



"Agony in the Garden", a wall-painting from about the year 1500, in the Church of St Mary, Elsinore, Denmark

When he is told that "some Greeks", who have come to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover, want to see him, Jesus tells his disciples that "the hour" for him to be glorified has arrived. The period of his revealing his glory, which began with the first sign at Cana and ended with the final one of the raising of Lazarus, is over, and his passion is about to begin.

One of the features of the Fourth Gospel (John) is that some of the most dramatic scenes which we encounter in the three Synoptic Gospels are missing: these include the testing of Jesus in the wilderness (the temptations) and the agony in the garden (better expressed as the struggle in Gethsemane). However, we find the components of these episodes scattered in the Johannine account. The scenes mentioned present Jesus struggling with what it means to be the Son of God and to be faithful to his mission. They show Jesus in a very human light: in our Gospel reading today, Jesus realises that his hour, the complex events of his passion and exaltation on the cross, has arrived and the possibility of praying to be spared it comes to his mind. However, he overcomes this understandable reaction and accepts the Father's will, since this is the purpose of his coming. The voice from heaven then vindicates Jesus' choice. There is a tendency sometimes to play down the human aspect of Jesus, to eliminate any hesitation or struggle on his part: although the Fourth Gospel views the crucifixion as the lifting up of Jesus in glory, this passage reminds us of the enduring dark nature of the cross. ■

DO

Take the crucifix in your hands: reflect on the figure on the cross and on the human nature of Jesus.



LEARN

The Gospel of John does not contain some dramatic scenes which we find in the Synoptic Gospels:

These include the temptations of Jesus, the agony in the garden, and the trial before the Sanhedrin.

The agony in the garden is more accurately understood as the struggle in Gethsemane of Jesus to remain faithful to the ultimate act of obedience to his mission from the Father.

SAY

Christ offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears. (Hebrews 5:7)

REFLECT

It is difficult to keep in balance the two natures of Jesus, the divine and human aspects of his being. The Gospel traditions about his being tested and his final test before the passion, described by the Synoptics in the Gethsemane scene and hinted at in our Gospel reading today from John, suggest that we should not forget or play down Jesus' human nature. The Gospel of John shows Jesus as being well aware of his divine nature and relationship with the Father, but the temptation to take shortcuts to fulfil his destiny as the Messiah or to avoid the supreme test of the passion altogether is still there, albeit in a much more subtle, but no less real, form.

If it is true, as the letter to the Hebrews tells us, that Jesus "has been put to the test in exactly the same way as ourselves, apart from sin", then we should not be afraid to imagine Jesus as being moved in much the same way as we would be in his shoes: for example, the Fourth Gospel tells us that Jesus is "troubled" when confronted with death. If Jesus is to be our model, then we need to know that he understands our human condition from his own experience and can sympathise with us in our difficulties and fears. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Give me justice, O God,
and plead my cause against a nation that is
faithless.
From the deceitful and cunning rescue me,
for you, O God, are my strength.

COLLECT

By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God,
may we walk eagerly in that same charity
with which, out of love for the world,
your Son handed himself over to death.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Jeremiah 31:31-34

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah.
See, the days are coming – it is the Lord who
speaks – when I will make a new covenant
with the House of Israel and the House of
Judah, but not a covenant like the one I made
with their ancestors on the day I took them
by the hand to bring them out of the land of
Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine, so
I had to show them who was master. It is the
Lord who speaks. No, this is the covenant I
will make with the House of Israel when those
days arrive – it is the Lord who speaks. Deep
within them I will plant my Law, writing it on
their hearts. Then I will be their God and they
shall be my people. There will be no further
need for neighbour to try to teach neighbour,
or brother to say to brother, “Learn to know
the Lord!” No, they will all know me, the least
no less than the greatest – it is the Lord who
speaks – since I will forgive their iniquity and
never call their sin to mind.
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 50

Response:
A pure heart create for me, O God.

1. Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.
In your compassion blot out my offence.
O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin. (R.)
2. A pure heart create for me, O God,
put a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
nor deprive me of your holy spirit. (R.)
3. Give me again the joy of your help;
with a spirit of fervour sustain me,
that I may teach transgressors your ways
and sinners may return to you. (R.)

SECOND READING Hebrews 5:7-9

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.
During his life on earth, Christ offered up
prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears,
to the one who had the power to save him
out of death, and he submitted so humbly
that his prayer was heard. Although he was
Son, he learnt to obey through suffering; but
having been made perfect, he became for all
who obey him the source of eternal salvation.
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of
God!
If a man serves me, says the Lord, he must
follow me
wherever I am, my servant will be there too.
Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of
God!

GOSPEL John 12:20-33

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
John.
Among those who went up to worship
at the festival were some Greeks. These
approached Philip, who came from Bethsaida
in Galilee, and put this request to him, “Sir,
we should like to see Jesus.” Philip went to
tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together
went to tell Jesus. Jesus replied to them:

“Now the hour has come
for the Son of Man to be glorified.
I tell you, most solemnly,
unless a wheat grain falls on the ground
and dies,
it remains only a single grain;
but if it dies,
it yields a rich harvest.
Anyone who loves his life loses it;
anyone who hates his life in this world
will keep it for the eternal life.
If a man serves me, he must follow me,
wherever I am, my servant will be there too.
If anyone serves me, my Father will honour
him.

Now my soul is troubled.
What shall I say:
Father, save me from this hour?
But it was for this very reason that I have
come to this hour.
Father, glorify your name!”

A voice came from heaven, “I have glorified
it, and I will glorify it again.”
People standing by, who heard this, said
it was a clap of thunder; others said, “It was
an angel speaking to him.” Jesus answered,
“It was not for my sake that this voice came,
but for yours.

“Now sentence is being passed on this
world;
now the prince of this world is to be
overthrown.
And when I am lifted up from the earth,
I shall draw all men to myself.”

By these words he indicated the kind of death
he would die.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
(all bow during the next two lines)
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the
Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Hear us, almighty God,
and, having instilled in your servants
the teachings of the Christian faith,
graciously purify them
by the working of this sacrifice.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**Amen, Amen I say to you: Unless a grain of
wheat
falls to the ground and dies, it remains a
single grain.
But if it dies, it bears much fruit.**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We pray, almighty God,
that we may always be counted among the
members of Christ,
in whose Body and Blood we have
communion.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

Many people seem to think that true religion
is defined by “giving up things”. In a sense it
is far easier to deny one’s body than quietly
and soberly to surrender your whole self for
God’s possessing. In Lent, how much easier
to give up wine or chocolate than seriously to
tackle our impatience. A friend of mine who
was prepared to fast most rigorously in Lent
was horrified when I suggested daily Mass
and half an hour’s prayer instead.

Sister Wendy Beckett

