



JESUS: OUR EXEMPLAR — During His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (and later just before His Death on the Cross), Jesus entrusted Himself to the Heavenly Father in prayer. We should do the same.

From the Cross to the Empty Tomb

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CATHOLIC BOOK PUBLISHING CORP.
New Jersey

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Pilate

The Challenge of Conscience

Near Lucerne, Switzerland rises 7,000 foot high Mt. Pilatus. Here Pontius Pilate, legend says, traveled when removed from office in 37 A.D. Here he died. A long way from Jerusalem where history remembers the most important public decision he ever made. Even farther has Pilate traveled in the imagination of Christians. The greater the distance from the pages of Scripture, the more virtuous Pilate becomes.

In the East, Tertullian gives him a Christian heart (*Apologeticum* 21.18.24). Augustine sees him as a prophet (*Sermo* 201). And seventh century Copts make him a saint. They even baptize their children with his name. In the West, Pilate's memory moves in the opposite direction. In medieval Passion plays, he is a sinister individual with little affinity with the message of Jesus. Tradition has done him no injustice. For in the story of the Passion of Jesus, Pilate is both noble and ignoble, both open and closed to the truth.

In 26 A.D. Pilate arrived in Caesarea Marittima to govern Judea as the Roman

The Good Thief

Divine Mercy

Three groups of people mock Jesus on the Cross. First, people passing by. They raise their voices and utter blasphemies against Jesus. They mock His claim to destroy the Temple and then rebuild it in three days. They taunt Him to save Himself by coming down from the Cross. But Jesus had taught that “*whoever would save his life will lose it*” (Mk 8:35). These are individuals with no deep knowledge of religion, only great antipathy.

Next the chief priest and scribes jeered at Jesus. Their knowledge of religion is more extensive. But knowledge alone does not save. Even the devils in hell know who Christ is.

This second group is proud. They are unwilling to receive the gift God is offering them in Jesus. They judge themselves already saved. They have set the standard for truth. They are closed to a truth that is greater than any human mind. A Messiah who suffers; a Messiah who is God. They literally “turn their nose at” Jesus for say-

Mary Magdalene

The Empty Tomb

Mary Magdalene first appears in the last gospel at the Cross. The first three gospel writers show us Mary standing in the distance. However, the fourth gospel moves Mary to the foot of the Cross (see Jn 19:25). The direction is theological. Lifted up, Jesus is already drawing His scattered disciples into the new family born in the blood of the Cross. Although John never mentions Mary Magdalene as following Jesus before this moment, he now shows her as refusing to leave Him.

All the gospels report Mary's visit to the tomb. Memories crowd their accounts. Details differ as their pen rushes to report the Resurrection. It is John who tells us the most of Mary's Sunday morning visit. Though he writes after Mark, Matthew, and Luke, he passes on to us the best historical tradition of the event.

Each evangelist notes that when Joseph and Nicodemus bury the body of Jesus, there are women present (see Mt 27:61; Mk 15:47; Lk 23:55-56). Mary Magdalene and