

COMMIT - DAY 1: PSALM 22 (PART I)

When we read through the accounts of the Passion in all four Gospels, we find seven statements that Jesus makes while he is on the Cross. These statements, known as the Seven Last Words, deserve our special attention. Of course, all of Jesus's words are important and hold a preeminent place in the written Word of God (which is one of the reasons we stand for the Gospel readings at Mass), but these words are especially noteworthy because of the incredibly painful effort they would have required.

Crucifixion kills by asphyxiation. Once the victim is nailed to the cross, the weight of the body makes breathing extremely difficult. As the victim loses blood, the heart and lungs begin to shut down. The excruciating pain and increasing weakness make it increasingly difficult to draw a breath until finally the exhausted victim can no longer raise himself up enough to empty his lungs and fill them again. With so much effort required so simply breathe, imagine the additional word-and pain-required to speak, let alone to cry out "with a loud voice" (Mark 15:34). When Jesus speaks from the Cross, we need to listen with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

The Seven Last words of Christ

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:34).

"Woman, behold, your son!"... "Behold your mother!" (John 19:26-27)

"I thirst" (John 19:28)

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

"It is finished" (John 19:30).

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46).

Mark records only one of these last statements: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" which Jesus quotes from the beginning of Psalm 22. Read Mark 15:24-39. What do people say to or about Jesus before he utters these words? What do they say to or about him afterward?

For the hours that Jesus hung on the Cross, the chief priests, bystanders, and even the criminals crucified with Jesus mock him. Then Jesus makes one statement in response, and they are silenced. Jesus's answer to those who taunt him is more than the opening words of Psalm 22 that he speaks-with these words Jesus invokes the entirety of the psalm. It is not until ancient times the way that a particular psalm was reference was by quoting its opening verse.

Psalm 22 is the cry of the righteous King David who is suffering and in danger, but who still has confidence that God will rescue him and give him victory. David is God's anointed king, and this psalm is his poignant plea for the Lord to save his chosen one. It is also a striking prophecy about the rejection and suffering of the Messiah, the descendant of David who will reign over God's people forever.



King David

In quoting Psalm 22, Jesus reminds the scoffers at the foot of his Cross not only of David's suffering, but of the psalmist's words that foretell the Messiah's suffering that they see before them: "All who see me mock at me;" "I am poured out like water, and my bones are out of joint;" "they have pierce my hands and feet;" "they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots;" etc. But in addition to giving us a glimpse into the crushing weight of his suffering, by invoking all of Psalm 22. Jesus also proclaims the goodness and ultimate victory of the Father and his Anointed One: "He has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him."

Without the context of Psalm 22, it would be easy to read Jesus's anguished words in Mark 15:34 and interpret them as a cry of despair, as if the Son really thought he had been completely abandoned by the Father. Certainly, Jesus at the Crucifixion has been abandoned-betrayed by one of his Apostles, denied by one of his closest friends, handed over by the leaders of his people, and given the cup of suffering to drink by the will of the Father. Jesus, being fully human, experienced the full weight of this suffering and abandonment. But just as faith and trust that the Father "has not hidden his face," teat the Father to whom "dominion belongs" will bring about the deliverance of his faithful Son, and that the Son will praise the Father and "proclaim his deliverance."

Take time to read Psalm 22:1-18 slowly and prayerfully, not only as David's supplication but as Christ's cry from the Cross. Consider how each verse speaks about some detail in the life and Death of our Lord. How does a deeper familiarity with this psalm impact your reflection on Jesus's Passion?

There can be a world of difference between what we know to be true and how we feel in the midst of suffering. Have you ever felt abandoned by God? If so, what got you through that experience? If not, what do you think would help you recognize God's presence in such a time?

COMMIT - DAY 2: TEMPLE VEIL TORN

Mark gives us a single sentence to announce the unthinkable and devastating moment of the Death of the incarnate Son of God: "And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last" (Mark 15:37). It is over. Jesus gives himself completely and breathes his last.

Then Mark relates the dramatic sign accompanying Jesus's Death: the tearing of the Temple veil. The veil hung insider the Temple building and was the divider between the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place. It separated the Ark of the Covenant, where God sat enthroned on the mercy seat above the Ark, from the priests ministering in the Holy Place at the altar of incense, the table of the showbread, and the menorah. In other words, the vail divided Heaven from earth: the all-holy God on one side, from fallen humanity on the other.

Look up the description of the veil for the Tabernacle in Exodus 26:31-35 and the vail for the Temple in 2 Chronicles 3:14. How is the veil described?

Two first-century Jewish authors, Josephus and Philo, both tell us that the four colors of the veil represented the four elements, and therefore the vail symbolized the whole cosmos: blue for air, purple

for the sea, crimson (or scarlet) for fire, and the white linen for the earth. They also tell us that the veil was forty cubits (sixty feet) long by twenty cubits (thirty feet) wide. The Mishnah, a collection of Jewish oral tradition written down in the third century AD, describes the veil as being as thick as a man's hand and requiring thirty priests to take it down and wash it (later rabbinic traditions says that these descriptions are hyperbole, but the point remains that the veil was huge and heavy). This veil, representing the cosmos and marking the boundary between Heaven and earth, is torn in two from top to bottom at the moment of Jesus' Death. This supernatural event is a dramatic announcement of the new reality instituted by Christ's sacrifice.

Go back and read the account of Jesus's baptism in Mark 1:9-11 again, and compare it to the tearing of the Temple veil in Mark 15:37-39. What happens in each scene? Considering that Mark uses the same verb, *schizomenous*, in both passages (which the RSV translates "opened" in 1:10 and "torn" in 15:38), what other parallels can we draw between these two bookends of Jesus's public life?

We have already seen how Mark presents Jesus as the new Temple in earlier passages of his Gospel. The tearing of the Temple veil reveals that with this new Temple there is no longer any need for a barrier between the presence of God in the Holy of Holies and the sinful people waiting outside. By his Death and Resurrection, Jesus cleanses us from our sin so that each of us can enter into the presence of God. We don't need to pass through the curtain to enter the Holy of Holies, as the high priest did in the old Temple because God has made our hearts his Holy of Holies by coming to dwell in our hearts in Baptism.

*"And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple
is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb."
- Revelation 21:22*

By every human standard, the Father seems distant and silent during the Crucifixion of his only beloved Son. But the tearing of the Temple veil is a powerful declaration that the Father is not only watching over his Son, but that he will be closer to his people than ever before. Although there may be times when we "feel" like God is not near or even paying attention when we are suffering, we can trust the words of the psalmist: "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). God comes close to us precisely in the Suffering and Death of his Son. Mark's original audience needed to hear this, as they were about to undergo severe persecution. We need this reminder as well.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta once said, "Suffering is the sharing in the Passion of Christ. Suffering is the kiss of Jesus, a sign that you have come so close to Jesus on the Cross that he can kiss you" (Quote from The Kiss of Jesus by Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle). How does God come close to you-and invite you to come closer to him-through suffering?

COMMIT - DAY 3: PSALM 22 (PART II)

Jesus's words from the Cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" invoke the whole of Psalm 22. The first part, as we have seen is a plea for deliverance from the persecution of enemies. The second part of the psalm expresses perfect hope and complete confidence in God's vindication-even in

the midst of the suffering at hand. This psalm, especially considered in relation to our Lord's Suffering and Death, provides us with an extraordinary model for loving surrender to God's Divine Providence.

LECTIO: The practice of praying with Scripture begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the verse below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

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

*I will tell of your name to my brethren;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
You who fear the LORD, praise him!
all you sons of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you sons of Israel!
For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted;
and he has not hidden his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him.*

*From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord!
May your hearts live for ever!
All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
For dominion belongs to the LORD,
And he rules over the nations.
and he wo cannot keep himself alive.
Posterity shall serve him;
men shall tell of the LORD to the coming generation,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
that he has wrought it.*

-Psalm 22:19-31

After asking God to deliver him, what does the psalmist say he will do for God?

What does the psalmist instruct others to do?

How does the psalmist describe God?

MEDITATIO: *Lectio*, a close reading and rereading is followed by *meditation*, a time to reflect on the Scripture passage and to ponder the reasons for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to meditate on the above verse.

“Oh my God when will it please You to give me the grace to remain habitually in this union of my will with Your adorable will, in which, without uttering a word all is said, in which all is accomplished by allowing You to act, in which one’s only occupation is that of conforming more and more entirely to your good pleasure; in which, nevertheless, one is saved all trouble since the care of all things is confided to You, and to repose in You is the only desire on one’s heart? Delightful state, which, even in the absence of all sensible faith, affords the soul an interior joy altogether spiritual. I desire to repeat without ceasing by this habitual disposition of my heart, “Fiat,” yes, my God, yes, all that You please, may Your holy will be done in all things. I renounce my own will which is very blind, perverse, and corrupt in consequence of its wretched self-love, the mortal enemy of Your pure love, of Your glory, and of my own sanctification.”

-Prayer of Father Jean-Pierre de Caussade,
Abandonment to Divine Providence

How is it possible to trust God in the midst of suffering?

What does Psalm 22 say to you about abandoning yourself to God’s Divine Providence?

ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO: Having read and meditates on today’s Scripture passage, take some time to pray – bringing your thoughts to God (*oratio*) – and to be receptive to God’s grace in silence (*contemplation*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolution*) to respond to God’s prompting of you heart in today’s prayer.

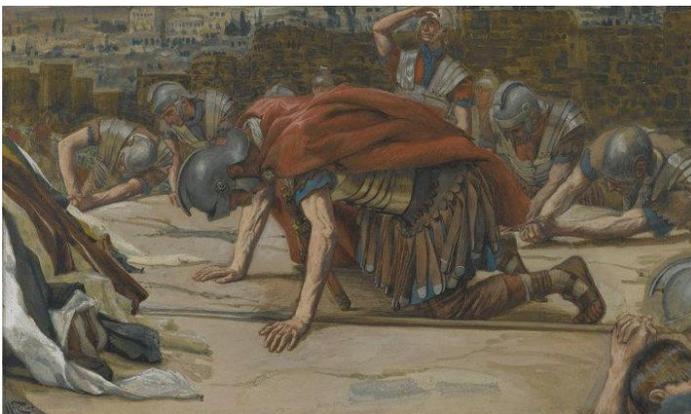
“All the trouble, for all time, of humanity enslaved by sin and death, all the petitions and intercessions of salvation history are summed up in this cry of the incarnate Word. Here the Father accepts them and beyond all hope, answers them by raising his Son.” - CCC, 2606-

COMMIT – DAY 4: “TRULY THIS MAN WAS THE SON OF GOD

In the Gospel of Mark, we saw Jesus using parables to teach the people. Jesus explains his use of parables by saying that the people “may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven” (Mark 4:12). Even the disciples, who have “been given the secret of the kingdom of God,” do not see, hear, and understand fully (Mark 4:11). As we saw previously, the background of Jesus’s explanation for the people’s lack of understanding is found in Isaiah 6:9-13, where God’s first message to Isaiah is that his people will not see, hear, understand, and turn and be healed until they have passed through the suffering and purgation of exile.

But now that Jesus has suffered and died to bring his people out of the exile of their sin, their eyes and ears will be opened to perceive and understand. With the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we will see thousands upon thousands hear the preaching of the Apostles, see the miracles worked at their hands, understand the Good News of Jesus Christ, and turn and be forgiven.

The first person to express understanding upon encountering the Suffering and Death of Jesus is the Roman centurion at the foot of the Cross. Read Mark 15:39. How does this Gentile’s confession of faith compare to the comments from the chief priests and bystanders in Mark 15:29-32?



At the darkest moment, this Roman recognized the Lord and believed. The testimony of the centurion would be particularly encouraging to the Christians in Rome who were facing persecution. The witness of these early Christian martyrs who were willing to suffer and die for their faith would bear great fruit in bringing many others to Christ (the word “martyr” comes from the Greek word for bearing witness or testimony, *martureo*).

Confession of the Centurion by Tissot.

What can we do to confess our faith and bear witness to Christ in a particular way in the face of suffering?

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”
-Tertullian

We see the radical courage and witness from the Apostles as well. When Jesus was arrested, they fled in fear. But after the Resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they were completely

transformed. Read Acts 5:17-42 and compare it to what you have read about the Apostles throughout the Gospel of Mark. How would you describe the transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit in these men?

The Apostles have the courage to preach despite the threats of the council because they witnessed not only the Death but also the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. They not only know that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God, but they also know him in a profound and intimate relationship. This knowing leads them to trust him, even to the point of “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41).

This confidence is the fruit Mark offers to us in his Gospel. From the first word, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1), to the last lines, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” and “He has risen” (Mark 15:39; 16:6), Mark focuses on Jesus’ divinity (as we examined in detail in Session 2). He wants to impart this all-important fact of Jesus’s identity not only so that we will know it intellectually, but so that we will know it in our hearts and be transformed by that knowledge when we “repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

“So it is that the Resurrection has entered the world only through certain mysterious appearances to the chosen few. And yet it was truly the new beginning for which the world was silently waiting. And for the few witnesses—precisely because they themselves could not fathom it— it was such an overwhelmingly real happening, confronting them so powerfully, that every doubt was dispelled, and they stepped forth before the world with an utterly new fearlessness in order to bear witness: Christ is truly risen.”

-Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two: Holy Week*

COMMIT – DAY 5: TRUTH AND BEAUTY



The Holy Women at the Sepulcher,

Peter Paul Rubens, ca. 1611-1514, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California.

In this session we take a look at another painting by the prominent Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). (In Session 2, we reflected on one of Rubens's paintings in the Jesuit church in Antwerp.)

The *Holy Women at the Sepulcher*, Rubens present us with the encounter of the women at Jesus's tomb on Easter morning. Each of the four Gospels recounts the glorious event of the empty tomb. Look up the following passages and not the items in the chart below.

	What is the time of day?	Who goes to the tomb?	What do they find? Who do they encounter?
Matthew 28:1-8			
Mark 16:1-8			
Luke 24:1-11			
John 20:1-14			

The Gospel recount that the women arrive “early” in the morning, “toward the dawn,” with John noting that “it was still dark.” The Sabbath is over, and the women are quick to awake and attend to the body of Lord.

The Gospels give us somewhat varying record of the women who head to the tomb early Easter morning. Mary Magdalene is mentioned by name in each of the four gospel accounts. But even in John's Gospel, which mentions only Mary Magdalene by name, Mary's words to Peter and John include the plural “we” to communicate the shared concern regarding the whereabouts of Jesus's body (see John 20:2). With the six figures approaching the tomb, Rubens appears to be drawing on Luke' account, which names three women and adds “and the other women with them” (Luke 24:10).

As the women approach the entrance of the tomb, they are perplexed to see that the stone has been rolled back. How could such a heavy stone be rolled away? They enter the dark tomb, but finding it empty they become increasingly troubled. Nothing has prepared them for the encounter that happens next.

While Matthew and mark make mention only of a single angel, Luke and John describe two angels who announce the glorious news of Jesus's Resurrection. The Gospels describe the angels with vivid language-they are dressed in white, with dazzling apparel, having appearance like lightning, with clothing

white as snow. It is no wonder that a mixture of fear, trembling, amazement, astonishment, and great joy overcome the women. Luke even notes that in their fear they “bowed their faces to the ground” (24:5) at the sight of these heavenly messengers.

With the darkness of the tomb enveloping the women, the light for the painting seems to emanate from these two luminous angelic beings and the soft golden halos that surround them. In addition light appears also to come from beyond them, as the sunrise greets this first day of the week and the divine light of the new creation brought about with the Resurrection of the Son of God breaks forth.

Much of the artistic debate on Rubens’s *Holy Women at the Sepulcher* concerns identifying the women. The central figure in purple is modeled after one of the best known Roman statues, the *Pudicitia*, currently in the Vatican Museums. *Pudicitia* was a classical Roman ideal of feminine modesty, chastity, and fidelity. Rubens had an extensive classical education and would have been well aware of Greek and Roman art and sculpture, much of which was rediscovered in the time of the Renaissance.

Even though Mary the Mother of Jesus is not mentioned in the Scriptural accounts of this scene, some argue that the central feminine figure attired in lavender is the Virgin Mary, the Christian archetype of feminine virtue, given that Rubens has modeled this figure’s robes and stance on the *Pudicitia* model. Others argue that given Mary Magdalene’s prominence in all four gospel accounts, this central figure is Mary Magdalene. Her transformation from sinner to saint, from one with many sins to one fully forgiven “for she loved much” (Luke 7:47) a transformation witnessed by her faith that keeps her at the foot of the Cross during the Crucifixion and brings her to the tomb weeping that someone has taken her Lord-makes her a model of chastity and fidelity by God’s powerful grace.

We will likely never know Rubens’s intention for the identity of each of the women of the Holy Sepulcher. But regardless, this wonderful painting allows the viewer to enter into this singular moment. Like the shepherds who heard the angels’ proclamation of Jesus’s Birth, we are with the women who hear the triumphant announcement of Jesus’s Resurrection. And we are sent, like them, to announce this Good News to all we meet.

Take a moment to journal your ideas, questions, or insights about this lesson. Write down thoughts you had that may not have been mentioned in the text or discussion questions. List any personal applications you gained from the lessons. What challenged you the most in the teachings? How might you turn what you’ve learned into specific action?
