

Psalm 31:9-16: This psalm is one of lament and petition to God in the midst of crisis. Although this psalm is coloured with trust and confidence in God, it is clear that the Psalmist is writing from a place of sickness, grief, depression, and persecution.

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.

For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.

I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbours,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;

those who see me in the street flee from me.

I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;

I have become like a broken vessel.

For I hear the whispering of many - terror all around!

- as they scheme together against me,

as they plot to take my life.

But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."

My times are in your hand;

deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

Let your face shine upon your servant;

save me in your steadfast love.

Philippians 2:5-11: Jesus' humility and obedience in his incarnate, crucified life, and God's exaltation of Christ. In a world of self-preservation, self-promotion, and just plain selfishness, we might be perplexed by these words. With so many people striving for power they do not deserve, why would Christ surrender his right?

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

COCU 24C READINGS

THE LITURGY OF THE PASSION is a meditation on the suffering of Jesus. But, in the Psalm reading, we are also invited to reflect on God's solidarity with all who suffer. In the Epistle, we are called to view Christ's passion as an example for us to follow. In addition, two narratives stand out in the Lukan account of Christ's passion. Firstly, Luke places the dispute over who is the greatest here, at the Last Supper, which, when placed alongside the Philippians reading, drives home the servant nature of Jesus' death, and the call for us to embrace the same self-giving life. Secondly, only Luke includes the account of the penitent thief on the cross who asks Jesus to remember him. The response of Christ to this man, in the midst of his own suffering and persecution, demonstrates very dramatically, the extent to which the loving, serving grace of Christ reaches, and the extent to which we are called to serve and love others in Christ's name. The Liturgy of the Passion invites us into a deep and transforming journey into Christ's suffering, Christ's presence in our suffering, and Christ's call for us to share his suffering. It's not just about the passion of the Christ - it's about the passion of the followers of the Christ as well, and about sharing Christ's suffering by serving and caring for suffering people around us. May our meditation on the suffering of Jesus lead us into lives that share in the pain of, and bring healing to, places of suffering in our world. (John van de Laar, *Sacredise*)

Isaiah 50:4-9a: A prophecy of the obedient servant, beaten and mocked, but vindicated by God.

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning the Lord God wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; the one who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Luke 23:1-49: Jesus is tried before Pilate and Herod, and crucified. Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.” Then Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He answered, “You say so.” Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no basis for an accusation against this man.” But they were insistent and said, “He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.” When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him.” Then they all shouted out together, “Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!” (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.” But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished. As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and

among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’” 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?” Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I command my spirit.” Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, “Certainly this man was innocent.” And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

The complete narrative of Jesus’ journey to death, from the Last Supper to his burial, is in Luke 22:14-23:56.