

# SUNDAY



Tamlaght  
O'Crilly  
Greenlough

## THE PASSION NARRATIVES IN MARK AND JOHN



### PALM SUNDAY THE PASSION ACCORDING TO MARK *The reality of Jesus is inseparable from the Cross*

#### 1. Who Jesus is: Mk 8

As soon as Peter recognises Jesus and says, 'You are the Christ', Jesus foretells his Passion. It is a further statement of who he is.

#### 2. Premonitions of the Passion

- chief priests looking for a way to arrest Jesus and have him put to death.
- woman anoints Jesus in anticipation of his burial.
- Judas looks for a way of betraying him.

#### 3. Jesus and Peter

Jesus before the Council responds with total integrity and truth; Peter, before the servant girl and bystanders, lying, denies Jesus.

#### 4. Inevitable Outcome

Jesus' acknowledgement of his identity and mission can have only one outcome: he is to die on the cross. Mark was influenced by the great Greek tragedies; the audience knows of the tragic end that is coming, but is powerless to prevent it. The action moves on inexorably to the end.

#### 5. The identity of Jesus is bonded to the Cross

The bystanders mock Jesus, 'Come down from the cross'. By dramatic irony, Mark underlines that the identity of Jesus and his mission depend on the cross. Nothing else is an option.

#### 6. Jesus is stripped of everything:

Mark shows Jesus gradually being stripped of everything: his freedom, justice, his clothing, his dignity, his followers - even to the point where he is stripped of the reassuring presence of the Father, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' This is the core of the Passion narrative in Mark. It is expressed visually in the Irish tradition by the image of the penal cross (ref. the Greenlough Cross). Jesus is shown isolated on the cross, surrounded only by the symbols of suffering, the nails, the lash, the ladder. Only the rooster and the cooking pot point to the resurrection.

#### 7. After I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee

Beyond the cross, Jesus promises his followers that he will not only forgive them, but he will go before them (*pro-agon*) again and lead them. Mark associates this restoration with Galilee, where the disciples had first experienced the presence and the power of Jesus: **He is going ahead of you to Galilee.**



## Palm Sunday The Passion According to Mark

# GOOD FRIDAY

## THE PASSION ACCORDING TO JOHN

### *Jesus reigns in glory on the Cross*

The Passion narrative in the gospel of John is totally different from the passion narrative in Mark. Mark tells the story, using techniques from the tradition of the great Greek tragedies. John gives us a mystical reflection, unbounded by physical historical limitations, based on a series of icon-like images or tableaux. At the heart of John's Passion narrative - (John 19: 17 - 37), there are five of these tableaux:

#### 1. Christ as King

Pilate mocks Jesus by calling him King of the Jews, but by a double irony those who believe know that Jesus truly is King. In the end the title, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* is placed on the cross, and Pilate stands by it: **What I have written, I have written.**

#### 2. Unity of Christ

The second image is the undivided garment of Jesus, for which the soldiers cast lots. This symbolically connects with the priestly prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper (Jn 17), where he prays for the unity of his followers so that the world may believe.

#### 3. Mary, Mother of the Church

At the very centre of the five tableaux is the image of Jesus on the cross giving his mother Mary to the beloved disciple, and therefore to all of us who are beloved disciples. In John's gospel, the Church is born at the moment of the death of Jesus on the cross, and Mary is present as mother of all beloved disciples: mother of the Church. There is a beautiful Irish phrase from the 8th century: *Muire, mothair na hEaglaise neamha agus talanda* - Mary, mother of the heavenly and earthly Church.

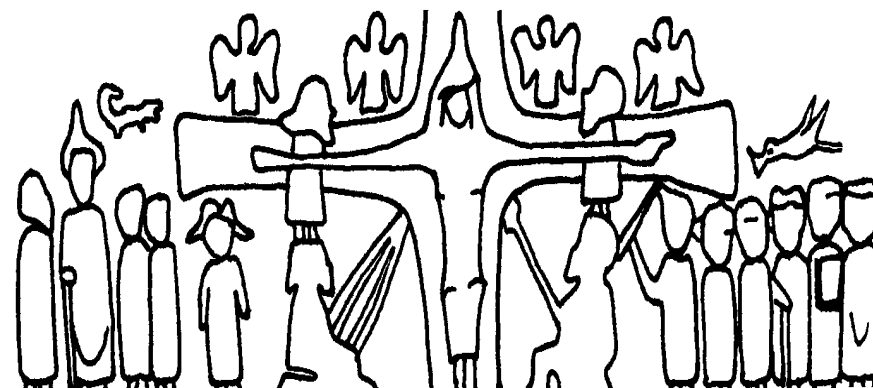
# GOOD FRIDAY

#### 4. Jesus gives the Spirit

In John's Passion narrative, the moment of death of Jesus is presented as the moment of Pentecost. As the sponge with the vinegar is offered to Jesus, the text doesn't simply say 'He expired' as in Mark and Luke, but 'Paredoken to pneuma' - he gave the gift of the Spirit. There is an equivalent in Irish: *Bhronn s  an Spiorad*.

#### 5. The water and the blood

The fifth symbolic image is the piercing of the side of Christ by the spear and the water and the blood flowing forth. In John's gospel, water is associated with the Spirit, and blood with redemption. In the early Church, the water was linked with Baptism, and the blood with the Eucharist: the sources of the sacramental life of the Church. This is beautifully expressed in the homily of St. John Chrysostom which is read in the prayer of the Church on Good Friday morning.



*Note: The Passion according to John is reflected in the great Irish Scripture crosses, and uniquely in the Maghera Crucifixion, Co. Derry.*