



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

700 King Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8P 1C7

Children's Liturgy of the Word

PALM SUNDAY

The Jews had been longing for a great leader, like one of their Kings of old, who would lead them to victory against the Roman invaders. They thought that Jesus might be that leader. At this time of Passover, many Jews gathered in Jerusalem to remember how God had saved them from slavery. But by his actions, he shows everyone that he is no earthly king or soldier – he comes as the King of peace, love and forgiveness. This is why he chose to enter the city riding on a donkey, commonly used for carrying loads, rather than a battle horse. It is important at this time to focus on the agony and desolation of the passion. Still, we also remember the fact of the resurrection, as described by the evangelists and witnesses who viewed it from the perspective of the risen Christ ascending into glory.

Procession

For the Procession with Palms, the children remain in their pews. After the Opening Prayer, the Priest calls them forward and sends them, with their leaders, to the place where they will celebrate their own Liturgy of the Word.

Background

In this holiest of weeks, we could not have two more opposite portraits of Jesus than Mark's account of the passion, which we read today, and John's on Good Friday.

Mark's version is stark, depicting a very human Jesus. In Gethsemane, Jesus falls prostrate to the ground in deep distress. He begs God to let the cup pass him by; three times; his pleas are met with silence. At earlier crucial turning points, Jesus had concrete signs of God's presence and affirmation: an overshadowing cloud and a heavenly voice, but in Gethsemane, there is only terrifying silence. Before him, across the Kidron Valley, rises the temple, with its officials who want him dead. Behind him, over the Mount of Olives, is the Judean desert. He could yet slip away and avoid death for the time being. What was God's will? Jesus finds no discernible response; all he can do is rely on his previous experiences of God's faithful love. Not knowing how God will bring the divine will for life and love to fullness through his brutal execution, Jesus chooses to remain in trust. As the Sanhedrin and Pilate interrogate Jesus, he remains silent, like the Servant in Isaiah 53:7. Throughout his ministry, Jesus was not silent in the face of injustice; he denounced it and acted to rectify it. Here, his refusal to engage with representatives of corrupt systems can be read as a silent protest against them.

The desolate portrait of a Jesus abandoned continues unrelieved as Mark re-counts the mockery by the soldiers, the march to the place of execution, and the verbal and physical abuse at Golgotha. Jesus's final words are an anguished cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" By invoking Psalm 22, Mark helps us see that even when one cannot sense God's presence or understand how God's saving purposes are in excruciating suffering, the Holy One never abandons any beloved daughter or son.

Leader's Reflection Questions

- † Reflect on your feelings as you listened to the Passion being read. What does the passion of Jesus tell us about where God is in the world's suffering and our own personal suffering? What does self-giving love imply for the way we live our lives? What does it ask of us personally?

The Liturgy

Procession from the main Church

Priest: I invite the children to join in the procession for their celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.

Children, the readings you will hear today show us how Jesus gave so much to others in his life and death. As people of faith, we hear the same message and confidently believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Go in peace and know that God is always with you in good times and bad.

When most of the children have formed a procession, the leader with the book proceeds to the place of the celebration. The second leader usually walks behind the children. Upon arrival at the location of the celebration, the leader places the book on the prepared table.

Welcome.

The leaders assist the children to sit and prepare. Begin with the Sign of the Cross. Help the children think and connect their actions as they touch their foreheads, shoulders, and stomachs. The leader may say the following prayer in these or similar words.

**Loving God, you invite us to follow you. Help us to listen to your voice.
Amen.**

Invite the children to listen to the Gospel.

Gospel

It is a good idea to divide the reading of the Passion into sections so that three, four or more people can read it. You might enlist the help of two or three older children and adult readers. (Do not make a play out of reading the Passion). Invite the children to stand for one reader, sit for the next and alternate accordingly.

(The leader may choose to introduce the Gospel with the following words:)

At the procession, we heard the Gospel reading about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and how the people welcomed him with joy and shouting. That joy and excitement did not last long. A few days later, after Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples (the Last Supper), he went into the garden to pray. There, he was arrested and taken to the high priest's house.

✠ A reading from the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Mark.

- Early in the morning, the chief priests, the nation's leaders, and the teachers of the law of Moses met with the Jewish council. They tied up Jesus and led him off to Pilate. He asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Those are your words," Jesus answered. The chief priests brought many charges against Jesus. Then Pilate questioned him again, "Don't you have anything to say? Don't you hear what crimes they say you have done?" But Jesus did not answer, and Pilate was amazed.
- During Passover, Pilate always freed one prisoner chosen by the people. At that time, there was a prisoner named Barabbas. He and some others had been arrested for murder during a riot. The Jewish people now came and asked Pilate to set a prisoner free, just as he usually did. Pilate asked them, "Do you want me to free the king of the Jews?" Pilate knew that the chief priests had brought Jesus to him because they were jealous. But the chief priests told the crowd to ask Pilate to free Barabbas. Then Pilate asked the crowd, "What do you want me to do with this man you say is the king of the Jews?" They yelled, "Nail him to a cross!" Pilate asked, "But what crime has he done?" "Nail him to a cross!" they yelled even louder. Pilate wanted to please the crowd. So he set Barabbas free. Then, he ordered his soldiers to beat Jesus with a whip and nail him to a cross.

- The soldiers led Jesus inside the courtyard of the fortress and called together the rest of the troops. They put a purple robe on him, and on his head, they placed a crown that they had made out of thorn branches. They made fun of Jesus and shouted, "Hey, you king of the Jews!" Then they beat him on the head with a stick. They spit on him and knelt down and pretended to worship him. When the soldiers had finished making fun of Jesus, they took off the purple robe. They put his own clothes back on him and led him off to be nailed to a cross. Simon from Cyrene happened to be coming in from a farm, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross. Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.

- The soldiers took Jesus to Golgotha, which means "Place of a Skull." There, they gave him some wine mixed with a drug to ease the pain, but he refused to drink it. They nailed Jesus to a cross and gambled to see who would get his clothes. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when they nailed him to the cross. On it was a sign that told why he was nailed there. It read, "This is the King of the Jews." The soldiers also nailed two criminals on crosses, one to the right of Jesus and the other to his left. So the Scriptures came true: "He was accused of being a criminal." People who passed by said terrible things about Jesus. They shook their heads and shouted, "Ha! So you're the one who claimed you could tear down the temple and build it again in three days. Save yourself and come down from the cross!" The chief priests and the teachers of the law of Moses also made fun of Jesus. They said to each other, "He saved others, but he can't save himself. If he is the Messiah, the king of Israel, let him come down from the cross! Then we will see and believe." The two criminals also said cruel things to Jesus.

- About noon, the sky turned dark and stayed that way until around three o'clock. Then, about that time, Jesus shouted, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" Some people standing there heard Jesus and said, "He is calling for Elijah." One of them ran and grabbed a sponge. After he had soaked it in wine, he put it on a stick and held it up to Jesus. He said, "Let's wait and see if Elijah will come and take him down!" Jesus shouted, and then he died. At once, the curtain in the temple tore in two from top

to bottom. A Roman army officer was standing in front of Jesus. When the officer saw how Jesus died, he said, "This man really was the Son of God."

The children sit to listen to the reflection.

An excellent place to begin is the question: What did you hear? Allow each child the opportunity to respond in their own words to hearing the Word of God. Then begin a general discussion, building on these responses, perhaps using some prepared questions, like the following, to stimulate ideas.

Try to emphasize the resurrection – that life succeeds death; that we await the Alleluias of Easter Sunday morning. For now and the next five days, we follow the way of the Cross.

- Our procession today was the beginning; we continue our pilgrimage to Easter for the rest of the week.
- Who was there?
- Why did they want Jesus crucified? (Jesus' teachings made the religious leaders angry.)
- What does the story tell us about God and suffering in the world?
- Why was Jerusalem so busy at this time? (Passover)

The Creed

Depending on the time, a simple profession of faith may be made (see below).

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?

All: We do believe.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who became our brother and gave his life for us?

All: We do believe.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts and gives us everlasting life?

All: We do believe.

Leader: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it.

Prayer of the Faithful

leaders may begin the intercessions by announcing the needs they know. It may be necessary for the leader to repeat and paraphrase the petition and conclude it with the cue for the response: we pray. All respond to each petition by saying: Lord, hear our prayer. Sample intercessions are below.

Leader: With hearts full of hope let us pray to God our creator and redeemer for all our needs. **R./**

Lector: **That the Church be a place where frightened people can shelter, we pray: R./**

Lector: **That we may learn not to give up when things get difficult, we pray: R./**

The leader may invite other intercessions from the children or add intercessions based on the Church's current needs, the world, or the local community.

Lector: **That we will be an example to others by the way we care for the poor, the sick and the unpopular, we pray: R./**

Lector: **For the gift of caring for others, we pray: R./**

Leader: **God, our strength and hope, you heal the hurting and the brokenhearted, bless us and those for whom we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Ask the children to return to the main assembly. Ask them to return quietly and think about what they have heard and are now doing.

Be mindful of children having difficulty finding their families.

Readings: Lectionary Sundays and Solemnities, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ottawa, ON, adapted for children.
Word & Worship Workbook for Year B, Mary Birmingham, Paulist Press, New York, NY.
Celebrating the Lectionary for Preschool and Kindergarten Year B, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL.
Sunday Weekly Leader Guide, Treehaus Communications, Inc., Loveland, OH.
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