

THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

On The Way To Calvary

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The Passion Of Jesus Christ

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PROLOGUE

The Passion Prophecy

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

PROLOGUE

See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted. Even as many were amazed at him—so marred were his features, beyond that of mortals his appearance, beyond that of human beings—So shall he startle many nations, kings shall stand speechless; For those who have not been told shall see, those who have not heard shall ponder it.

Who would believe what we have heard? To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up like a sapling before him, like a shoot from the parched earth; He had no majestic bearing to catch our eye, no beauty to draw us to him. He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, knowing pain, Like one from whom you turn your face, spurned, and we held him in no esteem.

Yet it was our pain that he bore, our sufferings he endured. We thought of him as stricken, struck down by God and afflicted, But he was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, all following our own way; But the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all.

Though harshly treated, he submitted and did not open his mouth; Like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before shearers, he did not open his mouth.

Seized and condemned, he was taken away. Who would have thought any more of his destiny? For he was cut off from the land of the living, struck for the sins of his people. He was given a grave among the wicked, a burial place with evildoers, Though he had done no wrong, nor was deceit found in his mouth.

But it was the Lord's will to crush him with pain. By making his life as a reparation offering, he shall see his offspring, shall lengthen his days, and the Lord's will shall be accomplished through him.

Because of his anguish he shall see the light; because of his knowledge he shall be content; My servant, the just one, shall justify the many, their iniquity he shall bear.

Therefore I will give him his portion among the many, and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty, Because he surrendered himself to death, was counted among the transgressors, Bore the sins of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

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In expressing the Passion, we recount the enduring pain, torture and suffering of Jesus between the night of the Last Supper onto his death on the Cross on Friday afternoon.

On three separate occasions, Jesus had foretold to his Apostles he would be rejected by the Jewish chief priests, the elders and scribes, would be put to death, and on the third day he would rise from the dead.¹ On their final days on their way to Jerusalem, Jesus predicts of his passion for the third time, “*Then he took the Twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon; and after they have scourged him they will kill him, but on the third day he will rise.” But they understood nothing of this; the word remained hidden from them and they failed to comprehend what he said.*”² When Jesus spoke of the “Gentiles” he was referring to the Roman authorities.

THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST JESUS

*Now the feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was drawing near, and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to put him to death, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered into Judas, the one surnamed Iscariot, who was counted among the Twelve, and he went to the chief priests and temple guards to discuss a plan for handing him over to them. They were pleased and agreed to pay him money. He accepted their offer and sought a favorable opportunity to hand him over to them in the absence of a crowd.*³

The officials of the Temple in Jerusalem, the chief priest, elders, scribes and members of the temple council of the Sanhedrin, feared Jesus; his teachings were not in keeping with the established norms of Jewish beliefs and practices. Furthermore, such unorthodox preaching would erode their religious and administrative powers over the people causing a detriment to their authority and a dilution of the centuries old practices of Jewish belief. “*... If we leave him alone, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our land and our nation.*” But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “*You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish.*”⁴ “*So from that day on they planned to kill him.*”⁵

Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus’ apostles, having learned of their attempts, makes a pact with the chief priests to betray Jesus to them at an opportune time for payment of thirty pieces of silver.⁶

¹ Matt 6:21-22; Luke 9:22

² Luke 18:31- 34

³ Luke 22:1-6

⁴ John 11:48-50

⁵ John 11:53

⁶ Matt 26:15

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THE LAST SUPPER

“When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it [again] until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; 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.” 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.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you. “And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me is with me on the table; for the Son of Man indeed goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed.” And they began to debate among themselves who among them would do such a deed.”⁷

It is early evening of Thursday, just after sundown. Jesus will be celebrating with his apostles the Passover meal, commemorating the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. It is a time of celebration, a time to recall the benevolence of God for His chosen people, of the attainment of the land that God had promised to Abraham. The Upper Room has been prepared for the Passover feast by Our Lady and the women; they have arranged the Pascal lamb, the unleavened bread, the wine and bitter herbs as prescribed in the scriptures. The atmosphere of the room gives off a warm and homelike appearance.

Awaiting the arrival of his disciples, Jesus is standing in the midst of the women, graciously extending his appreciation for their labors. Their very spirits are moved with supernatural joy by his tender words and loving smile, bringing a radiant glow to the faces of the women.

The apostles begin to arrive; Jesus greets each one with a fond embrace and words of festive jubilation. But for Jesus, this Passover jubilee is marred with a strain of deep sorrow. Jesus is troubled in spirit by his foreknowledge that this very night, Judas will betray him, and of the suffering and death he will endure the next day. After seated at table, Jesus addresses his disciples, *“Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”*⁸ This causes quite a stir among them - - - impossible, who would stoop so low to do such a thing? Yet, the apostles, still not comprehending the reality of Jesus’ statement, Jesus later says to Judas, *“What you are going to do, do quickly.”*⁹

*“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer”*¹⁰ says Jesus. This is the parting meal with his apostles - - - an ending of almost three years of close, wonderful fellowship. Taking the bread, he gives thanks, blesses it and breaks it, gives to his disciples and says, *“Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the*

⁷ Luke 22:14-23

⁸ John 13:21

⁹ John 13:27

¹⁰ Luke 22:15

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covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins."¹¹ Thus, Jesus gives to his disciples and to us a new sacrifice of a new covenant, being offered for the remission of sin - - his very Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. The apostles have now understood what he meant when he spoke to the crowd of thousands by the Sea of Galilee, "*Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you . . . whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remain in me and I in him.*"¹² The apostles catch their breath; Jesus has spoken clearly with deep feeling, clarity and solemnity that all the apostles realize there is something very special about this Passover meal. He has spoken not in parables but in plain words that cannot be misunderstood of the true meaning of his message.

Jesus has instituted for us the new sacrifice of the New Law, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, to be offered in his name to the Father in perpetuity. By his action and command, the prophesy of Malachi of the Old Testament some 500 years earlier is fulfilled, "*From the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the nations; incense offerings are made in my name everywhere, and a pure offering.*"¹³

To this day and forever more, Jesus, through the words of the ordained priest and the infusion of the Holy Spirit, makes Himself present at each Mass and offers Himself to the Father the sacrifice of redemptive love of the Cross, suffered once but offered over and over.

The apostles have just received their first Holy Communion and have been invested with the fullness of sacred priesthood of the new Covenant. With eyes closed and minds enkindled, they contemplate the overwhelming event and the commission bestowed upon them. During these hushed moments, Jesus ponders the depth of his sadness; this is the last night he will spend with his apostles. He has so much to tell them. They are in need of reassurance, of divine comfort especially to overcome the tragedies that are imminent, the strengthening of faith in time of daily trials, courage to withstand hatred and persecution even to the point of death of martyrdom.

The momentary silence is stirred with words of Jesus as he renders the extent of his love for them, saying, as if a father, "*My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. . . I give you a new commandment; love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"¹⁴

Jesus rises from the supper, lays aside his garments, takes a towel and washbasin, and begins to wash the feet of his disciples. Through the objections of his disciples, Jesus explains, "*Do you realize what I have done for you? . . . for I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.*"¹⁵ Jesus, the Master, has shown us, his subjects, we are to imitate that magnanimous humility of his, to be rendered with love, generosity and service to others. This is a parable in action rather

¹¹ Matt. 26:26-28

¹² John 6:54-57

¹³ Mal. 1:11

¹⁴ John 13:33-35

¹⁵ John 13:12-15

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than in words.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God, have faith also with me.”¹⁶ I am going to prepare a place for you, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.”¹⁷ It is beneficial that he depart from this life, and in so doing, “I will ask the Father and He will give you another Advocate¹⁸ to be with you always, the Spirit of Truth.”¹⁹ “I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.”²⁰ “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when He comes, the Spirit of Truth, He will guide you in all truth.”²¹

Before the meal is completed, Jesus offers his final prayer as a sort of preface to the Passion. Jesus prays for himself, then for his apostles and lastly for the whole Church that will evolve by the preaching of the apostles. The supper is now concluded; we follow Jesus with his apostles from the Upper Room into the coolness of a moonlight night, and, as is Jesus’ custom, to a garden on the Mount of Olives outside the walls of the Jerusalem.

AGONY IN THE GARDEN AND JESUS’ ARREST

Then going out he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. When he arrived at the place he said to them, “Pray that you may not undergo the test.” After withdrawing about a stone’s throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.” [And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.] When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief. He said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test.” 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. Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”²²

Jesus’ foreknowledge of the passion and crucifixion that he is to endure causes in him severe agony, mentally and physically. The mission which he has accepted from the Father is to be brought to fruition; the triumph over sin, the restoration of mankind to friendship and graces of God, to that salutary state that had been lost by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. This atonement is to be undertaken by the Only Begotten Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who has taken on the human nature in the

¹⁶ John, 14: 1

¹⁷ John, 14: 3

¹⁸ Mediator, comforter, consoler

¹⁹ John 14:15-16

²⁰ John 14:25-26

²¹ John 16:12-13

²² Luke 22:39-48

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person of Jesus of Nazareth as the Second Adam. The severe physical suffering and death, with all the accompanying humiliation, presents itself so vividly in his mind that he is filled with anguish and dismay beyond description; that his sweat is as drops of blood falling unto the ground. It is these thoughts of suffering within his human nature that Jesus calls upon the Father to spare him of this ordeal but he places his human will in accord with the will of the Father, “*Not my will, but yours be done.*”²³

With his restlessness of sorrow, he seeks unsuccessfully the solace from his disciples - - - but finds them asleep unaware of his tormented state and asks that they pray not for him but for themselves who will meet similar hardships. While Jesus is yet speaking to his disciples, Judas, with a group carrying swords and clubs hired by the chief priests, scribes and a detachment of Roman soldiers, appear from the darkness. Judas, as planned with the chief priests, approaches and identifies Jesus to the crowd with a kiss. The kiss, ordinarily a sign of love, esteem or loyalty, is used by the betrayer to cover his treachery. Jesus objects to the absurd manner of their approach, of their preparedness for violence, assuming he would be as a dangerous bandit. Jesus addresses them, “*Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to seize me? Day after day I sat in the temple area, yet you did not arrest me.*”²⁴ They seize Jesus, bind him and lead him away. Where are they taking him? Shall we follow them? The apostles have fled shamefully for their safety!

JESUS ON TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

*After arresting him they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest; Peter was following at a distance. The men who held Jesus in custody were ridiculing and beating him. They blindfolded him and questioned him, saying, “Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?” And they reviled him in saying many other things against him. When day came the council of elders of the people met, both chief priests and scribes, and they brought him before their Sanhedrin. They said, “If you are the Messiah, tell us,” but he replied to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I question, you will not respond. But from this time on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied to them, “You say that I am.” Then they said, “What further need have we for testimony? We have heard it from his own mouth.”*²⁵

Jesus has been arrested; we follow the hired mob and Roman soldiers. They lead us to the house of the High Priest, Caiaphas, where also in residence is his father-in-law, Annas, the prior and retired High Priest. A quick quorum of the Sanhedrin has been convened. Jesus, with wrists bound, stands meekly in their midst. They look upon him with disdain, sneering with menacing facial expressions, yet satisfied of the success in Jesus’ arrest without incident of insurrection. There a preliminary investigation is about to be held. There are no set judicial formalities but an occasion to assess the charges against the prisoner and assess his personality. Jesus is questioned, ridiculed and beaten.

²³ Luke 22:42

²⁴ Luke 22:52

²⁵ Luke 22:54, 63-71

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Caiaphas will call for the Sanhedrin to meet the next morning to convene a legitimate council for questioning to get a unanimous conviction meriting death.

By title of High Priest of the Temple, Caiaphas was also the supreme native magistrate of the Jewish state under the authority of the provincial Roman rule. He had at his disposal the temple police force which safeguarded the deposit of money and valuables, maintain peace within the precincts of the temple, and perform other security duties as warranted within the city.

The Sanhedrin is a council of the high priests, elders and scribes that make up the supreme judiciary body of the Jewish nation under the presidency of the reigning High Priest whose duties are to decide religious and legal questions that do not pertain to Roman interest. As such, it has no power to execute capital punishment of any sort.

Annas, whose reputation is of being very sly and cunning, is the first to interrogate Jesus with apparently harmless questions about his teachings and followers. Jesus, knowing his stratagem, retorts with *“Why ask me? Ask those who heard me what I said to them. They know what I said.”*²⁶ Annas suffers humiliation and discomfort because of one more perceptive than himself. His semblance exhibits an aura of defeat and the attendees sense the embarrassment of Annas. One of the temple guards nearest Jesus, hoping to ingratiate himself among the crowd, strikes Jesus with a remark, *“Is this the way you answer the high priest? Jesus answers, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?”*²⁷ Having obtained no satisfactory conclusion to their questions, it is decided to hold Jesus overnight as a prisoner in the house of the high priest until morning for questioning by the full complement of the Sanhedrin. For assurance against possible escape, Jesus is treated as if a common criminal and is cast into a surety pit in the lower level of the home.

At the break of dawn, the entire membership of the Sanhedrin is convened by the High Priest, Caiaphas. Jesus is brought up from the pit, is ordered before the council and, still shackled from the night before, stands weakly in the center of the large room facing the rows of seats of his alleged accusers. Many witnesses, coached to bring false testimony against Jesus, cannot agree in their testimonies. Finally, Caiaphas rises, addresses Jesus, Have you no answer? What are these men testifying against you? But Jesus is silent. In frustration in not being able to prove a charge of serious guilt, the High Priest says to him, *“I order you to tell us under oath before the Living God whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God”*. Jesus says in reply, *“You have said so, I am”*²⁸ The person of Jesus, has answered *“I am”* - - - the very same phrase used by God in identifying Himself to Moses - - - declares his Divinity in the presence of and in the hearing by the supreme judiciary and religious council of the entire Jewish nation. He is declaring his role as the Messiah appointed by God Himself, the Messiah who has been in expectation for generations upon generations. *“You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.”*²⁹

²⁶ John 18:21

²⁷ John 18:22

²⁸ Matt. 26:62-64

²⁹ Mark 14:62

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The members of the council reel back, flabbergasted, shocked and outraged. Jolted in anger, the High Priest tears at his garment in the ritual manner prescribed for the hearing of blasphemous speech, cries out, "He has blasphemed! What further need have we of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; what is your opinion?" They say in reply, "He deserves to die."³⁰

TRIAL BEFORE PILATE AND THE SENTENCE OF DEATH

Then the whole assembly of them arose and brought him before Pilate. 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." Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He said to him in reply, "You say so." Pilate then addressed the chief priests and the crowds, "I find this man not guilty." 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."

On hearing this Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean; and upon learning that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod who was in Jerusalem at that time. 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. He questioned him at length, but he gave him no answer. The chief priests and scribes, meanwhile, stood by accusing him harshly. [Even] Herod and his soldiers treated him contemptuously and mocked him, and after clothing him in resplendent garb, he sent him back to Pilate. Herod and Pilate became friends that very day, even though they had been enemies formerly. Pilate then summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people 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, nor did Herod, for he sent him back to us. So no capital crime has been committed by him. Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him."

But all together they shouted out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us." (Now Barabbas had been imprisoned for a rebellion that had taken place in the city and for murder.) Again Pilate addressed them, still wishing to release Jesus, but they continued their shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" 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." With loud shouts, however, they persisted in calling for his crucifixion, and their voices prevailed. The verdict of Pilate was that their demand should be granted. 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."³¹

But the Sanhedrin has no power to put someone to death; only the Roman governor has that power of life and death. Jesus, therefore, is being led away to the military

³⁰ Matt. 26:65-66

³¹ Luke 23:1-25

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headquarters and residence of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor in Jerusalem, to be judged according to Roman laws. In order to assure a judgment and sentence of death, the members of the Sanhedrin are prepared to present to Pilate three charges, - - - that of sedition, agitation of the populous, and pretending to be of royal sovereignty. Knowing they could not count upon Pilate's acceptance of their own verdict based on a purely religious charge, they present to Pilate a political charge, "*We found this man misleading our people; he opposes the payment of taxes (to the Roman empire) and maintains that he is the Messiah, a king.*"³² As the representative of Rome, Pilate is obligated to take notice of these accusations, especially the charge of kingship, which can be considered as possible sedition against the emperor of Rome. When asked by Pilate regarding his kingship, Jesus answers in a non-committal manner, "*You say so.*"³³ Jesus explains his kingship is not an earthly one in opposition to Rome. Pilate begins to believe that the charge by the Jews is a pretense and is satisfied that the charge of sedition is unfounded. Wishing to avoid further disagreement with the accusers, Pilate sends Jesus to King Herod who is staying in Jerusalem for the Passover feast, for his opinion of this conflict so as to avoid possible denouncement to the Emperor for negligence in dealing with a political agitator. Pilate's recourse to transfer responsibility to King Herod fails: Jesus is returned to Pilate's jurisdiction.

Pilate is still not convinced of the validity of the charges against Jesus. He orders that Jesus suffer the agonies of scourging as a distinct form of punishment for offenses which do not merit the death penalty. The implement of a scourge consists of leather thongs or light chains weighted with pieces of bone or metal fragments at the ends. Believing that Jesus should not be put to death, he intends to see him free after the scourging, hoping this compromise would appease Jesus' enemies.

Jesus' wrists are bound with strips of leather passed through a ring set into a pillar, is fettered to the pillar, his arms pulled over his head. He is stripped of his upper outer garment, baring his back readied for the lashes of the scourge. As the soldier raises the torturous devise over his head, we see the flourish of the thongs, hear its flutters through the air and observe the down-stroke upon Jesus' back. We gasp with a lurch of our bodies as the thongs smash against Jesus' back - - - he groans with a loud moan. The whine of the thongs repeats continuously - - - they trash upon his back - - - we quiver with each blow - - - Jesus quakes with each strike - - - his outcry is unbearable to our ears and resonates within our very breasts - - - the flesh of his back is torn apart - - - he bellows in pain. Jesus is weakened - - - he can barely stand - - - his knees give way - - - he is slumbered against the pillar, held to it by the bindings of his wrists to the ring of the pillar - - - he hangs limp. His back and sides reveal the brutality of the scourge, yet the beating continues. Splattered blood covers his body and the ground around him.

Finally, Pilate motions for the flogging to cease. The soldiers unbind Jesus from the pillar, raise him from his slouched position, forcing him to stand on the blood soaked ground. The soldiers concoct an idea; he claims to be a king? - - - He ought to be arrayed as a king - - - They throw a scarlet military cloak over his bruised shoulders, place a reed in his right hand as a royal scepter, and, weaving a crown of thorns they press it upon his

³² Luke 23:2

³³ Mark, 15:3

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head striking it with reeds for the thorns to dig into the scalp, bursting the blood capillaries; his vision is blurred by the blood rolling down his forehead, his face becomes covered with crimson sanguine fluid. The soldiers mock him, "Hail, king of the Jews."³⁴

Once more, Pilate addresses the crowd, "*Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I have found no guilt in him . . . Behold the man.*"³⁵ The crowd is not moved by the wretched appearance of Jesus; they cry out even more intently, "*Crucify him. If you release him you are not a friend of Caesar. Anyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar . . . We have no king but Caesar.*"³⁶ Pilate, fearful of retribution against himself and unable to convince the crowd, hands Jesus over to his centurion soldiers to have him put to death by crucifixion.

As if standing at the edge of a chasm, the shouts of "Crucify him" echo and reverberate in our ears over the silence of the courtyard of the Praetorium as Jesus is readied for the rendering of his sentence - - his crucifixion. It is not Pilate who has set the fate of Jesus; it is in fulfillment of the scripture promises for the salvation of mankind. Jesus is stripped of the scarlet military cloak and is dressed in his own clothes. The crudely hewn wood of the cross is ruthlessly lopped upon his bruised and bleeding shoulder. Being led by the Roman patrol, Jesus begins the arduous course to the hill of Golgotha (Calvary), outside the city wall of Jerusalem.

JESUS CARRIES HIS CROSS

*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. A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, 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.' At that time people will say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?" Now two others, both criminals, were led away with him to be executed.*³⁷

It is almost mid-day: it is Friday, the eve of the Sabbath. The city is abuzz with shoppers, as is customary, to procure provisions and fresh produce for the Sabbath day. Many are not aware of what has just occurred in the courtyard of Pilate's palace. The diversity of activity throughout the city creates a pleasant drone; neighborly greetings, vendors hawking their wares, shoppers bargaining for more favorable price, children substituting their boredom with playful hustle among the stalls. The air is equally filled with the savory aroma of spices, of baking bread and other delicacies, of readily prepared cuisine and of the exhilarating tang of pickled produce. Suddenly, shouts are heard, "Make way,

³⁴ Matt. 27:28-30

³⁵ John 19:1-5

³⁶ John 19:12, 15-16

³⁷ Luke 23:26-29

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make way". Centurion guards appear leading a horde of the chief priests, representatives of the Sanhedrin, and some locals accompanying three condemned criminals carrying crosses on their way beyond the city gates.

The earlier casual and festive aura among the shoppers and strollers is abruptly hushed with curiosity, but more so for such an ominous semblance of participants in its formation. Fingers are pointed indicating recognized participants and familiar faces. Someone among the bystanders is astounded, and overwhelmingly screeches, "Is that not Jesus - - the teacher from Nazareth? - - - he is blooded - - Why? What has he done? - - - Jesus, who healed the sick - - performed many wonders - - the blind, the lame. Why is he being led to Golgotha?"

As the retinue processes on the pathway of the city, the crowd begins to swell and the legionaries can scarcely contain the various numbers of sympathizers, the curious on-lookers and a tormenting mob. The pace of the procession is metered by the halting gait of Jesus' physical weakness burdened with the weight of the cross.

His flesh has been torn by the scourges, his head crowned with thorns; he has lost a great amount of blood. He is so weakened he can scarcely walk - - he staggers and stumbles - - falls onto his knees beneath the heavy cross as the crowd gives off a sudden gasp of empathy. We hear the resonant thud of the beam of the cross as it strikes the ground next to him. Jesus, as if a beast of burden, is whipped and poked by the soldiers to spur him on - - to rise and continue on his way to death.

With impeded strength of his tattered body, Jesus raises himself slowly from under the cross that had remained nested on his shoulder. Arduously he attempts to resume his pace, resisting the prodding of the soldiers. Having momentarily suppressed his physical distress, he sights his mother among the crowd.

Their eyes meet - - Mary is steeped in bitter grief. There is no exchange of words, but their eyes communicate a message of enthralling love between mother and child. To Jesus' physical pain is added an anguish of heart - - the chords within his chest tighten painfully, - - his throat quivers - - tears refuse to flow due to his dehydration. Jesus is gripped with guilt; that she should witness his wretched appearance, helplessly unable to comfort the pain his mother is feeling or to offer a final embrace. How can he soothe her anguish? - - - This must be - - - have trust - - - all will soon pass - - - look forward to the glory to be attained.

The pain in Mary's heart is beyond comprehension - - to see her son whom she bore - - the infant she nursed with gentle tenderness - - the child who, falling and bruising his knee, she would embrace and tell him it is going to be alright. Now helpless, she cannot run and scoop him up in her arms; she cannot take away the pain. The sword of sorrow, foretold by Simeon at the time of the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple,³⁸ now pierces the loving heart of Mary.

The soldiers jostle Jesus, compelling and propelling him from the temporary slower pace. Jesus is harshly treated, "*Like a lamb led to the slaughter or as a sheep silent before the*

³⁸ Luke 2:35

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*shearers, he did not open his mouth.*³⁹ The body of Jesus gives way to its weakness and he drops prostrate onto the dust of the pathway - - the cross dropping totally upon his back. Exhausted, with no allowance for rest, this fall renews the pain from all the wounds of his body and bleeding scalp. Desperately, the soldiers fearing Jesus may not be able to bear the distance to Calvary, the centurion orders Simon of Cyrene, a passerby who had “come in from the country-side,”⁴⁰ to carry the cross behind Jesus. Simon lifts the cross from atop of Jesus, lays it aside, assists Jesus to his feet and shoulders the cross upon himself. Simon’s assistance does not lessen Jesus’ crippling weakness; his steps become more and more unsteady. Momentarily, Jesus turns his head obliquely towards Simon and casts an inaudible word and a smile in a gesture of acknowledgement.

A woman in the crowd, Veronica by name, makes her way through the crowd. Bravely, though trembling in fear of the soldiers, never the less, defying them, approaches Jesus. Moved by love and compassion, having seen Jesus so afflicted, his face having lost all its beauty now bathed in sweat and blood, she reverently wipes his face with a white linen cloth. “*So marred were his features, beyond that of mortals his appearance, beyond that of human beings.*”⁴¹ In gratitude, Jesus leaves upon the linen an imprint of his countenance.

Among the spectators on the route, Jesus passes by a number of women, weeping, unable to restrain their composure to the awful sight of a man in such a broken, bruised and beaten manner. He instructs them not to weep for him, but to weep for themselves and for their children. “*Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, 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.*”⁴² Jesus’ caution refers to the eventual destruction of Jerusalem.⁴³

The procession of the condemned, their military escorts, and members of the Sanhedrin leave the city precincts through the Gate of Ephraim; the hill of Calvary, a rocky prominence rising about 15 feet from the surrounding soil, is visible a mere 600 feet away, adjacent to the road leading to the city of Joffa. At the very incline to the hill, Jesus falls a third time, unable to proceed any further. He can no longer stand on his feet: his strength has totally failed him and lies on the ground in utter exhaustion and pain. Supported by two soldiers, Jesus is lifted to his feet, and is stripped of his garments. We witness the violence with which the executioners strip Jesus. As they remove his cloak, we observe the blood stained inner garments - - garments that have now adhered to his skin. And in the stripping, the wounds of the scourging are painfully re-opened.

CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF JESUS

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. [Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive

³⁹ Isaiah 53:7-8

⁴⁰ Mark 15:21

⁴¹ Isaiah 52:14

⁴² Luke 23:28-29

⁴³ Luke 19:41-44

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them, they know not what they do.”] They divided his garments by casting lots. 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.” Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, “If you are King of the Jews, save yourself.” Above him there was an inscription that read, “This is the King of the Jews.” Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. 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. The centurion who witnessed what had happened glorified God and said, “This man was innocent beyond doubt.”⁴⁴

Simon gently lays the cross on the out-crop of rock on the crest of Calvary. The soldiers drag Jesus up the incline and sit him on the cross. His body is racked with the marks of torture; his face and bowed head evoke his unbearable agony. His sacred face bleeds under the piercing crown of thorns. They offer him wine mixed with myrrh, offered ceremonially as a Jewish custom, to deaden the senses before crucifixion.⁴⁵ Jesus refuses; he wishes not to alleviate the value of his sufferings.

Jesus is laid back, his arms being outstretched onto the horizontal beam. As one soldier holds Jesus' hand and wrist against the wood, the second soldier presses a spike against the flesh. With a heavy smash of the hammer, the spike is driven through the metacarpus and phalanges, crushing bone and flesh until it enters the wood of the Cross. Pain bursts like a bolt of fire as it screams through every nerve in our Savior's body. Jesus gives forth a soul-rending cry. The ordeal is repeated with the other arm; the agony explodes again. The gentle hands which once were raised in blessings, in healing of the sick, hands that raised Lazarus and a young man from the dead, hands that caressed the children, hands that were extended in forgiveness of sins are now pinned to the arms of the Cross.

They raise his knees for the feet to lie against the wood; they are hammered fast to the beam. With harrowing trauma rushing through his body, the nails tear through the extremity of the metatarsus, bone and sinew until the nails are imbedded into the Cross. The sacred feet that carried Jesus throughout Galilee and Judea announcing the Kingdom of God - - a message of love and forgiveness - - has been immobilized with inhuman cruelty. The hammering resounds off the city walls, announcing the advent of salvation - - the supreme sacrifice of atonement.

⁴⁴ Luke 23: 33 -47

⁴⁵ Matt. 15:23

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On the uppermost part of the Cross is set a scroll inscribed by Pilate himself, proclaiming, “*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,*” written in Latin, Greek and Hebrew.⁴⁶ The inscription intended by Pilate in ridicule of Jesus, unbelieving of the very truthfulness of Jesus’ kingship. Against the objections of the chief priests declaring Jesus as “*King of the Jews,*” at Pilate’s insistence it remain as written, signifying “the irrevocability of the sentence, and a desire to have revenge on the Jews: but in God’s providence Pilate’s inscription stands as a perpetual monument of the Kingdom of Jesus of Nazareth.”⁴⁷

St. Augustine (b.358- d.430) in one of his homilies, as found in “Treatise 50 on the Gospel of John,” reads: “By the trophy of the Cross, Jesus triumphs over the devil, the Prince of Death. On Palm Sunday, the multitude uttered words of praise to him, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel. The King of Ages has become the King of Men. For Christ was not King of Israel to exact tribute, or to arm a body of men with sword, or subdue visible foes; but King of Israel that he might rule souls, and counsel them regarding eternity, that he might lead to the Kingdom of Heaven such that believe in him, hope in him, and love him.”

At the direction of the commanding centurion, the four soldiers raise the Cross, fitting the beam into a crevice in the rock. As the beam settles in place with a thud, Jesus is jostled, stressing the spikes in his hand and feet. He is raised between heaven and earth, his arms outstretched as if embracing the entire universe in a message of hope and love, calling all of mankind to himself in his act of redemption.

It is noon and darkness comes over Jerusalem. Jesus, in excruciating agony, hears the abusive remarks from the spectators, passersby, chief priests and scribes. They reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, “*You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross. Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the king of Israel! Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” The revolutionaries who were crucified with him also kept abusing him in the same way.*”⁴⁸ Jesus utters no retort, rather he says, “*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do*”⁴⁹ in the spirit of Isaiah’s words, “*Because he surrendered himself to death, he was counted among the transgressors, bore the sins of many, and interceded for the transgressors.*”⁵⁰

Despite the pain that he is enduring, Jesus’ divine love eclipses any other thoughts within himself. He calls upon the Father to forgive them --- they do not comprehend ‘our purpose. – all this must be – I freely accept these tribulations – they are the sins of the world that I have taken upon myself for forgiveness.’ How little the chief priests and Scripture Scribes understand. Could they not know that Jesus is the culmination of the

⁴⁶ John 19:19

⁴⁷ Leonard, DD, Ph.D, Rev. W. *A Commentary on Holy Scripture*. Section 810b. London, T.Nelson & Sons, LTD

⁴⁸ Matt. 27:39–43

⁴⁹ Luke 23:34

⁵⁰ Isaiah 53:12

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prophesies of old? Rather, their comprehension is overshadowed by a blindness of self-endearment, self-righteousness and personal glories. This singular insignificant event, witnessed by the local spectators will have a universal, eternal effect.

The image of Jesus mounted on the Cross recounts for us his earlier discourse with Nicodemus regarding new birth from above. Jesus made reference to the mounted serpent in the desert during the exodus from Egypt, “*And just as Moses lifted the (brazen) serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*”⁵¹

“The brazen serpent raised by Moses as a divine remedy for poisonous serpent bite, as recorded in Num. 21: 9, is a figure of salvation through Christ crucified. The likeness of a non-poisonous serpent looked upon with faith, healed poisonous wounds and preserved temporal (earthly) life; the sinless Savior in the likeness of sinful flesh heals the poison wounds of sin and gives everlasting life.”⁵²

Jesus is crucified between two robbers, intended perhaps to throw contempt on Jesus’ claim of kingship by associating him with common criminals. This humiliation concurs with the prophesy of Isaiah, “*he was counted among the transgressors.*”⁵³ One of the two thieves engages in similar mockery against Jesus, saying, “*Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.*”⁵⁴ The other thief rebukes his partner, attesting to their own crimes warranting death as consequence of their sinful life; Jesus however is innocent of any crime. The penitent sinner, unashamed, gives the only words at Calvary in Jesus’ defense. He does not ask for a miracle of immediate dissent from the cross but asks only that Jesus remember him when he comes into the glory of his kingdom. In order to respond, Jesus raises himself by pressing against the nailed feet, lessening the tightness in his chest; each movement engulfs him in a new wave of agony. Jesus turns to the thief and gives a gentle look from his tortured face. The Cross becomes his pulpit and his throne as Jesus rewards the penitent’s act of faith and hope with the promise to be with him in perfect bliss in Paradise this very day.

*Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home*⁵⁵

There is a marked contrast between the jeers of the chief priests, scribes and on-lookers on Calvary and the tormenting grief of the little group of women and apostle John standing beside the Cross. They so ardently seek to take upon themselves some of the agony that Jesus is enduring. Are there any words or acts to lessen their sorrow? Oh, if only it be possible to silence those awful comments of blasphemy, ridicule and mockery!

⁵¹ John 3:14-15

⁵² Leonard, DD, Ph.D, Rev. W. *A Commentary on Holy Scripture*. Section 788d. London, T.Nelson & Sons, LTD

⁵³ Is. 53:12

⁵⁴ Luke, 23: 39

⁵⁵ John, 19: 25 – 27

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Amidst this turmoil and divergent atmosphere, Jesus looks down upon his unwavering few, and, in filial tenderness, entrusts his widowed mother to the care of his beloved apostle John.

Christian tradition, from early times to the present, has seen John as the representative of all Christians of whom Mary has become its spiritual Mother. In his encyclical, Pope Pius XI speaks of Mary as “ that self same Mary keeps within her heart all men who were committed to her protection on Calvary.” ((*Rerum Eccelsiae*, Encyclical on Catholic Missions, Pius XI, Feb. 28, 1926) The Church contemplates Mary’s motherhood to be mother of the members of Christ’s Mystical Body, the Church. Thus, from earliest times, Christians have sought Mary’s prayers and help for growth into holiness and for intimate relationship with her Son.

*And at three o’clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Some of the bystanders who heard it said, “Look, he is calling Elijah.”*⁵⁶

The body of Jesus continues to throb in aching agony - - - he feels alone - - -the consoling presence of his Father seems to have left him - - - his mind struggles through the maze of pain - - - and, praying the words of Psalm 22, he cries out, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” Mistakenly, some of the bystanders think he is calling upon their prophet Elijah for help in his distress. In his prayer of the psalm, Jesus, in his humanity asks why has the Father taken away the consolation he sought at this wretched hour. There is a feeling of loneliness - - his apostles have abandoned him - - - the crowd continues to ridicule and berate him - - - the sun has been darkened - - - he experiences a darkness and emptiness of soul - - - he is about to be separated from the physical. Yet, Jesus conforms and unites himself in the true spirit of the psalm. Although the psalm is a lament, it is unusual in its intensity of feeling. The author of the psalm speaks of the present distress contrasted to God’s past mercy. Ultimately the final verses are an invitation of a universal chorus of praise.⁵⁷ Doubtless, our Lord continues the psalm in silence.

“The psalm is not a cry of despair, but on the contrary, a hymn of supreme confidence in God despite profound suffering. The divine ‘forsaking’ in the psalm is no more than a poetical expression of acute physical and mental pain in which God has ‘abandoned’ the psalmist without however, having turned His face away. In our Lord’s mouth, indeed, the words are not even a complaint because his intention is simply to show the fruitful martyrdom of the innocent psalmist was a shadow of his own.”⁵⁸

In another section of the Catholic Commentary, we read, “Christ, the Just One, made the cry of the psalmist his own on the Cross with far more perfect sentiments of submission and confidence in God. The desolation felt in the human soul of Jesus is given expression in the psalmist’s words. But there is no question of despair or of abandonment to the humanity of the divinity. Christ was abandoned by God only in the

⁵⁶ Mark 15: 34-35

⁵⁷ Psalm 22 - Footnote

⁵⁸ Jones, L.S.S, A. *The Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture, Gospel of Matthew, 27:46, Sect. 722d*

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sense that God did not spare him the sufferings of the Passion and Crucifixion, but allowed his enemies to work their will on him.”⁵⁹

Let us give attention to the words of Psalm 22 as recited in prayer by Jesus.

Jesus’ cry from his distress:

*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why so far from my call for help, from my cries of anguish? My God, I call by day, but you do not answer; by night, but I have no relief. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the glory of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted and you rescued them. To you they cried out and they escaped; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.*⁶⁰

His condition as viewed by the bystanders:

*But I am a worm, not a man, scorned by men, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they curl their lips and jeer; they shake their heads at me: “He relied on the Lord—let him deliver him; if he loves him, let him rescue him.”*⁶¹

How he was blessed by the Father:

*For you drew me forth from the womb, made me safe at my mother’s breasts. Upon you I was thrust from the womb; since my mother bore me you are my God. Do not stay far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help.*⁶²

His shame and his plea for help:

*Like water my life drains away; all my bones are disjointed. My heart has become like wax, it melts away within me. As dry as a potsherd is my throat; my tongue cleaves to my palate; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs surround me; a pack of evildoers closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and my feet I can count all my bones. They stare at me and gloat; they divide my garments among them; for my clothing they cast lots. But you, Lord, do not stay far off; my strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the grip of the dog. Save me from the lion’s mouth, my poor life from the horns of wild bulls.*⁶³

Hymn of Praise:⁶⁴

Then I will proclaim your name to my brethren; in the assembly I will praise you: “You who fear the Lord, give praise! All descendants of Jacob, give honor; show reverence, all descendants of Israel!

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord; All the families of nations will bow low before him. For kingship belongs to the Lord, the ruler over the nations.

⁵⁹ O’Flynn, L.S.S., John A. *The Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture, Gospel of Mark, 15:34, Sect. 742e*

⁶⁰ Psalm 22:2-6

⁶¹ Psalm 22:7-9

⁶² Psalm 22:10-12

⁶³ Psalm 22:15-22

⁶⁴ Psalm 22:23-24, 28-29, 32

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The generation to come will be told of the Lord, that they may proclaim to a people yet unborn the deliverance you have brought.

Over the ridicule of some of the bystanders who had mistakenly thought Jesus was calling upon the prophet Elijah, the women and John, standing at the foot of the Cross, remained in painful silence and reverence to the prayer of the psalm, reflecting and joining in with Jesus in his prayer of confidence in God. And we await with anguish for the next moment.

After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth.⁶⁵

Having lost so much blood and possibly wracked with a burning fever, Jesus experiences an unbearable thirst; he rasps, "I thirst." As a final gesture of kindness, one of the soldiers dips a sponge into a vessel of common wine, no doubt a beverage equipped as gear for consumption by the soldiers, and offers it to the lips of Jesus. Jesus, the source of Living Water, seeks relief for his parched body and spirit.

When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.⁶⁶

With his lips moistened with common wine offered by the soldier, Jesus addresses the Father, "It is finished." Father, the mission to which you assigned me - - the work of redemption of mankind - - is now achieved. I have faithfully fulfilled Your will, the Sacrifice has been accomplished, my life work is complete.

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."⁶⁷

After three agonizing, lengthy hours on the Cross, Jesus is consumed with incalculable and indescribable anguish. He abandons himself to the weight of his body - - - no longer able to relieve the tightness within his chest and lungs - - - he bows his head and offers his spirit to the Father. "When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.'"⁶⁸

With arms outstretched on the beam of the Cross, Jesus offers to his Eternal Father the sacrifice that he freely accepted - - - the Divine Plan for man's redemption. We here witness the price by which salvation has been purchased for mankind.

The Israelites were saved from the land of slavery through the blood of an innocent lamb; all of mankind is saved from the clutches of slavery to sin and death through the blood of another innocent Lamb. Shadows and prophecies of old are over.⁶⁹ Here is the true Lamb of God who restored us as sons and daughters of God and heirs to His Kingdom, sharing in the Divine Life for eternity.

⁶⁵ John, 19: 28-29

⁶⁶ John 19:30

⁶⁷ Luke 23: 46

⁶⁸ Mark 15:39

⁶⁹ Heb. 10:1-10

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At the Last Supper, knowing that soon he would suffer the passion and death, Jesus had prayed, *“Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you.”* *“I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do. Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began.”*⁷⁰ Mankind has been redeemed and the Father is hereby glorified with the Son. **Amen**

EPILOGUE

Although the Gospels do not detail the agonies that Jesus suffered as he was being led carrying the cross from the Praetorium of Pontius Pilate to the site of crucifixion outside the city walls, Catholic tradition does speak of the arduous trek through the city of Jerusalem as attested in ancient Roman practice. The condemned person would carry the implement of execution to the appointed site, no less being subjected to indignities and ill-treatment on the way. The author of this tract has dared to exercise license to include that aspect of tradition into the scriptural account of the Passion.

The recounting of Jesus’ route developed into a spiritual pilgrimage and devotion from earliest time. (Catholic Encyclopedia, “Via Crucis”) Stations or stops on the route have been established in the city of Jerusalem whereby pilgrims may stop and meditate on those particular aspect of the painful journey of Jesus. This very devotion can be recounted in every Catholic Church wherein plaques of “stations” indicate those events of Jesus’ passion.

⁷⁰ John 17:1, 4-5