

**ST. JOHN’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA**

March 24, 2024 – PALM/PASSION SUNDAY, YR. B

The Rev. Dr. Nina George–Hacker

Homily: *“Truly, This Was God’s Son”*

Mark 11:1-11 (Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph)
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 (Christ is the chief cornerstone that the builders have rejected)
Isaiah 50:4-9a (A prophecy of Jesus’ determination to stay the course)
Psalm 31:9-16 (A prayer for mercy in a time of trouble)
Philippians 2:5-11 (We are to have the same mind as Christ, humble and self-emptying)
St. Mark 15:1-39 (The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, from the upper room to crucifixion)

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all provide a record of Christ’s Passion, but each differs with the author’s particular emphasis. This morning we heard St. Mark’s account that shows the stark abandonment of Jesus by His fellow humans. In the garden His disciples fell asleep three times while Jesus prayed. Judas betrayed Him, while Peter with a curse denied any knowledge of Him. *Every one of them* fled. Jesus’ only words from the Cross were: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Even this plaintive cry is met with derision. Yet, as Jesus breathes His last, God acts to confirm His Son’s identity and purpose. The veil of the Temple is torn in two, and a Roman Centurion confesses: “Truly this was God’s son.”

There are moments in the lives of most Christians when we desperately cry out along with Jesus: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” only to find, as Jesus did, that God is listening, and can reverse or redeem tragedy. It is above all a comfort to those who find it hard to bear their cross to know that it wasn’t easy for God’s own Son, either.

In St. Luke’s account, Jesus is less anguished by His own fate than by His concern for others. At the time of His arrest, He heals the ear of the slave which Peter had, in a moment of defensive furor, cut off. On the road to Calvary, Jesus worries about the fate of the women. From the Cross, He forgives those who nailed Him to its branches; and He promises paradise to the penitent thief. The crucifixion becomes the occasion of Divine forgiveness and care, and Jesus dies tranquilly praying: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

It is important that some see His head bowed in dejection, while others observe His arms outstretched in forgiveness, and still other perceive, in the title over the cross, the proclamation of a reigning king.¹

As He knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus pleaded with God to let this cup pass Him by, but gradually He stifled this natural human fear and weakness to the point of accepting His role as the sacrificial Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. He acquiesced with His plea to the Father, “Not my will but Yours be done.” Being in such an agony as to cause Him to sweat blood, He prayed all the more. Divine help in the form of an angel came to strengthen Him, whereas those chosen to be closest to Him—Peter, James and John—had fallen asleep. “Rise up, let us go,” He said to them. “My betrayer is near at hand.” And soon all the disciples deserted Him and fled away into the darkness, although Peter followed at a safe distance to see what the end would be.

In the trial of Jesus that ensued, the Sanhedrin, or Supreme Court of the Jews, actually broke its own laws. The trial should have been within the Temple precincts; it wasn’t. The trial should not take place at night; it did. Witnesses “evidence” should be in agreement; it wasn’t. A whole night should elapse before a verdict of death was carried out; Christ was put to death the same day.

The High Priest took matters into his own hands, asking a question that was completely forbidden by the Jewish Law, which strictly required that no question be put to the accused that might cause the person to incriminate himself. But it was finagled in such a way that Jesus was forced to answer. “I put you on oath by the living God,” Caiaphas said solemnly, “to tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus replied without hesitation that He was. Then the High Priest tore his robes claiming this was blasphemy, an insult against God that merited the death penalty, and they all agreed. This meeting, which began as a court of justice, now lost all semblance of legality, for it ended in a frenzy of venom and hatred, with these custodians of the law spitting upon the face of Jesus the Christ, blindfolding Him, hitting Him, and taunting Him to say who hit Him.

There was yet one obstacle to be cleared. The Jewish leaders might pronounce the death penalty, but only the Romans could carry it out, and Roman policy was not to become involved in religious quarrels. So the charge of blasphemy was changed to one of sedition: Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be a king and discouraged payment of taxes to Caesar.

Pilate knew full well that these were trumped-up charges, but he was frightened at the possibility of violence by the mob who had in fact hailed Jesus as their King. So Pilate tried to make Herod—the Jewish puppet ruler—responsible for condemning Jesus, and failed. He sought to arouse a spark of sympathy in the crowd by having Jesus scourged and bringing Him before them with a crown of thorns on His head, a robe of purple thrown around Him. But the thirst for blood of those present would not be denied. So Pilate, whose responsibility was to dispense Roman justice, after the futile gesture of washing his hands of the situation, delivered Jesus to be crucified.

The crucifixion of Christ would thereafter be a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles. But on that dark day at Calvary, the only person to openly confess Christ’s true identity was a Gentile, the Roman centurion in charge of the soldiers present, who cried out with certainty: “Truly this man *was* the Son of God.”²

Indeed, Jesus was, and is, and is to come. *Amen.*

¹ Adapt. John O’Connell, “1 April, Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday, Year B),” Association of Catholic Priests, [Homily Resources](https://associationofcatholicpriests.ie/homily-resource/1-april-passion-sunday-palm-sunday-year-b/), 1 April 2018 <<https://associationofcatholicpriests.ie/homily-resource/1-april-passion-sunday-palm-sunday-year-b/>> 15 March 2024.

² Adapt. John Walsh, “1 April, Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday, Year B)” Association of Catholic Priests, [Homily Resources](https://associationofcatholicpriests.ie/homily-resource/1-april-passion-sunday-palm-sunday-year-b/), 1 April 2018 <<https://associationofcatholicpriests.ie/homily-resource/1-april-passion-sunday-palm-sunday-year-b/>> 15 March 2024.