

EP THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. 39 MARK 15

The other Gospel accounts (Matthew 27:1, 2, 11-26; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28-19:16) provide far more detail about Pontius Pilate's interrogation of Jesus: Pilate's washing his hands to symbolize his lack of guilt in Jesus' death (Matthew 27:24); Pilate and Herod becoming friends (Luke 23:12); and the full conversation between Pilate and Jesus (John 18:33-38). It is nonetheless clear from St. Mark's account that Pilate viewed Jesus as a religious fanatic, rather than a political revolutionary, and therefore not deserving of death.

Barabbas was a political revolutionary. His name means "Son of the Father," and is a messianic title which many scholars believe he adopted to highlight his political goals. In some manuscripts Matthew 27:17 calls Barabbas "Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ," meaning that it is possible both Jesus and Barabbas were named Jesus; in this case, the crowd expressed their support for the experienced revolutionary instead of the One Who was truly "Son of the Father."

As with many of the incidents in Jesus' life, St. Mark greatly condenses His account of Jesus' suffering and death. His focus is primarily on the mockery and humiliation Jesus endured: mocked by the Roman soldiers as a failed political figure, mocked by the crowd as a false prophet, and mocked by the religious leaders as a failed Messiah.

Crucifixion was horrifically painful: nailed to a cross and held upright with one's lungs constricted, the crucified person usually died from the inability to continue breathing. Crucifixion was also shameful: only the worst criminals were executed in this manner. It is for this reason that Eusebius writes: "What

death is more shameful than to be crucified? What death worse than this condemnation is conceivable? Even now He remains a reproach among all who have not yet received faith in Him!" In His death Jesus was truly "numbered with the transgressors" (v. 28; cf. Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus' Crucifixion and death is a scene of the separation between humanity and God. At noon, the brightest time of the day, darkness came over the land (much as it did during God's judgment upon Egypt in Exodus 10:21-29). Jesus, in His humanity, cries out and asks why He has been forsaken. Finally, when Jesus dies, the veil of the Temple — which had enclosed the Holy of Holies, the presence of God — was torn in two. "The veil was rent," Blessed Theophylact writes, "as a sign from God that the grace of the Holy Spirit had departed from the Temple."

At the same time, however, the tearing of the veil also represents Jesus providing access for humanity to God the Father (see Hebrews 10:12-22). St. Gregory the Theologian teaches, "[Jesus] surrenders His life, yet He has power to take it again. Yes, the veil is torn, for things of heaven are being revealed, rocks split, and dead men have an earlier awakening (Matthew 27:51-53)." It is therefore not surprising that not only did one of the centurions who witnessed these miracles convert to Christianity, but so did some of the Temple priests (Acts 6:7).

A QUICK TIP FOR YOUR LIFE

APPRECIATE

Do you fully appreciate the sacrifice that Jesus made for you, and the great gift that He gives to you of eternal life through and in Him?

When you contemplate Jesus' great sacrifice, it may be helpful to remember this prayer from the Matins for Great and Holy Friday:

Every day I will bless you, and praise your name for ever and ever. I said, Lord, have mercy upon me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you. Lord, I have run to you for refuge; teach me to do your will for you are my God. For with you is the source of life, and in your light we shall see light. O continue your merciful kindness toward those who know you.

