



## Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

### Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020

1. Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.
2. Read the passage again and spend understand. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*
3. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.
4. Over the next week, set aside times to come back more than once to the passage. You could read it all or part of it again, slowly. Perhaps there is a special word for you in this passage of Scripture? Keep this word or phrase in your thoughts and gently repeat it, bringing it to mind and allowing God to speak to you in your heart.
5. Finally, come back to the text to conclude: What is God in this scripture asking of you this week? What is the one challenge, one little change you are asked to make or the thing you have been asked to do? Then say a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news in the passage. End in quiet prayer.



#### **A little pointer before you begin –**

This is a Lent of Long Gospels - When taking a gospel story for prayer, it is often helpful to break the story up into its individual sections and because of the length of today's Passion story I have done it for you. Each section represents a movement, an interaction between the characters. There are a number of main scenes in this story. Any one of them could be the focal point for your prayer or you could journey with it during the week. Try to identify the movement in the section you take for prayer. The objective is to discover the Good News in the story and how it is speaking to you, your situation and our world, our circumstances today. One should also note the different characters in the story, for each of them could be a character with whom you can identify. There are so many characters in this story, disciples, friends, and betrayers. We can recognise bits of ourselves in each of them. But who would you identify with most? What does it say to you?

### **THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL – Matthew 26:14-27:66      ‘The Passion Story’**

***Matthew 26:14-16: Judas' betrayal - Love of money leads a friend to betray Jesus***

14 Then one of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, 'What are you prepared to give me if I hand Him over to you?' They paid him thirty silver pieces, 16 and from then onwards he began to look for an opportunity to betray Him.

***Matthew 26:17-19: The preparation for the Paschal Supper - Preparing well the last meeting with friends***

17 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus to say, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for You to eat the Passover?' 18 He said, 'Go to a certain man in the city and say to him, "The Master says, My time is near. It is at your house that I am keeping Passover with My disciples." ' 19 The disciples did what Jesus told them and prepared the Passover.

***Matthew 26:20-25: The proclamation of Judas' betrayal - Even though Jesus knows everything, He sits at table with the betrayer***

20 When evening came He was at table with the Twelve. 21 And while they were eating He said, 'In truth I tell you, one of you is about to betray Me.' 22 They were greatly distressed and started asking Him in turn, 'Not me, Lord, surely?' 23 He answered, 'Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with Me will betray Me. 24 The Son of man is going to His fate, as the scriptures say He will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born!' 25 Judas, who was to betray Him, asked in his turn, 'Not me, Rabbi, surely?' Jesus answered, 'It is you who say it.'

***Matthew 26:26-29: The institution of the Eucharist - Between the betrayal of the one and the denial of the other, glows a sign of love***

26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had said the blessing He broke it and gave it to the disciples. 'Take it and eat,' He said, 'this is My body.' 27 Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He handed it to them saying, 'Drink from this, all of you, 28 for this is My blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 From now on, I tell you, I shall never again drink wine until the day I drink the new wine with you in the kingdom of My Father.'

***Matthew 26:30-35: The denial by Peter - Even though Peter breaks away from Jesus, Jesus does not break away from Peter***

30 After the psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away from Me tonight, for the scripture says: I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered, 32 but after My resurrection I shall go ahead of you to Galilee.' 33 At this, Peter said to Him, 'Even if all fall away from You, I will

never fall away.' 34 Jesus answered Him, 'In truth I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will have disowned Me three times.' 35 Peter said to Him, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You.' And all the disciples said the same.

***Matthew 26:36-46: The agony in the Garden of Olives - Jesus chooses fidelity rather than flight***

36 Then Jesus came with them to a plot of land called Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, 'Stay here while I go over there to pray.' 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him. And He began to feel sadness and anguish. 38 Then He said to them, 'My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here and stay awake with Me.' 39 And going on a little farther He fell on his face and prayed. 'My Father,' He said, 'if it is possible, let this cup pass Me by. Nevertheless, let it be as You, not I, would have it.' 40 He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping, and He said to Peter, 'So you had not the strength to stay awake with me for one hour? 41 Stay awake, and pray not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing enough, but human nature is weak.' 42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed. 'My Father,' He said, 'if this cup cannot pass by, but I must drink it, Your will be done!' 43 And He came back again and found them sleeping, their eyes were so heavy. 44 Leaving them there, He went away again and prayed for the third time, repeating the same words. 45 Then He came back to the disciples and said to them, 'You can sleep on now and have your rest. Look, the hour has come when the Son of man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Get up! Let us go! Look, My betrayer is not far away.'

***Matthew 26:47-56: Jesus' capture in the Garden - Even though He was innocent and good, Jesus is considered a bandit and criminal***

47 And suddenly while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared, and with him a large number of men armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 Now the traitor had arranged a sign with them saying, 'The one I kiss, He is the man. Arrest Him.' 49 So he went up to Jesus at once and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi,' and kissed Him. 50 Jesus said to Him, 'My friend, do what you are here for.' Then they came forward, seized Jesus and arrested Him. 51 And suddenly, one of the followers of Jesus grasped his sword and drew it; he struck the high priest's servant and cut off his ear. 52 Jesus then said, 'Put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, who would promptly send more than twelve legions of angels to My defense? 54 But then, how would the scriptures be fulfilled that say this is the way it must be?' 55 It was at this time that Jesus said to the crowds, 'Am I a bandit, that you had to set out to capture Me with swords and clubs? I sat teaching in the Temple day after day and you never laid a hand on Me.' 56 Now all this happened to fulfil the prophecies in scripture. Then all the disciples deserted Him and ran away.

***Matthew 26:57-68: Jesus before the Sanhedrin - The decision, which has already been made, of sentencing Jesus to death, is given a semblance of legality***

57 The men who had arrested Jesus led Him off to the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. 58 Peter followed Him at a distance right to the high priest's palace, and he went in and sat down with the attendants to see what the end would be. 59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus, however false, on which they might have Him executed. 60 But they could not find any, though several lying witnesses came forward. Eventually two came forward 61 and made a statement, 'This man said, "I have power to destroy the Temple of God and in three days build it up."' 62 The high priest then rose and said to Him, 'Have you no answer to that? What is this evidence these men are bringing against You?' 63 But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to Him, 'I put you on oath by the living God to tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God.' 64 Jesus answered him, 'It is you who say it. But, I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.' 65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has blasphemed. What need of witnesses have we now? There! You have just heard the blasphemy. 66 What is your opinion?' They answered, 'He deserves to die.' 67 Then they spat in His face and hit Him with their fists; others said as they struck Him, 68 'Prophecy to us, Christ! Who hit You then?'

***Matthew 26:69-75: Peter's denial - At the moment of trial, Peter, the leader, denies knowing Jesus***

69 Meanwhile Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came up to him saying, 'You, too, were with Jesus the Galilean.' 70 But he denied it in front of them all. 'I do not know what you are talking about,' he said. 71 When he went out to the gateway another servant-girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This man was with Jesus the Nazarene.' 72 And again, with an oath, he denied it, 'I do not know the man.' 73 A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'You are certainly one of them too! Why, your accent gives you away.' 74 Then he started cursing and swearing, 'I do not know the man.' And at once the cock crowed, 75 and Peter remembered what Jesus had said, 'Before the cock crows you will have disowned Me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly.

***Matthew 27:1-2: Jesus is led before Pilate - It is not the Jewish people but it is the élite who lead Jesus to His death***

1 When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people met in council to bring about the death of Jesus. 2 They had Him bound and led Him away to hand Him over to Pilate, the governor.

***Matthew 27:3-10: The death of Judas - A little of Judas lives in each one of us***

3 When he found that Jesus had been condemned, then Judas, His betrayer, was filled with remorse and took the thirty silver pieces back to the chief priests and elders 4 saying, 'I have sinned. I have betrayed innocent blood.' They replied, 'What is that to us? That is your concern.' 5 And flinging down the silver pieces in the sanctuary he made off, and went and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests picked up the silver pieces and said, 'It is against the Law to put this into the treasury; it is blood-money.' 7 So they discussed the matter and with it bought the potter's field as a graveyard for foreigners, 8 and this is why the field is still called the Field of Blood. 9 The word spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was then fulfilled: And they took the thirty silver pieces, the sum at which the precious One was priced by the children of Israel, 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, just as the Lord directed me.

***Matthew 27:11-26: Jesus before Pilate - Like the Servant of Yahweh, Jesus remains silent before those who accuse Him***

11 Jesus, then, was brought before the governor, and the governor put to Him this question, 'Are You the king of the Jews?' Jesus replied, 'It is you who say it.' 12 But when He was accused by the chief priests and the elders He refused to answer at all. 13 Pilate then said to Him, 'Do you not hear how many charges they have made against You?' 14 But to the governor's amazement, He offered not a word in answer to any of the charges. 15 At festival time it was the governor's practice to release a prisoner for the people, anyone they chose. 16 Now there was then a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. 17 So when the crowd gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?' 18 For Pilate knew it was out of jealousy that they had handed Him over. 19 Now as he was seated in the chair of judgement, his wife sent him a message, 'Have nothing to do with that upright man; I have been extremely upset today by a dream that I had about Him.' 20 The chief priests and the elders, however, had persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. 21 So when the governor spoke and asked them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' they said, 'Barabbas.' 22 Pilate said to them, 'But in that case, what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Let Him be crucified!' 23 He asked, 'But what harm has he done?' But they shouted all the louder, 'Let Him be crucified!' 24 Then Pilate saw that he was making no impression, that in fact a riot was imminent. So he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your concern.' 25 And the people, every one of them, shouted back, 'Let His blood be on us and on our children!' 26 Then he released Barabbas for them. After having Jesus scourged he handed Him over to be crucified.

***Matthew 27:27-31: Jesus is crowned with thorns - To undress, torture and strike someone is what humiliates that person most***

27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium and collected the whole cohort around Him. 28 And they stripped Him and put a scarlet cloak around Him, 29 and having twisted some thorns into a crown they put this on His head and placed a reed in His right hand. To make fun of Him they knelt before Him saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' 30 And they spat on Him and took the reed and struck Him on the head with it. 31 And when they had finished making fun of Him, they took off the cloak and dressed Him in His own clothes and led Him away to crucifixion.

***Matthew 27:32-38: Jesus is crucified - The law says that the one hanging on a cross is "cursed by God" (Deut 21:23)***

32 On their way out, they came across a man from Cyrene, called Simon, and enlisted him to carry His cross. 33 When they had reached a place called Golgotha, that is, the place of the skull, 34 they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall, which He tasted but refused to drink. 35 When they had finished crucifying Him they shared out His clothing by casting lots, 36 and then sat down and stayed there keeping guard over Him. 37 Above His head was placed the charge against Him; it read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' 38 Then two bandits were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.

***Matthew 27:39-44: Jesus is insulted - Hanging, naked, bared before all, defenceless, without any right***

39 The passers-by jeered at Him; they shook their heads 40 and said, 'So You would destroy the Temple and in three days rebuild it! Then save Yourself if You are God's son and come down from the cross!' 41 The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked Him in the same way, 42 with the words, 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the king of Israel; let Him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in Him. 43 He has put His trust in God; now let God rescue Him if He wants Him. For He did say, "I am God's son." ' 44 Even the bandits who were crucified with Him taunted Him in the same way.

***Matthew 27:45-56: The death of Jesus - "My God! Why have you forsaken Me?" He dies letting out a cry***

45 From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?' 47 When some of those who stood there heard this, they said, 'The man is calling on Elijah,' 48 and one of them quickly ran to get a sponge which he filled with vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it to Him to drink. 49 But the rest of them said, 'Wait! And see if Elijah will come to save Him.' 50 But Jesus, again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. 51 And suddenly, the veil of the Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, the rocks were split, 52 the tombs opened and the bodies of many holy people rose from the dead, 53 and these, after His resurrection, came out of the tombs, entered the holy city and appeared to a number of people. 54 The centurion, together with the others guarding Jesus, had seen the earthquake and all

that was taking place, and they were terrified and said, 'In truth this man was son of God.' 55 And many women were there, watching from a distance, the same women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and looked after Him. 56 Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

***Matthew 27:57-61: Jesus is buried - Jesus is not even buried decently***

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, called Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. 58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. 59 So Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean shroud 60 and put it in his own new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a large stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away. 61 Now Mary of Magdala and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre.

***Matthew 27:62-66: The guard of the tumult - Darkness, even the most intense, cannot extinguish life***

62 Next day, that is, when Preparation Day was over, the chief priests and the Pharisees went in a body to Pilate 63 and said to him, 'Your Excellency, we recall that this impostor said, while He was still alive, "After three days I shall rise again." 64 Therefore give the order to have the sepulchre kept secure until the third day, for fear His disciples come and steal Him away and tell the people, "He has risen from the dead." This last piece of fraud would be worse than what went before.' 65 Pilate said to them, 'You may have your guard; go and make all as secure as you know how.' 66 So they went and made the sepulchre secure, putting seals on the stone and mounting a guard.

## A Short Thought

This Sunday's Gospel is often known as 'the long Gospel'. Don't let that put you off otherwise you miss the drama of the journey that this week offers you. It is a story that most know and reveals the drama of the week ahead. Try to read the Gospel, or part of it, this week. Read it as if hearing the story for the first time! The account of the Passion is a vivid story with a variety of characters and much action. Keep in mind that one of the aims in reflecting on the passage is to discover the GOOD NEWS the story has for us.

## SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- We hold up our palms singing "Hosanna, Hosanna" as we prepare to follow Jesus into Holy Week. How can we enable this to be a personal 'moment of opportunity' for us too?
- What does it actually mean to be a follower of Jesus? What does this self-emptying on the cross challenge us to do? (Amanda Dillon ~ Intercom)
- What parts of the story are uncomfortable? What parts are easier to read? Why?
- The cross looks shameful, not glorious. It is scandalous and a stumbling block for many. It does not seem to make sense to us. But Jesus' cross displays the glory of his love - love for you personally. Think about the fact that Jesus' love, his love shown on the cross is the ultimate sign of his love, mercy and his glory. Remember that suffering is never the will of God, but the cross shows us that God is with us in our suffering – we are never alone no matter how dark thing may seem. What will the love of God, the mercy of God, as revealed by the cross, empower you to do? What change will you make? How will you be love?

## Prayer -

O God of eternal glory, you anointed Jesus your servant to bear our sins, to encourage the weary, to raise up and restore the fallen. Keep before our eyes the splendour of the paschal mystery of Christ and, by our sharing in the passion and resurrection, seal our lives with the victorious sign of his obedience and exaltation. We ask this through Christ, our liberator from sin, who lives with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, holy and mighty God for ever and ever. **Amen**

### Prayer in these uncertain times

*We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen*