

Introit: Psalm 118:19-29

P Open to me the gates of righteousness! I shall enter through them. I shall give thanks to the LORD.

C **This is the gate of the LORD, through which righteous people will enter.**

P I shall give thanks to You. For You have answered me, and You have become my Salvation.

C **The Stone that the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone.**

P This has come from the LORD. It is marvellous in our eyes.

C **This is the day that the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!**

P Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, please give us success!

C **Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you all from the house of the LORD.**

P The LORD is God, and has given us light. Tie the festive procession together with leafy branches as far as the horns of the altar!

C **You are my God, and I shall give thanks to You. You are my God. Let me honour You highly.**

All **Give thanks to the LORD! For He is good. For His mercy endures for ever.**

Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

C **Amen.**

Old Testament: Isaiah 50:4-9a

Epistle: Philippians 2:5-11

Gospel: Matthew 27:11-66.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon this morning is written in the book of Matthew 27:11-54, which was a part of our Gospel reading before

11 Jesus stood before the governor. The governor asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “It is as you say.”

12 While the chief priests and elders were accusing Him, He did not answer at all. **13** Then Pilate asked Him, “Do You not hear how much testimony they are bringing against You?”

14 However, Jesus made no reply to him, even about a single statement, so that the governor was very amazed.

15 At every feast the governor used to release to the crowd one prisoner whom they chose. **16** At that time they were holding a well-known prisoner called Barabbas. **17** Therefore, when the people had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called ‘Christ’?”

18 For he knew that they had handed Jesus over to him because they were jealous.

19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent someone to tell him, “Do not have anything to do with that innocent Man! For I have suffered greatly today in a dream because of Him.”

20 However, the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus put to death. **21** The governor asked them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?”

They said, “Barabbas.”

22 Pilate asked them, “Then what should I do with Jesus, who is called ‘Christ’?”

They all said, “Let Him be crucified!”

23 Pilate said, “No, what wrong has He done?”

Nevertheless, they began to shout even louder: “Let Him be crucified!”

24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd. He said, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood. You will see to it yourselves.”

25 All the people answered, “Let His blood be on us and on our children!”

26 Then he released Barabbas for them, but he had Jesus scourged, and handed Him over to be crucified.

27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's quarters, and gathered the whole company of soldiers around Him. 28 They took His clothes off and put a scarlet robe on Him. 29 They twisted together a crown of thorns, placed it on His head, and put a stick in His right hand, knelt in front of Him, and made fun of Him, saying: "Welcome, King of the Jews!" 30 They spat on Him, took the stick, and began to beat Him on the head.

31 After they had made fun of Him, they took the robe off Him, and put His own clothes on Him. Then they led Him away to crucify Him.

32 While they were going out, they found a man from Cyrene by the name of Simon, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross.

33 When they had come to a place called "Golgotha," which means "The Place of a Skull," 34 they offered Him a drink of wine mixed with gall, but, when He had tasted it, He refused to drink it.

35 After they had crucified Him, they divided His clothes among themselves by throwing lots. 36 Then they sat down there and kept watch over Him. 37 Above His head they placed the written charge against Him: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

38 At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one at His right and the other at His left. 39 Those who were passing by kept ridiculing Him, shaking their heads, 40 and saying, "You, who are going to tear down the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

41 The chief priests, together with the scribes and elders, also kept making fun of Him in a similar way, saying, 42 "He saved others: He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel. He should come down from the cross now, and we shall believe in Him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him! For He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 In the same way even the robbers who had been crucified with Him kept insulting Him.

45 At noon darkness came over the whole land and lasted until three in the afternoon. 46 About three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "This man is calling Elijah."

48 Immediately one of them ran, took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to Him to drink. 49 The others said, "Let Him alone! Let us see if Elijah is coming to save Him!"

50 Jesus cried out once again with a loud voice and gave up His spirit.

51 Just then the curtain in the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth shook and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had died were raised. 53 They came out of the tombs, after Jesus had risen, went into the Holy City, and appeared to many people.

54 When the captain and those who were watching Jesus with him saw the earthquake and the other things that happened, they were terrified. They said, "Truly, this Man was the Son of God!"

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

Our Passion Gospel begins with the Governor of all things standing before Pontius Pilate. Ironically, the all-powerful Lord allows Himself to be questioned by a weak and sinful representative of the Gentiles. We know that Pilate is weak because he eventually caves to the pressure of the crowds to crucify Christ. Although it was God's preordained plan that Christ would die for the sins of the world, that does not excuse Pilate for allowing this perversion of justice. - For all that he tried to claim innocence, he was guilty as well. Perhaps Pilate should have listened to his wife. She sent a message to him while he was sitting on the judgment seat. **"Do not have anything to do with that innocent Man! For I have suffered greatly today in a dream because of Him."**

Dreams, in general, are unreliable. They can mean anything or nothing. But in this case, the earth-shattering events to come were so momentous that even that woman's dream pointed to the truth. Think off

that a gentile woman became a prophet of sorts, to speak the truth about Christ. He was the righteous man, innocent and unworthy of death. Leave Him alone, she advises.

But Pilate doesn't listen. He listens instead to the bloodthirsty cries of the mob. Then he tries to claim innocence. - He washes his hands in a public display, as if that proves that he's not guilty of killing an innocent man.

Like all of us, Pontius Pilate wants to appear innocent to the world. We don't want people to see our guilt. We want to hide our trespasses, as if to show the world that we are a good person, not bad. I wonder sometimes at the lengths some people will go! Surely we have lied to protect our reputation. Surely we have covered up or hidden or kept secret whatever is shameful in our lives. Surely we have blamed others for what is really our fault.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, when Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent, we have all been trying to show an innocent face to the world.

Sometimes we're as silly as Pilate, thinking that an outward show like washing with a little water can make us innocent.

But it does. Not in the way Pilate meant it. There is a true washing that removes guilt. - Real, physical water is used, combined with the Word of God. But this washing from God is not a humanly invented sacrament for self-justification. In Christ who died, our Baptism has become the true washing of innocence. For Christ washes us into union with His death. - He washes us into the holiness of His Blood, shed in perfect righteousness for sinners.

Pilate saw none of this. He was only fearful of the riot that was beginning. The Jews were prone to rebellious demonstrations that often had to be put down in bloody fashion. Pilate was probably more fearful of the repercussions to his political position than the violence the people might do. May our motives be purer. May we not fear man, but the Lord God, and so strive to keep His commandments. May we resist the pressures of those around us who want us to act contrary to the Law. May we also not remain silent and do nothing when the innocent are slandered, or threatened with death.

In the midst of the travesty of justice and inhumanity in the Passion account, the Jewish people speak what is perhaps the best prayer that can be spoken in response to the suffering of our Lord. - They cry out, "His Blood shall be upon us and upon our children!" - What they meant was a horrifying half-truth. They are saying, let Him be killed, and we'll take responsibility. - They thought that He was such a bad man, - an unholy blasphemer, that any means justified the ends to which they were putting Him. - They thought that God would surely approve of killing this Man whom they thought to be evil.

Yet if we pray this prayer in faith, it takes on a wonderful and blessed meaning. "O Lord, let Your precious Blood, shed on the Cross, be on us and our children!" - For no one is righteous unless the holy Blood of the Lamb covers their iniquities. - Only they have life who receive in faith the benefits of the death of Christ. - May we humbly trust in the Blood of Christ. May the Lord grant us faith that does not waver as it clings to the innocent death of our King.

The soldiers made fun of Him. They knelt down before Him, saying, "**Hail, King of the Jews!**" Even as Blood dripped from the crown of thorns, they felt no sympathy. - They gave Him a reed for a sceptre, then took the reed and beat Him with it.

He didn't even protest. He didn't use His power to defend Himself. - For He didn't come to avoid pain, but to willingly suffer it. He submitted to all the humiliating shame. - When they had crucified Him, the soldiers sat down to keep watch over Him. When they should have been kneeling in reverence, they sat casually, as if the most important event in history was not happening before them. This was only a job for them, an order to be obeyed. Were they bored or annoyed at this duty? Maybe. - Lest we be too proud, let us remember that we are sometimes bored or annoyed when the Lord is in our presence. - We are sometimes casual when we should be filled with reverent awe when the Lord gives out the fruits of His death.

When He hung upon the Cross, the people mocked Him by calling Him the Son of God. They said, **“You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross. - He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him! For He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”**

Set aside the complete lack of compassion behind such words, which is horrible enough. Beyond that, we see a miscomprehension in the crowds. These people meant to show that they were really the pious, spiritual people, and Christ had been a liar. For surely, they thought, God would not completely abandon His own beloved Son, which Christ had claimed to be.

But that is the exact reason He came. He came for sinners, just like those who stood before His cross to mock Him. He came into human flesh so that He could bleed even for the soldiers who pounded nails into Him. He willingly came to Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, to present Himself as the Lamb without blemish who would be slaughtered for our sins.

The crowds so misunderstood the purpose of God in sending His Son. Yet most certainly we would not have seen the glory of God in the Man tortured on Golgotha. - We only see the plan of God for us because He has revealed it in Scripture, and then opened our minds to comprehend by His Spirit. - Without that revelation, we would be as ignorant as the crowds who mocked them. We would see the Cross only as a terrible day when innocence was tragically crucified.

But now we know that the Passion of Christ is our salvation. We see in His sufferings the glory of God’s grace. We comprehend, even us who are spiritually ignorant in our flesh, that Christ is the Son of God, who came for this exact purpose – to save us by His death. - So Christ is recognized as the Son of God by the centurion, but He is not recognized when He is feeding the multitudes or doing miracles or showing love in His words. No, He is recognized as God’s Son when He breathes His last and the heavens are dark and the earth shudders and rocks are split. The centurion is filled with great fear because he recognizes that here was no mere man, but the Son of God.

In death, Christ shows Himself as the true Son of God more clearly than anywhere else. On the Cross, He fulfills His identity as the Son who obeys His Father even to the point of death. He yielded up His breath at the very end because even then, after all He had suffered, He did not have to die. - He was still the almighty Son of Man who could have resisted death forever. Or with a single word, He could have healed all His wounds and stepped down from the Cross. At a single word, legions of angels could have swooped down from heaven to rescue Him. - But Christ came to finish all things. He did not shy away from death, even after all the torture and pain inflicted on Him. Even then, He voluntarily yielded up His final breath.

This is the love of Christ for us. He suffered all rather than lose us. He suffered the greatest shame in history to redeem us. - He paid the ultimate price, dying for our sins when His innocent flesh should never have tasted death. All this He did for us.

We see the benefits of His death when the bodies of many saints were raised. They came out of their tombs after Christ was raised and entered Jerusalem and appeared to many people. This is a foretaste of the Resurrection at the Last Day.

God was showing us that His Son’s death had already purchased eternal life for all His saints. WE have eternal life also, because Christ died in OUR place. - Because the Innocent Man paid our punishment in death, we receive His reward in unending life.

The Lord keep us in reverent contemplation of these events this Holy Week, since these events are our life and salvation. In His Name, the King and the Son of God, the Lamb slain for us. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

3rd Hymn: 55,

Prayer of the Church Palm Sunday

P Let us pray for the Church, that she may faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of God's Word to the joy and edification of Christ's holy people and for the calling of many into new life in Christ:

Brief Silence

P Merciful Lord, You established Your Church through the blood of Christ and sent forth Your people to serve the world in Your name. Bless Your Church with pure doctrine, with zeal for Your Kingdom and with faithfulness, that we may not waver from the truth of Your Word nor fail to welcome the stranger in Your name; Lord in Your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

P Merciful Lord, You have raised up faithful Pastors and Church workers for Your Church, and we appeal to You to continue to provide for these faithful workers. - Prosper the work of those who bring the light of Christ to those living in darkness, both hear in the AELC and the ULMA in America. Bless those whose acts of mercy extend Your love to the disabled, wounded and forgotten throughout the world, that Your Church may serve You in faithful service as well as faithful witness; Lord in Your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

P Merciful Lord, all things come from You and all things return to You. Give to Your people leaders who will act with integrity and serve honourably. Bless all who make, administer and judge our laws. Protect service men and women in their duty for freedom, and bless all emergency workers, police and firefighters in their service to us; Lord in Your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

P Merciful Lord, You know the sufferings of Your people and the needs of all who cry to You. Grant to us what is good and needful for us, and lead us to trust in Your mercy so that we may neither despair in our need nor grow weary of the burdens of this mortal life. Hear us on behalf of all whom we name before You in our hearts; Lord in Your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

P Merciful Lord, grant to us every aid and blessing of Your Holy Spirit, that we who have cried out "**Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord**" may welcome Him who fulfils His promise with His presence in the bread and wine of this Holy Communion. Keep in faithfulness the grace given to us here. Sustain us through the Holy Week of our Lord's journey to the cross, and lead us to trust in His promise to raise us up with Him on the Last Day; Lord in Your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

P Merciful Lord, accept the gifts we bring today, born of a grateful heart and brought to You as part of the living sacrifice of our very selves. Bring us and all people to repentance and faith, especially our enemies, and bring us to acknowledge You with one heart and one mind. Lead us to live faithfully and generously, loving You above all things and our neighbour as ourselves; Lord in Your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

P Merciful Lord, grant us all things needful to us and beneficial to our faith, and help us pray with confidence through the merits and in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C **Amen.**

4th Hymn: 7