, "Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?" And they spoke many other words against him, reviling him. (Lk 22: 63-64)

The Sanhedrin had sentenced Jesus to death, but there was one problem. Under Roman rule, the Jewish leaders had no authority to carry out a death sentence. They could judge in religious matters, but only the Roman governor could impose a death sentence.

So the Roman governor would have to be persuaded to have Jesus killed. As soon as the morning came, the Sanhedrin sent Jesus off to be tried by the governor, Pontius Pilate.



*“I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.’ They said, ‘What is that to us?’”
(Mt 27: 4)*

Judas Repents

Meanwhile, Judas began to have second thoughts. When he betrayed his Master, he might not have believed that the authorities would actually kill Jesus.

When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. (Mt 27: 3-5)

Although Judas “repented,” he still failed to understand what Jesus had been trying to teach him. If he had understood, he would not have fallen into despair. He would have known that he could ask for Jesus’ forgiveness even when Jesus was on the cross, and Jesus would forgive him.

But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.” So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. (Mt 27: 6-7)

An ancient tradition says that Judas was buried in the valley of Hinnom or Topheth, on the exact spot where Jeremiah had smashed a pot:

Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, and shall say to them, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury.” (Jer 19: 10-11)

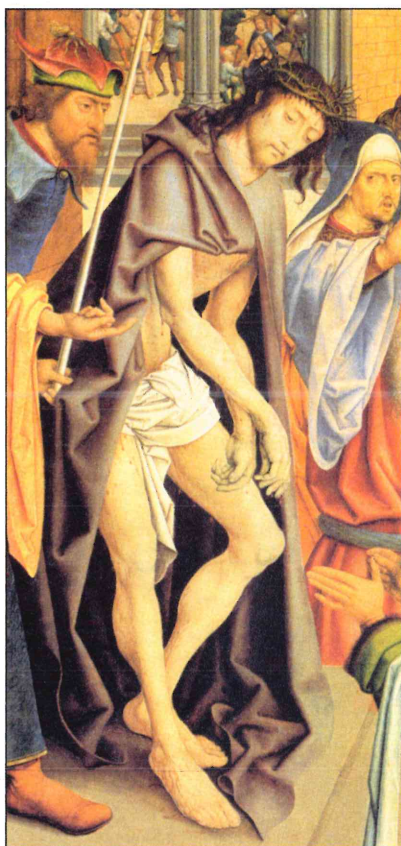
Pilate Examines Jesus

What could Jesus be charged with that would provoke Pilate to execute him? The Sanhedrin could think of only one thing: he said he was King of the Jews. Pilate would see that as a threat to start yet another Jewish insurrection. “We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king,”¹¹ the Sanhedrin told Pilate. The part about forbidding them to give tribute to Caesar was a lie, but it was the sort of charge they needed if Pilate was to be persuaded that Jesus was a danger to Rome.

Pilate wanted nothing to do with the case. “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law,” he told the Jerusalem leaders. But they reminded him, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” And death was what they wanted.

So Pilate interrogated Jesus.

Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not of this world.” Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” (Jn 18: 3-38)



As far as Pilate could tell, Jesus was a harmless philosopher. “I find no crime in this man,” he told the crowd.

But the crowd was insistent. “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

Was Jesus a Galilean? Galilee was King Herod’s jurisdiction. So Pilate sent Jesus over to Herod Antipas, who happened to be in Jerusalem at the time. Herod Antipas—the son of the wicked King Herod who had killed the Holy Innocents in Bethlehem—questioned him for a while, but Jesus refused to answer. So Herod and his soldiers, thinking they were having a great joke, put Jesus in kingly clothes and sent him right back to Pilate.

Crucify Him!

Pilate brought the Sanhedrin together again. “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people,” he said; “and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; I will therefore chasten him and release him.”¹²

That was not what the crowd wanted to hear. There were indignant shouts.

“I find no crime in him,” Pilate told the assembled crowd again. “But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover; will you have me release for you the King of the Jews?”¹³



"And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him." (Mt 27: 31)

The crowd had been primed to demand nothing less than Jesus' death. "Not this man," they shouted, "but Barabbas!"¹⁴

Barabbas was exactly the sort of terrorist fanatic the crowd accused Jesus of being. He "had committed murder in the insurrection," Mark tells us. In Aramaic, his name meant "son of the father." Instead of the Son of the Father, whose kingdom was not of this world, the crowd demanded the release of a robber and murderer who was the opposite of Jesus.

Pilate sent Jesus off to be scourged, hoping that would appease the crowd. A scourge was a particularly horrible kind of whip designed to tear the skin. If the torturer was overly enthusiastic, the victim could die from the injuries. But Jesus did not die. He was weak but still standing when they were through with him. The soldiers, deciding to have a little more fun with him, made a crown out of thorns and stuck it on his head; then they found a purple robe (purple was the color of royalty) and put it on him. They took turns striking him while shouting "Hail, King of the Jews!"

At last Pilate brought Jesus back out to the crowd. "See," he said, "I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him."

But all the chief priests and officers shouted, "Crucify him!"¹⁵

Still Pilate seemed unwilling to send Jesus off to die. The chief priests had to play their trump card. "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend," they told Pilate; "everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar."¹⁶

The threat was not hard to see behind the veil. If Pilate let Jesus go, word would get back to Rome that Pilate had been allowing open rebellion in his province. The governor would have to answer to the Caesar, the Roman emperor, and Caesar would not be pleased.

In her Magisterial teaching of the faith and in the witness of her saints, the Church has never forgotten that "sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured" (*Roman Catechism* I, 5, 11; cf. Heb 12:3). Taking into account the fact that our sins affect Christ himself (cf. Mt 25:45; Acts 9:4-5), the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone:

We must regard as guilty all those who continue to relapse into their sins. Since our sins made the Lord Christ suffer the torment of the cross, those who plunge themselves into disorders and crimes crucify the Son of God anew in their hearts (for he is in them) and hold him up to contempt. And it can be seen that our crime in this case is greater in us than in the Jews. As for them, according to the witness of the Apostle, "None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." We, however, profess to know him. And when we deny him by our deeds, we in some way seem to lay violent hands on him.¹⁷

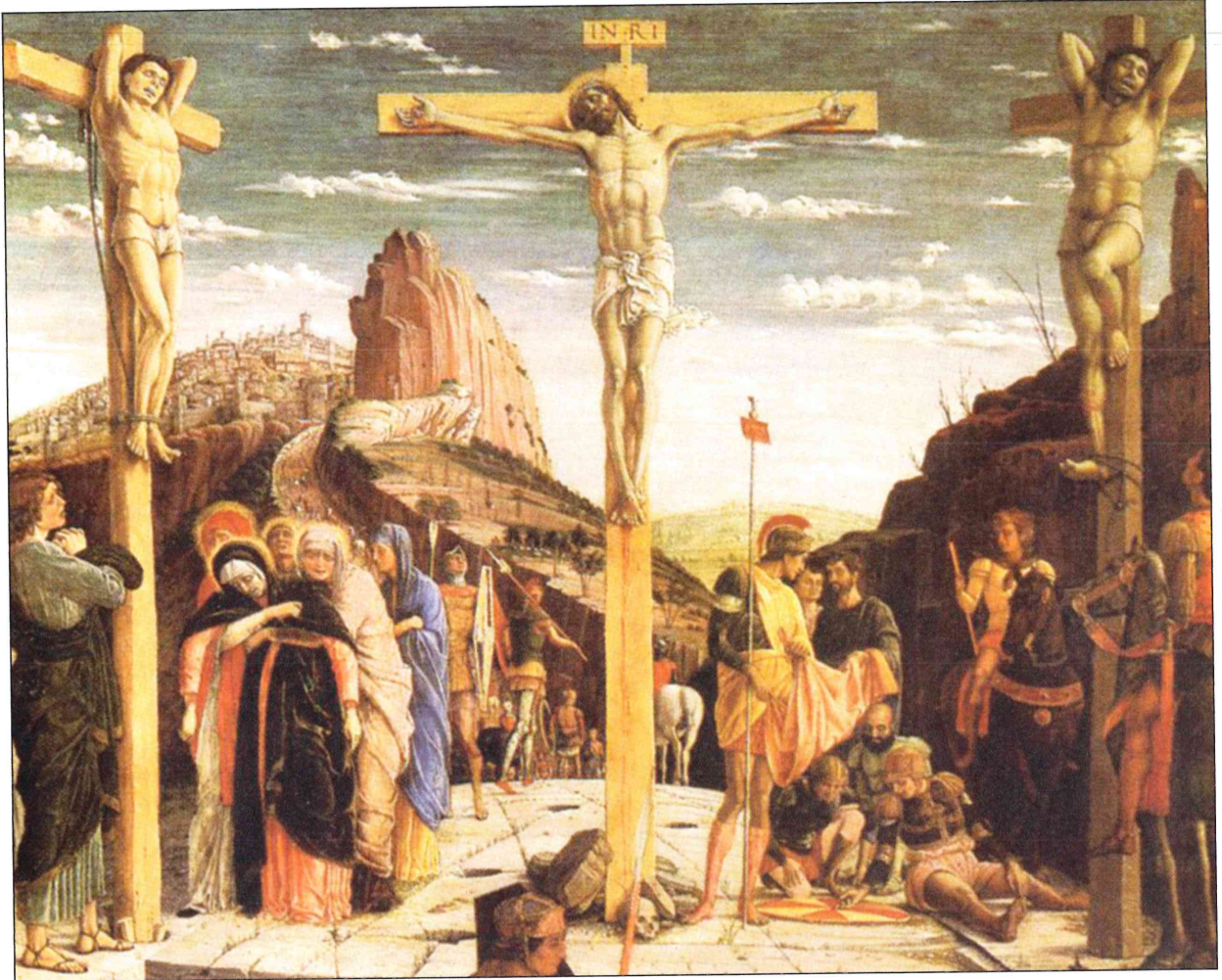
Nor did demons crucify him; it is you who have crucified him and crucify him still, when you delight in your vices and sins.¹⁸ (CCC 598)

Jesus Crucified

When Jesus started on the way, he was carrying his own cross.¹⁹ He had been weakened by the scourging, and he was probably physically incapable of carrying the cross all the way. So the soldiers took hold of an innocent passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, and made him carry the cross. Legally, a Roman soldier could press a native into service to carry baggage for a distance of one Roman mile. (Jesus referred to that law in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles."²⁰)



“So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha.” (Jn 19: 17) .



Many of the women who had been Jesus' disciples followed him, mourning.

But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

(Lk 23: 28-31)

When they came to Golgotha, the place of crucifixion, someone offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh—a painkiller meant to reduce his suffering a little. Jesus refused to take it. He would not lessen the pain he had to suffer.

So Jesus was nailed to the cross like the worst of common criminals, and two of the worst of common criminals were crucified with him, one on either side. Even as he was suffering the horrible agony of nails being driven through his hands and feet, Jesus still found the strength to say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. The chief priests of the Jews then said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." (Jn 19: 19-22)



ישוע ברצני כרלג זהררם
ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΝΑΖΟΪΟΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ
IESVS NAZARENVS REX IVDÆORVM

Today, the letters **INRI** appear on Christian crosses and in church decorations. Those are the initials of Pilate's Latin inscription: *Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudeorum* which is *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*.

The soldiers, meanwhile, were dividing up Jesus' meager property. They each took some of his clothes. But when they came to his tunic, they discovered that it was made all of one piece, with no seams, just like the sacred tunic that a Jewish high priest wore. It seemed a shame to tear it in pieces. So they cast lots for it, which is to say they flipped a coin or rolled the dice.

Some of the bystanders shook their heads and mocked him. "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"

One of the thieves also mocked Jesus the same way.

But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Lk 23: 40-43)

Behold, Your Mother

Crucifixion was a long and horrible death; the victim had plenty of time to realize he was dying and think about the end that was coming. Jesus had one important piece of earthly business to take care of.

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. (Jn 19: 26-27)

In ancient Judea, a widow with no sons had no way to support herself. Jesus made his best friend responsible for Mary because Mary had no other sons to take that responsibility.

Because John, who tells this story, deliberately keeps his name a secret to the end, he invites us to see ourselves as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Every beloved follower of Jesus has Mary for a mother and Jesus for a brother, with God himself for our father.

The Last Cup

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15: 33-34)

Some of the onlookers who did not hear correctly, or who did not know Aramaic, thought he was calling for Elijah. But in fact Jesus was reciting the first line of Psalm 22, which in hindsight seems to be a perfect description of everything Jesus suffered. (See the sidebar *The Crucifixion Psalm*.)

Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he himself had sinned (cf. Jn 8: 46). But in the redeeming love that always united him to the Father, he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, to the point that he could say in our name from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15: 34; Ps 22: 2; cf. Jn 8: 29). Having thus established him in solidarity with us sinners, God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all," so that we might be "reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom 8: 32; 5: 10) (CCC 603)



"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

As Jesus came close to the end, one of the onlookers offered him a sponge of sour wine on a branch of hyssop²¹—the same herb that was used for sprinkling the blood of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12: 22.

After he had drunk the vinegar, Jesus said, “It is finished.” It was the last cup of the Passover, the Cup of Consummation—the one Jesus had sworn not to drink until the time had come. Jesus had drunk the chalice which his father had given him, “and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”²²

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mk 15: 38-39)

The curtain physically separated the people from the dwelling-place of God. At the moment of Jesus’ death, that separation ended. If it was the outer curtain, then the tearing also prefigured the end of the world of the Old Covenant: the outer curtain was decorated with pictures representing the whole creation.

The Sabbath was fast approaching (the Jewish day began at sunset). The crucified criminals would have to be buried before then, since no work could be done on the Sabbath.

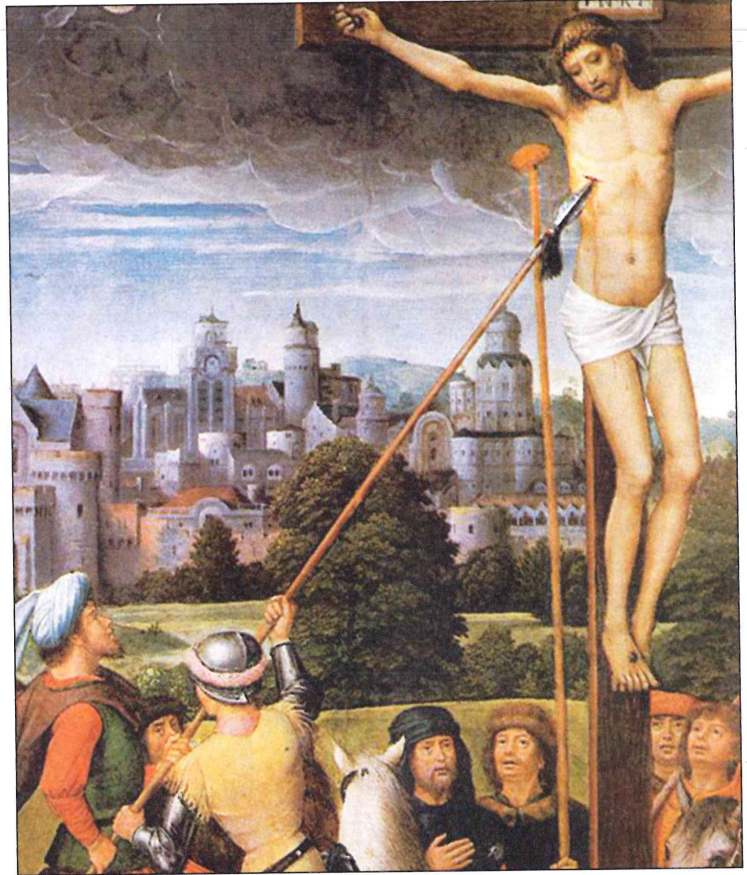
Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. (Jn 19: 31)

Breaking the legs of the criminals was actually a mercy; it made them die quicker, which was all they could hope for. But Jesus was already dead. When the soldiers came to him, they saw that he was dead, so they did not break his legs. (“You shall not break a bone of it,” says Exodus 12: 46, giving instructions for preparing the Passover lamb.)

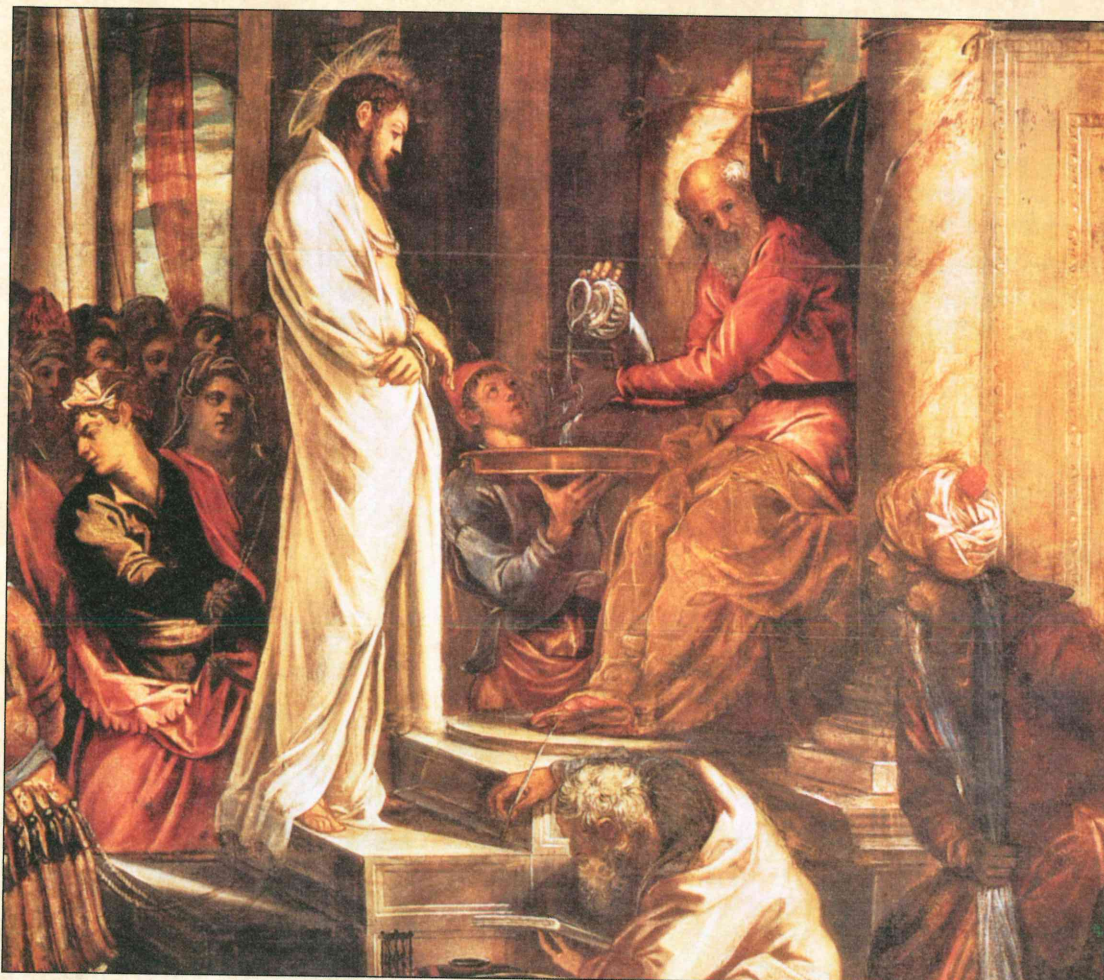
But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. (Jn 19: 34)

In the time of Jesus, wine was mixed with water before it could be drunk. The Church still keeps up that custom in preparing the wine for the Eucharist.

After Jesus’ crucifixion, Christ, his human soul still united to his divine person, went down to the realm of the dead. Early Apostolic preaching regarding Christ’s descent into hell taught us that Jesus, like all men, experienced death, but he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the imprisoned spirits (1 Pet 3:18-19). The descent into hell brings the Gospel message of salvation to complete fulfillment, and this is the last phase of Jesus’ messianic mission. During this time after his death and before his resurrection, Jesus spread his redemptive work to all men of all times and all places. There he opened heaven’s gates for the just who had gone before him.



Pontius Pilate



Every time we say the Creed, we remember that Jesus “was crucified under Pontius Pilate.” But the Gospel writers paint Pilate as more than a simple villain. St. John, especially, shows him as a complex character who believes Jesus is innocent but lacks the courage to act on what he believes. The chief priests and the anti-Jesus faction take advantage of his cowardice by playing on his fear of his Roman superiors (see Jn 19: 12: “If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar.”)

Pilate had no respect at all for the traditions and customs of his Jewish subjects, but he lived in constant fear of riots. That taught the people of Judea a simple lesson: if you want to get something out of Pilate, all you have to do is threaten a riot. If he had had respect for his subjects’ traditions, but had shown courage against the mobs, he might have been an ideal governor. As it was, it didn’t take long for the Romans to realize they had the wrong man for the job. A few years after the trial of Jesus, Pilate was recalled in disgrace. One tradition says he killed himself rather than return to Rome as a failure.

But there is an alternate ending to the story. In some Asian churches, the tradition grew up that Pilate was haunted by guilt after Jesus’ death. He tried to kill himself, but was repeatedly saved by divine intervention. At last he came to believe, was baptized a Christian, and died a saint.



The Ecce Homo Basilica.
One of three Ecce Homo Arches along the
Via Dolorosa, the traditional route by which Jesus
went from Pilate’s hall of judgment to Calvary.

The Crucifixion Psalm

As Jesus hung dying on the cross, he cried out with a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*”

Some of the bystanders who couldn't hear too clearly thought he was calling for Elijah. But the disciples who heard him knew that he was reciting the first line of Psalm 22. When they remembered the rest of Psalm 22, they realized that it was a perfect description of the suffering Jesus had endured.

Yet Psalm 22 ends in triumph. Although the psalmist seems to accuse God of forsaking him, he ends with a hymn of praise for God's certain deliverance. There on the cross, when he seemed to be defeated and dying, Jesus was looking forward to his triumphant victory over death.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

Yet thou art holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
In thee our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.
To thee they cried, and were saved;
in thee they trusted, and were not disappointed.

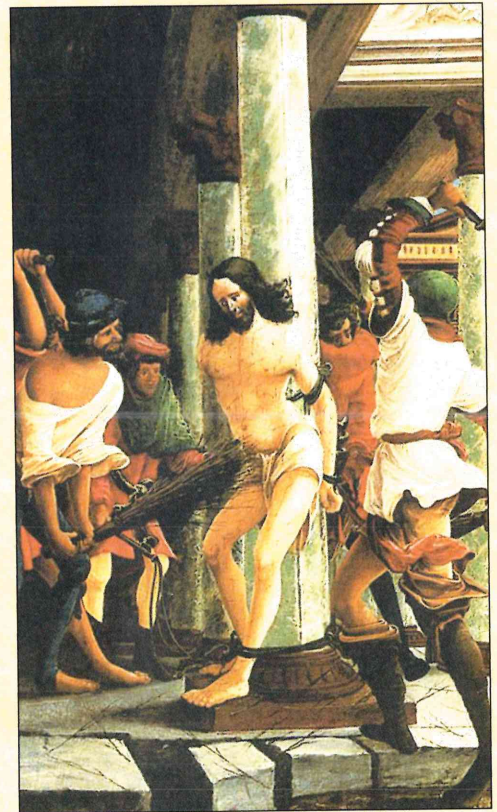
But I am a worm, and no man;
scorned by men, and despised by the people.
All who see me mock at me,
they make mouths at me, they wag their heads;
“He committed his cause to the LORD; let him
deliver him,
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”

Yet thou art he who took me from the womb;
thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's
breast.

Upon thee was I cast from my birth;
and since my mother bore me thou hast
been my God.
Be not far from me;
for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

Many bulls encompass me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax,
it is melted within my breast;
my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
thou dost lay me in the dust of death.



Chapter 21: The Cup of Consummation

Yea, dogs are round about me,
a company of evildoers encircle me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
They divide my garments among them,
and for my raiment they cast lots.

But thou, O LORD, be not far off!
O thou my help, hasten to my aid!
Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!
Save me from the mouth of the lion,
my afflicted soul from the horns of the
wild oxen!

I will tell of thy name to my brethren;
in the midst of the congregation I will
praise thee:
You who fear the LORD, praise him!
all you sons of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you sons of
Israel!

For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted;
and he has not hid his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried up to him.

From thee comes my praise in the great
congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who
fear him.

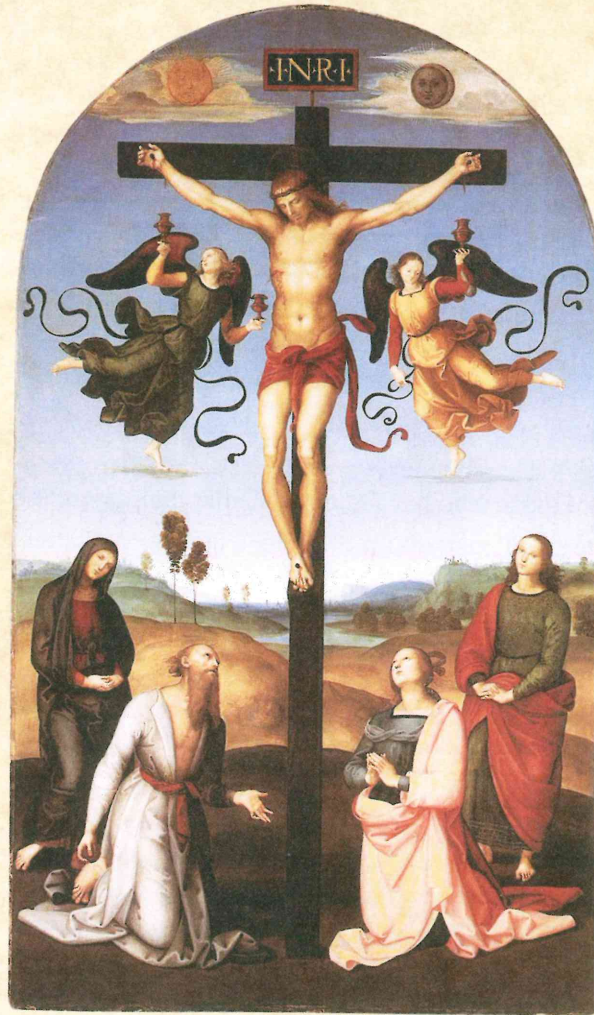
The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.

Yea, to him shall all the proud of the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and he who cannot keep himself alive.

Posterity shall serve him;
men shall tell of the LORD to the coming generation,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
that he has wrought it.



The Jews

Throughout the Passion narrative in St. John's Gospel, Jesus' opponents are described as "the Jews." Sometimes later readers concluded that the Jews as a race or a nation bore the guilt of crucifying Jesus.

Of course, a more careful reading of the Gospel would prevent that misunderstanding. Jesus was a Jew. John, who wrote it, was a Jew. Almost all the earliest Christians were Jews. Probably most of the people who first read the Gospel of John were Jews.

Some commentators say that John was using the term "Jews" to mean simply the Jewish authorities. But the first readers would have heard more than that. Later Gentile readers might read about "the Jews" in John's Gospel and say, "They crucified Christ." But St. John's first readers, Jews themselves, would read the same Gospel and say, "We crucified Christ." Some would argue the term "Jews" would refer to all of those who have rejected Christ throughout the centuries as distinct from those of Jewish blood.

Later, we'll read about St. Peter's first sermon after Christ's resurrection. On the day of Pentecost, he told a crowd of thousands of Jews of all nations,

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (Acts 2: 22-23)

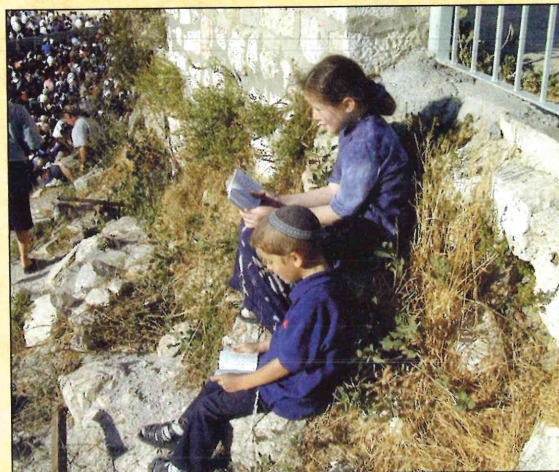
Peter's message to his audience is unmistakable: *you* crucified Jesus.

As a result of Peter's sermon, about 3,000 people—probably some of the same crowd that had shouted "Crucify him!"—believed and were baptized. The people who had the most to be forgiven were the ones who most welcomed the gospel of forgiveness.

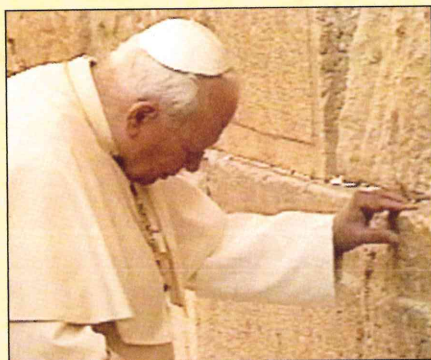
The same should be true for us today. When we read the Gospel, we should remember that all of us are sinners, and all of us bear the guilt of crucifying the Son of God.

The historical complexity of Jesus' trial is apparent in the Gospel accounts. The personal sin of the participants (Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate) is known to God alone. Hence we cannot lay responsibility for the trial on the Jews in Jerusalem as a whole, despite the outcry of a manipulated crowd and the global reproaches contained in the apostles' calls to conversion after Pentecost (cf. Mk 15: 11; Acts 2: 23, 36; 3: 13-14; 4: 10; 5: 30; 7: 52; 10: 39; 13: 27-28; 1 Thes 2: 14-15). Jesus himself, in forgiving them on the cross, and Peter in following suit, both accept "the ignorance" of the Jews of Jerusalem and even of their leaders (cf. Lk 23: 34; Acts 3: 17). Still less can we extend responsibility to other Jews of different times and places, based merely on the crowd's cry: "His blood be on us and on our children!" a formula for ratifying a judicial sentence (Mt 27: 25; cf. Acts 5: 28; 18: 6). As the Church declared at the Second Vatican Council:

... [N]either all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his Passion... [T]he Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture.²³ (CCC 597)



Jewish children praying at the Western Wall.



In 2000, Pope John Paul II prayed at the Western Wall asking God's forgiveness for the suffering Christians have caused Jews.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

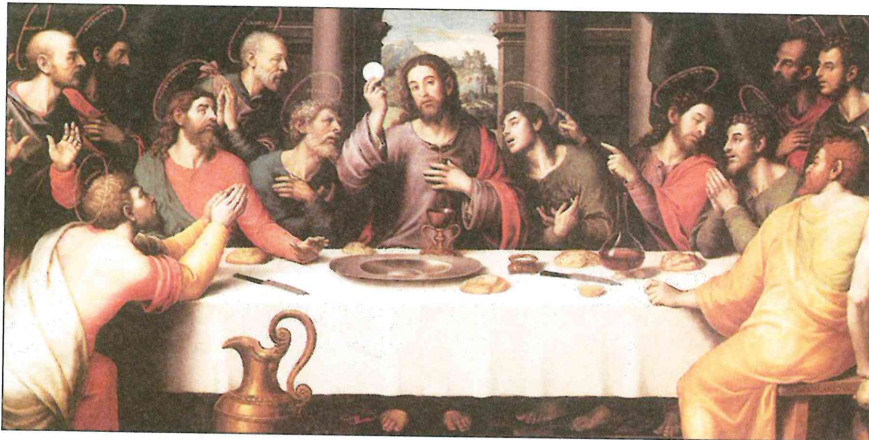
John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*

A causal influence of the Eucharist is present at the Church's very origins. The Evangelists specify that it was the Twelve, the Apostles, who gathered with Jesus at the Last Supper (cf. Mt 26: 20; Mk 14: 17; Lk 22: 14). This is a detail of notable importance, for the Apostles "were both the seeds of the new Israel and the beginning of the sacred hierarchy." By offering them his body and his blood as food, Christ mysteriously involved them in the sacrifice which would be completed later on Calvary. By analogy with the Covenant of Mount Sinai, sealed by sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood, the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper laid the foundations of the new messianic community, the People of the New Covenant.

The Apostles, by accepting in the Upper Room Jesus' invitation: "Take, eat," "Drink of it, all of you" (Mt 26: 26-27), entered for the first time into sacramental communion with him. From that time forward, until the end of the age, the Church is built up through sacramental communion with the Son of God who was sacrificed for our sake: "Do this in remembrance of me... Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11: 24-25; cf. Lk 22: 19).

22. Incorporation into Christ, which is brought about by Baptism, is constantly renewed and consolidated by sharing in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, especially by that full sharing which takes place in sacramental communion. We can say not only that *each of us receives Christ*, but also that *Christ receives each of us*. He enters into friendship with us: "You are my friends" (Jn 15: 14). Indeed, it is because of him that we have life: "He who eats me will live because of me" (Jn 6: 57). Eucharistic communion brings about in a sublime way the mutual "abiding" of Christ and each of his followers: "Abide in me, and I in you" (Jn 15: 4).

By its union with Christ, the People of the New Covenant, far from closing in upon itself, becomes a "sacrament" for humanity, a sign and instrument of the salvation achieved by Christ, the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt 5: 13-16), for the redemption of all. The Church's mission stands in continuity with the mission of Christ: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20: 21). From the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the Cross and her communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the Church draws the spiritual power needed to carry out her mission. The Eucharist thus appears as both *the source* and *the summit* of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit.



The Eucharist is both the source and the summit of all evangelization.

VOCABULARY

ANNAS

The former high priest. He was deposed by the Romans but still considered the true high priest by many Jews.

BLASPHEMY

The crime of insulting God or of claiming Godlike attributes. Jesus was accused of blasphemy for identifying himself as the Son of God and Christ.

CAIAPHAS

The reigning high priest who had been appointed by the Roman government.

CALVARY

See Golgotha

CRUCIFIXION

A form of execution used by the Romans in which the victim is nailed to a wooden cross and left to die slowly.

CUP OF CONSUMMATION

The last cup in the Passover ceremony. At the Last Supper, Jesus ended the meal before the Cup of Consummation; his death on the Cross was to be the consummation of his Passover sacrifice.

GETHSEMANE

Means "olive press." A garden outside Jerusalem where Jesus went to pray after the Last Supper. He was betrayed and arrested there by a band of soldiers.

GOLGOTHA

A hill outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. The name means "place of the skull."

JUDAS ISCARIOT

One of the Twelve. He betrayed Jesus to the authorities.

LAST SUPPER

The Passover meal that Jesus and his disciples celebrated before his arrest. Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper.

NAZARENE

Someone from the town of Nazareth. This is how a placard identified Jesus on the cross.

PONTIUS PILATE

The Roman governor of Judea. Although he found Jesus guilty of nothing, he sentenced him to death by crucifixion.

PRAETORIUM

The center of Roman government in a province.

SANHEDRIN

The Jewish governing council. Its responsibilities were mainly religious; the Romans had taken over its governmental functions.

SIMON OF CYRENE

The man who was forced to help carry Jesus' cross to Golgotha.



STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When Passover was celebrated, what four “cups” were drunk?
2. What psalms were sung during the meal?
3. What did the phrase “blood of the covenant” indicate?
4. What important part of the Passover celebration did Jesus leave out at the Last Supper?
5. Where did Jesus go with the Apostles after the Last Supper?
6. What “cup” is Jesus referring to when he is praying at Gethsemane?
7. By what sign did Judas identify Jesus to the soldiers who had come to arrest him?
8. Who was Annas?
9. How many times did Peter deny that he knew Jesus?
10. What is the difference between the weeping of Judas and St. Peter?
11. What was the charge used to condemn Jesus?
12. Why did the Sanhedrin not kill Jesus right away?
13. What did the chief priests do with the money Judas threw back at them after Jesus had been betrayed?
14. What did the Sanhedrin accuse Jesus of in order to get Pilate to execute him?
15. Who did the crowd want freed instead of Jesus?
16. What does CCC 598 tell us?
17. What two people carried Jesus’ cross to Golgotha?
18. What title did Pilate have placed on the cross?
19. Which disciple did Jesus choose to care for his mother?
20. When did Jesus drink the Cup of Consummation?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. St. Peter’s denial of Christ is an oft-quoted part of the gospels. Though it is easy to recognize Peter’s weakness in denying Christ, often overlooked is the amount of courage it took him to go to the courtyard in the first place. Do you think you would have had the nerve to go? What do you think was going through Peter’s mind when he decided to take the risk?
2. Jesus’ death and resurrection changed the whole history of mankind. What do you think would be the conditions prevalent in the world if Jesus had not suffered for us? Would we be living as the Old Testament pagans did?
3. St. Thomas Aquinas believed that blasphemy was a greater sin than murder. What do you think were his reasons for saying this? Is blasphemy a serious problem today?

FROM THE CATECHISM

596 The religious authorities in Jerusalem were not unanimous about what stance to take towards Jesus (cf. Jn 9:16; Jn 10:19). The Pharisees threatened to excommunicate his followers (cf. Jn 9:22). To those who feared that “everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation,” the high priest Caiaphas replied by prophesying: “It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish” (Jn 11:48-50). The Sanhedrin, having declared Jesus deserving of death as a blasphemer but having lost the right to put anyone to death, hands him over to the Romans, accusing him of political revolt, a charge that puts him in the same category as Barabbas who had been accused of sedition (cf. Mt 26:66; Jn 18:31; Lk 23:2, 19). The high priests also threatened Pilate politically so that he would condemn Jesus to death (cf. Jn 19:12, 15, 21).

611 The Eucharist that Christ institutes at that moment will be the memorial of his sacrifice (1 Cor 11:25). Jesus includes the apostles in his own offering and bids them perpetuate it (cf. Lk 22:19). By doing so, the Lord institutes his apostles as priests of the New Covenant: “For their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth (Jn 17:19; cf. Council of Trent: DS 1752; 1764).”

1009 *Death is transformed by Christ.* Jesus, the Son of God, also himself suffered the death that is part of the human condition. Yet, despite his anguish as he faced death, he accepted it in an act of complete and free submission to his Father’s will (cf. Mk 14:

33-34; Heb 5:7-8). The obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing (cf. Rom 5:19-21).

1365 Because it is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice. The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution: “This is my body which is given for you” and “This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:19-20). In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28).

1851 It is precisely in the Passion, when the mercy of Christ is about to vanquish it, that sin most clearly manifests its violence and its many forms: unbelief, murderous hatred, shunning and mockery by the leaders and the people, Pilate’s cowardice and the cruelty of the soldiers, Judas’ betrayal—so bitter to Jesus, Peter’s denial and the disciples’ flight. However, at the very hour of darkness, the hour of the prince of this world (cf. Jn 14:30), the sacrifice of Christ secretly becomes the source from which the forgiveness of our sins will pour forth inexhaustibly.

2471 Before Pilate, Christ proclaims that he “has come into the world, to bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37). The Christian is not to “be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord” (2 Tm 1:8). In situations that require witness to the faith, the Christian must profess it without equivocation, after the example of St. Paul before his judges. We must keep “a clear conscience toward God and toward men” (Acts 24:16).

Endnotes

- | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Mk 14:26. | 8. Mt 26:75; Lk 22:62. | 14. Jn 18:40. | 19. Jn 19:17. |
| 2. Mk 14:41-42. | 9. Jn 18:24. | 15. Jn 19:1-6. | 20. Mt 5:41. |
| 3. Mk 14:44. | 10. Mk 14:61-64. | 16. Jn 19:12. | 21. Jn 19:29. |
| 4. Jn 18:11. | 11. Lk 23:2. | 17. Roman Catechism I, 5, 11; | 22. Jn 19:30. |
| 5. Lk 22:53. | 12. Lk 23:14-16. | cf. Heb 6:6; 1 Cor 2:8. | 23. Nostra Aetate 4. |
| 6. Jn 18:12-14; 19-23. | 13. Jn 18:38-39. | 18. St. Francis of Assisi, | |
| 7. Jn 18:18. | | Admonitio 5, 3. | |