



# Bringing Home the Word

*Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion (C)*

April 14, 2019

## Recognizing the Companions We Need

By Mary Katharine Deeley

On Palm Sunday, we gather as a Church to celebrate Jesus' coming into Jerusalem and hear the story of his passion and death. Each Gospel writer tells the story a little differently. Each one lifts up different faces and characters, and through their eyes we watch what unfolds.

Luke's Gospel is the only one that mentions the women who followed Jesus from Galilee (23:55–56). We know nothing about these women other than

where they came from, but two things stand out: These women temporarily set aside their Passover preparations to care for a man who had been publicly condemned as a criminal, and they were willing to look their beloved Jesus' death full in the face. They watched while Joseph of Arimathea laid him in the tomb and made sure that Jesus would be cared for even in death. They saw where he was buried and laid out and then went to prepare the spices and oils that would anoint his body and honor it.

Today, these women are examples of the countless anonymous disciples who quietly challenge culture and politics to follow the Lord's call. We rarely notice them, even now, but they are in our churches and our neighborhoods, willing to do what needs to be done, even if it means suffering, sacrificing, or looking rejection and death in the face. As we enter Holy Week, these people just might be the companions we need. +

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## A Word from Pope Francis

Let us ask for the grace to follow Jesus faithfully, not in words but in deeds. Let us also ask for the patience to carry our own cross, not to refuse it or set it aside, but rather, in looking to him, to take it up and to carry it daily.

—Palm Sunday, April 9, 2017



## Sunday Readings

### Isaiah 50:4–7

The Lord God is my help, therefore I am not disgraced.

### Philippians 2:6–11

He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

### Luke 22:14–23:56 or Luke 23:1–49

When [the women] had seen the tomb and the way in which his body was laid in it, they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I attempt to identify and assist those who are quietly doing God's work?
- Do I humbly do God's work, rather than seeking recognition or other earthly rewards?

# False Piety, True Contrition

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce

There's a joke about a priest and deacon who are peeking out from the vestibule at a man sitting in the back pew of church, beating his breast and saying aloud, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." The priest turns to the deacon saying, "Now look at who thinks he's a sinner!"



margin of this article is justified."

The tax collector wasn't justified simply because he beat his breast and said he was a sinner. He was justified because he was truly contrite.

True contrition, as the Church teaches, has four steps—none of which can be skipped if we're to be "made straight."

This joke is based on the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14). Who among us would ever want to see ourselves as the Pharisee in this story, bragging about how holy we are? But the tax collector? Oh, boy! That's me—a sinner and not too proud to admit it to anyone.

This reaction, of course, isn't what Jesus had in mind. He was viscerally opposed to public displays of piety. He advised his disciples: "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you," (Matthew 6:6).

Jesus noted that the tax collector went home "justified," while the Pharisee did not. "Justified" implies that a person is "vindicated," as in "my decision was justified by the fact that everything worked out in the end." But it also means to make something straight, as in "the left

## Step by Step

First, we have to admit wrongdoing. This is what the Pharisee (like many of us) was unwilling to do. The tax collector, on the other hand, admitted that he had done many bad things, and he was genuinely sorry for them, which is the second mandatory step of contrition.

The third step is what Catholics call "a firm purpose of amendment." That means we have a plan for how we're going to change our behavior. A vague "I'll try harder to be good" is insufficient. The idea isn't to mimic the tax collector who came back every week to beat his breast and say what a sinner he was. The point of admitting our sins and asking for mercy is that we are supposed to stop sinning!

The final step in true contrition is penance. That is, we must suffer consequences and make up for the harm

we have done. To be justified, the tax collector couldn't simply go out and "sin no more." He also had to try to make right whatever he could—perhaps by giving money back to people he had cheated or, if that was impossible, by donating money, time, or talent to some good cause. If there were no other way to change his sinful behavior, then the tax collector might have to quit his job to be justified.

## Beyond "I'm Sorry"

If the tax collector was truly contrite and not just putting on a show of piety, he would have wanted to follow all four of these steps. That's why he would have gone away justified. Otherwise, he would have been no different than the Pharisee. Nor would we.

In this business of asking forgiveness, we have to make sure that we are not exalting ourselves with false piety, for as Jesus said at the end of the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted." This goes for all sinners. +

## PRAYER

*Lord, your life teaches the way of peace and nonviolence. Help me to imitate your example in times of conflict.*

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

April 15-20

**Monday**, Holy Weekday:  
Is 42:1–7 / Jn 12:1–11

**Tuesday**, Holy Weekday:  
Is 49:1–6 / Jn 13:21–33, 36–38

**Wednesday**, Holy Weekday:  
Is 50:4–9a / Mt 26:14–25

**Thursday**, Holy Thursday: Ex 12:1–8,  
11–14 / 1 Cor 11:23–26 / Jn 13:1–15

**Friday**, Good Friday: Is 52:13–53:12 /  
Heb 4:14–16; 5:7–9 / Jn 18:1–19:42

**Saturday**, Holy Saturday:  
Gn 1:1–2:2 or Gn 1:1, 26–31a /  
Gn 22:1–18 or Gn 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18 /  
Ex 14:15–15:1 / Is 54:5–14 / Is 55:1–11 /  
Bar 3:9–15, 32–4:4 / Ez 36:16–17a, 18–28 /  
Rom 6:3–11 / Lk 24:1–12

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