

# Sermon

## Palm Sunday Year B

### Gospel Mark 15:1-39

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

**Prayer:** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. **AMEN**

**Homily:**

When I was a kid I wasn't really into organized sports.

But, we played a lot of soccer in high school seminary.

One time, playing football, the QB sent a pass my way.

I caught it! And I ran like a demon.

But I was neck tackled by my best friend,

A few yards short of a touchdown.

Good ol' what's his name. Boy I was fighting mad!

I liked football, but it hurt *way* too much. <sup>i</sup>

I still love to play catch, but baseball was never my thing.

I can't bat to save my life. <sup>ii</sup>

*I dunno! Maybe my mind is always in the clouds.*

Back when I was a partner in a big law firm -- a million years ago --

that Bay Area Law Firm used to rent a big box suite,

So we could all watch the Oakland A's play baseball.<sup>iii</sup>

It was beautiful. Green grass. Warm sun.

Cold beer. Plenty of good food.

Plus, besides talking and politicking, I learned about baseball.

One of my partners, named Jim, was from “Back East”.

Jim LOVED baseball! He recorded every hit and at-bat,  
On a little card, with a short little pencil.

Jim taught me about what’s called a “sacrifice hit”.

That’s where a specially chosen batter hits the ball  
In a special way to allow a guy who’s already on base,  
To run to home. But, the batter doesn’t get to score.

The batter sacrifices his own shot at glory,  
so that some other guy, and the team, gets a run.

I guess that’s what it means to when they say somebody  
“takes one for the team”.

*It’s a good thing. It’s an unselfish thing.*

Those beautiful days in the Oakland A’s stadium were fun.

It was fun finding out how a batter can take one for the team.

But, when Jesus “took one for the team”, it wasn’t fun at all.

Not a pretty thing to see. No easy thing, at all.

Not for anyone. And especially not for Jesus.

Jesus really wanted to live. Life mattered to him.

He wept at Lazarus' tomb<sup>iv</sup> .

He wept over the City of Jerusalem<sup>v</sup> , and

He wept the garden of Gethsemane<sup>vi</sup>.

He knew what he was facing. It wasn't going to be pretty. *At all.*<sup>vii</sup>

A thousand years before Jesus, the Greeks practiced crucifixion.

Crucifixion became a familiar form of judicial terror.

In 1960, Hollywood made a big movie about a rebel slave leader named Spartacus. Kind of a real story.

Around 70 AD, Spartacus and 120,000 rebel slaves pushed back.

But they lost. *Big Time.* 6,000 of them were crucified.<sup>viii</sup>

Archaeologists found the skeleton of a crucified Jewish man, named Jehohanan. His ankles were nailed to his cross.<sup>ix</sup>

Jehohanan, and Spartacus, and tens of thousands of others, Were killed in pursuit of their dreams and goals.

Some say that dying for dreams and goals is a worthy thing to do.

We do have to take risks and make sacrifices, in life.

*But, Jesus was the all time sacrifice hitter!*

*He had nothing to gain. He was already the Son of God!*

*Jesus' plans aren't about him. His plans are about us!*

*Jesus was the all time sacrifice batter!*

And Jesus' team isn't just our kind of people.

Sure, there are people who think like us, and dress like us,  
On his team.

But on Jesus' team there are plenty of people who don't

look like us or think like us. *They may not even like us.<sup>x</sup>*

*But, Jesus is the all time sacrifice batter!*

His team is humanity. All of us.

Sinner's and saints. Paupers and billionaires.

And maybe their dogs and kitties and cattle and horses!

Today, we have the benefit of 2,000 years of hindsight.

None of this was so clear back then.

What was clear was that Pilate had punched Jesus' ticket.

Some of his friends thought Jesus had come to save Israel.

But, he was on Death's doorstep.

He couldn't even carry his own cross.

*Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.*

Today, we sing “All glory, laud and honor”,  
but back then, the cheers had mostly turned to sneers.<sup>xi</sup>

Jesus was our sacrifice batter. And He still is!  
But he’s everyone else’s, too!  
No one gets a special claim on Jesus.

He died for all of us, because, one way or the other,  
We all sin and we all need God’s grace. All of us.  
*Especially me.*

Jesus came, 2000 years ago, to take up *our cause*,  
And lead us to peace here and in heaven.

But, Jesus also came to take up the *other guy’s cause*,  
And her burden and her pain.  
And to lead her to heaven.

Jesus came to lead us all to heaven. *All of us.*  
Left, Right. Red, brown, yellow, black and white.  
We are precious in his sight.

Jesus didn’t come to join our team;  
he made his sacrifice play, so we could join his. **-AMEN**

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<sup>i</sup> Shoulder pads would've helped.

<sup>ii</sup> Maybe I don't have good eye-hand coordination.

<sup>iii</sup> My staff and I used to drive 275 miles north, from Bakersfield, for that fun day.

<sup>iv</sup> John 11:35.

<sup>v</sup> "He beheld the city, and wept over it" (Luke 19:41)

<sup>vi</sup> See, Heb. 5:7.

<sup>vii</sup> Mark's Gospel gives us a pretty good picture.

<sup>viii</sup> ... along the road from Capua to Rome, which is just a bit more than 100 miles.

<sup>ix</sup> Today some argue, in court, that the needle prick in a condemned person's vein is cruel and unusual punishment!

<sup>x</sup> Maybe for good reasons!

<sup>xi</sup> But, cf, "Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'" "