



a Kendall Hunt Company

Palm Sunday, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Isaiah 50:4-7

Psalms 22:7-8, 16-17, 18-19, 22-23

Philippians 2:6-11

Matthew 26:14-27:66 [or (short form) 27:11-54]

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading which appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

Word in Liturgy



We celebrate the entire Paschal Mystery of Jesus (i.e., his suffering, Death, and Resurrection) every time we gather for Eucharist. At certain times, however, one particular dimension of that single reality is focused upon more prominently than others in a given liturgical celebration. The many celebrations of Holy Week, starting with today's, exemplify how the liturgy is able to celebrate the entire paschal mystery, even while commemorating one or another historical moment of its unfolding. Today, our focus is first on the Lord's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, and then on the events of his passion and death. Nonetheless, we also celebrate his resurrection, as we recognize in the breaking of the bread the presence of the Risen One in our midst.

The second part of the Book of Isaiah, written during the exile in Babylon, was intended as a word of consolation and hope to the Jewish people in a time of severe national trial. Particularly in the so-called Songs of the Servant, the author attempts to make sense out of the suffering that Israel was undergoing. Many scholars believe that the unnamed servant represents Israel (although there may have been an individual whose actual experience became in these poems a metaphor for the nation's suffering). Today's reading is from the third of the Servant Songs. The servant's sufferings, graphically portrayed here, are ultimately seen as redemptive. It is little wonder that the early Christian community identified Jesus with the servant, and even shaped their narrative of his passion and death in light of the descriptions found here.



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While the other readings are the same every year, the gospel reading changes in each Lectionary cycle. In year A we read from Matthew's account of the passion. Despite the many similarities of all of the passion accounts, each evangelist tells the story in ways that reflect his particular concerns. One of the distinctive features of Matthew's account is his deliberate citation of the Jewish scriptures in order to show that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. Writing for Jewish Christians at a time when they still felt keenly their recent break with the synagogue, Matthew wants to reassure them that Jesus' passion fulfills the Jewish scriptures. In addition, Matthew wants to "make sense" out of the suffering and shameful death that Jesus endured. He does so by emphasizing that the passion of Jesus is part of God's redemptive plan for the world.

Catholic Doctrine

Christ's Obedience as a Model for Believers

The gracious gift of Jesus to us is that he takes upon himself the weight of our sinful nature. In this liturgy we proclaim that the suffering of Christ is not without purpose, but is entered into willingly for our sake (CCC 602). Jesus accepts death because he places his life in conformity to the plan of his heavenly Father. The whole purpose of his taking on our fleshly existence is to accomplish the will of the One who sent him (CCC 606). The sacrifice he embraces is not an indictment of his mission, but just the opposite—it is expressive of the depth of his own loving union with God. Jesus lays down his life freely because of this loving union.

This willing sacrifice on the part of the Son did not require anything in advance from humanity. His death was offered while we were yet in sin. This alone proclaims the love God has for us, a love that does not require any merit on our part, but which is a free, overwhelming gift that the Savior gives to us (CCC 604). This gift is offered to every person. Christ dies for all, without exception.

The suffering, death, and resurrection of the Lord which is celebrated on this day has two aspects. The first aspect has already been discussed—Christ liberates us by freely sacrificing himself for our sinful selves from that which enslaves us, sin. The second aspect of the paschal mystery is that his resurrection opens the way for us to new life, a wholeness and salvation that we could not achieve on our own, for we were mired in sin (CCC 654). We believe that by being joined to his own death in baptism we are therefore joined to his rising and are enabled to walk in newness of life.

The fruitfulness of Christ's mission and the efficacy of his suffering, death, and resurrection



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are made possible because in his passionate love for God and for us, the Lord Jesus is obedient to the will of the Father (Latin, oboedire, "to give ear, to hear"). On the way to Jerusalem and the events of his passion and death, Jesus is transfigured in the presence of his disciples. He who hears and is obedient to God the Father's plan of salvation is, in turn, the one to whom the disciples are then instructed on the mountain of Transfiguration, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matthew 17:5). Christ is the model of obedience for believers.

