

We have just heard the Passion of St. Matthew. If you have not already heard it on television or read it through yourself, I encourage you to do so now. It runs from Matthew 26:14 to 27:66 and though it is lengthy you can read it in a few minutes. So, go first to your Bible and read St. Matthew's Passion through. And then come back and read my words.

At their heart, all the Gospels are Passion narratives with long introductions. Many scripture scholars have commented on that. In other words, the whole Gospel is centered around and summed up in its Passion narrative. The very heart of the mission of Jesus, the Son of God, is reflected in the fact that he came into the world to free us from sin and death. And that great act of our salvation was carried out through his passion, death and Resurrection.

As I wrote above, this year we are privileged to hear the Passion of St. Matthew. In this Gospel Jesus is portrayed as the One who journeys into the darkness, into dysfunction, into the land of sin. And he does so to 'undue' sin, to vanquish it from within, from within the world.

In Matthew's Passion Jesus is surrounded by every kind of sin and he lures it out of its many hiding places to identify it. The Passion can really help us reflect on our sin by seeing if we fit into the picture of any of the groups of people or the sin that we see there. Can we see ourselves, project ourselves in any aspect of the sins portrayed in the Passion?

The story begins with Judas' betrayal - for a few dollars.

There's something spiritually gross about the betrayal of a friend. And that might be particularly true when we betray someone because we seek money for ourselves. Think, for a moment, of all the families we've known who have been torn asunder over feeling cheated out of a loved one's will or estate. That happens all the time and it's ugly.

So, we might ask ourselves: Have we ever betrayed friends? And if so, why?

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The action moves to Gethsemane where Jesus anguishes over the impossibly difficult moments to come in his certain death. And the disciples fall asleep.

That's the second sin in the Passion - **sloth** - a tendency to "fall asleep" at the most spiritually decisive times in our lives. At the moment we're called to do something great for justice - do we fall asleep? Do we fail to act?

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In Matthew's Passion there's the sin of violence - done to the One who said:

"Turn the other cheek."

"Love your enemies."

"Pray for your persecutors."

But here in the Garden of Gethsemane out comes the unruly mob with their swords. An ear is cut off and Jesus says: "Put the sword away."

Cutting off an ear symbolizes a breakdown of communication. Cutting off an ear means we don't *hear* each other anymore.

This scene helps us to examine our hearing one another - our speech - our gossip - and the 'violence' done when we aren't listening to one another.

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Then, when it's clear that Jesus will be taken away, his friends leave him. Called to resist evil, they run away. Have there been moments when I've been called to courageously make a stand and I've fled the scene, afraid that I'll be hurt?

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Who comes forward next? Those who believe they'll be able to achieve their ambitions - **if they lie!** Speech is meant for truth. There's something especially troubling about lying. Are we truthful? Or are we just politically correct?

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And still another sin is found in today's Passion narrative. And that's the sin against the Holy Spirit. It's found in Judas.

Despairing, after having betrayed the Lord, Judas hangs himself. He had totally missed the meaning of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness on so many occasions. He refuses to accept God's forgiveness.

Peter *denies* Jesus and he regrets it. But Peter will return and seek forgiveness and will be given it.

The disciples flee the scene of the crucifixion and they regret it. They come back to Jesus after the Resurrection and are forgiven when he says to them, "*Peace be with you*" in the Upper Room after the Resurrection.

But Judas kills himself! That act is a denial of the power of the Holy Spirit to forgive us.

The point is that God extends mercy to anyone who seeks it and for any sin. Are we meant to see in this scene our own inability to accept God's forgiveness for the sins we have committed? I know that many worry about whether they have truly been forgiven for their sins of the past, even after they have been to confession. If we have been truly remorseful for those sins and confessed them we have been forgiven, once and for all.

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So, all these forms of darkness are brought out into the open light through Christ's Passion.

The Good News of St. Matthew's Passion is that the Son of God journeys into our world to swallow up sin, to vanquish it, right here in our world, through his death and resurrection.

Though this year the vast majority of us will miss being physically present with one another for the beautiful liturgies and rich music that normally lie ahead of us in this holiest of weeks - Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday evening's Easter Vigil Mass and Easter Sunday morning - I encourage you to pray along with the Church by watching these liturgies on television or on your computer.

Pray with Bishop McManus on TV Channel 193, or Bishop Barron on his *Word on Fire* website, or through Boston's *CatholicTV* network, or through any other of the opportunities for praying the Mass and services on television.

I know that I will really miss seeing you here at Christ the King where *so many* parishioners are *so faithful*.

But I still hope that you'll follow the entire 'journey' with the Lord. And know that you are in my prayers. I love you so much! And I miss seeing you so much!