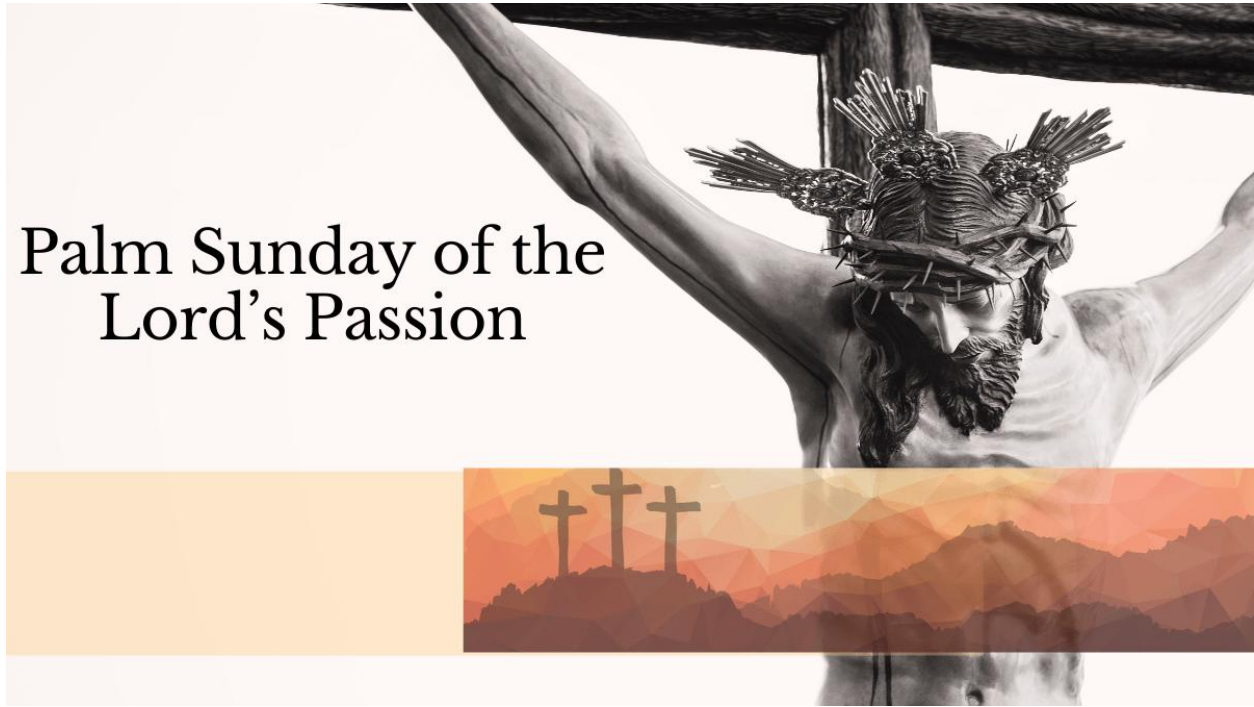


# Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion



**Introduction to The Lucan Passion Narrative:** The passion narratives provide the climax for each of the four gospels, catching up themes that weave their way through the evangelists' entire portrayal of Jesus' life and bringing them to a dramatic completion. In deft strokes the evangelists tell us of the final hours of Jesus' life – his last meal with his disciples; his arrest in Gethsemane; his interrogation by the religious leaders; the trial before Pilate; and finally the heart clutching scenes of Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial.

Although the Passion narratives of all four Gospels are similar in many ways, there are also significant differences among them. The Gospel of Luke is dependent upon Mark for the composition of the passion narrative – as Luke is in many aspects of the entire gospel – but Luke has incorporated much of his own special tradition into the narrative. Among the distinctive sections in Luke are:

- (1) the tradition of the institution of the Eucharist (Luke 22:15-20);
- (2) Jesus' farewell discourse (Luke 22:21-38);
- (3) the mistreatment and interrogation of Jesus (Luke 22:63-71);
- (4) Jesus before Herod and his second appearance before Pilate (Luke 23:6-16);
- (5) words addressed to the women followers on the way to the crucifixion (Luke 23:27-32);
- (6) words to the penitent thief (Luke 23:39-41);
- (7) the death of Jesus (Luke 23:46, 47b-49). Luke stresses the innocence of Jesus (Luke 23:4, 14-15, 22) who is the victim of the powers of evil (Luke 22:3, 31, 53) and who goes to his death in fulfillment of his Father's will (Luke 22:42, 46). Throughout the narrative Luke emphasizes the mercy, compassion, and healing power of Jesus (Luke 22:51; 23:43) who does not go to death lonely and deserted, but is accompanied by others who follow him on the way of the cross (Luke 23:26-31, 49).

## Chapter 22 The Passover Meal

<sup>14</sup> When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; <sup>16</sup> for, I tell you, I shall not eat it (again) until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God." <sup>17</sup> Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, "Take this and share it

among yourselves; <sup>18</sup> for I tell you (that) from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” <sup>19</sup> Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” <sup>20</sup> And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.”

<sup>21</sup> “And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me is with me on the table; <sup>22</sup> for the Son of Man indeed goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed.” <sup>23</sup> And they began to debate among themselves who among them would do such a deed.

### Commentary

The account of Jesus’ last supper is an important and key narrative in the Christian community. It provides the foundation of our Eucharistic celebration, a poignant theology of the Messiah’s death, and more. In our Catholic tradition, Jesus’ words convey the sacramental understanding of the Real Presence of Christ in our celebrations. These ten short verses contain more than a simple commentary can provide.

In these brief notes we should remember as Fr. Donald Senior notes: “Luke’s Gospel delights in portraying Jesus at meals: the supper in the house of Simon the Pharisee where the woman had anointed Jesus and washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, and in turn received the gift of unconditional forgiveness (7:36-50); meals with sinners that provoked the ire of his opponents (15:1-2); breaking bread with the crowds who hungered for his word (9:10-17).” While Christian denominations have debated which congregation faithfully celebrates Jesus’ intention of that last meal, we should remember that this meal is an eloquent sign of Jesus’ entire mission – the gathering of one people, breaking one bread in order that all might be one in God.

Luke Timothy Johnson (*Luke*, 342) explains:

“Nowhere in Luke’s story is there such a weight of interpretation given to every gesture, and nowhere is this interpretation so thoroughly self-referential as here. Note for example, Jesus’ first statement over the cup (22:17), He blesses the cup. He passes it to his apostles, telling them to “*share it among yourselves*” since he will not drink it again until the kingdom of God comes. The symbolism of sharing implicit in drinking from the same cup is here exploited to signify...the role of the disciples after Jesus’ death... [A]t one level, this is an implicit bestowal of authority and fellowship, for such was the status of those who drank from the same cup as the king... The apostles are to continue Jesus’ authority after the resurrection.

At another level, sharing equally in the cup signifies as well as a sharing in the suffering of the Messiah, for as we will shortly learn, this is the cup of suffering in which his blood is being poured out for them.... It is also, in a very real sense, through the fellowship meals of believers that Jesus as the resurrected one will share again in the fruit of the vine of the kingdom of God. The time of “final liberation” will come only with the return of the Son of Man (21:28); but in the meals of the community, the “liberation” accomplished by Jesus will be realized.”

But the words of blessing over the cup: “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you*” is rich in reference – first of all to the Passover celebration itself. Each of the four cups in the Passover celebration mingle praise for God and petitions for the people – all centered on the elemental experience of liberation that was the Exodus. It was an escape from Egypt, but more it was the formation of a people made explicit in the giving of the Torah, establishing the covenant, and the promise of a land. Just as the covenant was sealed by the sacrificial blood then, it is by the giving of life in sacrifice that a regeneration of God’s people can take place.

### Notes

**22:14 with the apostles:** In this verse Luke makes three subtle changes (to Mark 14:17)

- “*the hour*” replaces “when evening came” – Luke’s solemn proclamation of the “hour,” a recurring marker of importance in his gospel (*cf.* 1:10, 2:38, 7:21, 10:21, 12:12, 12:39, 12:40, 12:46, and 13:31), also makes the contrast to the betrayal in the Garden: “*this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness.*” (22:53)
- “*apostles*” replaces “*the twelve*” – perhaps this is some later sensitivity to the betrayal of Judas, but given Luke’s missionary imperative, he is connecting apostleship (being sent) with the centrality of the Eucharistic setting.
- the apostles recline with Jesus rather than he with them emphasizing the central role of Jesus as teacher and host.

**22:15** *eagerly desired*: *epithymia epethymesa* literally is “I have desired with desire”

**this Passover**: Luke clearly identifies this last supper of Jesus with the apostles as a Passover meal that commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Jesus reinterprets the significance of the Passover by setting it in the context of the kingdom of God (Luke 22:16). The “deliverance” associated with the Passover finds its new meaning in the blood that will be shed (Luke 22:20).

**before I suffer**: this constitutes a reminder of the three predictions of his suffering and death and points to the deeper significance of the meal. This is unique to Luke.

**22:16 until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God**: The natural subject of fulfillment is the Passover meal itself. This then raises the question on how the fulfillment will occur. There are two possibilities:

- An eschatological banquet (*cf.* 13:29 and 14:15-24) in which the Passover liberation theme is complete when the time of the Second Coming and there is true liberation.
- The celebration of the Eucharistic meals by the Christian community at which the risen Lord is present.
- ...and of course, in true Catholic tradition, both together.

**22:17 gave thanks**: *eucharisteo* which refers to the *berekah* or blessing prayer spoken over the elements at the Jewish meal

**a cup**: Luke has two blessings over “a cup” – one before and one after the breaking of the bread (*cf.* vv.17, 20) – where the other gospels have one cup blessing followed by the breaking of the bread. According to most ancient discussions of the Passover there are four cups of wine. Each has its own blessing

**22:18 I shall not drink...until the kingdom of God comes**: This phrase appears to echo one of the later cup blessings in which the *berekah* prays that God will reign over the people of Israel for ever and ever. This gives a context for the earlier command to share the cup among all present.

**22:19 took...blessing...broke...gave**: This is the same sequence in the feeding of the multitudes in 9:16. Luke is identical to the other synoptic gospels save one respect. Where the others use *eulogeo* (bless), Luke uses *eucharisteo* (give thanks). Luke’s narrative is closer to the Pauline description in 1 Cor 11:24 than the other synoptic gospel accounts.

**This is my body, which will be given for you**: In the Passover haggadah (the telling of the story) the words interpret the bread as “because our fathers were redeemed from Egypt.” These words are told before the bread is broken and given – for that part there are no words. When Jesus speaks these words he is proclaiming that his own body will be broken for redemption. In the Catholic understanding, this also points to the Eucharist where the Body and Blood of Christ are sacramentally present.

**22:19c-20 which will be given . . . do this in memory of me**: these words are omitted in some important Western text manuscripts and a few Syriac manuscripts. Other ancient text types, including the oldest papyrus manuscript of Luke dating from the late second or early third century, contain the longer reading presented here. The Lucan account of the words of institution of the Eucharist bears a close resemblance

to the words of institution in the Pauline tradition (see 1 Cor 11:23-26) which was written some 30 years prior to Luke.

**22:19 do this in memory of me:** the “do” in this verse is in the present imperative and is thus a command to continue the practice. The word *anamnesis* is more than simple memory. While certainly requiring a longer explanation, in haggadic liturgical use, the Hebrew *zakaron* (which the LXX translates as *anamnesis*) is far more than psychological memory. The biblical concept of anamnesis is not an abstract concept or mere recollection, but in the Old Testament it is always closely bound up with an action. Remembrance is not only an activity which is concerned with the past, but one commits the will, soul and body to that past which is being made present (cf. Isa 47:7 and Eccl 11:8). It is neither a question of aesthetic recollection nor of epistemological speculation, but rather that a person remembers God means that he or she is placed in a context—a context which consists of God’s activity in the past, the present and the future – in a single moment which exists before us.

**22:20 the new covenant in my blood:** the covenant (*berith/diatheke*) is a binding relationship and is the central bond of loyalty and love between God and his people. The OT symbolism of blood is the divine principle of life: “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb 9:22). That Jesus points to this new covenant being formed in his blood means that “divine blood” is being poured out – not only for forgiveness – but also a source of divine life. What has previously prohibited (drinking blood, that which is reserved to and returned to God) is now freely given.

**shed for you:** The OT background of the phrase in 22:20, “in my blood which will be shed for you” (*en tō haimati mou to hyper hymōn ekchynnomenon*), is less clear. Scholars see (1) a material allusion to the sacrificed paschal lamb, with its redemptive shedding of blood, thus to Exod. 12:6–7, 13 (2) a material allusion to the bloody sacrifice that established the Mosaic covenant, thus to Exod. 24:8; Zech. 9:11; (3) a verbal allusion to the Hebrew text of Isa. 53:12 (Suffering Servant); and (4) a phrase that simply expresses violent death.

**22:22 as it has been determined:** Jesus as made clear the necessity that the Son of Man suffer (9:44, 17:25). The perfect participle of *orizo* shows that this is God’s will that directs events.

### Teachings at the Table

<sup>24</sup> Then an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest. <sup>25</sup> He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as ‘Benefactors’; <sup>26</sup> but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. <sup>27</sup> For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves. <sup>28</sup> It is you who have stood by me in my trials; <sup>29</sup> and I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me, <sup>30</sup> that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

<sup>31</sup> “Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.” <sup>33</sup> He said to him, “Lord, I am prepared to go to prison and to die with you.” <sup>34</sup> But he replied, “I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows this day, you will deny three times that you know me.”

<sup>35</sup> He said to them, “When I sent you forth without a money bag or a sack or sandals, were you in need of anything?” “No, nothing,” they replied. <sup>36</sup> He said to them, “But now one who has a money bag should take it, and likewise a sack, and one who does not have a sword should sell his cloak and buy one. <sup>37</sup> For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, namely, ‘He was counted among the wicked’; and indeed what is written about me is coming to fulfillment.” <sup>38</sup> Then they said, “Lord, look, there are two swords here.” But he replied, “It is enough!”

## Commentary

Luke's arrangement of the material makes the harshest contrast between the covenant action of Jesus and the action of the betrayer at the same table. But the role of Judas is mentioned only. The focus of the "teaching" is for the disciples who do not yet fully comprehend who Jesus is or what is at stake on this Passover eve. Jesus warns them that even presence at the Lord's table is no guarantee of fidelity to Jesus. What constitutes fidelity is to bear fruit in ministry and witness. Jesus understands his earthly life is coming to an end and thus the table scene is a last testament in which he admonishes and encourages the apostles to understand authority, leadership and mission in the light of Jesus' ministry with them: as servants.

Yet, the callousness of the whole group of the Twelve is revealed as their argument about which of them could be guilty of betrayal evolves into a dispute about their greatness. This dispute occurs at a different place in the other Synoptics (Mark 10:42–45; Matt 20:25–28). Jesus tells them that the kingdom has completely different categories of greatness than the world has. He noted ironically that those who tyrannize over their subjects are called "Benefactors": this was the case in Rome, Egypt, and other Gentile territories. The one who is great in the kingdom of God will be the one who serves in imitation of the Master himself. The Twelve will be given authority, however they will also be subject to temptation and testing. They can expect to share the fate of Jesus.

Jesus addresses the leader of the new patriarchs by his Hebrew name. He says that Satan has asked to test the Twelve; the implication is that God's special permission is needed to interfere with the Twelve. Jesus' powerful intercession will help the leader, but Peter is free to choose, however badly. Jesus refers to the coming apostasy of Peter, from which he will return to strengthen his brothers. Peter does not accept the hint of his weakness and protests his allegiance and fidelity. Jesus then utters the prediction of his betrayal with unequivocal clarity. Peter must get over thinking that his special role among the Twelve was earned by his own strength.

Luke's Gospel reserves a special role for the Twelve, that core group of Jesus' disciples. The very number was symbolic of the gathering of the lost tribes of Israel, the renewal of God's people that was the object of Jesus' mission. His disciples were to be the witnesses to Jesus' teaching and healing (24:44-49); they were to gather the church and take its mission to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) So Jesus prays for Simon and for the other disciples that the power of evil would not sweep them away (22:31-32). Even though Peter will weaken, the power of grace will draw him back, and his ministry, in turn, is to strengthen his brothers and sisters in the community. As we will see, the evangelist does his best to tell the passion story in this spirit, downplaying the impact of Peter's denial and passing over in silence the flight of the other disciples. For Luke the sure reconciliation that the Risen Christ brings to the community dissolves memories of its infidelities.

In a parting message to all, Jesus asks them to recall the instructions they were given for the preaching mission (9:3). They had been told to rely on God's providence for the things they would need. Now, because of the impending crisis of Jesus' passion and death, and in view of the persecution sure to come on the early church, Jesus tells them to prepare themselves well for the struggle, even to preparing to defend themselves. He is speaking figuratively to alert them to the seriousness of the struggle, but they take him literally, producing two swords. "It is enough!" puts an end to a conversation that has been over their heads.

## Notes

**22:24 *an argument broke out among***: literally "there happened a rivalry (*philoneikia*) among them." The substance of this account is included in Mark (10:33-34) and Matthew (18:1 *ff*), as well as an earlier version in Luke 9:46.

**22:25 benefactors:** this word occurs as a title of rulers in the Hellenistic world. Where Luke softens Mark's strong sense of domination (Mk 10:42) to something more neutral, but still the intent is to compare the sense of those who "*lord it over*" and those "*in authority*" with those who would serve

**22:28 who have stood by me in my trials:** the verb *diameno* has the sense of "enduring" and continuing to do so. It is Luke's interpretation of the parable of the sower (8:12, 15) – those who fall away do not bear fruit. Those who persevere bring fruit to maturity. This recognition of fidelity is a prelude to the bestowal of authority in v.29

**22:29 I confer a kingdom:** The act of conferring (*diatithemi*) has a clear legal tone. What Jesus has been given by the Father is now conveyed to the apostles. What has been conveyed – *basileia*. As mentioned in other notes, this Greek word is better translated as "reigning" with the kingly authority than referring to a kingdom and its sense of geographical location.

**22:30 you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel:** Apart from the other gospel accounts, Luke uses the setting of the banquet table of the kingdom to point forward to the role that the apostles will have with the restored Israel in the narrative of Acts.

**22:31-32 Simon, Simon...:** Jesus' prayer for Simon's faith and the commission to strengthen his brothers anticipates the post-resurrectional prominence of Peter in the first half of Acts, where he appears as the spokesman for the Christian community and the one who begins the mission to the Gentiles (Acts 10-11).

**22:31 Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat:** The verb *exaiteo* often has the sense of "seeking the surrender of someone." Jesus points out that a period of temptation and testing awaits the apostles – just as it had for Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry (4:1-13)

**all of you:** literally, "you." The translation reflects the meaning of the Greek text that uses a second person plural pronoun here.

**22:32 but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail:** Here the word "you" is singular and is addressed to Peter

**once you have turned back:** the verb *epistrepho* is frequently used for "conversion." Here it points to Peter's post denial rehabilitation.

**22:35 When I sent you forth...:** Previously they lacked nothing as they went out among believers, but in their mission to the world such hospitality can no longer be assumed.

**22:36 money bag...sack...sword...cloak:** In contrast to the ministry of the Twelve and of the seventy-two during the period of Jesus (Luke 9:3; 10:4), in the future period of the church the missionaries must be prepared for the opposition they will face in a world hostile to their preaching.

**22:37 this scripture must be fulfilled:** The Suffering Servant canticle of Isaiah (52:13-53:12) is referenced here and has three purposes: (a) interpreting Jesus' death in terms of the fulfillment of God's will rather than human plans, (b) interprets this death as one of suffering for the lawless and sinners although he himself is innocent, and (c) it shows that Scripture has foretold by Jesus being arrested as *lestes* (22:52) and being crucified between two *kaourgoi* (23:32)

**22:38 It is enough!:** the farewell discourse ends abruptly with these words of Jesus spoken to the disciples when they take literally what was intended as figurative language about being prepared to face the world's hostility.

### The Time of Testing

<sup>39</sup> Then going out he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup> When he arrived at the place he said to them, "Pray that you may not undergo the test." <sup>41</sup> After

withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, <sup>42</sup> saying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." <sup>43</sup> (And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. <sup>44</sup> He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.) <sup>45</sup> When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief. <sup>46</sup> He said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test."

<sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking, a crowd approached and in front was one of the Twelve, a man named Judas. He went up to Jesus to kiss him. <sup>48</sup> Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" <sup>49</sup> His disciples realized what was about to happen, and they asked, "Lord, shall we strike with a sword?" <sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. <sup>51</sup> But Jesus said in reply, "Stop, no more of this!" Then he touched the servant's ear and healed him. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus said to the chief priests and temple guards and elders who had come for him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> Day after day I was with you in the temple area, and you did not seize me; but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness."

### Preliminary Note

Of course we all know that after the meal with his disciples that Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Actually, no gospel says that. Matthew and Mark wrote that he went to a garden. John says he went to Gethsemane. Fuse them all together and you get the "Garden of Gethsemane." What does Luke say? Luke only calls it "the place." There is no garden specifically mentioned nor is Gethsemane. Is it important? Well, it is a reminder to be attentive to the text before you and not meld the familiar stories and scenes from other sacred writers. Each sacred writer has something distinctive that can be missed if one fuses all the details from other accounts.

Part of the distinctiveness is the chiasmic structure of the account – in other words, a sideways pyramid. What is at the center is important and the structure draws attention to it. Without offering a full explanation, the center of vv.39-46 is v.42: *Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.* Throughout Luke, Jesus is portrayed as entering prayer before a key moment – and this holds true here also.

### Commentary

After the Passover feast, Jesus and his disciples go "to the Mount of Olives" (22:39). Luke situates this dramatic prayer of Jesus on that mountain where Judaism expected the end of the world to take place. Luke has streamlined and simplified Mark's account of the agony in the garden. The scene is focused on Jesus and not the disciples (as Luke does not include Jesus' repeated trips back to the apostles). Jesus does not select three disciples out of the group to accompany him; as a result, his admonition to pray so as not to be overcome by temptation is addressed to all the Twelve (and the readers) as a main theme (vv. 40, 46). Jesus himself is tested by his desire to avoid the cup, but he accepts the will of the Father. This is the climax of the struggle with Satan (see 4:1–13); an angel comes to his aid, so that he is able to pray with greater intensity. His sweat is not bloody but falls from him like drops of blood. Meanwhile the disciples, still unaware of the significance of what is going on in their midst, have fallen asleep. In the warning to them, we hear Jesus admonishing us to strengthen ourselves by fervent prayer for the persecution that will surely come to his followers.

Jesus asks his disciples to join him in prayer that they, too, "*may not undergo the test*" (22:40). The "test" here means that final struggle between good and evil that Judaism expected at the end of the world, a "test" experienced whenever a person of faith encounters the aggressive power of death and evil in the world. Jesus' own prayer has that same fierce intensity: he is dedicated to doing his Father's will but he also prays for deliverance from the power of death. The very act of prayer, of pouring out one's anguish and fear before God, brings strength. So Jesus stands up and goes to find his disciples sleeping – "*from*

*grief*” the evangelist notes, softening the impact of yet another sign of their weakness. Once again Jesus warns them of the approaching “test”; the community may not be ready for the fierce power of death but Jesus, the Son of God, is.

At that moment Judas, identified with tragic irony as one of the Twelve (v. 47), brings a crowd to arrest Jesus. In Luke’s account, his treacherous kiss never reaches Jesus because the Servant-Master already knows its purpose: “*Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?*” (22:48). The disciples, dazed by this onslaught and still not comprehending Jesus’ teaching, reach for their weapons: “*Lord, shall we strike with a sword?*” (22:48). It is a question that Christians have often asked when confronted with evil. Without waiting for a reply, one disciple (unlike John, Luke does not identify him as Peter) slashes off the ear of the High Priest’s servant. Characteristic of this gospel, Jesus’ response to the issue of violent reprisal is to reach out and heal the wounded man. The Jesus who taught his disciples to “*love your enemy*” and not to return evil for evil (6:27-36) lives by his own words.

Jesus upbraids the arresting party for seeking him in an out-of-the-way place under cover of darkness, indicating that their deed cannot bear the light of day. What they are doing is indeed a sign of the “power of darkness” (v. 53). Jesus refers to the time of his passion as the “hour”; but the tone is not positive as in John’s Gospel, where the hour is the time fulfilling the Father’s plan (John 13:1; 17:1); here it is “*your hour*” of darkness.

### Notes

**22: 39 *Mount of Olives*:** Luke omits the place-name “Gethsemane. It is a small ridge of three summits, about two miles long, the highest of which is not quite 3,000 feet above sea level, running N to S across from the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem. It is known for its abundance of olive trees.

**22:40 *Pray that you may not undergo the test*:** Luke’s gospel has two interesting differences from the other gospels: (a) Jesus tells the disciples to pray, rather than wait while he goes to pray and (b) he does not single out Peter, James and John. His command here echoes the closing of the Lord’s Prayer (11:4) as well as Jesus’ words at the Last Supper about fidelity in testing (22:28-38)

**22:41 *he prayed*:** In Luke’s portrayal we do not see the grief and anguish displayed in the other gospels (Mk 14:33 and Mt 23:37). Rather than throwing himself on the ground, here, Jesus simply kneels.

**22:42 *Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me*:** Luke (with Mark) show that God Father’s will is being fulfilled and that for a new way to be accomplished, the Father must remove/take away the cup – it will not simply “pass” (Mt). This idea is further accented in “*not my will but yours be done.*”

**22:43-44 *And to strengthen him...sweat became like drops of blood*:** These verses, though very ancient, were probably not part of the original text of Luke. They are absent from the oldest papyrus manuscripts of Luke and from manuscripts of wide geographical distribution. It should be clearly noted that the text does not say that Jesus sweated blood, but simply makes a comparison to the profuseness of the sweat (in its huge drops).

**22:45 *sleeping from grief*:** the grief (*lype*) is associated with the apostles. In Greek it is a word with the connotation and connection to the results of fear or cowardice

**22:46-50:** There are many small differences in the Lucan account: Judas leads the crowd, the crowd is more clearly designated as opponents of Jesus, Judas does not kiss Jesus (only attempts), Jesus is not addressed as Rabbi, Jesus states the reason for the crowd’s arrival, Jesus’ healing of the

**22:51 *and healed him*:** only Luke recounts this healing of the injured servant.

**22:53 *but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness*:** “*hour*” – Luke’s solemn proclamation of the “hour,” a recurring marker of importance in his gospel (*cf.* 1:10, 2:38, 7:21, 10:21, 12:12, 12:39, 12:40, 12:46, and 13:31). But this hour stands in contra distinction to Jesus’ hour.



## Peter's Denial

<sup>54</sup> After arresting him they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest; Peter was following at a distance. <sup>55</sup> They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it, and Peter sat down with them. <sup>56</sup> When a maid saw him seated in the light, she looked intently at him and said, "This man too was with him." <sup>57</sup> But he denied it saying, "Woman, I do not know him." <sup>58</sup> A short while later someone else saw him and said, "You too are one of them"; but Peter answered, "My friend, I am not." <sup>59</sup> About an hour later, still another insisted, "Assuredly, this man too was with him, for he also is a Galilean." <sup>60</sup> But Peter said, "My friend, I do not know what you are talking about." Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed, <sup>61</sup> and the Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." <sup>62</sup> He went out and began to weep bitterly. <sup>63</sup> The men who held Jesus in custody were ridiculing and beating him. <sup>64</sup> They blindfolded him and questioned him, saying, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" <sup>65</sup> And they reviled him in saying many other things against him.

### Commentary

The scene shifts. Those arresting Jesus bring him to the house of the high priest (22:54-65). Here he will be interrogated and beaten throughout the night (22:63-65). These scenes of a furtive and violent arrest, of nighttime torture and interrogation have been repeated over and over in the history of Christian martyrdom, including our day.

In the Lucan narrative, Peter's denials are not intertwined with that of the trial. While the Markan intertwining has more of a dramatic effect, the impact of Peter's actions are no less impacting: Peter's table boast (22:33) and his cowardice/fear (see note 22:45). Jesus' prophecy is coming true. What is unique to Luke's is Jesus' words that Peter would be reconciled and would return to heal his brothers (22:32).

Peter had followed Jesus to the courtyard of the High Priest's house and mingled with the crowd around a fire built to cheat the cold night air (22:54-62). But Peter's attempt to merge with the crowd fails; a maid recognizes him in the light of the fire: "*This man too was with him.*" Peter vigorously denies that he even knows Jesus. But a little later the danger comes again as another person recognizes him, then "*an hour later,*" another who catches Peter's Galilean accent. Each time Peter, the leader of the twelve, denies that he ever heard of Jesus.

The first readers of this gospel, for whom Peter was still a fresh memory and the ancestor of their faith, must have found this scene painful. Luke adds a touch of exquisite drama and deep compassion. Unlike the other passion stories, the evangelist has staged this scene so that Peter and Jesus are within sight of each other: the warming fire and the knot of soldiers torturing Jesus are in the same courtyard. As the cock crows--the very signal that Jesus had foretold to Peter (22:34), Jesus turns and looks at his disciple. That gaze penetrates Peter's heart; he remembers Jesus' words, words warning of failure but also promising forgiveness, and leaves the courtyard weeping in remorse.

### Notes

**22: 54 *house of the high priest*:** Matthew and John identify the high priest as Caiaphas

**22:61 *the Lord turned and looked at Peter*:** Only Luke records this moment.

***the word of the Lord*:** Only Luke uses this phrase, giving a special prophetic coloration to the incident. This and many other of the Lord's prophetic words are coming to a time of fulfillment.

## The Sanhedrin Hearing

<sup>66</sup> When day came the council of elders of the people met, both chief priests and scribes, and they brought him before their Sanhedrin. <sup>67</sup> They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us," but he replied to them, "If I tell

you, you will not believe, <sup>68</sup> and if I question, you will not respond. <sup>69</sup> But from this time on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” <sup>70</sup> They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied to them, “You say that I am.” <sup>71</sup> Then they said, “What further need have we for testimony? We have heard it from his own mouth.”

### Commentary

The long nighttime ends with an early morning session before the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews in Jerusalem. Although the gospel accounts give this event the semblance of a “trial” it was probably an informal hearing as the leaders prepared their case against Jesus for presentation before the Roman governor. Luke’s description of a single meeting of the Sanhedrin, taking place at daybreak, is more likely than that of Mark and Matthew, who describe a night meeting followed by a morning session to carry out the decision. A night meeting of the Sanhedrin is otherwise unknown.

Jesus is unwilling to identify himself as the kind of Messiah popularly expected; rather, he speaks of himself as an authoritative judge in his role as the Son of Man (Dan 7:13–14). They interpret this answer (correctly) as an affirmation of a special divine status; they can only view this as blasphemy, sufficient reason to condemn him to death (see Mark 14:62–64). The Sanhedrin was (likely) not empowered to impose the death sentence; they had to submit their accusation to the judgment of the Roman authority.

Luke’s narration of the events is distinctive for what it lacks in comparison to the Gospels of Mark and Matthew: there is no succession of false witnesses, no rending of the documents by the chief priests, no cry of blasphemy or statement that Jesus deserves death. As well there are unique features in what Luke includes: the whole Sanhedrin is involved in the questioning – thus the rejection is not from the chief priest alone, but the whole of the religious leadership. And perhaps more importantly, Jesus’ response concerning his being Son of God is answered, not in terms of the parousia (as in Mark and Matthew), but in terms of the resurrection – after which the risen Christ will be seated at the right-hand of the Father.

Luke brings us quickly to the heart of the issue: the reader of this gospel knows from the opening scenes of the infancy narrative that Jesus is the “Messiah” and the “Son of Man”. But the opponents are closed to this truth. They have not believed his words and deeds and an admission that he is the “Son of God” will not help their unbelief, because they do not seek him. Perhaps ironically, Jesus tells them, “in your very question, you possess the answer and the gateway to eternal life”: “*You say that I am*” (v.70).

The exultation of Jesus to the right hand of God is beginning in the Sanhedrin session; it will be advanced on the cross, where Jesus will speak of being in paradise *this day* (23:43); and it will be fulfilled in the ascension of Jesus which concludes the Gospel (24:50-51)

### Notes

**22:66-71 *When day came*:** Luke recounts one daytime trial of Jesus (Luke 22:66-71) and hints at some type of preliminary nighttime investigation (Luke 22:54-65). Mark (and Matthew who follows Mark) has transferred incidents of this day into the nighttime interrogation with the result that there appear to be two Sanhedrin trials of Jesus in Mark (and Matthew)

**22:66 *council of elders of the people met*:** There have been many scholarly debates as to whether this “meeting” was a trial or not. This question can not be clearly resolved. Fr. Raymond Brown’s *The Death of the Messiah* (Vol. 1), pp. 328-397 is a comprehensive treatment. Brown’s estimate is that this is a legal proceeding, more attuned to our concept of a preliminary hearing. In any case, that seems to be Luke’s treatment, as there are no religious charges preferred. The only formal charges are political ones brought by the Roman authorities (23:1)

***Sanhedrin*:** the word is a Hebraized form of a Greek word meaning a “council,” and refers to the elders, chief priests, and scribes who met under the high priest’s leadership to decide religious and legal questions that did not pertain to Rome’s interests. Jewish sources are not clear on the competence of the Sanhedrin

to sentence and to execute during this period. Further mudding the picture is, even if they had executioner's powers, the Sanhedrin were not allowed to hold capital trials on the eve of a Sabbath or a festival (*m. Sanh* 4:2).

**22:71** *“What further need have we for testimony? We have heard it from his own mouth.”* : Luke does not report that the Jewish religious leaders charged Jesus with blasphemy (as do Mark and Matthew). Rather you will find this is a taunt which comes from those mocking Jesus (v.65; the word blaspheme appears but is not translated by the NAB) and as a charge against Stephen (Acts 6:11)

### Chapter 23 Delivered to Prefects and Kings

<sup>1</sup> Then the whole assembly of them arose and brought him before Pilate. <sup>2</sup> They brought charges against him, saying, “We found this man misleading our people; he opposes the payment of taxes to Caesar and maintains that he is the Messiah, a king.” <sup>3</sup> Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He said to him in reply, “You say so.” <sup>4</sup> Pilate then addressed the chief priests and the crowds, “I find this man not guilty.” <sup>5</sup> But they were adamant and said, “He is inciting the people with his teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here.”

<sup>6</sup> On hearing this Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean; <sup>7</sup> and upon learning that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod who was in Jerusalem at that time. <sup>8</sup> Herod was very glad to see Jesus; he had been wanting to see him for a long time, for he had heard about him and had been hoping to see him perform some sign. <sup>9</sup> He questioned him at length, but he gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup> The chief priests and scribes, meanwhile, stood by accusing him harshly. <sup>11</sup> (Even) Herod and his soldiers treated him contemptuously and mocked him, and after clothing him in resplendent garb, he sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> Herod and Pilate became friends that very day, even though they had been enemies formerly.

#### Commentary

The leaders bring Jesus to Pilate and begin to charge him with serious crimes. Luke alone emphasizes the political nature of the charges against Jesus: “We found this man misleading our people; he opposes the payment of taxes to Caesar and maintains that he is the Messiah a king” (23:2). Later they repeat the charges: “He is inciting the people with his teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here” (23:5).

Pontius Pilate had been procurator, or Roman governor, of Judea for about five years. His seat of government was at the seacoast town of Caesarea, but he was in Jerusalem because of the large gathering of Jews for the feast of Passover. Luke follows Mark's outline but makes several additions to throw into high relief Jesus' innocence.

One of the charges is clearly false — the opposition to Roman taxes (see 20:20–25). Jesus has not spoken clearly to the Sanhedrin about being the Messiah (22:66), but he has not denied it; his entry into Jerusalem implied it (19:28–40). Luke has added the explanatory “a king” for the sake of his Greek readers. After Jesus' noncommittal reply, Pilate pronounces him innocent. No reason is given, because in abbreviating the account Luke has taken the arguments for granted. The charges are repeated, this time in terms that encompass Jesus' whole ministry as traditionally described, beginning in Galilee and eventually affecting the whole land (Acts 10:37) – forcing Pilate's hand as the Roman keeper of imperial order.

The mention of Galilee gives Pilate the opportunity to divert the case to the tetrarch of Galilee, Herod Antipas, who was also in Jerusalem for the feast. Herod's curiosity about Jesus was mentioned earlier (9:9). Jesus does not respond to the request for a sign nor to the ill-motivated questions, as he never does in the Gospels. Herod's mocking treatment of Jesus ironically heals an enmity with Pilate (whose conduct cited in 13:1 may have been one of the causes). The cooperation of the two is later seen as the fulfillment of prophecy (Ps 2:1–2; Acts 4:25–28).

As for the Jewish religious leaders, their initial and subsequent attempts to shape the civil authorities to take deadly action against Jesus have come to naught, despite their continuing harsh accusations (v.10). There is only one course of action left them. For them to create the civil disturbance that Pilate will want to stop.

Fr. Donald Senior's comments on this section are noteworthy:

Luke's account is filled with irony. It is ironic that the leaders whose responsibility was to defend the freedom and faith of Israel would become concerned with the rights of Caesar. But the reader of the gospel is aware of another level of irony: in fact, Jesus' powerful ministry of justice was a profound threat to the oppressive might of Caesar. And indeed his mission had intended to "stir up the people" as the Lucan Jesus has journeyed majestically from Galilee to Jerusalem. But the revolution Jesus incited was not the predictable clash of alternate political systems, but a call for fundamental conversion and a vision of a renewed human family built on justice and compassion--a vision capable of shaking the foundation of every oppressive political system.

Further irony is found in the fact that the secular authorities, Pilate and then Herod, find Jesus innocent while the religious leaders tenaciously seek to destroy him. Luke has the Roman Governor and the vassal king of Galilee repeatedly affirm this. "I find this man not guilty", Pilate declares (23:4). And in a curious scene unique to Luke (23:6-16), even when Jesus is mocked as a bogus prophet by Herod Antipas, the corrupt king and murderer of prophets (9:7-9; 13:31-33) could find no guilt in Jesus.

### Notes

**23:1-5, 13-25** Twice Jesus is brought before Pilate in Luke's account, and each time Pilate explicitly declares Jesus innocent of any wrongdoing (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). This stress on the innocence of Jesus before the Roman authorities is also characteristic of John's gospel (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). Luke presents the Jerusalem Jewish religious leaders as the ones who force the hand of the Roman authorities (Luke 23:1-2, 5, 10, 13, 18, 21, 23-25).

**brought him before Pilate:** The prophecy that the Son of Man would be handed over to the Gentiles is fulfilled.

**23:2 brought charges against him:** Luke uses the technical term to accuse someone in a legal setting.

**Messiah, a king:** or "anointed king." While Jesus never affirmed such a statement, the charge does reflect a reality: the people proclaim Jesus as king (19:38) as he had spoken of himself in terms of kingship (19:11-27). However, the Jewish religious leaders have morphed this into the political realm in an unambiguous reduction: king – a charge that the Roman authorities can not ignore.

**23:3 "Are you the king of the Jews?":** Pilate is interested in one charge only. The Sanhedrin has successfully got the attention of the Roman Perfect.

**23:4 "I find this man not guilty":** literally, "I have found no cause" – meaning there is no evidence. And thus the Jewish religious leaders present continue to press their case (v.5)

**23:5 inciting...with his teaching:** The basis of the charges now shift from Jesus' self proclamation as "Messiah, king" to his teachings inciting civil unrest – again they have Pilate's attention. History seems to indicate that Pilate only came to Jerusalem during festivals when the likelihood of civil unrest was the greatest.

**throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here:** indicating that this is a program of deliberate propaganda. Yet the mention of Galilee allows Pilate to shuffle the problem off to Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee (3:3) as Luke tells us in 23:6-7.

**23:9 but he gave him no answer:** Within the early Christian community, Jesus' continued silence was understood in the light of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:7 – "*Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth.*"

**23:6-12** The appearance of Jesus before Herod is found only in this gospel. Herod has been an important figure in Luke (Luke 9:7-9; 13:31-33).

**23:8 Herod was very glad to see Jesus... wanting to see him ... he had heard about him ... hoping to see ..sign:** Herod is someone who has been curious about Jesus for a long time (9:7-9). His curiosity goes unrewarded. It is faith in Jesus, not curiosity, that is rewarded (Luke 7:50; 8:48, 50; 17:19).

**23:12 became friends:** Pilate's recognition of Herod's authority signified a recognition of him, clearly something Herod desired.

### Condemned to Death

<sup>13</sup> Pilate then summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people <sup>14</sup> and said to them, "You brought this man to me and accused him of inciting the people to revolt. I have conducted my investigation in your presence and have not found this man guilty of the charges you have brought against him, <sup>15</sup> nor did Herod, for he sent him back to us. So no capital crime has been committed by him. <sup>16</sup> Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him." <sup>17</sup> ....

<sup>18</sup> But all together they shouted out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us." <sup>19</sup> (Now Barabbas had been imprisoned for a rebellion that had taken place in the city and for murder.) <sup>20</sup> Again Pilate addressed them, still wishing to release Jesus, <sup>21</sup> but they continued their shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" <sup>22</sup> Pilate addressed them a third time, "What evil has this man done? I found him guilty of no capital crime. Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him." <sup>23</sup> With loud shouts, however, they persisted in calling for his crucifixion, and their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup> The verdict of Pilate was that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup> So he released the man who had been imprisoned for rebellion and murder, for whom they asked, and he handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they wished.

<sup>26</sup> As they led him away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. <sup>27</sup> A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. <sup>28</sup> Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, <sup>29</sup> for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.' <sup>30</sup> At that time people will say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' <sup>31</sup> for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?"

### Commentary

The second scene before Pilate is a threefold crescendo of Jesus' innocence, the crowd's hostility, and Pilate's weakness. Pilate tries various routes to convince the people of Jesus' innocence. But he is not strong or free enough to do what he knows is right. The people call for the release of the prisoner Barabbas under terms of what may have been a local custom authorized by the Judean procurators. Barabbas was a revolutionary and murderer who really would have constituted a danger to the stability of Roman rule.

Crucifixion is suddenly mentioned for the first time in verse 21. Luke does not explain why the crowds have become so violent (see Mark 15:11). Crucifixion was a cruel and humiliating punishment that the Romans inflicted only on slaves and non-Romans guilty of the worst crimes. Jews saw in this treatment the sign of a curse (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13). Pilate tries to appease the crowd with a promise to have Jesus scourged — an absurdity if Jesus is innocent. Finally Pilate cannot withstand the pressure. Jesus is delivered to the will of the crowd; their will is allowed to prevail, perverse as it is, because it coincides

with the will of the Father (22:42).

Fr. Donald Senior:

So once again Pilate refuses to condemn Jesus; the charges of sedition are emphatically denied: “I have conducted my investigation in your presence and have not found this man guilty of the charges you have brought against him...so no capital crime has been committed by him.” (23:14; see also 23:22).

Some biblical scholars think that in so doing Luke wanted to assure his Roman readers that Jesus was not a political revolutionary and that the Christians could live in peace in the empire. Perhaps so, but Luke also presents Pilate (and even more so Herod) as weak and ultimately corrupt because they finally accede to the demands of the leaders that Jesus be crucified. Rather than attempting to soothe the anxieties of Roman officials, it is more likely that Luke wanted to show that Jesus died unjustly yet without swerving from his fidelity to God’s will. This had been the fate of the persecuted prophets of Israel and it would be the fate of courageous followers of Jesus down to our own day. Jesus was the first Christian martyr, following the pattern of many of his Jewish ancestors who had suffered for their fidelity to God.

The devotion of the way of the cross finds its roots in Luke’s passion story. He alone gives details about events along that final stretch of Jesus’ journey from Galilee. The Messiah who has “set his face toward Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51) would now come to the summit of his journey to God.

As the execution detail leads Jesus from the Governor’s palace to the rock quarry outside the gates of the city where public executions took place, they impound Simon of Cyrene, a passerby, to carry the cross of Jesus. Luke’s wording makes it clear that he sees in the figure of Simon an image of discipleship: Simon takes up the cross of Jesus and carries it “behind Jesus”. The phrase is identical to Jesus’ own teaching on discipleship: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (14:27). Those who would live the way of Jesus must be willing to pour out their life on behalf of others.

The sense of urgent crisis reasserts itself in Luke’s story. The Jerusalem crowds are not all hostile to Jesus. Even though some joined in condemning him there are others who lament this tragedy (23:27). As the prophets had before him, Jesus warns the people of Jerusalem that sin has its consequences. Tears were not needed for Jesus but for the havoc that evil would bring upon the people of the Holy City. Luke’s Gospel has ambivalent feelings about Jerusalem. From one point of view, it was the city of God, the locus of the temple where Jesus began his life and where the early community would gather in prayer after the resurrection. “From Jerusalem” the gospel would stream out into the world. But Jerusalem was also the murderer of the prophets and the symbol of rejection. Luke and the early church interpreted the terrible suffering that befell Jerusalem during the revolt against Rome in A.D.70 as a sign of sin’s ultimate effect.

### Notes

**23:13 *chief priest, the rulers and the people***: Where previously Luke has only shown the impulse and responsibility of the Jewish religious leaders, here he does include “the people.” One might speculate if the leaders are among the people, inciting them (Mt 27:20 and Mark 15:11), but Luke is silent on the matter.

**23:14 *not found this man guilty of the charges***: Where previously Pilate had said this about the charge of Jesus’ self-proclamation as king, now Pilate says that there is no basis to the charge of inciting the people against Rome.

**23:15 *nor did Herod***: Pilate offers proof to the people that even the Tetrarch Herod is in agreement.

***no capital crime has been committed***: Luke alone mentions the specifics of Pilate’s assessment. While the notion of whether the Sanhedrin had authority to execute people for religious crimes is well debated

without resolution, some commentators offer this verse as an indication that Pilate clearly understood what was being requested of him by the religious leaders.

**23:16 flogged and then release him:** the term *paideuo* (lit. educate) refers to disciplinary punishment, such as whipping (*cf.* 1 Kings 12:11, 14; 2 Chr 14:2; 2 Cor 6:9). It is clear Pilate intended this as the full punishment not as a prelude to crucifixion.

**23:17** The verse, “He was obliged to release one prisoner for them at the festival,” is not found in many early and important Greek manuscripts, and so is not considered part of the original text of Luke. It is authentic to Mark 15:6 “*Now on the occasion of the feast he used to release to them one prisoner whom they requested*” (also Matthew 27:15). The obligation to release a prisoner was said to be in accordance with a custom of releasing at the Passover feast one prisoner chosen by the crowd. This custom is also mentioned in John 18:39. Outside of the gospels there is no direct attestation of it, and scholars are divided in their judgment of the historical reliability of the claim that there was such a practice.

**23:21 crucify:** Crucifixion was a typical, though not exclusive, Roman means of execution.

**23:22 What evil has this man done? I found him guilty of no capital crime:** The scene is now beyond legal charges and has centered on any possible evil (*kakon*) done; on any just cause for Jesus’ execution. In the Greek, “guilty of no capital crime” is actually “no cause for death.”

**23:26-32** An important Lucan theme throughout the gospel has been the need for the Christian disciple to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Here this theme comes to the fore with the story of Simon of Cyrene who takes up the cross and follows Jesus (see Luke 9:23; 14:27) and with the large crowd who likewise follow Jesus on the way of the cross.

**23:28 Daughters of Jerusalem:** While Jesus may literally be speaking to women inhabitants of Jerusalem, the expression also has biblical roots as referring to the city itself, as it does here. Once again, the Lucan narrative casts Jesus’ words in a prophetic tone.

**22:29-30 the days are coming... mountains fall on us:** this passage begins with the prophetic phrase and conjures up images of the fate of women and children during times of war. There is an echo of Hosea 10:8 (also used in Rev 6:16). Barrenness and sterility are classic expressions of failure and God’s disfavor.

### The Death of the Prophet

<sup>32</sup> Now two others, both criminals, were led away with him to be executed. <sup>33</sup> When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup> (Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”) They divided his garments by casting lots. <sup>35</sup> The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God.” <sup>36</sup> Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine <sup>37</sup> they called out, “If you are King of the Jews, save yourself.” <sup>38</sup> Above him there was an inscription that read, “This is the King of the Jews.”

<sup>39</sup> Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” <sup>40</sup> The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” <sup>42</sup> Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” <sup>43</sup> He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon <sup>45</sup> because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. <sup>46</sup> Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”; and when he had said this he breathed his last.

## Commentary

Luke adds a poignant detail to his description of Jesus' journey to the cross; with him march two criminals. The Jesus who had been described by his opponents as a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Lk 7:34) would not only live with such friends but die with them (see 22:37; Isa 53:12).

Luke fills the crucifixion scene with details typical of his portrayal of Jesus. He is crucified with the two criminals surrounding him, fulfilling Jesus' own prediction at the supper table: "For I tell you that the scripture must be fulfilled in me, namely, 'He was counted among the wicked'" (22:37). Just as Jesus had repeatedly taught his disciples not to respond to violence with more violence and to be forgiving (6:27-36), so he forgives the very men who had condemned him and who drive the stakes into his body (23:34) – words echoed by Stephen, the first martyr (Acts 7:60). The dividing of the garments reflects the words of Ps 22:19. Though Luke does not exonerate the Jewish people completely from complicity in the death of Jesus, he continues to show that it was caused mainly by the hostility and jealousy of their leaders (v. 35). Luke has the scoffers refer to Jesus as the "chosen one" (as at the transfiguration: 9:35) rather than as the "king of Israel" (Mark 15:32; Matt 27:42), a title less striking to non-Jewish readers. The soldiers offer him their own cheap drink, which might be considered an act of kindness, but it is mockery to offer such a drink to a king.

The incident of the good thief is unique to Luke. When one of the crucified criminals joins in the chorus of derision that accompanies Jesus to his death, the other confesses his sin and asks for mercy (23:39-43). It is Luke's prescription for authentic conversion as exemplified in the story of publican and the sinner (18:9-14). One criminal mocks Jesus; the other criminal asks Jesus to remember him when he begins his reign. He means the definitive messianic kingdom that Jews expected at the end of the present age, but in Luke's theology it also refers to the time of Jesus' exaltation through resurrection and ascension. Jesus promises him a place in "Paradise" *today*, because the death of Jesus is beginning the exodus (9:31) that will open a new way to salvation.

The moment of Jesus' death is charged with drama. As a sign of the terrible power of death, the sun's light is eclipsed and darkness grips "the whole land" (23:44). The triumph of darkness (22:53) now seems complete as Jesus nears death. Luke does not speak technically of an eclipse of the sun but of the failure of its light as if to say that even God's presence leaves the people. This is, indeed, the "hour of darkness".

The Temple veil covering the entrance to the Holy of Holies is torn in two. There are three possible explanation given for the meaning of this sign: (a) punishment to come against Temple because of the rejection of the prophet; (b) a new dispensation of covenant away from the atoning sacrifice of animal blood to the "pouring out" of Jesus' blood, once for all; and (c) the end of the division of Jew and Gentile, giving all equal access to God.

From the midst of these terrible omens comes Jesus' piercing voice, his life breath poured out in a final prayer: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (23:46). The words are from Psalm 31 (v. 6) and express the core of Jesus' being: his unshakable trust in God, a trust that death itself could not destroy.

## Notes

**23:32 criminals:** Luke uses a generic term where Mark/Matthew describe the other two men as bandits or revolutionaries (*lestai*) – a term forsworn by Jesus in 22:52

**23:33 Skull:** Luke does not use the Aramaic name "Golgotha" as the other evangelists do, but simply refers to the place of execution as "The Skull," a name that described the rock formation at Calvary.

**they crucified him:** Luke omits the giving of wine mixed with myrrh.

**23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do":** this portion of Luke 23:34 does not occur in the oldest papyrus manuscript of Luke and in other early Greek manuscripts and ancient versions of wide geographical distribution. However, thematically it (a) matches the Lucan version of the



Lord's Prayer (11:4) and it (b) established in practice the very proclamation of the Gospel for the forgiveness of sins.

***divided his garments by casting lots***: an allusion to Ps 22:19 extensively used by the gospel writers in their interpretation of the death of the Messiah. The psalm describes a righteous person unjustly afflicted by enemies who in the end is vindicated by God.

**22:35 *the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him***: The people have come for the spectacle (23:48) but they stand in silence. Not so the rulers who continue their derision and mocking. Again Luke distinguishes the people from the rulers.

***He saved others, let him save himself***: This is the first of three slurs regarding “saving” (vv. 36, 39). The irony is that the reader knows that not saving himself is the very means by which others are in fact saved.

***the chosen one***: Luke continues the irony. This phrase echoes the words spoken about Jesus at the Transfiguration. Thus the ruler are, in their derision, proclaiming truth.

**22:38 *This is the King of the Jews***: All the gospels have this as the formal charge levied by the Romans (with some variations). Pilate has declared Jesus innocent of this charge, but now directs (presumably) the charge to be publicly displayed. There are several reasons suggested: (a) to protect himself against a later charge he had simply given in to the mob demands, (b) to mock the Jewish religious leaders, and (c) to give warning to other would be revolutionaries against the empire.

**23:39-43 “The Repentant Thief”** : This episode is recounted only in this gospel. The penitent sinner receives salvation through the crucified Jesus. Jesus’ words to the penitent thief reveal Luke’s understanding that the destiny of the Christian is “to be with Jesus.”

**22:40 *Have you no fear of God***: an appropriate exhortation for those facing death and judgment. The exhortation is a call for decision to choose the redemption offered in the crucifixion of Christ.

**22:41 *this man has done nothing criminal***: the fourth declaration of innocence, now made by one who had committed crimes for which death is mandated.

**23:43 *Paradise***: “Paradise” can be traced back to the Persian term for an enclosed park and was used in the Greek Old Testament for the Garden of Eden in Genesis. Late Hebrew writings considered paradise an intermediate state of happiness of the righteous before the final judgment (4 Ezra 4:7; 2 Enoch 42:3). This intermediate state seems to have been the meaning of paradise here.

**23:44 noon . . . three in the afternoon**: literally, the sixth and ninth hours.

**23:45 *eclipse of the sun***: It should be noted that Luke has placed this event and the splitting of the Temple veil before the death of Jesus, concentrating the wrath of God before the moment when Jesus would entrust his spirit into his father’s hands. The Greek simply says “given out was the sun” or “darkened was the sun.” Such a translation avoids the astronomical problem that no eclipse was recorded and that the maximum eclipse length is some seven minutes, 40 seconds and not the three hours indicated by the gospels. Other phenomena are possible: sunspots, solar storms, sirocco dust storms, thunderstorms, etc.

The darkness that came over the whole land echoes OT texts that describe the same cosmic phenomenon in connection with the coming of the day of the Lord (cf. Joel 2:10, 30–31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Zeph. 1:15). Whether taken as a reference to a literal event or as a symbolic comment on Jesus’ death, this OT background underscores the significance of Jesus’ death, both in terms of the cosmic stage on which the final hours of Jesus’ life are played out and in terms of the arrival of the “last days” for which God’s presence and judgment were prophesied.

**23:46 *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit***: In Luke there is no cry of desolation “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1), rather Jesus’ final words are from Ps 30:6. This psalm also

portrays a righteous man rejected by his enemies, but expresses a quiet confidence in the saving power of God. The psalm concludes: “Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.” In later rabbinic tradition Ps. 30:6 was used as part of the evening prayer: pious Jews ask God to care for them and protect them during sleep in the descending night. As this prayer fits the evening before sleep, it fits the evening of life before death, as sleep was regarded as the threshold of death

**22:46** : The Greek verb is *ekpneō*, lit. “to breath out,” but also euphemistically “to breath one’s last”, or to die. The Markan expression is “he gave up the spirit.” In John it is “handed over the spirit.”

### Responses to the Prophet’s Death

<sup>47</sup> *The centurion who witnessed what had happened glorified God and said, “This man was innocent beyond doubt.”* <sup>48</sup> *When all the people who had gathered for this spectacle saw what had happened, they returned home beating their breasts;* <sup>49</sup> *but all his acquaintances stood at a distance, including the women who had followed him from Galilee and saw these events.* <sup>50</sup> *Now there was a virtuous and righteous man named Joseph who, though he was a member of the council,* <sup>51</sup> *had not consented to their plan of action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea and was awaiting the kingdom of God.* <sup>52</sup> *He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.* <sup>53</sup> *After he had taken the body down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried.* <sup>54</sup> *It was the day of preparation, and the sabbath was about to begin.* <sup>55</sup> *The women who had come from Galilee with him followed behind, and when they had seen the tomb and the way in which his body was laid in it,* <sup>56</sup> *they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils. Then they rested on the sabbath according to the commandment.*

### Commentary

His death has an immediate impact. The Roman centurion who had overseen his execution is struck to the heart by the manner of Jesus’ death, the first of an endless stream of believers touched by the cross of Christ. “This man was truly just”, he acclaims. The wording of his confession fits perfectly with Luke’s portrayal of Jesus in the passion. Jesus the martyr prophet was indeed a just man: totally committed to God’s cause; willing to face death for the sake of the gospel.

Luke also uniquely describes the impact of Jesus’ death on the bystanders. The people who had walked the way of the cross with Jesus (23:27) and now witness his death return “beating their breasts” – a sign of repentance (23:48). And standing at a distance are those “who knew” Jesus (Luke’s subtle way of inching the frightened and scattered disciples back into the story?) and the faithful women “who had followed him from Galilee” (23:49). The gathering of the community which would burst into life after the resurrection already begins, at the very moment of Jesus’ life-giving death.

The passion narrative ends on a muted note. The power of Jesus reaches beyond death as Joseph of Arimathea, whom Luke describes with his favorite terms as a “virtuous” and “righteous” man, a member of the very council who had condemned Jesus yet one who had not consented to their verdict, takes courage and comes to claim the body of Jesus for burial. In any age, claiming the body of an executed man from the authorities is a public act, exposing one’s allegiances for all to see. Joseph stands clearly with the crucified Jesus.

He wraps Jesus’ broken body in a linen burial cloth and places it in a rock tomb in which no one had yet been buried. Luke carefully sets the stage for the marvelous events of the resurrection. The Sabbath eve was approaching so there was no time to anoint the body. But the faithful women who had ministered to Jesus in Galilee (8:2-3) and stood by him at the moment of death (23:49) prepare spices and perfumed oil – ready to return and anoint the crucified body of Jesus as soon as the Sabbath rest was completed.

One cannot miss the touching poignancy of these details: the courageous devotion of Joseph, the faithful women who abide by the Sabbath law yet with their hearts in that tomb with the one they loved and had lost. The reader knows, however, that death will not have the last word. The “just one” would break the

bonds of death and the tomb would be robbed of its treasure. The Spirit that had fallen on Jesus at the moment of his Baptism would once again pulsate within his living being as the Risen Christ would rise triumphant from death and charge his disciples to bring God's word and the witness of their lives to all nations.

### Notes

**23:47 *This man was innocent*:** The word *dikaïos* means “righteous, by implication innocent.” The deeper religious significance is righteous.

**23:49 *all his acquaintances*:** Literally, “those known to him.” Luke does have the earlier scene where the disciples abandon Jesus during his arrest. Instead he has Peter following Jesus from afar (22:54) as well as his disciples watching from afar here.

***the women*:** Luke points out the woman who had followed Jesus from Galilee and who are part of the first Church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14) – they are eye witnesses to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

**23:50-51 *Joseph... Arimathea*:** A town north of Jerusalem. Joseph is described in the same terms as Zechariah and Elizabeth (1:6) and Simeon (2:25). Like Simeon and Anna (2:38), he is awaiting the reign of God.

### Epilog

The Gospel of Mark is one of the sources for Luke's own accounting, but as already noted in the introduction there are unique Lucan features. In addition, having studied the Passion account, perhaps we can add a few more items to our list;

- Where Mark/Matthew characterize the isolation of Jesus and failures of the disciples, Luke portrays Jesus free of “trouble and sorrow unto death.” In fact Jesus' prayer to his Father receives a comforting angel in response.
- Readers are given the sense that Jesus is in constant communion with the Father, such that Jesus' last words are not a cry of anguish from someone forsaken, but more a tranquil release of life, trusting in his Father's plan
- As for Jesus' disciples, Peter is assured that Jesus is praying for him in order that his faith not fail. When Peter denies the Lord, the Lord is there to remind Peter of that his prayers are continuing

Overall there is much less of a negative tone in Luke's Passion account. The other gospels have healing, forgiveness and reversal only after Jesus' death and resurrection. For Luke, the healing and forgiving power of God is already active in the passion before Jesus' death. The Jesus who healed throughout the ministry, as he now goes to death, heals the ear wound of one who came to arrest him, and heals the antagonism between his judges (Pilate and Herod). The Jesus who forgave throughout his ministry, as he now goes to death, forgives those who crucify him not knowing what they do, and rewards with the promise of communion in Paradise, the repentant wrong-doer.

Jesus, who called all people to the kingdom, experienced those who accepted his word and those who did not. In Luke's Passion account, a multitude of people follow Jesus to the place of execution, take no part in the mockery, and return, striking their breasts. The Daughters of Jerusalem beat themselves and lament for him. There are Jewish figures at the end of the Gospel (Joseph and the women) to match the Jewish figures at the beginning of the infancy narrative (Simeon and Anna).

Jesus heals and forgives as he suffers and dies. This has been his ministry from start through to the very end. From the beginning of his life Jesus was set “for the rise of many in Israel” (2:34) even to the point of “my blood that is poured out for you” (22:20). What Jesus has done is to give us the gift of redemption so that we would be people who heal and forgive.

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