

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

March 29, 2026

The Lord is my help.

Rather, he emptied himself.

Truly, Son of God.

-rvb.

Monday of Holy Week. – March 30, 26.

Isaiah 42:1-7 – Someone whispers low/ A quiet, gentle spirit/ A song of peace and justice.

John 12:1-11 – Love, oil, and hair/ Finest fragrance in the land/ A hidden agenda.

Prayer. Help me to dream dreams of the kingdom, being God never-ending love for each one of us.

Coping with stress. Take a hot bath or shower to relieve tension.

Two Good Deeds for personal growth and the welfare of others:

1. **Be Encouraging.** No one likes a wet blanket. Be encouraging when your friends share their problems with you. Be supportive when they tell you about their goals.
2. **Be Enthusiastic.** Life is too beautiful to live with dread and boredom. Embrace every day with joy and love. Start every day on a fresh start! Approach every situation with excitement! And bring this energy to everything you do and everyone you meet. :)

Quotation. “As long as you keep a person down, some part of you has to be down there to hold him down, so it means you cannot soar as you otherwise might.” Marian Anderson (1897-1993)

Tuesday of Holy Week. – March 31, 26.

**Isaiah 49:1-6 – Bend and stretch my soul/ Facile fingers shape and form/
The time is coming.**

**John 13:21-33, 36-38 – Eating on the run/ Overwhelmed with evil thoughts/
Fingering silver.**

Prayer. You are the potter who gives life to the soul of my clay.

**Coping with stress: Over the course of the day recite a mantra – “Lord
Jesus Christ, you are with me and all will be well.”**

Two Good Deeds for personal growth and the welfare of others:

- 1. Be Reasonable. Know your rights, but do not overstep your boundaries. Act within good reason — You will be the best judge of that.**
- 2. Be Repentant. Has there been anything you did of which you are not too proud? Repent and process it; do not leave it inside your system, because it is like rotting flesh — it will create an invisible stench and affect you subconsciously in your daily actions.**

Quotation. “If we were to select the most intelligent, imaginative, energetic, and stable third of humankind, all races would be represented.” Franz Boas (1858-1942)

Wednesday of Holy Week. – April 1, 26.

**Isaiah 50:4-9 – Words soaked in honey/ Dripping on the beaten face/
Soothing hand of God.**

Matthew 26:14-25 – The silver glistens/ Denial is the escape/ The bread tells it all.

Prayer. I pray that I will not betray the one who loves me.

Coping with stress. Focus on understanding rather than on being understood.

Two Good Deeds for personal growth and the welfare of others:

1. Aim for Excellence. Do not take on more than you can manage. If you are managing your responsibilities well, challenge yourself by taking on more. It is when you push your limits that you grow the most. Push your boundaries. Stretch yourself. This will increase your capacity as a person. However, avoid extremes. The pursuit of perfection is unhappiness.

2. Expect nothing less than the best. Hold yourself to the highest standard in whatever you do. Always aim for the highest goals, the best results, and the grandest vision. Live your life to the fullest. Because why should you settle for a life that is anything less?

**Quotation. “America is a vast and quarrelsome family, a family rent by racial, social, political, and class division, but a family nonetheless.”
Leonard Pitts (1957-)**

Holy Thursday of Holy Week. – April 2.

**Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14 – A bloody supper/ A meal to be remembered/
Pilgrims in great haste.**

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – An unbloody meal/ Body broken, blood poured
out/ Death and life renewed.**

**John 13:1-15 – Dirty, dusty feet/ Their squirming toes are humbled/ Jesus
bending low.**

**Lord, may our feet be clean, making them worth following in your
footsteps.**

**An eye witness account from New York
City , on a cold day in December,**

some years ago: A little boy,
about 10-years-old, was standing before a shoe store on the
roadway, barefooted, peering through the window, and shivering
With cold.

A lady approached the young boy and said,
'My, but you're in such deep thought staring in that window!'

'I was asking God to give me a pair of
shoes,' was the boy's reply.

The lady took him by the hand, went into
the store, and asked the clerk to get half a dozen pairs of socks
for the boy. She then asked if he could give her a basin of water
and a towel. He quickly brought them to her.

**She took the little fellow to the back
part of the store and, removing her gloves, knelt down, washed
his little feet, and dried them with the towel.**

By this time, the clerk had returned with
the socks. Placing a pair upon the boy's feet, she purchased him
a pair of shoes.

She tied up the remaining pairs of socks
and gave them to him. She patted him on the head and said, 'No
doubt, you will be more comfortable now.'

As she turned to go, the astonished kid
caught her by the hand, and looking up into her face, with tears
in his eyes, asked her:

'Are you God's wife?'

Prayer. May my feet be washed; may we follow you nailed to the cross and not flee from your sacrificial love.

Coping with stress. Do something to improve your appearance.

Two Good Deeds for personal growth and the welfare of others:

- 1. Be a Leader. A leader is someone who brings the best out of others, who inspires others to be bigger than who they are, who energizes people into action, and who leads the way with a common vision. Contrary to what many think, leadership does not begin when you lead a group of people. It begins in our everyday life, from how we conduct ourselves and live our lives. Are you the captain of your ship?**
- 2. Be a Listener. The ability to listen is quite underrated in our society today. Many people are good at talking but not listening. For today, make a point to listen to what others around you are saying. Ask questions. Clarify their answers. You may enhance your understanding of the situation.**

Quotation. Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good.” Charlotte Whitton (1896-1975)

Good Friday. -April 3, 26.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 – Suffering servant/ Stops the world in its tracks/ No mere mortal man.

Hebrews 4:14-16, Mo5:7-9 – True obedience/ More than just one of the boys /A mediator.

John 18:1-19:42 – Nasty times ahead/ Bitter words and piercing nails/ Early to the grave.

Prayer. I am buried alive in my sorrow and pain for you are with me, Lord.

Coping with stress. Schedule or plan a realistic day, do something nice for yourself.

Two Good Deeds for personal growth and the welfare of others:

1. Have Integrity. Set your moral and ethical principles and be consistent. Never compromise on them no matter what.

2. Be Intuitive. Follow your gut instinct. Let your intuition guide you. You will never go wrong with it. The more you follow your gut, the stronger your connection with your intuition will be. Often the heart discerns deeper than the mind.

The silence of God intensifies the tragedy of Good Friday, because what Jesus experienced many of us do. But Good Friday is not the end of the story. On Easter God broke his silence and spoke. God raised his son out of the silent depths of death. God has spoken loudly, clearly, and definitively. Life and history have changed forever.

Kneeling At the Cross

Mary, your eyes tell a sad and tragic story-

a psalm of lament rises from your sorrowful heart.

Your first-born son, half naked and innocent-

leans heavily on the wood of the cross.

Above his head is not a kingly sign,

but a ribbon of hope.

His brother and sister keep vigil-

wondering, where is God now?

Jesus, I do not see nails pinning your hands in place-

but nails piercing the axle of the Resurrection

on which the wheel of life turns.

All the way to God is God-

when we kneel at the foot of the cross.

-rvb

Quotation. "God loves homosexuals as much as he loves everybody else." Ryan White (1971-1990)

Holy Saturday – April 4, 26 – Vigil and April 5, 26. - Resurrection of the Lord, Mass of Easter Day.

Acts 10:34a, 37-43 – Friday is buried.

Colossians 3:1-4 – Resurrection steps are heard.

John 20:1-9 – Glorious New Life.

Prayer. Emily Dickinson – "While it is alive until death touches it. While it and I lap one air, dwell in one blood, under one sacrament. Show me division can split or pare. Love is like life, merely longer. Love is like death, during grave. Love is the fellow of Resurrection, scooping up the dust and chanting "LIVE."

Coping with stress. Spend time with nature - I arise to meet the day – thank you for the gift of another day of life, love, and laughter.

Two Good Deeds for personal growth and the welfare of others:

3. Be Sincere / Genuine. Speak from the heart, always. Do not say something unless you mean it. One of my core values is authenticity

— I only say things that I mean, and never say things if I do not believe in them.

4. **Be Spontaneous. Be uninhibited! Allow yourself to act freely, without restrictions. Not everything has to adhere to a plan all the time. Allow yourself to just go with the flow.**

Quotation. “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.” Franklin Roosevelt (1881-1945).

---“It is in Jesus that we live, move, and have our being.” -Acts 17:28.

Roger J. Vanden Busch

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At the Procession with Palms - Gospel

Matthew 21:1-11

When Jesus and the disciples drew near Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tethered, and a colt with her. **I love animals.**

“.....Some moment when a sickening cry and ears like errant

wings, ...Starve, scourge, deride me; ...I am dumb, I keep my
secret still. ...Fools! For I also had my hour; ... One far fierce hour
and sweet; There was a shout, about my ears, and palms
before my feet.” -G.K. Chesterton.

And if anyone should say anything to you, reply,
'The master has need of them.'

Then he will send them at once."

This happened so that what had been spoken through the prophet
might be fulfilled:

Say to daughter Zion,

"Behold, your king comes to you,

mEEK and riding on an ass,

and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had ordered them.

They brought the ass and the colt and laid their cloaks over them,
and he sat upon them.

The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road,
while others cut branches from the trees
and strewed them on the road.

The crowds preceding him and those following

kept crying out and saying:

"Hosanna to the Son of David;

blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;

hosanna in the highest."

And when he entered Jerusalem

the whole city was shaken and asked, "Who is this?"

And the crowds replied,

"This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee."

At the Mass - Reading I

[Isaiah 50:4-7](#)

The Lord GOD has given me

a well-trained tongue,

that I might know how to speak to the weary

a word that will rouse them.

Morning after morning

he opens my ear that I may hear;
and I have not rebelled,
have not turned back.

I gave my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who plucked my beard;
my face I did not shield
from buffets and spitting.

**The Lord GOD is my help,
therefore I am not disgraced;
I have set my face like flint,
knowing that I shall not be put to shame.**

A reflection, exegesis, and commentary on the scriptures.

This reading from Isaiah is the third “Servant Song.” The servant speaks of himself in the monologue. Speaking in the first person, the servant describes the prophetic aspect of his own identity and character. The servant possesses two qualities of the ideal prophet who proclaims the kingdom of God within. They are: 1. Openness to the will of God as Jesus was in today’s “Passion” narrative; and 2. The courage to speak in God’s name as Jesus did before Caiaphas, the scribes, and pharisees, verses 1-5. In verses 6-9, the servant endures humiliation, yet his patience while in the depths of trials and tribulations proclaims the servant’s unshaken faith in God. During the trial scene in the Passion narrative, it is evident Jesus is the “Suffering Servant” of whom Isaiah sings his praises. Finally in verses 10-11, all who oppose God’s servant must face retribution. The servant has a prophetic role, but Israel refuses to believe that he speaks in God’s name. **The kingdom of God is within the servant waiting to burst forth as flood waters inundate a parched land.**

SPRING - your journey has ended here, In a draught.

**SEEDING – the planter scatters. The seed is sown. It is covered by
plowed earth. Caressed and held, waiting for the rain.**

**WAITING – heat dances on the crackled, earthen floor. Skipping down
the city streets, it tiptoes on colored roof tops.**

**CRAVING – a solitary cloud creeps across the empty creek moaning,
rain, rain, rain.**

-rvb.

Responsorial Psalm

[Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24;](#)

R. (2a) My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

All who see me scoff at me;

they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads:

**“He relied on the LORD; let him deliver him,
let him rescue him, if he loves him.”**

R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

**Indeed, many dogs surround me,
a pack of evildoers closes in upon me;**

They have pierced my hands and my feet;

I can count all my bones.

R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

**They divide my garments among them,
and for my vesture they cast lots.**

But you, O LORD, be not far from me;

O my help, hasten to aid me.

R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

I will proclaim your name to my brethren;

in the midst of the assembly I will praise you:

“You who fear the LORD, praise him;

**all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him;
revere him, all you descendants of Israel!”**

R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Reading II

[Philippians 2:6-11](#)

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

A reflection, exegesis, and commentary on the scriptures.

In this reading from Philippians, Paul shares with the community a Christ-focused hymn to be sung during the liturgy. The hymn is a mirror image of the first reading from Isaiah as it exalts Jesus' humiliation which he suffered on the cross. Like the "suffering servant," he was obedient and because he was, he is exalted by his Father.

As one listens to this hymn being chanted, we hear in verses 1-4 of the exhortation to unity and meekness; Verses 5-7 unfold like a flower revealing the 7-fold humbling and downward movements of Jesus in our lives. As the flower unfolds in its untold beauty, verses 9-11 praise and exalt the Christ.

Speaking of the 7-fold downward movements of Jesus, this would make for an ideal meditation on the humility, suffering, obedience, and the self-emptying love of Jesus during Holy Week--

The Seven Downward Movements of Jesus

A spiritual pattern of how Christ comes down into our lives to raise us up.

1. From Divine Glory to Human Flesh

Jesus begins in the fullness of divine majesty yet chooses to become human.

- This movement reminds us that God meets us in our humanity, not above it.

2. From Humanity to Servanthood

He doesn't come as a king or philosopher but as a servant.

- In our lives, this means Jesus enters not through our strengths but through our need.

3. From Servanthood to Obedience

Jesus embraces the Father's will even when it leads to suffering.

- He teaches us that surrender is not defeat but trust.

4. From Obedience to the Cross

He accepts the most humiliating form of death.

- Jesus meets us in our deepest pain, shame, and brokenness.

5. From the Cross to the Grave

He descends into death itself.

- Christ goes to the very places we fear most—loss, darkness, endings.

6. From the Grave to the Depths (the “Harrowing of Hell”)

Tradition holds that Jesus descends to the realm of the dead to free captives.

- Even the places we think are beyond hope are not beyond His reach.

7. From the Depths into Our Hearts

The final descent is the most intimate: Jesus comes to dwell within us.

- He enters the hidden, wounded, unspoken places of our lives to bring resurrection. -Internet.

Verse before the Gospel

[Philippians 2:8-9](#)

Christ became obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name which is above every name.

Gospel

[Matthew 26:14—27:66](#)

One of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot,
went to the chief priests and said,
"What are you willing to give me
if I hand him over to you?"

They paid him thirty pieces of silver,
and from that time on he looked for an opportunity
to hand him over.

**On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread,
the disciples approached Jesus and said,
"Where do you want us to prepare
for you to eat the Passover?"**

He said,

"Go into the city to a certain man and tell him,
'The teacher says, "My appointed time draws near;
in your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples.'"
The disciples then did as Jesus had ordered,
and prepared the Passover.

When it was evening,
he reclined at table with the Twelve.
And while they were eating, he said,
"Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me."
Deeply distressed at this,
they began to say to him one after another,
"Surely it is not I, Lord?"

He said in reply,

"He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me
is the one who will betray me.

The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him,
but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed.
It would be better for that man if he had never been born."

Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply,

"Surely it is not I, Rabbi?"

He answered, "You have said so."

**While they were eating,
Jesus took bread, said the blessing,
broke it, and giving it to his disciples said,
"Take and eat; this is my body."
Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying,
"Drink from it, all of you,
for this is my blood of the covenant,
which will be shed on behalf of many
for the forgiveness of sins.**

I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine
until the day when I drink it with you new
in the kingdom of my Father."
Then, after singing a hymn,
they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus said to them,
"This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken,
for it is written:

*I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed;*
but after I have been raised up,
I shall go before you to Galilee."

Peter said to him in reply,
"Though all may have their faith in you shaken,
mine will never be."

Jesus said to him,
"Amen, I say to you,
this very night before the cock crows,
you will deny me three times."

Peter said to him,
"Even though I should have to die with you,
I will not deny you."

And all the disciples spoke likewise.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane,
and he said to his disciples,

"Sit here while I go over there and pray."

He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee,
and began to feel sorrow and distress.

Then he said to them,

"My soul is sorrowful even to death.

Remain here and keep watch with me."

He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying,

"My Father, if it is possible,

let this cup pass from me;

yet, not as I will, but as you will."

When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep.

He said to Peter,
"So you could not keep watch with me for one hour?
Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test.
The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."
Withdrawing a second time, he prayed again,
"My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass
without my drinking it, your will be done!"
Then he returned once more and found them asleep,
for they could not keep their eyes open.
He left them and withdrew again and prayed a third time,
saying the same thing again.
Then he returned to his disciples and said to them,
"Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?
Behold, the hour is at hand
when the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners.
Get up, let us go.
Look, my betrayer is at hand."

While he was still speaking,
Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived,
accompanied by a large crowd, with swords and clubs,
who had come from the chief priests and the elders
of the people.
His betrayer had arranged a sign with them, saying,
"The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him."
Immediately he went over to Jesus and said,
"Hail, Rabbi!" and he kissed him.
Jesus answered him,
"Friend, do what you have come for."
Then stepping forward they laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.
And behold, one of those who accompanied Jesus
put his hand to his sword, drew it,
and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear.
Then Jesus said to him,
"Put your sword back into its sheath,
for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.
Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father
and he will not provide me at this moment

with more than twelve legions of angels?
But then how would the Scriptures be fulfilled
which say that it must come to pass in this way?"
At that hour Jesus said to the crowds,
"Have you come out as against a robber,
with swords and clubs to seize me?
Day after day I sat teaching in the temple area,
yet you did not arrest me.
But all this has come to pass
that the writings of the prophets may be fulfilled."
Then all the disciples left him and fled.

Those who had arrested Jesus led him away
to Caiaphas the high priest,
where the scribes and the elders were assembled.
Peter was following him at a distance
as far as the high priest's courtyard,
and going inside he sat down with the servants
to see the outcome.
The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin
kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus
in order to put him to death,
but they found none,
though many false witnesses came forward.
Finally two came forward who stated,
"This man said, 'I can destroy the temple of God
and within three days rebuild it.'"
The high priest rose and addressed him,
"Have you no answer?
What are these men testifying against you?"
But Jesus was silent.
Then the high priest said to him,
"I order you to tell us under oath before the living God
whether you are the Christ, the Son of God."
Jesus said to him in reply,
"You have said so.
But I tell you:
From now on you will see 'the Son of Man

seated at the right hand of the Power'
and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'"
Then the high priest tore his robes and said,
"He has blasphemed!
What further need have we of witnesses?
You have now heard the blasphemy;
what is your opinion?"
They said in reply,
"He deserves to die!"
Then they spat in his face and struck him,
while some slapped him, saying,
"Prophecy for us, Christ: who is it that struck you?"

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard.
One of the maids came over to him and said,
"You too were with Jesus the Galilean."
But he denied it in front of everyone, saying,
"I do not know what you are talking about!"
As he went out to the gate, another girl saw him
and said to those who were there,
"This man was with Jesus the Nazorean."
Again he denied it with an oath,
"I do not know the man!"
A little later the bystanders came over and said to Peter,
"Surely you too are one of them;
even your speech gives you away."
At that he began to curse and to swear,
"I do not know the man."
And immediately a cock crowed.
Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had spoken:
"Before the cock crows you will deny me three times."
He went out and began to weep bitterly.

When it was morning,
all the chief priests and the elders of the people
took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.
They bound him, led him away,
and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.

Then Judas, his betrayer, seeing that Jesus had been condemned,
deeply regretted what he had done.

He returned the thirty pieces of silver
to the chief priests and elders, saying,
"I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."

They said,
"What is that to us?
Look to it yourself!"

Flinging the money into the temple,
he departed and went off and hanged himself.

The chief priests gathered up the money, but said,
"It is not lawful to deposit this in the temple treasury,
for it is the price of blood."

After consultation, they used it to buy the potter's field
as a burial place for foreigners.

That is why that field even today is called the Field of Blood.

Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah
the prophet,

*And they took the thirty pieces of silver,
the value of a man with a price on his head,
a price set by some of the Israelites,
and they paid it out for the potter's field
just as the Lord had commanded me.*

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and he questioned him,
"Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus said, "You say so."

And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders,
he made no answer.

Then Pilate said to him,

"Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?"

But he did not answer him one word,
so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now on the occasion of the feast
the governor was accustomed to release to the crowd
one prisoner whom they wished.

And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

So when they had assembled, Pilate said to them,

"Which one do you want me to release to you,

Barabbas, or Jesus called Christ?"

For he knew that it was out of envy

that they had handed him over.

While he was still seated on the bench,

his wife sent him a message,

"Have nothing to do with that righteous man.

I suffered much in a dream today because of him."

The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds

to ask for Barabbas but to destroy Jesus.

The governor said to them in reply,

"Which of the two do you want me to release to you?"

They answered, "Barabbas!"

Pilate said to them,

"Then what shall I do with Jesus called Christ?"

They all said,

"Let him be crucified!"

But he said,

"Why? What evil has he done?"

They only shouted the louder,

"Let him be crucified!"

When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all,

but that a riot was breaking out instead,

he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd,

saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood.

Look to it yourselves."

And the whole people said in reply,

"His blood be upon us and upon our children."

Then he released Barabbas to them,

but after he had Jesus scourged,

he handed him over to be crucified.

**Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium
and gathered the whole cohort around him.**

They stripped off his clothes

and threw a scarlet military cloak about him.

Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head,
and a reed in his right hand.

And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying,
"Hail, King of the Jews!"

They spat upon him and took the reed
and kept striking him on the head.

And when they had mocked him,
they stripped him of the cloak,
dressed him in his own clothes,
and led him off to crucify him.

As they were going out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon;
this man they pressed into service
to carry his cross.

And when they came to a place called Golgotha
—which means Place of the Skull —,

they gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall.

But when he had tasted it, he refused to drink.

After they had crucified him,
they divided his garments by casting lots;
then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

And they placed over his head the written charge against him:

This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Two revolutionaries were crucified with him,
one on his right and the other on his left.

Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying,
"You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,
save yourself, if you are the Son of God,
and come down from the cross!"

Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said,

"He saved others; he cannot save himself.

So he is the king of Israel!

Let him come down from the cross now,
and we will believe in him.

He trusted in God;

let him deliver him now if he wants him.

For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

The revolutionaries who were crucified with him also kept abusing him in the same way.

From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

And about three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"

which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Some of the bystanders who heard it said,

"This one is calling for Elijah."

Immediately one of them ran to get a sponge; he soaked it in wine, and putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink.

But the rest said,

"Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to save him."

But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit.

Here all kneel and pause for a short time.

And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom.

The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said,

"Truly, this was the Son of God!"

There were many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him.

Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus.

**He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus;
then Pilate ordered it to be handed over.
Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen
and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock.
Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb
and departed.
But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary
remained sitting there, facing the tomb.**

The next day, the one following the day of preparation,
the chief priests and the Pharisees
gathered before Pilate and said,
"Sir, we remember that this impostor while still alive said,
'After three days I will be raised up.'
Give orders, then, that the grave be secured until the third day,
lest his disciples come and steal him and say to the people,
'He has been raised from the dead.'
This last imposture would be worse than the first."
Pilate said to them,
"The guard is yours;
go, secure it as best you can."
So they went and secured the tomb
by fixing a seal to the stone and setting the guard.

A reflection, exegesis, and commentary on the scriptures.

The Passion narrative juggles a series of contrasting characters, events,
and dramas. The first part of the Passion is steeped in darkness, deceit,
and deviousness, whereas the second part gropes toward the light and
the life of the Resurrection:

First Part:**men****foe****getting****Thirty pieces of silver****cursed****Judas at Passover not at****sleepiness****deceit****selling opportunity****Second Part****women****friend****giving****vile ointment****blessed****the Lord's Supper****support****devotion****burying the dead****Who are we in this Passion story of conflict, contrast, and contradiction?**

As Christians may we not condemn the Christ by our silence and indifference. As Americans may we not lose our Democracy and our Constitutional rights by our silence and indifference. Let us roll back the stones lest Jesus will be the last Christian to die on the cross.

Ironically, here is another kind of silence that condemns. Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "The Grand Inquisitor" portrays Jesus on trial before religious and political leaders. The story concludes: "When the Inquisitor stopped speaking, he waited some time for his prisoner to answer him. Jesus' silence weighed down upon him. His silence condemned the Inquisitor and his Tribunal. He saw that the prisoner had listened carefully all the time, looking gently in his face. But he did not want to reply. The Inquisitor longed for Jesus to say something, however bitter and terrible. Jesus approached him in silence and softly kissed him on the forehead. That was his answer. The Inquisitor shuddered. His lips moved. He went to the door, opened it, and said to him. 'Leave, no more...Come not at all, never, never!'" And he let Jesus out into the dark alleys of the town (from this point on my words) where ICE agents were beating, killing, and rounding up immigrants without due process. The prisoner walked through the midst of the barbaric attacks by ICE agents; it is said that Jesus was never crucified for he died that day. His silence condemned them; they were on trial, and Jesus found them to be guilty.

The poet, T.S. Eliot reminds us, "This is the greatest treason, to do the right thing for the wrong reason." In the initial reading from the gospel of

Matthew, before the three readings are proclaimed, the author strives to demonstrate that this prophet from Nazareth is the promised Messiah.

However, he differs from the anticipated one. While the people were cheering for the right person, it was for the wrong reason. Jesus enters Jerusalem in a humble, lowly fashion, and not like that of a mighty warrior king as the people cried out,

“The crowds preceding him and those following

kept crying out and saying:

"Hosanna to the Son of David;

blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;

hosanna in the highest."

The people who cheered Jesus were looking for a messiah who would be a weapon against the Romans. When people are faced with a crisis, they look for a fix for their pain instead of dealing with their pain and making choices for themselves.

The Passion narrative is found in all four Gospels. Each evangelist has a distinct perspective of the suffering/crucified Christ. The passion stories play a special role in the New Testament. They do not teach abstract

theology, like some of the letters of Paul. Nor are they a collection of sayings, like parables. They are narratives, the longest in the Christian bible, which track the final days of Jesus through his execution as a criminal and the scattering of his bewildered followers, from Gethsemane to the grave. Let us look beyond the grave. We are co-creators with God, not puppets on a string waiting for something to happen or someone to save us. We make life happen. “We are healed of our suffering only to be experiencing it to the fullest.” – Marcel Proust.

Final prayer: God, your son, Jesus always moves downward so that we can be lifted upward. Where we expect God to be “above,” He is “below”—in humility instead of pride, in service instead of “status,” in suffering instead of “control,” and in love instead of “egocentrism.” Amen.

May the blessings of Health, Happiness, and Holiness be upon you and your loved ones. Amen.

-Roger J. Vanden Busch.