

Following Jesus Christ

Prayers and Meditations on the Passion of Christ

Revised Edition

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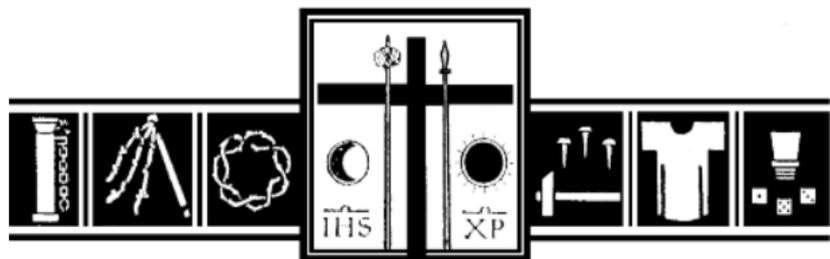
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Following Jesus Christ

FOLLOW me” (*Mark 1:17*). Like his disciples who heard his invitation long ago, we want to follow Jesus. But something else he said, one of his “hard sayings,” makes us pause. “Take up [your] cross daily, and follow me” (*Luke 9:23*). What does he mean: “Take up [your] cross”?

It’s hard to take up a cross; it threatens so much we hold dear! We like success. Doesn’t a cross mean failure? We want to hold onto life. Doesn’t the cross take life away?

Learning the Wisdom of the Cross

JESUS’ first followers also struggled with questions like these; only gradually did they learn the wisdom of the cross. Only gradually do we learn it, too. His passion shocked them at

first, but slowly they came to see it as a wise and tender book that told them how to think about life, how to live, how to use this world, what to expect, what to hope for. It taught them that failure could end in triumph and death itself could end in resurrection.

The Passion: A Story Jesus Told

IT was Jesus, risen from the dead, who taught this mystery to his disciples. The Easter gospels describe how it happened.

Appearing to his disciples at Jerusalem on Easter Sunday, Jesus said to them, “ ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord” (*John 20:19-20*).

That same day, on the way to Emmaus, he said to two disciples who had lost hope in him:

“ ‘Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (*Luke 24:26-27*).

Gradually, in the light of his death and resurrection, the disciples came to see life differently.



Meditating on the Gospels of the Passion

THE stories of the passion and resurrection of Jesus, found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are at the heart of the New Testament. Though agreeing on the basic beliefs about Jesus, each gospel recalls who Jesus is, what he suffered and why, in a distinctive way.

The Gospel of Mark, the first of the gospels to appear in written form, presents Jesus going to death in utter desolation, draining the cup of suffering given him by his Father. His cry from the cross is a cry of faith mingled with deep fear and sorrow. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Reading this gospel, we share with Jesus the dark mystery of unexplained suffering that all of us face in this life.

Matthew’s gospel dwells on the fulfillment of God’s plan in the passion of Christ. Nothing



THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 26:1—27:66

The Gathering Storm

Matthew 26:1-16

WHEN Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, “As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. “But not during the Feast,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.”

While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive

perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”

Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

The Kairos

Matthew 26:17-35

ON the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

He replied, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed