



# Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion



Matt. 21:1-11 • Is 50:4-7 • Phil. 2:6-11 • Mat. 26:14-27:66

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Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the holiest week of our liturgical year when we relive the deepest mysteries of our faith. The liturgy and reading bookmark the events at the beginning and the end of the week—our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the Agony in the Garden, the Trials, the Crucifixion, our Lord's death and burial. They call us to relive our Savior's Passion, focusing on the unimaginable suffering he endured to redeem us. They lead us into the darkest, the deepest Mysteries of our Faith. How could Jesus—*why* would Jesus—all powerful, all knowing, all just—choose to suffer and die in order to redeem those who had rejected him?

There are many ways to answer that question. Most often we hear that because we had disobeyed God and sinned against him we deserved punishment. But in his mercy, rather than imposing on us the punishment we deserved, God sent his only Son to suffer and die in our place. There are certain passages of Scripture that support that explanation. But while that theory may explain what Jesus' suffering accomplished, it really doesn't explain why God would do that. Why would God choose to have Jesus suffer and die on the cross? What was in God's heart?

There's a clue hidden the Gospel reading, Matthew's account of the Passion. It's buried away and usually overlooked. At the beginning of the account we are told that Judas betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders for thirty pieces of silver. Later, after Jesus' arrest, we are told that he regretted what he had done and went back to the leaders. But when they refused to release Jesus, Judas threw the thirty pieces of silver into the Temple and then went out and took his own life. Meanwhile, we are told, the leaders took the money and bought the Potters Field with the very same coins that had been used to purchase Jesus' life.

**T**he Potters Field was a familiar sight in most ancient cities and villages. It was usually just outside the village where the potters could dig clay for their vessels. But it also served as a place where they and the villagers could throw their discards – the pots that had shattered in the kiln, the pots that villagers had broken, vessels that could no longer served their purpose. You can imagine what the Potters Field in a city the size of Jerusalem must have looked like. It was a scrap heap of shattered, broken, useless pots. "They took the thirty pieces of silver and bought the Potters Field."

The pot is a common symbol in the Scriptures. It is a symbol of the human life. God is the Potter; you and I are his creation. In Genesis we read how God fashioned the first human, Adam, out of clay, and filled him, breathed into him, his Spirit. Isaiah writes that we are like clay in God's hands, that he forms each one of us uniquely, shaping us through the events of our lives to serve a unique purpose. St. Paul writes that we are earthen vessels —clay pots—created to hold a treasure of immeasurable worth. Each of us is designed by God to bear the Holy Spirit, a vessel designed in the very image and likeness of God.

But, Isaiah says, we are like clay that looks at the Potter and rebels: "You don't know what you're doing!" We take ourselves out of God's hands, and try to shape our lives into what we think they should be. And in doing so, the pot is shattered; the work that God designed is broken, ruined. It can no longer serve the purpose for which it was created.

The Potters Field is a symbol of our lives and of the world. It was filled with the shards of countless broken pots—lives that had been broken by sin, our turning away from God, our feeble attempts to live as we think best. The Potters Field represents all of our lives, the shattered images of God, destroyed by our own sin, no longer able to do what we were created to do.

“They took the thirty pieces of silver and bought the Potters Field.” The Gospel tells us that that field of shattered, broken, useless lives was precious to God. It was worth the price of the life of his Son. Our broken lives, our sinful lives, are precious to God. Our Creator, our Father, was willing to pay the ultimate price to purchase the broken pieces to make them his own once again.

It’s a simple symbol, hidden among the dramatic events of the Passion narrative, but it helps us answer the question. Why would Jesus choose to suffer and die for us who rejected him? What was in God’s heart? The answer is simple: an unfathomable love. We need not see the Passion of Jesus as an expression of God’s anger, a punishment to satisfy God’s demand for justice. We can understand it as an act of infinite, unconditional love. It was the way that our Creator—the one who shaped us in his own image and breathed his own breath into us — showed us that he still loves us, even in our brokenness. He was willing to pay the price of his own life to unite us to him once again.

Furthermore, as we will hear in the Gospel story a week from today, God is able to do what no potter can do. He is able to take the shattered pieces of our lives and put them back together again. The resurrection of Jesus reveals that God’s love for us will heal and transform us—not just restore us to what we were before—but into something infinitely beyond what we have ever imagined, the promise of the Transfiguration. In the end, we shall be like him.

That is what we celebrate this Holy Week. In the midst of these dark and deep mysteries is hidden the deepest mystery of all—the unfathomable love of a God who, even in our brokenness, considers us worth dying for.

## For Reflection & Prayer

† In what way does the Cross help you understand God’s love for you? How has that love healed the brokenness in your life? Where do you need that healing now?

† St. James exhorts us to “be doers of the Word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). What is one thing you can do this week to put the message of this Scripture into action?

Though he was in the form of GOD he did not deem equality with GOD something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men.

He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!

Because of this GOD highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name above every other name. So that at Jesus’ name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of GOD the Father, JESUS CHRIST is LORD!

*Philippians 2:6-11*