

SATURDAY, MARCH 31: JOHN 19:38-42

HOLY SATURDAY

Joseph and Nicodemus were not rejoicing as they interred Jesus' body in the new tomb. There was only sorrow and sadness that day. But their sorrow would be turned in joy on Sunday when they heard that the one whom they had buried was now alive. We are able to rejoice at the burial of Christ because we live in the knowledge that Christ is risen from the grave. Everyone is saddened when they remember that each must die and be laid in the tomb. But all who are baptized see that Christ, by being buried, has sanctified the graves of the saints. The baptized have nothing to fear from death. Our Lord has gone that way before us and emerged victorious over death.

We also rejoice in Christ's burial because St. Paul tells us that in holy baptism we were buried with Christ, and in His resurrection we were raised with Christ. Being reborn through the water of holy baptism, we are to mortify the Old Adam, our sinful nature, by daily repenting of sin, striving against it, and trusting in the promise of the Gospel. For the faithful baptized, the burial of Christ reminds us that we are buried with Christ, therefore death will be conquered in us at the resurrection on the Last Day. Christ's burial also reminds us to daily put our sinful nature in that tomb so that we might daily rise to new life, with new movements of the heart that truly love God and our neighbors.

We pray: Heavenly Father, we give You hearty thanks for our new life in holy baptism, that You have forgiven our sins and raised us up in Christ Jesus. Grant us strength to daily bury the old Adam in us, so that You may raise up the new man to walk in righteousness and purity. Amen.

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**MARCH 5—MARCH 31, 2018**

**A PUBLICATION OF  
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF  
NORTH AMERICA**

## *The Calendar*

March 4	Oculi
March 11	Laetare
March 18	Judica
March 25	Palmarum

(Please note: because the traditional date for the Festival of the Annunciation falls on Palmarum, the Festival is transferred to the Monday after the First Sunday after Easter, i.e., April 9.)

### ***2018 Synod and Summer Camp***

This year's Diocesan Synod will take place at Salem Lutheran Church (Malone, Texas) during the week of June 25–29 so that it will coincide with the annual Summer Camp, which will also be at Salem. (The 2018 Colloquium was held in January in Fort Wayne, Indiana.)

Although the Colloquium and Synod usually occur during the same week, they were divided this week to accommodate the Seminary schedule, so that the clergy of the diocese would gather after the seminarian's conclusion of his studies to conduct his theological colloquy. Josiah Scheck's colloquy is presently scheduled to take place on Tuesday, June 26. The seminary graduation is scheduled for Wednesday evening, June 27.

This year's Summer Camp will build on the theme of last year, continuing our exploration of the history of the Lutheran Church through the settlement of the Americas, beginning with the Church in New Sweden (Delaware) in the 1630s.

Further details concerning both the Synod and Camp will be available in future issues of *The Lutheran Herald* and from the pastors of the diocese.

**FRIDAY, MARCH 30: JOHN 19:25-37**

**GOOD FRIDAY**

“It is finished!” These are very important words. Grace and truth comes through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Before He bowed His head and gave up His spirit He proclaimed that the work that had brought Him to this point was finally finished. Our atonement was accomplished!

In His death He did not just finish the betrayal and suffering that came in the days before. Nor was it just the completion of His earthly ministry that began years before at His baptism. His atonement for the sins of the world was the completion of centuries worth of teaching and prophecy. It was the finish to the promise given millennia before when Adam and Eve listened to the Serpent and fell into sin, bringing death and condemnation to all mankind. By His own death Jesus Christ, God of God, finished the promise that Satan's head would be crushed as the Son of Mary was struck with death on the cross.

But even though our Lord was beaten, bruised, and pierced to the point of death, He would not stay dead! He finished our redemption at His death, but He would also rise again to declare for Himself that He had done it! His resurrection confirmed that He was the Son of God and truly the worthy sacrifice that paid for our sins with His own blood!

We pray: Merciful and everlasting God, who hast not spared Thine only Son, but delivered Him up for us all that He might bear our sins upon the cross, grant that our hearts may be so fixed with steadfast faith in Him that we may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus came preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This kingdom at hand was His own. He came to conquer His enemy, the Serpent, and make all believers His own by His death on the cross.

The Jews praised Jesus as He came into Jerusalem on a donkey. They cried “Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ The King of Israel!” (John 12:13). And the Pharisees despaired because the people had gone after Him.

Later Satan and his seed would sway the crowds to denounce Jesus and follow their lead as they pandered to a faithless earthly kingdom. But in spite of the sinfulness of man, Jesus Christ was the true King, and whether they embraced Him or not, He came to offer them grace, mercy, and peace in His sacrifice. Even if the Jews rejected Him, He came to be their king, and He was in fact the Son of David, who fulfilled the psalms that were written by the former king of Israel.

The world today still clings to its earthly kingdoms, and people are still fickle toward Christ. Sometimes people praise Jesus because they think it makes them pious, or because they want His help, but the same people can forget about Him, or even mock Him, soon after. Thanks be to God that He shows us His mercy in Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and grants us His Word and Spirit so that we may be made part of His kingdom through repentance and faith in Him.

We pray: O Lord God, by Your Word and Spirit make us truly faithful, and keep us steadfast as members of Your heavenly kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Oculi Sunday

### Article II.

Also they [the Lutheran pastors] teach, that since the Fall of Adam, all men begotten according to nature, are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through baptism and the Holy Ghost.

They condemn the Pelagians and others, who deny that the vice of origin is sin, and who, to obscure the glory of Christ’s merit and benefits, argue that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.

—The Augsburg Confession

### Article II.

#### Of Original Sin.

The second article, Of Original Sin, the adversaries [the Roman Catholic theologians] approve, but in such a way, that they, nevertheless, censure the definition of Original Sin, which we incidentally gave. Here at the very threshold, his Imperial Majesty will discover that the writers of the Confutation [the Romanist response to the Augsburg Confession] were deficient not only in judgment, but also in candor. For whereas we, with a simple mind, desired, in passing, to recount those things which Original Sin embraces, these men, by framing an invidious interpretation, artfully distort a proposition that has in it nothing which of itself is wrong. Thus they say: “To be without the fear of God, to be without faith, is actual guilt”; and therefore they deny that it is original guilt.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession

(The Augsburg Confession was written in 1530, the Roman Confutation responded to the Confession in 1530, and then the Lutheran Apology (Defense) was written in 1531.)

**MONDAY, MARCH 5: LUKE 18:15-30**

**THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.”

The disciples get bad press. They didn't hate children. Back then, it was the father's duty to be the spiritual leaders of their homes (as our Small Catechism urges at the beginning of each chief part)! The fathers would receive their instruction from the teacher (rabbi), and then they in turn would go home and teach their families. Children bothering the master seemed socially wrong.

Jesus does not subject Himself to such social convention. He has something else to teach the disciples, the children, and us. “Let the little children come to Me,” He says, “for of such is the kingdom of God.” What does that mean? Do we all need to become sweet and innocent like little children? Well, no. Children are not innocent! They are just as sinful from conception as King David admitted he was. Rather, children have no “bargaining chips,” no power, no money, not even mature refinement in flattery. They come with joy, wanting to receive whatever the Lord gives them. They come receiving in the way of the Gospel, in the way of gift, not in the way of Law and merit. So we are to receive what He graciously gives us, and that turns out to be forgiveness of sins, life, salvation, and everything else that we need according to His holy will.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me my pretenses, and grant me ever the forgiveness of sins and eternal life by Your grace, through the faith the Holy Spirit has created in me. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28: JOHN 19:1-12 WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK**

The Devil and his children thought they could defeat Jesus by manipulating Pilate into crucifying Him. They wanted to silence Jesus by killing Him, and they wanted the extra benefit of having Him killed by the government as a public enemy. That way, their hands would seem clean and Jesus' reputation would be as one who was cursed. As our Lord said in His exchange with Pilate, their sin was great.

The Devil, the ancient Serpent, and his seed, the wicked Jews and their chief priests, tried to crush Jesus. However, God only allowed their evil efforts to temporarily wound His Son. He took their evil intentions and brought about the greatest good to ever happen in the course of human history: Christ Jesus died and rose again for our salvation. He died to take away the sins of the world, and His atonement made it possible for us to be saved by this divine grace through faith in His innocent suffering and death. Through this faith we are made His own to live under Him in His holy kingdom.

The unfaithful people who heeded Satan's lies did not protect their chances for a kingdom. They rejected the true kingdom of God and foolishly looked to the kingdom of Caesar for help. Nevertheless, in the kingdom of His Church Jesus Christ continues to be near to all mankind as His faithful people call all sinners to repent, and as they proclaim the Gospel of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins for those who believe!

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds are continually afflicted, may mercifully be relieved by the Passion of Thine only-begotten Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Peter's denial is one of the saddest sins recorded in Scripture. Peter's faith had led him to confess Christ as the Son of the living God who has the words of eternal life. He even says in Mark 14:31, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" Yet here he is, confessing the very opposite of what he had so often spoken. It is a grievous sin to deny Christ. St. Luke writes that after this "the Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61). Luke also tells us that after this Peter went away and wept bitterly. He immediately saw his sin and surely remembered Christ's words, "whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:33).

Peter's denial is written for our learning. Even as Christians we daily sin, and there even times when we sin grievously against our conscience. Peter's example is given so that we see first, that if Peter can so easily sin this way, we should be on guard against such sin. Second, Peter's example is given to us that we see what true repentance looks like. Whenever we realize we've sinned, we should sorrow over our sin, repenting, and then believe Christ's word, "For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matthew 9:13). No matter your sin, and no matter how you fell into it, repent of it, confess it to your heavenly Father, and take heart, certain that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15).

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, grant us grace so to pass through this holy time of our Lord's Passion that we may obtain the pardon of our sins. Amen.

"Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham."

Jesus goes to the house of Zacchaeus. Who is he? He is a tax collector, which means that in the eyes of most Jews he was a thief and a collaborator with the occupying armies of Rome. Respectable people hated him. But as we observed yesterday, Jesus cares more about souls than about social conventions. Jesus tells him He is coming to his house!

People complained. Jesus let them. Zacchaeus declares that he will give half of what he owns to the poor, and make restitution for any wrong he has done. And Jesus announces that "today salvation has come to this house." Why? Because he gave away so much money? No. Zacchaeus had repented, and placed his trust in the Lord Jesus. True repentance seeks to make amends where it can, and confesses the Lord's generous gift of salvation by being generous with others. Zacchaeus was saved by grace through faith in Christ.

We pray: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.”

Our Lord is confronted by Sadducees, who believed neither in the resurrection, nor in angels. And they pose a question with which they had probably made a lot of Pharisees (who believed in the resurrection) look quite foolish. A man dies, so his wife is given to his brother, and so on through seven brothers, and then she dies. In the resurrection, whose wife will she be? The question is designed to make the doctrine of the resurrection look silly.

Jesus answers them by quoting Exodus. He reminds them that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not the God of the dead, but of the living, implying that the patriarchs are not gone, but live eternally. As to their question, He clarifies that in the resurrection marriage is a thing of the past, and the saved are made “equal to the angels” (which the Sadducees also erroneously did not believe in).

Jesus refuted Sadducean false doctrine that we might know that He really has come to give us eternal life. He dies on the cross to give it to us. Dear ones in Christ, believe it.

We pray: O Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you for the gift of eternal life. By the power of the Holy Spirit, guard me against all false doctrine that would destroy this blessed confidence. Amen.

Impetuous Peter strikes Malchus and cuts off his right ear. St. Luke records that immediately Jesus “touched his ear and healed him” (Luke 22:51). This served two purposes. The first purpose was to protect Peter from retribution and to demonstrate to everyone that Jesus’ mission was not violence and insurrection. “For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them” (Luke 9:56).

The second reason Jesus healed Malchus’ ear was to teach His disciples, then and now, that in order to understand what is about to happen to Him in the next twenty four hours, you’ll need your ears. How often had Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” Viewing the trials, the mocking, the spitting, the flogging, the cross, the nails, the thorny crown, all of it must be viewed with the ears. Everything that happens to Jesus isn’t for us to see. We are to hear the words of Moses and the Prophets and let their divinely inspired words teach us about the passion of Christ. The prophets teach us that it was the Father’s will that the Son be smote, that His suffering was for the sake of sins, and that by His wounds we are healed. If we only look at Jesus’ passion and death with our eyes then all we’ll see is suffering and death. But if you see with your ears what Moses and the Prophets have to say, then you’ll see the sacrifice for your sins, for your salvation, and for your everlasting life.

We pray: Give us ears to hear, Almighty God, so that we may right view our Lord’s passion and death through the inspired words of Your Prophets, and by hearing, truly love You and give You thanks for our salvation. Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord Palmarum (Palm) Sunday

## Article III.

Also they [the Lutherans] teach, that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did take man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are Two Natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but for all actual sins of men. He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into Heaven, that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign, and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin. The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles' Creed.

—The Augsburg Confession

THURSDAY, MARCH 8: LUKE 21:37-22:38      THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”

It is the night in which our Lord was betrayed. Jesus, as omniscient God, knew that Peter would fall. He knew that he would deny Him three times. He warned Peter that it was so. Peter swore it would not happen. It happened. In the moment of truth, Peter lacked the courage to confess his faith in the Lord to a servant girl.

We all fall short. And how often have we heard someone say, “You can't do thus-and-such! If you do, it will destroy your witness!” Often such voices are trying harder to get us to bow to Victorian social acceptability than to the Word of the Lord. But even if we are caught red handed sinning, is our witness over? No. It just takes a different form.

It was so with Peter. He fell. His fall is recorded in Scripture. For centuries now, Christians have, and continue to, catch him red handed. His witness changes to an example of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. When you are caught sinning, or you catch yourself, do not make excuses. Plead guilty. Repent. And so let your witness be your testimony of a wonderful Savior who forgives you, me, even Peter, and who puts us back into action. In this way, our Lord can use us to strengthen others.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me. Then, forgiven, have Your use of me to point others to Your forgiveness. Amen.

“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.”

Yesterday, we saw our Lord making use of His omniscience to warn Peter of his impending denials. Today, we see our Lord choosing not to avail Himself of His omniscience.

You can know your mother’s maiden name or your favorite kind of ice cream, but until I mention these subjects, you are not actively thinking about them. As true God, Jesus knew His Father’s will. Yet to be true man and a true human substitute for us, He chose “not to be actively knowing” what He could know. So He prays in His perfect humanity, longing for a way out, but nevertheless perfectly submitting Himself to God’s will.

This is certainly a great example for us. Is it not the greatest struggle in our sanctification to learn to pray “Thy will be done” and not be muttering in the back of our minds “but what I really want here is my will”? Jesus prays “Thy will be done,” perfectly meaning it, perfectly bowing to the will of His Father. But this is more than just a good example. It’s substitutionary. Jesus prays “Thy will be done” perfectly, so that His perfect life may be substituted before God for all our imperfect “Thy will be done” prayers. Jesus was perfect for you. Thus His sacrifice is perfect, and saves you.

We pray: O Lord, grant us ever to pray and to live in a manner pleasing in your sight. And when we are displeasing, grant us repentant hearts that rejoice in Jesus’ perfection for us. Amen.

The question is often raised: “Why did Jesus have Judas to be one of His disciples, when He knew all along what would happen?” The answer is found in the question itself: “He knew all along what would happen.” As hard as it was for Jesus to accept Judas as a disciple, Judas played a very significant, albeit unwitting role, in God’s plan of salvation.

First of all, Judas would fulfill Scripture: “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (Ps. 41:9). Secondly, such a betrayer was necessary. It was night, with no corrective vision, and there was no picture to identify Jesus. Additionally, there was a multitude of Jews in Jerusalem for the Passover. And so, the guards needed an inside man to point Jesus out—even to the extent of Judas’ marking Jesus with a kiss. Thirdly, since Jesus revealed the sign of the betrayer to the disciples, they would be strengthened by the knowledge that Jesus was still in charge—even when circumstances appeared otherwise: “Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He (v. 19).

Prayer: “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.” (TLH 514:1, 5)

In today's text, Jesus gives a lengthy discourse on the theology of His impending death. Almost lost before that instruction is this brief episode: "Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus'" (vs. 20-21).

It's the beginning of Passover week—the reason these Greeks came to Jerusalem. But it seems their focus is on this up-and-coming preacher from Nazareth. We don't know much about them, for very little is revealed. Noteworthy, however, is that they seem to have no preconceived notions about Jesus. They're prepared to let Him make His own case. They simply ask Philip: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Coincidentally, Philip is the one who invites Nathanael to "come and see." There can be no better words of invitation than just "come and see," for they invite others to "taste and see that the Lord is good." We don't rely on our own wisdom and words to "win people over," we just ask them to immerse themselves in the Word of God. These Greeks, then, had the right idea. They weren't interested in what Philip thought of Jesus, they only needed Him as a guide to take them to the Source.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, may we be faithful guides in leading others to Your Son, and be concise and true in our speech as they learn of the Source of their salvation; In Jesus' Name. Amen.

"And they all cried out at once, saying, 'Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas'."

Barabbas had been thrown in prison for rebellion and murder. He is not a good man, even by the standards of civic righteousness. He will never be able to stand before God based on his own merits or works. But he is a man curiously named. "Bar" means son, "abba" means father. So his name means "son of the father."

And along comes Jesus, the Son of the Father! And Jesus takes Barabbas' place under the law of Rome, bearing the punishment of crucifixion that Barabbas deserved, while Barabbas goes free. Jesus does more than that, of course. He, the Son of the Father, takes his place and our place under the holy Law of God, so that he, and we, may truly become sons of the Father.

The murderous, Christ-rejecting cries of the crowd are used by God to see His Son to the cross, so to pay the purchase price for the salvation of all mankind. It is done, and now, to all who believe in Him, Jesus gives all the blessings of His own Sonship, including the gifts of His own holiness and eternal glory with God in heaven.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, I give You thanks that You have suffered in my place, and have given me Your saving mercies. As You have blessed me with the gifts of Your sonship and Your holiness, grant me grace to live up to Your righteousness in which You have clothed me. Amen.

The chief priests, scribes and elders sneered and mocked Jesus, who hung on a cross above them. The soldiers joined in making fun of Him. According to Matthew and Mark, both criminals revile Jesus and join in the blasphemy. However, only St. Luke informs us that one of the malefactors changed his mind. When the first said, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us,” the second responds, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.”

Jesus’ words—few though they were—and actions must have made quite an impression. Following Jesus’ death, the centurion proclaimed, “Certainly this was a righteous Man.” The crowd, who had come to see a spectacle, left beating their breasts in recognition that something terribly wrong had just occurred. The robber was not the only one who came to a change of heart as a result of the crucifixion. Though he had just recently mocked Jesus as a fraud, that same robber now defends Jesus. He confesses his sins as worthy of the punishment of crucifixion but acknowledges that Jesus has done nothing wrong. His prayer is astounding! “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” This confidence which led this condemned man to request forgiveness from a crucified Messiah is none other than the Christian faith.

Our Jesus takes on the punishment which we rightly deserved. He does it for the sole purpose that the Father would forgive us for our ignorant sinning. Jesus’ word promises eternal life for all who hold the Christian faith. “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

Father, forgive me, for the sake of Your Son, my Savior.  
Amen.

Today we look at the events that took place on the Friday before the one called “Good.” Jesus was at Bethany where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived. There was a dinner given for Jesus, who was seated next to Lazarus. One can only imagine the joy this family felt after his recent resurrection. To honor Jesus, Mary then does something extraordinary: “Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil” (v. 3). But rather than celebrate Mary’s offering, Judas chastises the act: “But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it” (vs. 4-6). The Gospel writer reveals Judas’ hypocrisy. He put up a façade to make himself look like he cared for others, but his heart really only cared for himself.

The lesson here is not “how to look for hypocrites,” since only God can judge the heart. Rather, let us look into our own heart—that we may recognize and confess the sin within us, and amend our sinful lives.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, thank you calling us to faith through the means of Holy Baptism. As that faith is challenged daily by the many means of Satan, keep us firm in our Baptismal faith through Your Word and Supper, that we may perform righteous deeds that are motivated by a clean heart; In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

During Jesus' trials before Pilate, three times he used the word "king." Now it was time for others to join in the mocking: "And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him" (v. 20). Jesus had borne the abandonment of His followers, the insults of religious leaders, the neglect of Roman authority, and now the mocking of those who crucified Him. Poured on top of all that was the physical agony of the crucifixion itself. There was the unbelievable pain of having His hands and feet nailed—and the additional pain of having to push and pull Himself up just to catch a breath. All of this was added to the scourging He'd just endured—and the continual scorning from passers-by.

But as bad as all of this was, surely it paled in comparison to His suffering for the sins of all time. Even one single sin justified eternal damnation, and Jesus had taken on the burden of countless sins committed by innumerable humanity—past, present, and future. Let us never cease to marvel at this immeasurable sacrifice. Let us never cease to praise our infinite God who became finite man that He might endure the suffering we deserved—that we may be His redeemed children.

Prayer: "Upon the cross extended, see, world, thy Lord suspended. Thy Savior yields His breath. The Prince of Life from Heaven Himself hath freely given to shame and blows and bitter death." (TLH 171:1)

"...for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it..." (Acts 5:38-19). Jesus tells His disciples on Tuesday (Nisan 12) that He will die by crucifixion on the day of the Passover in just two days. The Jewish Passover (Nisan 14) begins at sundown on Thursday. At about the same time, the chief priests, the scribes and the elders had decided not to have Jesus arrested and killed during the seven-day Passover celebration.

Who is really in charge? On the first day of the feast, between Thursday night and Friday night, Jesus had been arrested, declared guilty, crucified and buried. Yes, Jesus is in charge! He tells us "Therefore, My Father loves Me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (John 10:17-18). His work is all according to the Father's will so that He might secure our atonement. The Gospel promise is sure, "everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name" (Acts 10:43).

When a woman anoints Jesus at the house of Simon, He says, "For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial." Jesus approves of her action! Even though the disciples do not seem to be paying attention to Jesus' words about His upcoming death, burial and resurrection, she did.

Heavenly Father, lead us to receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save our souls. Amen (James 1:21 paraphrased)

The description of Jesus' disposition takes a mysterious, dark turn in the Garden of Gethsemane. St. Matthew says, "...He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.'" The Greek words are quite expressive indicating that Jesus is overcome with great sadness and dread. The English adjectives exceedingly and deeply help to convey Jesus' pitiful condition of distress. He takes Peter, James, and John with him as He goes to pray, but they fall asleep and are no comfort. Jesus prays to His Heavenly Father. At no point does Jesus wish to avoid His Father's will, He is resolutely determined to do it. The purpose of His supplication was to pray, "...Not as I will, but as You will."

Nevertheless, do not be mistaken, this was exceedingly deep suffering, "with vehement cries and tears" (Heb. 5:7)! Jesus tells the disciples that his sorrow is "even to death." This sorrowing to death is not simply his own mortality, but the death which we deserved because of our sins. Jesus' sorrow was the taking on of our curse of death and Hell so that we might have life and Heaven. The Prophet Isaiah called Jesus, "A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Ch. 53). When we know that He endured this sorrow out of love for us to make expiation for our sins, we are exceedingly and deeply grateful. Isaiah continues, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Is 53:5)

Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of our souls, we give you thanks for your mediatorial suffering which brings us eternal salvation. Amen.

In all, there were six trials of Jesus. Three were conducted by the Jews, and three by the Romans. In the short span of roughly eight hours, they were all complete. The Jews were determined to pull out all the stops in getting Jesus condemned to death. They first brought Him before Annas, the former high priest, then Caiaphas, the current high priest; and then finally before the whole Sanhedrin. And in spite of the Jews constant attention to the most minute details of the law, they committed legal atrocities against the One who was innocent from all eternity. How ironic that the Jewish authorities—the very ones who should've recognized and welcomed the Messiah—were the ones who did their best to ensure Jesus' condemnation. At all three of their meetings, they consistently broke their own rules to conclude that Jesus deserved death. The dreaded Romans, on the other hand, represented by Pilate and Herod, came to the opposite conclusion: Jesus was innocent of the charges laid against Him. But instead of defending and protecting Him, Herod gave Him back to Pilate, who then turned Him over to the people.

It was an incredible turn of events, to be sure. But God used the hateful sins of commission by the Jews and the irresponsible sins of omission by the Romans to accomplish His will of salvation. Two sources of earthly power, one religious and one secular, had to be at their worst to have not only an innocent man condemned, but a perfect one as well.

Prayer: "O dearest Jesus, what law hast Thou broken that such sharp sentence should on Thee be spoken? Of what great crime hast Thou to make confession—what dark transgression?" (TLH 143:1)

In today's reading, we're confronted with events that are often overlooked. With the days of Good Friday and Easter just ahead, Maundy Thursday is sometimes relegated to being just a "prelude." But in fact, without Jesus passing through the agony of Gethsemane, there would be no Good Friday and no Easter. Perhaps the greatest test Jesus underwent were those awful hours of Thursday evening.

It's an interesting setting, this garden. For Jesus doesn't confront other people, but His own humanity. The God who is also one hundred percent man is faced with the final countdown to crucifixion—a death He'd been dreading His whole life. This garden would not serve as gardens normally do, as a place of respite, but as a haunting quiet that allowed Satan to do his worst. The dread of Gethsemane's garden would be the ironic opposite of the pleasure of Eden. As we near the end of our Savior's journey, Jesus must finish the task of undoing the sins committed in that other garden.

Knowing the vulnerability of His human nature, Jesus asks His three closest disciples to accompany Him, while He prays to the Father: "He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will'" (vs. 35-36). While the disciples fail Him, the Father does not. Jesus leaves the Garden with firm resolution: "Rise, let us be going!" (v. 42).

Prayer: "Go to dark Gethsemane, ye that feel the Tempter's pow'r; your Redeemer's conflicts see, watch with Him one bitter hour; turn not from His griefs away, learn of Jesus Christ to pray."  
(TLH 159:1)

The Nicene Creed says, "...and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate." The Jewish nation did not have the power of capital punishment, and thus any sentence of death needed to be brought to the Roman governor for his approval and decree. Pontius Pilate examined Jesus and concluded that Jesus was not an earthly king guilty of any treasonous charge. He heard the accusations of the Jewish leaders and concluded that "they had handed him over because of envy." Nevertheless, Pilate feared for his job and gave in to their demands to have the innocent Jesus crucified.

In Matthew chapter 27, the Sanhedrin hands Jesus over to Pontius Pilate (v.2). In verses 3-10, Judas, the one who handed Jesus over to the Sanhedrin (26:15), commits suicide. Once the self-serving Pilate had declared himself innocent, he handed Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified (v.26). With the handing over of our Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, into the hands of men (Matt. 17:22), into the hands of Gentiles (20:19), and into the hands of Pontius Pilate, the governor (27:2), we have the redemptive work of Jesus for our salvation.

St. Peter tells us that Jesus was "handed over by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). "For God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). Repent of your sins and believe in the One who was handed over so that you might receive the forgiveness of your sins.

O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. Amen.

Both Sts. Matthew and Mark record that there was darkness over all the land from the sixth hour (Noon) until the ninth hour (3 PM). St. Luke goes on to say, “while the sun’s light failed,” (23:45) but that doesn’t help us to physically understand what happened. With an eclipse impossible during a full moon, there is simply no natural explanation for this worldwide phenomenon. The Scriptural meaning is given by Jesus’ own words. “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ... ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” The darkness is a visible sign of the judgment of the Father who rejected His Son. Jesus’ words are fulfillment of Psalm 22.

Although Jesus was without sin and declared by the Father to be His Beloved Son in whom He is well-pleased. This innocent Jesus chose to drink the cup of wrath and punishment which we deserved. He took the righteous judgment of the Father upon Himself. 1 Peter 2:24 says that “Jesus Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree.” And Galatians 3:13 says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”

We normally hear of the judgment which will come at the end of the world in terms of darkness and the sun ceasing to shine. When we see this miraculous sight before the end of the world, we ponder Jesus’ question! What is the reason that You forsook Your Son? In faith, we cry out with a loud voice, “Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come” (Rev 14:7). I am saved!

O Lord, forgive me my sins. Amen.

It is our Lord’s words which instituted our Lord’s Supper. The Words of Institution, used in the Divine Service, are a conflation of the four recorded accounts so that we might not lose any detail. Even though St. Mark’s account doesn’t include the explicit words, “for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28), nor does it include the command for the church to repeat it, saying, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:24), the benefit and purpose are there. St. Mark’s brief account tells us the Lord took some of the unleavened bread and proclaimed that it was His body and gave it to them to eat. Similarly, the Lord took a cup filled with wine and proclaimed that it was His blood of the covenant. They all drank from that one cup.

The Body and Blood of Our Lord is the very One which was being “poured out for many” in sacrifice on the cross. The words, “for many,” teach us that His suffering and death was not just for the disciples present that night, but for “many,” that is all people. Other passages (1 John 2:2) confirm that “many” does not refer to a limited atonement of believers only. The “for” (or “on behalf of”) teaches a benefit by substitution. Jesus does it on behalf of them, so that He might redeem them (Gal. 3:13). Even St. Mark’s brief account shows that our Lord desires that all men might come to believe and receive His “poured out” Body.

It was God alone who fulfilled the Old Testament covenant (berith) when His Son was sacrificed. The benefits of Jesus’ substitution—proclaimed in His new testament (diatheke)—are given out in the Lord’s Supper.

O Lord, through the reception of Christ’s Body and Blood, give us forgiveness of sins. Amen.