

## **Gospel and Father Eamon's Commentary for All Ages** **First Sunday of Lent February 21, 2021**

**Opening prayer:** *(Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.)*

*Creator God, you formed the first man and woman from the clay of the earth and breathed into them the Spirit of Life, but they turned from you and sinned. We have also turned from you and your ways. During this Lenten season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, you call us back to you and we ask for your help and your strength to remain faithful to you. Draw all of us closer to you. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Gospel: Mark 1:12-15** *(Let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us.)*

**The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him. After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."**

### **Commentary:**

In today's Gospel reading Mark tells us the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert. He was among wild beasts – which indicate how savage the temptation to sin can be, but there were also angels ministering to him – an indication that God always provides us with protection against temptation – if we will only choose it.

After his time in the desert, Jesus begins his public ministry and his first words were: *"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel."* Repent means to change our ways. Lent is the time we look at those thoughts and actions that cause us to be less than the person God created us to be. We then choose to listen to Jesus and choose the ways of goodness and kindness and love he teaches us in the Gospel.

### **Questions:**

1. What word or phrase stuck out to you in the gospel?
2. How do you think that word or phrase relates to what is happening in your life right now?
3. Is Jesus asking you to change something to be a better person or do something to help someone else?

**Closing prayer:** "May your Word grow strong in our hearts. Amen." Father Eamon Tobin

## **Gospel and Father Eamon's Commentary for All Ages** **Second Sunday of Lent February 28, 2021**

**Opening prayer:** *(Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.)*

*God, our Father, you have chosen us to be your sons and daughters. You cherish us as you cherish your beloved Son Jesus. Though we do not deserve it, we rejoice in your love. Help us to trust in that love and to find more ways to share your love with others. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Gospel: Mark 9:2-10** *(Let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us.)*

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them. As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

In this mystical and awe-filled event, Jesus and his three apostles experience the glory of God. The references to Jesus' face "*dazzling as the sun*" and his clothes "*radiant as light*" remind us of the stories of the Old Testament. The presence of Moses and Elijah symbolizes "the Law" (given to Moses) and "the Prophets" (like Elijah) who taught us the ways of God. In Jesus, both come together to show us this is how we are to be. The response of the apostles is one of incredible joy and awe. They do not want to leave: "*Let us make three tents.*" Spiritual theologians tell us that the "*experience of the holy*" can cause us to be overjoyed and overwhelmed at the same time. The heavenly voice tells the apostles to *listen* to Jesus for he is God's chosen one. In the dark days ahead, this mountaintop experience will sustain both Jesus and the apostles. Remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the night before he died: "*We have some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter now. Because I have been to the mountaintop ... mine eyes have seen the glory of the Lord.*"

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3. Is Jesus asking you to change something to be a better person or do something to help someone else?

**Closing prayer:** "May your Word grow strong in our hearts. Amen." Father Eamon Tobin

## **Gospel and Father Eamon's Commentary for All Ages** **Third Sunday of Lent March 7, 2021**

**Opening prayer:** *(Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.)*

*Blessed are you, God of the Covenant, You formed us as your covenant people. You invite us into a new covenant of love in your Son. Help us to live always in accord with your will. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Gospel: John 2:13-25** *(Let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us.)*

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, *Zeal for your house will consume me.* At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken. While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.

### **Commentary:**

The Gospel for the next three Sundays will be from John. Many of John's stories have two levels of meaning. In today's gospel, Jesus is angry that the religious leaders at the time had turned the temple and honoring God into a business. Not only that, they had limited honoring God to only some people. *God wants the Temple which honors him to be a house of prayer 'for all nations.'* Jesus declared that *salvation was for all peoples.*

Above, we said that many of John's stories have two levels of meaning, a *literal* meaning and a *deeper* meaning. On a *deeper* level, John is referring to the temple of Jesus' body which will be resurrected and become the new focus of his followers' worship life.

### **Questions:**

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3. Is Jesus asking you to change something to be a better person or do something to help someone else?

**Closing prayer:** "May your Word grow strong in our hearts. Amen." Father Eamon Tobin

## **Gospel and Father Eamon's Commentary for All Ages**

### **Fourth Sunday of Lent March 14, 2021**

**Opening prayer:** *(Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.)*

*God of our ancestors, we thank you for gathering us together in your name, we thank you for continuing to be patient with us when we fail to follow your ways. Help us during this Lenten journey to commit ourselves more fully to you. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Gospel: John 3:14-21** *(Let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us.)*

**Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."**

**For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

**And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.**

#### **Commentary:**

The Gospel begins with the story from the Old Testament when Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt. They had to travel through the desert where they were bitten by serpents and some of them died. At God's command, Moses made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole. Whoever looked at the serpent was healed. This is a story to teach us that everyone who looks to Christ with faith and repentance will be saved. Believing in Christ is a choice to live in the light. We can open our hearts to the light or we can reject the light. The choice is ours. Acceptance of the light will lead us to heaven. We consciously choose to live our lives with God.

#### **Questions:**

1. What word or phrase stuck out to you in the gospel?
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**Closing prayer:** "May your Word grow strong in our hearts. Amen." Father Eamon Tobin

## **Gospel and Father Eamon's Commentary for All Ages** **Fifth Sunday of Lent March 21, 2021**

**Opening prayer:** *(Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.)*

*God of our ancestors, you have entered into a new covenant with us through the death and Resurrection of Jesus. Help us to be more faithful to our covenant relationship with you. Bless us now as we prepare to share our lives and your Word this we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Gospel: John 12:20-33** *(Let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us.)*

Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Passover Feast came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me. "I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again." The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder; but others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come for my sake but for yours. Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.

### **Commentary:**

The religious leaders are worried that the "whole world" is flocking to the side of Jesus. The first evidence of this is the appearance of some Greeks who come to Philip to ask if he can arrange for them a meeting with Jesus. Their presence shows that Jesus has come to save all people. The following are eight observations on this discourse from John's Gospel:

1. Jesus begins by speaking of his "*hour*"- a reference to his return to God. he will pass through death, be raised up, and return to his Father.
2. Jesus uses a *wheat grain* to speak of life and death. Just as a grain of wheat must first die before it bears fruit, so too must Jesus die prior to his Resurrection, and so too must we die to sin and selfishness before we bear godly fruit in our lives. Married couples know this more than other people. For the marriage to grow, each spouse must frequently die to his/her own desires.
3. "*Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life, will preserve it.*" This means that those who cling to their lives, concerned only about themselves, will eventually lose out on the meaning of life, which is to love and serve others. Thomas Merton talks about our *true self* and *false self*. The *true self* is that part of us that seeks to follow God and his ways. The *false self* is that part that wants to be independent of God and his ways, the part that is self-centered, controlling, jealous, etc. this self we must "hate" – or we might say "deny" – and not allow to control our lives. This false self must be transformed through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
4. "*Whoever serves me must follow me...the Father will honor whoever serves me.*" Serving Jesus means, being willing to lay down our life for others—to die to the desires of our false self. To serve Jesus is to follow him in his path of love and to carry our cross. Such service and love will honor the Father.

5. *“Save me from the hour”* is a reference to Jesus’ agony in the garden. It is a beautiful statement about Jesus’ humanity. As a person who loves life and people, he has no desire to die. He recoils from it. Yet, if going through this *“hour”* is what he must do, then he is willing to do it.
6. *“Then came a voice from heaven”* reminds us of the voice that spoke at Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration. *“I have glorified the Father.”* Jesus gives “glory” to the Father (and so do we) by following the will of God. Jesus also says: *“I always do the things that please the Father.”*
7. *“Now is the time of judgment in this world. Now the ruler of this world will be drawn out.”* The judgment is our “yes” or “no” to Jesus. When we say “yes,” love is released into the world, and darkness and evil are overthrown—and vice-versa.
8. *“When I am lifted up, I will draw everyone to myself”* is a reference to Jesus’ Cross and how the force of his love will attract and draw people to him.

**Questions:**

1. What word or phrase stuck out to you in the gospel?
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**Closing prayer:** “May your Word grow strong in our hearts. Amen.” Father Eamon Tobin

## **Gospel and Father Eamon's Commentary for All Ages**

### **Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion March 28, 2021**

**Opening prayer:** (Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.)

*Father, we once again prepare to celebrate the holiest week in our Church year, the celebration of Jesus' passion, death and Resurrection. Through his blood you established a new covenant with your people. May your Holy Spirit give us new and fresh insight and appreciation of those events in your Son's life. Bring us one day to the glory of his resurrection.*

**THE GOSPEL: Mark 14:1-15:47** (Let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us.)

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to take place in two days' time. So the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to arrest him by treachery and put him to death. They said, "Not during the festival, for fear that there may be a riot among the people."

When he was in Bethany reclining at table in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, costly genuine spikenard. She broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head. There were some who were indignant. "Why has there been this waste of perfumed oil? It could have been sold for more than three hundred days' wages and the money given to the poor." They were infuriated with her. Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me. The poor you will always have with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them, but you will not always have me. She has done what she could. She has anticipated anointing my body for burial. Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went off to the chief priests to hand him over to them. When they heard him they were pleased and promised to pay him money.

Then he looked for an opportunity to hand him over.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him. Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there." The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he came with the Twelve. And as they reclined at table and were eating, Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be distressed and to say to him, one by one, "Surely it is not I?" He said to them, "One of the Twelve, the one who dips with me into the dish. For the Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born." While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will have your faith shaken, for it is written: *I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be dispersed.* But after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee."

Peter said to him, "Even though all should have their faith shaken, mine will not be."

Then Jesus said to him, "Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times." But he vehemently replied, "Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you." And they all spoke similarly. Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and

he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch." He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will." When he returned he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Withdrawing again, he prayed, saying the same thing. Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open and did not know what to answer him. He returned a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough. The hour has come.

Behold, the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners. Get up, let us go. See, my betrayer is at hand." Then, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, "The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely." He came and immediately went over to him and said, "Rabbi." And he kissed him. At this they laid hands on him and arrested him. One of the bystanders drew his sword, struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his ear. Jesus said to them in reply, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs, to seize me? Day after day I was with you teaching in the temple area, yet you did not arrest me; but that the Scriptures may be fulfilled." And they all left him and fled. Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. They seized him, but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked.

They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. Peter followed him at a distance into the high priest's courtyard and was seated with the guards, warming himself at the fire. The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they found none. Many gave false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. Some took the stand and testified falsely against him, alleging, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands and within three days I will build another not made with hands.'" Even so their testimony did not agree.

The high priest rose before the assembly and questioned Jesus, saying, "Have you no answer? What are these men testifying against you?" But he was silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him and said to him, "Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed One?" Then Jesus answered, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.'"

At that the high priest tore his garments and said, "what further need have we of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as deserving to die. Some began to spit on him. They blindfolded him and struck him and said to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards greeted him with blows.

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the high priest's maids came along. Seeing Peter warming himself, she looked intently at him and said, "You too were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about." So he went out into the outer court. Then the cock crowed. The maid saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." Once again he denied it. A little later the bystanders said to Peter once more, "Surely you are one of them; for you too are a Galilean." He began to curse and to swear, "I do not know this man about whom you are talking." And immediately a cock crowed a second time. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times." He broke down and wept.

As soon as morning came, the chief priests with the elders and the scribes, that is, the whole Sanhedrin held a council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate.

Pilate questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He said to him in reply, "You say so." The chief priests accused him of many things. Again Pilate questioned him, "Have you no answer? See how many things they accuse you of." Jesus gave him no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now on the occasion of the feast he used to release to them one prisoner whom they requested. A man called Barabbas was then in prison along with the rebels who had committed murder in a rebellion. The

crowd came forward and began to ask him to do for them as he was accustomed. Pilate answered, "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" For he knew that it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate again said to them in reply, "Then what do you want me to do with the man you call the king of the Jews?" They shouted again, "Crucify him." Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" They only shouted the louder, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified.

The soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort. They clothed him in purple and, weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him.

They began to salute him with, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting upon him. They knelt before him in homage. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him out to crucify him.

They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

They brought him to the place of Golgotha — which is translated Place of the Skull —, They gave him wine drugged with myrrh, but he did not take it. Then they crucified him and divided his garments by casting lots for them to see what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." With him they crucified two revolutionaries, one on his right and one on his left. Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself by coming down from the cross." Likewise the chief priests, with the scribes, mocked him among themselves and said, "He saved others; he cannot save himself.

Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also kept abusing him.

At noon darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 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." One of them ran, soaked a sponge with wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink saying, "Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to take him down."

Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

*Here all kneel and pause for a short time.*

The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

There were also women looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses, and Salome. These women had followed him when he was in Galilee and ministered to him. There were also many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

When it was already evening, since it was the day of preparation, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a distinguished member of the council, who was himself awaiting the kingdom of God, came and courageously went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was amazed that he was already dead. He summoned the centurion and asked him if Jesus had already died. And when he learned of it from the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. Having bought a linen cloth, he took him down, wrapped him in the linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses watched where he was laid.

### **Commentary:**

The suffering and death of Jesus is the centerpiece of Mark's Gospel. Hints of the Passion are found already in chapters 1-2, and by chapter 3, a plot against Jesus is being planned. Halfway through the Gospel, Mark has Jesus predicting three times the details of his Passion. In chapter 11, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for the events which this Sunday's liturgy enacts ritually. Six of the 16 chapters of Mark are devoted exclusively

to the last week of Jesus' life. This has led scholars to call Mark's Gospel a "Passion narrative with an extended introduction." Two central themes to watch for in Mark's Gospel are:

- The contrast between *Jesus' fidelity* to God and his mission no matter what the cost, and the *infidelity* of the disciples and crowds. Jesus has no desire to die. He prays three times that God would spare him, but if fidelity to God and his mission involves embracing the Cross and death, he is willing to do that. This fidelity is expressed in his wonderful prayer of surrender, "*Not my will but your will be done.*" In stark contrast, we notice weakness and infidelity in the disciples. They fall asleep when Jesus needs their support in the garden. Peter, the leader, denies Jesus. Judas betrays him. At the time of his arrest, they "*all fled and left him.*" At the time of his trial, the crowds who have previously sung his praises now chant "*Crucify him! Crucify him!*" But not all are unfaithful. A few women remain faithful. One anoints him; others keep watch as he dies on the Cross.
- Mark's Passion presents us with a very *human* picture of Jesus. In the garden, he begs the Father three times to free him from dying. We can *feel* Jesus' disappointment when he finds his beloved disciples asleep not just once but three times. What must he have felt when all his disciples "fled and left him"? How painful it must have been for Jesus to hear the crowds call for the release of the criminal Barabbas and call for Jesus' crucifixion. Then consider the scourging of his body, the crowning with thorns, the crucifixion and, most of all, the sense of his Father abandoning him: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" This is a cry of one steeped in human agony. Jesus pays the ultimate price for fidelity to his call.

## AN EXTENDED COMMENTARY ON MARK'S PASSION

### *A Woman and a Betrayer*

Mark's Passion opens with a beautiful story of a woman showing tender love for Jesus. This story is sandwiched or bracketed by two ugly scenes: the chief priests looking for a way to arrest Jesus and Judas plotting with them for a way to hand Jesus over to his enemies. There is a strong contrast between the two scenes. The woman's extravagant act of love anticipates Jesus' extravagant act of love on the Cross.

### *Betrayal within the Eucharist.*

Using his characteristic bracketing technique, Mark places a conversation about betrayal in between the Preparation for the Last Supper and the actual Last Supper.

Jesus singing "songs of praise" the night before he was to die a criminal's death is extraordinary. Perhaps it says to us that as we spend our lives for Jesus, we also should sing God's praises.

### *Gethsemane*

After the Last Supper, Jesus goes out to Gethsemane with Peter, James and John. Peter has just said how he will stand by Jesus no matter what. Earlier in the Gospel, James and John assert that they can "drink the cup of suffering" with Jesus. Now we see the vast difference between words and actions. They fall asleep when Jesus most needs their support. Later, they will all flee and Peter will deny Jesus. In contrast, Jesus remains faithful to God but not without a struggle. He hopes against hope for a way other than the way of the Cross. In the end, he surrenders to God's will ("*Not my will but your will*"). In John 4:34, the apostles offer Jesus food, to which he responds: "*My food is to do the will of Him who sent me.*" In the Passion event, it is important for us to remember that God is not demanding that Jesus die a cruel death. Rather, he wants Jesus to be faithful to his mission even if it means a cruel death. It is the truth that it is the sin of humanity that brought about Jesus' suffering and death.

### *The Arrest of Jesus*

In this scene, we witness further the abandonment of Jesus. We just read how Jesus is abandoned through the human weakness of Peter, James and John. Now, we have the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. He treats Jesus

as a friend by kissing him and at the same time plants the kiss to point Jesus out to the authorities. Then Mark tells us, “*All left him and fled.*” The young man who runs away naked is symbolic of us who may, in a time of crisis and fear, run away from Jesus, leaving behind our baptismal identity. Jesus is now left alone with his enemies. Not one of his friends shows faithful discipleship. In contrast, Jesus shows himself to be fearless and speaks up with dignity to those who come to arrest him.

### *Peter’s Denial and the Trial of Jesus*

The trial of Jesus is a farce. Trials are not allowed at night. False witnesses fail to agree with each other. During his trial, Jesus continues to show himself to be courageous and confident. When he declares himself to be the Christ, the Blessed One, he knows he is signing his own death sentence and yet he does it. Then follows the threefold denial of Peter. These two stories are another example of *contrast* so strong in Mark’s Passion. As two examples of behavior under pressure, Jesus shows us what to do and Peter shows us what *not* to do. Jesus exemplifies courage, Peter cowardice. Jesus, while losing his life through steadfast witness, ultimately saves it; Peter, trying to save himself, in fact, condemns himself. Readers are called to follow Jesus. We notice that during his trial, Jesus affirms that he is the “*Christ, the Son of the Blessed One.*”

### *Jesus before Pilate*

Jesus is then brought before the Jewish and Roman authorities. Both share in the brutal humiliation of Jesus. Pilate believes Jesus to be innocent but he is too much of a crowd-pleaser to let him go free. He shows himself to be a coward just as Jesus shows himself to be fearless and strong, the innocent sufferer who identifies with all who are unjustly and falsely accused. The crowds also fail Jesus, choosing a criminal over him.

### *The Crucifixion*

Jesus is led away to Golgotha to be crucified. A stranger named Simeon is forced to help Jesus carry his Cross. After Jesus is crucified, the bystanders mock and verbally abuse him. Darkness covers the land for three hours. In this time of darkness, Jesus even feels abandoned by God (“*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*”). Sin separates us from God. Having taken the weight of the sin of humanity upon his shoulders, Jesus experiences separation from God.

“*The veil of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom.*” This is the veil that separates people from the Holy of Holies into which no one is allowed to enter except the High Priest. The veil is torn back and the way to God is now wide open to all and not just to the High Priest. Then a Gentile soldier, a most unlikely one, recognizes the true identity of Jesus: “*Truly this man is the Son of God.*” We notice the presence of the women who continue to follow Jesus after all his male disciples have fled.

### *The Burial*

In the early days of Christianity, some may have claimed that Jesus never really died. So it is important for Mark to include an account of Jesus’ burial so that people will know that Jesus really died. Dying is an essential dimension of being a human person. Joseph of Arimathea, a devout Jew and a member of the Council, shows himself to be an admirer of Jesus by asking Pilate for his body so that he can give it a proper burial.

### **Questions:**

1. What word or phrase stuck out to you in the gospel?
2. How do you think that word or phrase relates to what is happening in your life right now?
3. Is Jesus asking you to change something to be a better person or do something to help someone else?

**Closing prayer:** “May your Word grow strong in our hearts. Amen.” Father Eamon Tobin