

FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD (GOOD FRIDAY)

Isaiah = I-ZAY-uh

A reading whose power arises from bold claims and compelling rhythms. Allow these elements to ring out in your proclamation. Isaiah's prophecy speaks directly to the congregation and the mystery into which it is immersed.

Even emphasis on the words in this line.

The questions Isaiah asks set the tone for the lines to follow.

LECTIONARY #40

READING I Isaiah 52:13—53:12

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

See, my servant shall prosper,
he shall be **raised high** and greatly **exalted**.
Even as **many** were **amazed** at him—
so **marred** was his look beyond **human semblance**
and his **appearance** beyond that of the **sons of man**—
so shall he startle many nations,
because of **him** **kings** shall stand **speechless**;
for **those** who have not been **told** shall see,
those who have not **heard** shall **ponder** it.

Who would **believe** what we have **heard**?
To **whom** has the **arm** of the **LORD** been **revealed**?
He grew **up** like a sapling **before** him,
like a **shoot** from the parched **earth**;
there was **in him** no stately bearing to make us **look** at him,
nor **appearance** that would **attract** us to him.
He was **spurned** and **avoided** by **people**,
a man of **suffering**, accustomed to **infirmity**,
one of **those** from whom people hide their **faces**,
spurned, and we **held him** in no **esteem**.

READING I

The first reading for today's liturgy is commonly known as the Suffering Servant Song. The tone is mournful at times—some have compared it to a dirge—but hopeful, too. Altogether, there are four servant songs, all of which are found in Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55). The time and place of this writing is the sixth century BC, while the Jews were in exile in Babylon.

In the opening sentence of this reading, God is the speaker, and God refers to the subject of this oracle as "my servant," but the text gives us few clues about the

servant's identity. The Hebrew word translated here as "many" has the connotation of a number too big to count, and the word translated as "amazed" also means "appalled, stunned, or desolated," like a desert is desolate. The servant is presented as so disfigured that he could hardly be recognized as human. Further, we are told that the kings and nations were startled by him. The word translated as "to startle" is most often understood to mean "to spurt or splatter." The connection here might be that the servant's disfigurement is so terrible that it causes the observers to spurt,

metaphorically, or leap into a response of horror at what they see.

Suddenly and without transition, God is no longer speaking. Instead, a group identified only as "we" speaks. Their message is one of amazement at what is happening before their eyes. The "arm of the Lord" is a phrase designed to evoke the idea of God's intervention in history, usually in victory, though not always in a military sense. The servant is compared to a tender plant or a shoot emerging out of the dry desert soil, evoking the wonder that we experience on an early spring day in a

Note the rhythms in the lines in this section, many of which place an emphasis on two of the words in the line, "infirmities" and "bore"; "sufferings" and "endured"; and so forth. Let these rhythms carry your proclamation.

The story of the Suffering Servant is of course anticipatory of the Passion in John's Gospel.

The rhythms that prevail in the previous section continue in this one, often with an emphasis on two words in the line.

Once again, let these rhythms carry your proclamation.

Words like "slaughter," "condemned," "wicked," and "evildoers" are loaded with significance. Recite them clearly and that significance will be evident to the assembly. No need to over-dramatize the words when you proclaim them.

Yet it was our **infirmities** that he **bore**,
 our **sufferings** that he **endured**,
 while we **thought** of him as **stricken**,
 as one **smitten** by God and **afflicted**.
 But he was **pierced** for our offenses,
crushed for our sins;
upon him was the **chastisement** that makes us **whole**,
 by his **stripes** we were **healed**.
 We had all gone **astray** like **sheep**,
each following his **own** way;
 but the **LORD** laid upon him
 the **guilt** of us **all**.

Though he was **harshly** treated, he **submitted**
 and **opened not** his mouth;
 like a **lamb** led to the **slaughter**
 or a **sheep** before the **shearers**,
 he was **silent** and opened not his **mouth**.
Oppressed and **condemned**, he was taken **away**,
 and who would have thought any **more** of his **destiny**?
 When he was cut **off** from the land of the **living**,
 and **smitten** for the sin of his **people**,
 a **grave** was **assigned** him among the **wicked**
 and a **burial** place with **evildoers**,
 though he had **done no wrong**
 nor **spoken any falsehood**.
 But the **LORD** was pleased
 to **crush him** in **infirmity**.

If he **gives** his life as an **offering** for sin,
 he shall **see** his descendants in a **long life**,
 and the **will** of the **LORD** shall be **accomplished**
through him. »

climate that is somewhat hostile to new life (see also Isaiah 11:1), but the group notes that the servant, at his arrival, is nothing much to look at and is even rejected or forsaken by those around him. Notice also the use of the phrase "one of those from whom people hide their faces," which was used to describe a person's response to seeing a leper in the ancient world.

This same unidentified group goes on to talk about the suffering that the servant endured, not because of his own wrongdoing but on behalf of those who rejected him, because they thought his sorry state

was due to his own misdeeds. The language used to describe the servant's suffering is extremely weighty and graphic. The word translated here as "pierced" is also translated as "thrust through," and the word translated here as "crushed" can mean "broken into pieces" or "shattered." Similarly, the word translated here as "stripes" can be translated as "scourging or beatings." Thus, although the group's amazement is proportional to the horror that they are witnessing, it is even more striking because they say, "the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all." This kind of

suffering for the sake of another is unheard of and is almost too much for our small minds to comprehend. How could God love humanity this much?

This Suffering Servant Song uses the sheep metaphor in two separate instances. First, the group identifies itself as sheep "each following his own way." Second, the sheep metaphor is applied to the servant who belongs to the flock and now is chosen to be a sacrificial offering for the rest. The onlookers mistakenly think that he is a lamb made ready for slaughter and cut off from life. But the prophet reminds us that

As the reading concludes, the mood lifts. There is a sense of promise and redemption. Don't, however, overdo it. The hope will come through when you proclaim these words straightforwardly.

For meditation and context:

A reading that prepares the assembly to understand the sacrifice of Jesus portrayed in the passion to follow. The theology suggested in this reading is as mysterious as it is natural. Christ is our model, our exemplar. As a man, he felt things just as we feel them. And yet his suffering, as God, is inconceivable.

this is not the end of the story. He tells us that God willed for the servant to be a reparation or guilt offering to seek purification from sin or to repair an offense. Thus, the servant, being one with the people of Israel, suffers for the sins of the people in fulfillment of God's plan of salvation.

You might recall that this oracle began with a declaration of the servant's eventual exaltation. Now, finally, the details of his victory are described. Having fulfilled God's will to give himself over and shed his blood as a guilt offering for a sinful people, he will see the light and have length of days.

Because of his affliction

he shall see the light in fullness of days;
through his suffering, my servant shall justify many,
and their guilt he shall bear.

Therefore I will give him his portion among the great,
and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty,
because he surrendered himself to death
and was counted among the wicked;
and he shall take away the sins of many,
and win pardon for their offenses.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 31:2, 6, 12–13, 15–16, 17, 25 (Luke 23:46)

R. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

In you, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.

In your justice rescue me.

Into your hands I commend my spirit;
you will redeem me, O LORD,
O faithful God.

For all my foes I am an object of reproach,
a laughingstock to my neighbors,
and a dread to my friends;

they who see me abroad flee from me.

I am forgotten like the unremembered dead;
I am like a dish that is broken.

But my trust is in you, O LORD;
I say, "You are my God.

In your hands is my destiny; rescue me
from the clutches of my enemies
and my persecutors."

Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your kindness.

Take courage and be stouthearted,
all you who hope in the LORD.

READING II Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

Brothers and sisters:

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through
the heavens,

Jesus, the Son of God,

let us hold fast to our confession.

Further, God says, "my servant shall justify the many." To justify means to be put in right relationship with God. Although the author of the Suffering Servant Song could not have anticipated the crucifixion and exaltation of Jesus some 550 years later, it is easy to see how early Christians would latch on to this oracle to make sense of their experience of the living Christ who now stands before the throne of God.

READING II Like the servant in Isaiah's Suffering Servant Song, who is both one with the sheep and set

apart to be the sacrificial lamb in the guilt offering made on behalf of the people of God, the Letter to the Hebrews portrays Jesus as the great high priest who is without sin but who is one with God's people, even insofar as he could experience temptation and suffer pain. The Greek verb *sumpatheo*, translated here as "to sympathize," can also mean "to feel for or have compassion on another." Therefore, the author says, we can approach Jesus freely and with great confidence to receive mercy and grace in troubled times.

Though framed in a negative construction ("We do not have . . ."), this statement expresses the crucial sympathy Christ has for us and that we should have for him. Proclaim this sentence with care.

To intensify the sympathy, "In the days when Christ was in the flesh. . ."

Even stresses on "source," "salvation," and "obey."

Kidron = KID-ruhn

The passion narrative in John's Gospel depicts Jesus foreknowing all that will happen to him, giving him an appearance of calm in a storm. John's passion, like those in the synoptic gospels, is full of drama, with scenes as vivid as those in any novel or film, but whose focus, Jesus, is defined by quiet intensity. Let that guide your recitation and let the drama inherent in the narrative express itself through you.

It is not uncommon, because of the length of this reading, for it to be shared among a group of lectors as well as a deacon and priest. While there are several characters in this narrative, including different speakers, avoid the tendency to do voices or to add drama by raising your voice unnecessarily. Let this narrative speak for itself through you. Don't overdo these expressions of "I AM."

When the author refers to the days when Jesus "was in the flesh," he might have had in mind Jesus' forty days in the wilderness, when he was tempted by Satan, or the agony in the garden of Gethsemane before his arrest, or he might have been referring, more generally, to the human experience of fear in the face of suffering and death. Notice also that the author describes God as having heard Jesus' pleas "because of his reverence." This word can also be translated as "Godly fear or piety." Jesus is further described as having learned obedience from what he

For we do not have a **high priest** who is unable to **sympathize** with our **weaknesses**, but one who has similarly been tested in **every way**, yet **without sin**.

So let us **confidently** approach the **throne of grace** to receive **mercy** and to find **grace** for timely **help**.

In the **days** when Christ was in the **flesh**, he offered **prayers** and **supplications** with loud **cries** and **tears** to the **one** who was able to **save** him from **death**, and he was **heard** because of his **reverence**.

Son though he was, he learned **obedience** from what he **suffered**, and when he was made **perfect**, he became the **source** of eternal **salvation** for all who **obey** him.

GOSPEL John 18:1—19:42

The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

Jesus went out with his **disciples** across the Kidron valley to where there was a **garden**, into which he and his disciples **entered**.

Judas his betrayer also **knew** the place, because **Jesus** had often met there with his **disciples**.

So **Judas** got a band of **soldiers** and guards from the **chief priests** and the **Pharisees** and **went** there with **lanterns**, **torches**, and **weapons**.

Jesus, knowing **everything** that was going to **happen** to him, went out and said to them, "**Whom** are you **looking for**?"

They answered him, "**Jesus** the **Nazorean**."

He said to them, "**I AM**."

Judas his betrayer was also **with** them. >>

suffered. The Greek word for obedience also means "compliance or submission." In other words, although Jesus was Son of God, he perfected his humanity in filial piety, perfectly honoring his Father by freely submitting to the will of God even unto death, whereby he was consecrated as the eternal high priest, who could convey salvation to the rest of humanity.

GOSPEL John's story of the passion, death, and burial of Jesus, which is read every Good Friday, follows the general storyline of the synoptic

Gospels, but it differs in several important ways, because John understood Jesus' death not as a discrete moment of despair, but simply as a necessary part of his "lifting up" or his "glorification." Thus, John's version of the story of Jesus' suffering and death is part of a larger story of victory over the world's hate. In John's Gospel, the world is a symbol for all that is opposed to Jesus.

This passion narrative begins and ends in a garden. Because the garden is unnamed, some scholars of John's Gospel have suggested that the garden symbolizes the primeval garden of Eden in the Book of

Even stresses on "let these men go."

Even stresses on "struck the high priest's slave."

Malchus = MAL-kuhs

Annas = AN-uhs

Caiaphas = KI-uh fuhs

John's Gospel tends to heap scorn upon the Jews, which has contributed to an ugly tendency toward anti-Semitism in Christianity. Mindfulness of this history can empower your proclamation.

The story of Peter's denial provides a sympathetic note in an often harsh narrative. Peter's weakness is the assembly's; his denials ("I am not") speak directly to our spiritual struggles.

Even emphasis on the words in this line.

When he said to them, "I AM,"
they turned **away** and fell to the **ground**.
So he again **asked** them,
"Whom are you looking for?"
They said, "Jesus the Nazorean."
Jesus **answered**,
"I **told** you that I AM.
So if you are **looking** for me, **let these men go.**"
This was to fulfill what he had **said**,
"I have not **lost** any of those you **gave** me."
Then Simon **Peter**, who had a **sword**, **drew it**,
struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right **ear**.
The slave's name was **Malchus**.
Jesus said to Peter,
"Put your **sword** into its **scabbard**.
Shall I not **drink** the **cup** that the **Father** gave me?"
So the band of **soldiers**, the **tribune**, and the Jewish **guards**
seized **Jesus**,
bound him, and brought him to **Annas** first.
He was the **father-in-law** of Caiaphas,
who was **high priest** that year.
It was **Caiaphas** who had counseled the **Jews**
that it was **better** that one man should die rather than
the **people**.
Simon **Peter** and another disciple followed **Jesus**.
Now the **other** disciple was known to the high **priest**,
and he **entered** the courtyard of the high priest with **Jesus**.
But **Peter** stood at the gate **outside**.
So the **other** disciple, the **acquaintance** of the high priest,
went out and **spoke** to the gatekeeper and brought Peter in.
Then the maid who was the gatekeeper said to Peter,
"You are **not** one of this man's **disciples**, **are you?**"

Genesis. Much of what we see in this Gospel is overlaid with symbolism, so this connection with the garden of Eden is certainly possible, though of course, we cannot know fully what was in John's mind.

Almost immediately, the narrator tells us that Judas knew this place where Jesus and the other disciples were gathered. We have also been told repeatedly that Judas is the one who will betray Jesus, so the reader knows what will happen in this garden scene. And now Judas appears with a large contingency of Roman soldiers and Jewish temple guards. They come with

lanterns and torches, indicating that this is the hour of darkness, which represents the absence of belief in John's Gospel (see John 8:12; 9:4). Likewise, Judas' betrayal of Jesus with a kiss is extremely dishonoring.

When Judas and the crowd of soldiers and temple guards arrive on the scene, Jesus initiates a dialog by saying "Whom are you looking for?" Elsewhere in John's Gospel, this question is an invitation to discipleship (see John 1:35-51 and John 20:11-18). But those who come to arrest Jesus understand only the plain meaning of his words. Thus, the crowd answers, "Jesus

the Nazarene," clearly missing the irony of his call to discipleship. In response, Jesus says, "I AM," which is reminiscent of Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush, when he asks God to reveal the divine name and God says, "I AM" (Exodus 3:14). Three times in this brief scene, Jesus is identified as "I AM." In Greek, it is *ego eime*.

Peter, likewise, does not understand the significance of this moment, because, with a single sword, he attempts to defend Jesus from the well-armed crowd that seeks to arrest him. But the crowd of soldiers quickly grab Jesus and take him,

He said, "I am **not**."

Now the **slaves** and the **guards** were standing around
a **charcoal** fire
that they had **made**, because it was **cold**,
and were **warming** themselves.

Peter was also **standing** there keeping **warm**.

The **high priest** questioned **Jesus**
about his **disciples** and about his **doctrine**.

Jesus **answered** him,

"I have spoken **publicly** to the **world**."

I have **always taught** in a **synagogue**

or in the **temple** area where all the **Jews** gather,
and in **secret** I have said **nothing**. Why **ask** me?

Ask **those** who **heard me** what I said to **them**.

They **know** what I **said**."

When he had **said** this,

one of the temple guards standing there struck Jesus and said,
"Is **this** the way you **answer** the **high priest**?"

Jesus **answered** him,

"If I have spoken **wrongly**, **testify** to the wrong;
but if I have spoken **rightly**, why do you strike **me**?"

Then **Annas** sent him bound to **Caiaphas** the **high priest**.

Now **Simon Peter** was standing there keeping **warm**.

And they **said** to him,

"You are not one of his **disciples**, **are you**?"

He **denied** it and said,

"I am **not**."

One of the **slaves** of the **high priest**,

a **relative** of the one whose **ear Peter** had cut **off**, said,

"Didn't I see you in the **garden** with him?"

Again Peter denied it.

And **immediately** the cock **crowed**. >>

Even emphasis on the words in this line.

Jesus' response suggests the core of his resolve to face the suffering to come.

Again, a return to the story of Peter. Don't overly dramatize the denial. Peter's shame will come through clearly when you proclaim this passage deliberately and clearly.

bound, to Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest Caiaphas, who questions Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. The narrator reminds the reader that Caiaphas was the one who prophesied about Jesus' death after the Jewish religious authorities became fearful about the tumult that would arise when people started to learn about the raising of Lazarus (John 11:45–53).

Meanwhile, interspersed among the presentation of Jesus before Caiaphas and the trial before Pontius Pilate, we learn that Peter and another disciple, possibly the Beloved Disciple, who is first mentioned in

the story of Jesus' last supper with his disciples (John 13:21–30), follow Jesus to the gate of the high priest's courtyard. The other disciple is allowed into the courtyard, but Peter was made to stay outside, until the other disciple summoned for him to be allowed inside. This detail is significant because, while Peter is in the high priest's courtyard and Jesus is inside of the high priest's home, Peter is confronted three times: first by a maid servant, next by the slaves and guards gathered around the fire, and finally by a slave who was related to the person whose ear was cut off by Peter.

Each time they ask whether he is one of Jesus' disciples, he denies it. Twice he says *ouk eimi*, that is, "not I am!" The sentence in Greek places the emphasis on "not," which calls our attention to the "I am" sayings attributed to Jesus earlier in the Gospel. It also signals to the reader the irony of Peter's denial of Jesus. Is the Gospel writer trying to present Peter as one who *should* be able to speak openly or publicly on Jesus' behalf but who cannot muster the courage to do so?

Next, John tells the story of Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate, and he does it in

praetorium = prih-TOHR-ee-uhm

Here begins a long passage of exceptional vividness and power. It contrasts the conversation between Pilate and Jesus in the praetorium with the more aggressive exchanges between Pilate and the crowd. It is told from Pilate's point of view, which allows us to sympathize with Pilate. It's a truly remarkable passage whose drama need not be exaggerated. Pace your reading to allow its potent drama to come through on its own.

Pilate is dismissive here, but don't exaggerate his dismissiveness.

The crucial question. Again, don't exaggerate it. Pilate, a government official, is asking an earnest question.

Even emphasis on the words in this question.

Jesus' answer is completely mysterious but supercharged with confidence. Read these words clearly and plainly.

Then they **brought Jesus** from Caiaphas to the **praetorium**.

It was **morning**.

And they themselves did not enter the praetorium, in order not to be **defiled** so that they could **eat the Passover**.

So **Pilate** came out to them and said,

"What charge do you bring **against this man?**"

They **answered** and **said** to him,

"If he were not a criminal,

we would not have handed him **over** to you."

At this, Pilate said to them,

"Take him yourselves, and **judge** him according to your **law**."

The Jews answered him,

"We do not have the right to execute **anyone,**"

in **order** that the word of **Jesus** might be **fulfilled**

that he said **indicating** the kind of **death** he would **die**.

So Pilate went back into the **praetorium**

and **summoned Jesus** and **said** to him,

"Are you the King of the **Jews?**"

Jesus answered,

"Do you say this on your **own**

or have others **told** you **about** me?"

Pilate answered,

"I am not a Jew, am I?

Your own **nation** and the chief **priests** handed you **over** to me.

What have you done?"

Jesus answered,

"My kingdom does not belong to this **world**.

If my kingdom **did** belong to this world,

my **attendants** would be **fighting**

to **keep** me from being handed **over** to the **Jews**.

But as it **is,** my **kingdom** is not **here**."

So Pilate said to him,

"Then you are a king?"

seven scenes. In the first scene, we learn that it is early in the morning shortly before dawn, on the preparation day for Passover. Jesus had already been brought to the praetorium, the Roman governor's residence in Jerusalem. Those who came from Caiaphas' stayed outside. The narrator of the story says that it is to avoid being made ritually unclean and unable to celebrate the Passover meal, though we do not know whether there was such a rule in place at the time. But their action prompted Pilate to come *outside* into the predawn darkness to ask about the formal charges being

brought against Jesus. Because of their ambiguous response, Pilate first chooses not to get involved. But the exchange between the crowd and Pilate reveals that they want Jesus executed. The narrator adds that this scene is a fulfillment of Jesus' words that he would die by being "lifted up" in crucifixion (John 12:32-33).

The crowd is now identified as the *judaioi*, which is here translated as "the Jews." However, many scholars of John's Gospel would caution against the use of this term, because it can be misinterpreted as an antisemitic trope. To better under-

stand this term, it is helpful to know that the community for whom John is writing is also Jewish. Thus, these negative statements about the *judaioi* are more likely the effects of an intra-family fight: a minority community of Jewish Christians struggling against a larger community of Jews who refuse to believe that Jesus is the Christ. To avoid this problem, biblical scholars suggest that we translate *judaioi* as "Judeans" or that we substitute "Jewish religious authorities" in place of "the Jews."

In the second scene of this trial, Pilate goes *inside* the praetorium to question

Again, mysterious and confident.

Almost even emphasis on the words in this line, with extra added to "guilt."

Barabbas = buh-RAB-uhs
Avoid the tendency to shout this line.

"Scourged" is a wicked word. Read it slowly, one elongated syllable.

No need to shout this line. It's all too clear what is happening.

Even stresses on the words in this line.

Pilate is at a loss, but he's also a dutiful Roman bureaucrat.

Lower your voice here. Don't exclaim.

Don't shout.

Jesus answered,
 "You **say** I am a king.
 For **this** I was born and for **this** I came into the world,
 to **testify** to the **truth**.
Everyone who **belongs** to the truth **listens** to my **voice**."
 Pilate said to him, "What is **truth**?"

When he had **said** this,
 he **again** went out to the Jews and **said** to them,
 "I find no **guilt** in him.
 But you have a **custom** that I release one **prisoner** to you
 at **Passover**.
 Do you want me to **release** to you the **King** of the **Jews**?"
 They cried out again,
 "Not **this** one but **Barabbas**!"
 Now **Barabbas** was a **revolutionary**.

Then **Pilate** took Jesus and had him **scourged**.
 And the **soldiers** wove a **crown** out of **thorns** and **placed** it
 on his **head**,
 and **clothed** him in a purple **cloak**,
 and they **came** to him and said,
 "**Hail, King** of the **Jews**!"
 And they **struck** him **repeatedly**.
 Once more Pilate went out and said to them,
 "**Look**, I am **bringing** him out to you,
 so that you may **know** that I find no **guilt** in him."
 So **Jesus** came out,
 wearing the **crown** of **thorns** and the **purple cloak**.
 And he **said** to them, "**Behold**, the **man**!"
 When the **chief priests** and the **guards** saw him they cried out,
 "**Crucify** him, **crucify** him!"
 Pilate **said** to them,
 "**Take** him **yourselves** and crucify him.
 I **find** no **guilt** in him." »

Jesus. He asks, "Are you King of the Jews?" Perhaps he had heard rumors about Jesus being called the messiah, meaning "anointed one." But Jesus refuses to answer Pilate's question about whether he is a king. Instead, he talks about a kingdom that is not of this world, which prompts Pilate to ask his question again. Jesus continues with statements about how he "came into the world, to testify to the truth" and how those who believe respond to the truth. The truth is the revelation of God, and Jesus is God's revealer (John 1:17-18). But Pilate remains totally clueless about Jesus and his

identity. Hence, his sardonic question, "What is truth?"

In the third scene, Pilate again goes *outside*, this time to tell the crowd that he does not find Jesus guilty and that he wanted to make a deal. He would release Jesus whom he calls "King of the Jews" as a Passover prison release. But the crowd refuses and wants Barabbas, instead. The narrator tells us that Barabbas was a robber and revolutionary, but we should not miss the irony. His name means "son of the father."

In the fourth scene, Pilate goes back *inside* to have Jesus scourged. His soldiers mock Jesus by dressing him in a purple robe and placing a crown of thorns on his head. As they strike him repeatedly and shout "Hail, King of the Jews," the irony of their actions weighs heavily on the scene. Jesus really is the king of the Jews.

In the fifth scene, once again Pilate goes *outside*. He attempts to demonstrate to the crowd that he views Jesus as innocent of any crime. As Jesus stands before the crowd, beaten and bloodied but still wearing the regalia of a bemocked king,

This question has a note of astonishment.

Jesus' answer to Pilate's question once again is mysterious and confident.

Gabbatha = GAB-uh-thuh

Don't shout.

This line of the chief priests is dismissive; don't overdo the dismissiveness.

The Jews answered,
 "We have a **law**, and according to that **law** he ought to **die**,
 because he **made** himself the Son of **God**."
 Now when Pilate **heard** this statement,
 he became even more **afraid**,
 and went **back** into the **praetorium** and said to Jesus,
 "**Where** are you **from**?"
 Jesus did not **answer** him.
 So Pilate **said** to him,
 "Do you not **speak** to me?
 Do you not **know** that I have **power** to **release** you
 and I have **power** to **crucify** you?"
 Jesus **answered** him,
 "You would have **no power** over **me**
 if it had not been **given** to you from **above**.
 For this **reason** the one who handed me over to you
has the greater **sin**."
Consequently, Pilate tried to **release** him;
 but the Jews cried out,
 "If you **release** him, you are not a **Friend** of **Caesar**.
Everyone who makes himself a **king** opposes **Caesar**."
 When Pilate **heard** these words he brought Jesus **out**
 and **seated** him on the judge's **bench**
 in the **place** called Stone **Pavement**, in Hebrew, **Gabbatha**.
 It was **preparation** day for **Passover**, and it was about **noon**.
 And he **said** to the Jews,
 "**Behold**, your **king**!"
 They cried out,
 "**Take him away**, **take him away**! **Crucify** him!"
 Pilate **said** to them,
 "Shall I **crucify** your **king**?"
 The chief priests answered,
 "We have **no king** but **Caesar**."
 Then he handed him **over** to them to be **crucified**.

Pilate announces, "Behold the man!" Is this yet another insult hurled at Jesus, so as to say, "Look at this puny and powerless creature!" or is Pilate unwittingly setting the stage for the crowd to reveal the real reason for wanting Jesus to be put to death? They explain, Jesus "made himself the Son of God."

In the sixth scene, Pilate goes *inside* to question Jesus once more. He asks Jesus, "Where are you from?" Jesus refuses to answer, but the Christian community for whom this Gospel was written can quickly say, "Jesus is from God. He is the Son of

God!" Pilate persists, even threatening Jesus with his power to put someone to death, but Jesus responds, saying "You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above." But Pilate knows that he is quickly losing control of the situation, as the crowd's spokespeople charge him with acting against the emperor if he fails to put Jesus to death.

In the final scene, Pilate goes *outside* again, bringing Jesus before the crowd. Taking his place on the judgment seat, Pilate makes one last attempt to release Jesus as he declares, "Behold your king!"

but again here is the irony; Jesus really is the king of the Jews. The crowd screams for Jesus to be crucified. However, rather than issue the order, Pilate turns Jesus over to the crowd for sentencing. The narrator notes that this scene takes place at noon on the preparation day for Passover. Why is this detail important? Jesus, the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36), is sentenced to death at the same time that the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple not far away.

These seven scenes of Jesus' trial before Pilate are organized to create a chi-

Golgotha = GAWL-guh-thuh

In two short lines the act of Jesus' crucifixion, to which this whole Passion has been building, is expressed. Read these lines plainly and slowly.

Pilate's are his final, ominous words in this Passion. Pause slightly after proclaiming them.

Be sure to read the names of these women clearly.

Almost even stresses on the words in this line.

So they took **Jesus**, and, carrying the **cross** himself,
he went out to what is called the **Place of the Skull**,
in Hebrew, **Golgotha**.
There they **crucified** him, and **with him two others**,
one on either **side**, with **Jesus** in the **middle**.
Pilate also had an **inscription** written and put on the **cross**.
It read,

"Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews."

Now **many** of the Jews **read** this inscription,
because the **place** where Jesus was crucified was near the **city**;
and it was **written** in **Hebrew, Latin, and Greek**.

So the **chief priests** of the Jews said to **Pilate**,
"Do not write 'The King of the Jews,'
but that he said, **'I am the King of the Jews.'"**

Pilate answered,
"What I have written, I have written."

When the **soldiers** had crucified **Jesus**,
they took his **clothes** and divided them into **four shares**,
a **share** for each **soldier**.

They also took his **tunic**, but the tunic was **seamless**,
woven in one piece from the **top down**.

So they said to one **another**,
"Let's not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will **be,"**
in order that the passage of Scripture might be fulfilled
that says:

*They **divided** my garments among them,
and for my **vesture** they cast **lots**.*

This is what the soldiers **did**.

Standing by the cross of **Jesus** were his **mother**
and his mother's **sister**, **Mary** the wife of **Clopas**,
and **Mary of Magdala**.

When **Jesus** saw his **mother** and the disciple there whom
he **loved**
he said to his **mother**, **"Woman, behold, your son."** >>

asm. In a chiasm, the first scene of this story matches the last scene, the second matches the second-to-last scene and so on. Since this chiasm has an odd number of scenes, the main theme and focus of the chiasm can be found in scene four, in which the soldiers mock Jesus as a king, but Jesus is not a victim. He truly is the king of the Jews.

Turning now to the crucifixion scene, the Gospel writer continues this theme of Jesus as the victor. The narrator tells us that Pilate placed an inscription at the head of Jesus' cross. The chief priests of the Temple expressed their opposition, saying,

"Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that he said, 'I am the King of the Jews.'" The difference is significant, since the first is a proclamation of faith, whereas the chief priests' attempted rewording is a statement of the charges made against Jesus. But Pilate insisted on his own wording, and the inscription was posted in three languages—Latin, Greek, and Hebrew—for the whole world to see. The Latin reads *Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*, which produces the acronym INRI, which we often see on crucifixes or in artistic renditions of the crucifixion.

Also noteworthy is the detail about Jesus' seamless garment, which is not found in the synoptic Gospels. Some have speculated that this is an allusion to Jesus' priestly role, because the first-century Jewish historian Josephus writes about the high priest wearing a seamless garment under his outer robes. Others have suggested that it is a symbol of unity, a theme that Jesus addresses in his lengthy farewell discourse before his arrest. The Gospel writer tells us only that it was to fulfill Scripture, namely Psalm 22:19: "They divide

"I thirst," concentrates the agony of the crucifixion. Say it simply and clearly.

hyssop = HIS-uhp

These words, "It is finished," culminate the drama of the Passion. Give each word even stress, pausing ever so slightly between them, almost: "It. Is. Finished."

The details in the passage that concludes John's Passion are of interest because they speak to the awful economy of torture and execution (on the part of the Roman soldiers) as well as the requirements of the burial of a corpse according to Jewish custom. It's effective to read these words with scrutiny and openness.

John is speaking directly to his audience in these words; through you, directly to the assembly.

Then he said to the disciple,

"Behold, your mother."

And from **that hour** the **disciple** took her into his **home**.

After **this**, aware that everything was now **finished**, in order that the **Scripture** might be **fulfilled**, Jesus said, **"I thirst."**

There was a **vessel** filled with **common wine**.

So they put a **sponge** soaked in wine on a sprig of **hyssop** and put it up to his **mouth**.

When **Jesus** had taken the wine, he said,

"It is finished."

And **bowing** his head, he **handed** over the **spirit**.

[Here all kneel and pause for a short time.]

Now since it was **preparation** day,

in **order** that the bodies might not remain

on the **cross** on the **sabbath**,

for the **sabbath** day of that **week** was a **solemn** one,

the **Jews** asked Pilate that their **legs** be broken

and that they be taken **down**.

So the **soldiers** came and broke the **legs** of the first

and then of the other one who was **crucified** with **Jesus**.

But when they came to **Jesus** and saw that he was already **dead**, they did **not** break his **legs**,

but one **soldier** thrust his **lance** into his **side**,

and immediately blood and **water** flowed **out**.

An **eyewitness** has testified, and his **testimony** is true;

he **knows** that he is speaking the **truth**,

so that **you also** may come to **believe**.

For this **happened** so that the **Scripture** passage might be **fulfilled**:

*Not a **bone** of it will be **broken**.*

And again another passage says:

*They will look **upon him** whom they have **pierced**.*

my garments among them; / for my clothing they cast lots."

Another detail that is only in John's Gospel is the scene in which we see Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of Jesus, her sister, and the Beloved Disciple at the cross. Jesus asks his mother to take the Beloved Disciple as her son, and likewise, the Beloved Disciple is asked to take Mary as his mother. The narrator tells us that the Beloved Disciple took Mary into his home "from that hour." Although the Gospel writer is not explicit about this connection, one can surmise that this scene reflects

the notion that the Johannine community understood the Beloved Disciple to be their leader and spiritual guide.

Finally, Jesus is offered wine from a sponge that is attached to a branch of hyssop. Hyssop is associated with the first Passover (Exodus 12:22-23) and the narrator also notes Jesus' unbroken legs, which alludes to the unblemished lambs offered in sacrifice. This is in keeping with John the Baptist's introduction of Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36). We also have the detail about the piercing of Jesus' side and the blood and water pouring out. This detail

might simply indicate that Jesus was dead. However, in John's Gospel, water is associated with baptism and new life, and blood reminds us of Jesus' statements about drinking the cup that the Father gave him to drink (John 18:11) and about consuming his blood in the "Bread of Life" discourse (John 6:53-56), which Johannine scholars associate with the Eucharist.

John's story of the burial of Jesus also has some unique details. We learn that Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of being ostracized by his Jewish comrades for

Arimathea = ayr-ih-muh-THÉE-uh

Nicodemus = nik-uh-DEE-muhs
 Don't hurry over these details.
 myrrh = mer
 aloes = AL-ohz

Read this concluding phrase, "for the tomb was close by," slowly.

After **this**, Joseph of **Arimathea**,
secretly a disciple of **Jesus** for **fear** of the **Jews**,
 asked **Pilate** if he could **remove** the body of **Jesus**.
 And Pilate **permitted** it.
 So he came and took his **body**.
Nicodemus, the one who had **first come** to him at **night**,
also came bringing a mixture of **myrrh** and **aloes**
 weighing about one **hundred** pounds.
 They took the body of **Jesus**
 and bound it with **burial cloths** along with the **spices**,
 according to the **Jewish burial custom**.
 Now in the **place** where he had been **crucified** there was
 a **garden**,
 and in the **garden** a new **tomb**, in which **no one** had yet
 been **buried**.
 So they laid **Jesus** there because of the Jewish **preparation day**;
 for the **tomb** was close **by**.

believing that Jesus was the messiah. And then there is Nicodemus, whom we hear about earlier in John (see John 3:1–21) and who never seems to make the leap to full faith in Jesus. As they lay Jesus' body to rest, do they believe he will be raised from the dead? What is the purpose of this closing scene of the passion narrative? What does it mean to you? C.C.