

# Purification and Enlightenment Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA  
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion • Year A

*Almighty Father,  
by your Son's holy  
and glorious wounds  
guard us,  
keep us,  
save us,  
and raise us up.*



## Sunday Word

Matthew 21:1–11 (Procession with Palms)

Isaiah 50:4–7

Psalm 22:8–9, 17–18, 19–20, 23–24

Philippians 2:6–11

Matthew 26:14–27:66

### *Lord, We Are Unworthy*

Judas, the betrayer of Jesus, says, “Surely not I Lord?” (Matthew 26:22). He speaks for the betrayal committed by all of us—our sins nailed Jesus to the cross.

Peter and the two sons of Zebedee are invited by Jesus to pray with him before his arrest in the garden, but they fall asleep—our spirits may sometimes be willing, but our flesh is weak.

Peter denies any association with Jesus when questioned by one of the maids in the courtyard—too often, by word and deed, we ourselves deny association with Christ.

### *For Reflection . . .*

*Which betrayal have you engaged in, such as pride, foolishness, or indifference? Why?*

*Which weakness is yours, such as vanity, pleasure in the misfortune of others, over-indulgence? What can you do about it?*

*Which denial is yours, such as failing to help a neighbor, misusing your gifts, forgiving slowly, neglecting responsibilities, fearing to stand up for right? How can you make amends?*

### *Lord, Make Us Worthy*

Jesus cries out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). He is innocent and without sin. And yet, because he loves us, he takes all our sins upon himself so that we might be redeemed. He thus cries out on our behalf, not because he is guilty. He cries out to express solidarity with humanity in our sinfulness so that we might, in him, be reconciled to the Father.

### *For Reflection . . .*

*What words would be included in your prayer of thanksgiving to Jesus for all he has done for you?*

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## Church Teaching: Jesus Christ, Son of God

Of his own accord, Jesus freely accepts death on the cross. His death by crucifixion is not a pretend death. It is real anguish and real death.

As the Evangelist reports, Jesus cried out and “gave up his spirit” (Matthew 27:50). Darkness falls and this desolate spot where executions occur, Golgotha (“the place of the skull”), quakes. Rocks split apart. The veil in the Temple sanctuary is torn in two from top to bottom. It is ripped apart not by any human agency.

The Roman soldier in charge of the guard rightly fears the events which accompany the death of Jesus and is moved in faith to attest, “Truly, this man was God’s Son!” (Matthew 27:54).

Who else can appeal to God on our behalf but God’s own Son? Whose voice can carry the weight of our appeal but the Son of God? Who else can break the bonds of death and sin and conquer the cross at Golgotha but the Son of God? Who else can heal, redeem, restore, and raise us to newness of life but the Son of God?

### *Distinctiveness of Church Teaching*

Saint John Chrysostom (347–407) says, “Why does he speak this way, crying out, “*Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?*” That they might see that to his last breath Jesus honors God as his Father and is no adversary of God. He spoke with the voice of Scripture, uttering a cry from the psalm. Thus even to his last hour he is found bearing witness to the sacred text.”

*Pray the words of Psalm 22 (the Responsorial Psalm from today’s Mass) with Jesus.*

Saint Cyril of Alexandria says, “The Savior is led to the suffering that brings salvation. . . . Now the cross has become the means by which he governs, through which he continues to rule over all heaven, since it is true that even as “far as death” he has become “obedient, even to death of a cross. Therefore God has exalted him.”

*Reread Philippians 2:6–11 (the Second Reading from today’s Mass). Exalt the Lord Jesus.*

### **Key Images and Symbols of the Season**

**JERUSALEM**—the city of Jesus’ triumph.

**THE HOUR IS AT HAND**—the “hour” of Jesus’ greatest, most glorious work: his arrest, trial, suffering and death by crucifixion and death for our sakes.

**CROSS**—instrument of death, instrument of our salvation.

**BLOOD OF THE NEW COVENANT**—the Savior’s precious blood shed on our behalf out of love for us.

**SON OF GOD**—humbly accepting death, only to be greatly exalted by his heavenly Father.

### **Preparing for Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist**

*The Liturgy today is overwhelming in its power! There are multiple images, many layers of significance, and so many realizations which await us in the Liturgy and in contemplating it afterward. What stands out for you most of all?*

*Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Savior, is the Son of God. He was obedient and freely accepted death for our sake. You will soon receive Baptism into that same “death” that you might be raised by Christ into his new life. What do you offer him in return, in thanksgiving, praise, and love?*

