

JESUS' FINAL TEST

(LUKE 22:14–23:56)



At the beginning of Luke's Gospel narrative, we saw Jesus tested as to how he understands being the Son of God. Luke ended his account with the ominous words that "the devil left him, to return at the appointed time".

During the Last Supper, he tells us that "Satan entered into Judas" and was also seeking to challenge Simon Peter. So the scene is set for the final test of Jesus as the Son of God.

Throughout his account, Luke has presented the disciples in a more positive light than Mark, and this more sympathetic view persists throughout the passion narrative, which we hear read today. The male disciples are not described as fleeing the scene when Jesus is arrested and may well be included among those who witness the crucifixion.

Luke's version is much more gentle and understanding of the complexity facing the characters in the story. Jesus' message of healing and reconciliation continues right up to the end: Pilate and the soldiers do not make fun of Jesus; there is no crown of thorns; the crowd of Jewish people following Jesus on his way to Calvary, not all of whom are disciples, are presenting as "lamenting for him". Jesus speaks sympathetically to the "Daughters of Jerusalem". He prays for forgiveness for those responsible for his being executed on political charges, perhaps not only those who actually carry out the dreadful deed, but also those who engineered it, the chief priest and scribes who did not realise what they were actually doing. ■

LEARN

"The Agony in the Garden" is more accurately expressed as "Jesus' Struggle in Gethsemane".

Luke describes the individuals sentenced to death with Jesus as "criminals", not "thieves".

Each evangelist tells the story of Jesus from his own understanding and point of view.

This is why Jesus' final words on the cross are different: Luke has "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit", whereas Mark has "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

DO

Take your palm cross in your hand: think about these points from this year's reading from the passion according to Luke.



SAY

**Into your hands, Lord,
I commit my spirit and
myself.**

(see Luke 23:46)

REFLECT

Many people find Luke's Gospel version the one they prefer. One of the reasons may be that the Third Evangelist shows Jesus and his teaching as most understanding of human nature and the issues which confront us. The passion narrative brings many of these themes together. We have noted how we can see that Jesus continues to reconcile people who have been at odds with one another. He urges those bewailing his fate to think of themselves and their families. At the very

end, he comforts the criminal (who is not described as a "thief", let alone a "good thief"), who turns to him and asks him to remember him. Finally, his last words are of confidence, entrusting his spirit, himself, to the mercy of God.

Some years ago, there was a film entitled *The Last Temptation of Christ*. This presentation focused on the passion of Jesus and, perhaps unwittingly, the title captured the true meaning of this episode. If we understand "temptation"

as "test", then we can see that Jesus is being challenged to avoid what is in store for him, to take the easier way and to escape while there is still time. That is why it is better to understand "The Agony in the Garden" as "The Struggle in Gethsemane": Jesus is once again confronted with what it means to be the Son of God. Eventually, this is expressed in the cross. Will Jesus accept this or take the alternative way? Luke gives us the answer. ■

1. THE SOLEMN ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel. Hosanna in the highest.

THE RESPONSORY

R. As the Lord entered the holy city, the children of the Hebrews proclaimed the resurrection of life. *Waving their branches of palm, they cried: Hosanna in the Highest. V. When the people heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they went out to meet him. *Waving their branches.

2. THE SIMPLE ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Six days before the Passover, when the Lord came into the city of Jerusalem, the children ran to meet him; in their hands they carried palm branches and with a loud voice cried out: *Hosanna in the highest! Blessed are you, who have come in your abundant mercy! O gates, lift high your heads; grow higher, ancient doors. Let him enter, the king of glory! Who is this king of glory? He, the Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory. *Hosanna in the highest! Blessed are you, who have come in your abundant mercy!

COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God, who as an example of humility for the human race to follow caused our Saviour to take flesh and submit to the Cross, graciously grant that we may heed his lesson of patient suffering and so merit a share in his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST READING Isaiah 50:4-7

A reading from the prophet Isaiah. The Lord has given me a disciple's tongue. So that I may know how to reply to the wearied, he provides me with speech. Each morning he wakes me to hear, to listen like a disciple. The Lord has opened my ear. For my part, I made no resistance, neither did I turn away. I offered my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who tore at my beard; I did not cover my face against insult and spittle. The Lord comes to my help, so that I am untouched by the insults. So, too, I set my face like flint; I know I shall not be ashamed. The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 21

Response: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

- 1. All who see me deride me. They curl their lips, they toss their heads. "He trusted in the Lord, let him save him; let him release him if this is his friend." (R.)
- 2. Many dogs have surrounded me, a band of the wicked beset me. They tear holes in my hands and my feet. I can count every one of my bones. (R.)
- 3. They divide my clothing among them. They cast lots for my robe. O Lord, do not leave me alone, my strength, make haste to help me! (R.)
- 4. I will tell of your name to my brethren and praise you where they are assembled. "You who fear the Lord give him praise; all sons of Jacob, give him glory. Revere him, Israel's sons." (R.)

SECOND READING Philippians 2:6-11

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Philippians. His state was divine, yet Christ Jesus did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are, and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory! Christ was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all names. Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory!

GOSPEL Luke 22:14-23:56

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

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

Through the Passion of your Only Begotten Son, O Lord, may our reconciliation with you be near at hand, so that, though we do not merit it by our own deeds, yet by this sacrifice made once for all, we may feel already the effects of your mercy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Father, if this chalice cannot pass without my drinking it, your will be done.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Nourished with these sacred gifts, we humbly beseech you, O Lord, that, just as through the death of your Son you have brought us to hope for what we believe, so by his Resurrection you may lead us to where you call. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE PEOPLE

Look, we pray, O Lord, on this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ did not hesitate to be delivered into the hands of the wicked and submit to the agony of the Cross. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

The goal of fasting is inner unity. This means hearing, but not with the ear; hearing, but not with the understanding; it is hearing with the spirit, with your whole being.

Thomas Merton