

# Following The Footsteps Of The World's Saviour

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he darkened, the moon will not give her light, and the stars will fall from heaven" (Matthew 24:29).

To temper the fear of His faithful followers, the divine Master told the charming parable of the wise and foolish virgins—five who were ready and five who were not as they waited for the coming of the Bridegroom. The conclusion was obvious—those who are prepared have no cause to fear.

WEDNESDAY, Jesus stayed at Bethany. The stage was cleared for Judas to step upon it.

The chief priests and the key men of the capital met at the home of Caiaphas to determine their course of action. They were stirring up a riot during the feast days when so many thousands of visitors were in the city. They never dreamed the traitor was even then on his way to solve their dilemma.

"Then one of the Twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said to them, 'What are you willing to give me for delivering him to you?'" They were delighted at this sudden turn of events, offered him a paltry thirty pieces of silver—enough to buy a new outfit of clothes—and "from then on he sought an opportunity to betray him" (Matthew 26:14-16).

THURSDAY, the disciples asked Jesus, "Where dost thou want us to prepare for thee to eat the passover?" (Matthew 26:17). Our Lord assigned the inseparable Peter and John to the task. Nothing more is said in the Gospels about what Jesus did during the daylight hours. He most certainly spent this day with his friends and with his mother.

The decisive events of the evening are told in graphic detail by all four Gospel writers. We can best know these events by a reverent reading of the Gospels themselves.

To understand them better, a few items of background information, however, can aid us.

The Last Supper was our Lord's observance of the Passover—oldest and greatest of the Jewish feasts.

The second book of the Bible, Exodus, describes its origin. During Israel's enslavement in Egypt, God struck that nation with ten plagues. The tenth killed the firstborn son of all Egyptian families. Jewish households were spared because they marked their doorposts with the blood of a lamb. That night Israel escaped its masters, passed over into freedom and began their trek to the promised land.

The ritual meal, inaugurated in Egypt, was never abrogated. The Talmud, an ancient book of Jewish traditions, describes in detail the rite of the Passover—the lamb must be whole, no bones broken; it must be cooked in an open fire; the number of cups and the exact proportions; bitter herbs—reminders of the tears of their ancestors—and un-

leavened bread, symbol of the manna which saved the Israelites from starvation.

Christian tradition identifies a large room in what is now a Mohammedan mosque as the place where Jesus met His twelve Apostles for the Passover dinner. The whole city was destroyed in the year 10 so all we have today is an approximate reconstruction—its walls three times destroyed and finally taken over by Mohammedans.

Scripture says the Last Supper was held in a "large upper room" (Mark 14:15) so selected to add greater solemnity to this farewell meal.

The table was probably U-shaped with divans or couches placed along the outer side to permit the guests to recline as they ate—the custom at that time. The center portion of the U arrangement was left open to give servants easy access to the tables. Peter was at our Lord's left, John at His right, and Judas next to John. With this arrangement in mind we can easily understand the Gospel narrative of the Supper.

The Supper which was destined to be our Lord's supreme instruction to the faithful began with a significant gesture. To break the shell of pride and envy which restricts all spiritual progress, Jesus performed the humbling service of washing His disciples' feet.

In an era which had no cars nor paved roads, feet became weary and dirty. As moderns welcome guests by taking their hat and coat the ancients gave their greeting by succumbing to a servant to wash the dirty feet. On this night, Jesus would play the role of the servant, an example more convincing than words could ever be.

Judas witnessed all this, he who was already hired to serve the enemies of the Lord. The Saviour determined to give him a final token of love—a gesture still observed in Syria and other Middle East nations—dipping a morsel of bread in the sauce and giving it to one's guest.

This Jesus did to Judas who could then take no more. He went out on his errand. And "it was night" (John 13:30). These simple words with their doleful sound tell that this was the hour of the power of darkness.

Toward the end of the ceremonial dinner, Jesus interrupted the ritual to inaugurate His own. As the eleven remaining Apostles watched wondering why even their Master dared vary the ancient Passover, they saw Him take the bread, bless it, break it and say those awe-inspiring words which changed lifeless bread into the Bread of Life, "This is My Body."

Then a few words and the wine became "My Blood" so soon to be shed as the price of the world's redemption.

Take, eat, drink and do this in memory of Me, He said.

This command has been kept as no other command has ever been kept and is keeping it still able to take hold of a man and change his life.

Faith in the Real Presence of our Lord in the Eucharist is the center of Christian worship and a standing inspiration to Christian life.

When the meal and new wine were over, Jesus lingered to talk with His chosen ones. St. John devotes chapters 13 through 17 of his Gospel to a careful transcript of our Lord's words, concluding with the prayer to His heavenly Father.

This last discourse is a summary of all the Saviour had taught for the past three years.

The full moon made the city silvery and the plaintive chant from a hundred thousand Passover rites must have filled the night with melody. But a trap had been set and Judas was waiting.

It was after 10 p.m., perhaps near midnight, when Jesus left the supper room to go to Gethsemani—apparently what we today would call a country cottage and garden where a city dweller could come on a hot summer day to breathe some fresh air and enjoy the cool shade-tree. The property was fenced in by a stone wall. Jesus, it seems, stopped there often whenever He left Jerusalem too late to go all the way to Bethany.

Our Lord's agony in the garden is one of the most puzzling events in His life. That He would become hungry, thirsty, fatigued—that He was unaided because He would to share all our weaknesses. But how could He plead at this last moment to escape the cross, the goal and purpose of His birth?

Courteous explanations have been proposed but the mystery remains. All agree, however, that this episode reveals how His human nature shrank from the torture toward which His divine nature impelled Him.

The conflict is the enigma which has haunted the human race since its creation—the futile flight from the clear will of God.

The conflict in Christ climaxed in His decisive acceptance, "... not as I will but as thou wilt!" (Matthew 26:39).

There in the distance there was a burst of voices and clinking of weapons. Judas had guessed rightly; the Master was here—and as the chief priests had wanted it, there were no crowds, just a sleepy band of eleven frightened men.

Judas gave that horrible kiss and the Lord whom heaven and earth cannot contain was made a prisoner. The disciples fled, leaving their Master alone in the hands of His enemies.

Jesus now had to retrace the route he had taken two or three hours earlier. He was led to Annas, nine years the Jewish high priest, whose



five sons and one grandson had succeeded him in that office and now Caiaphas his son-in-law was the nominal title holder.

Annas, however, retained his original power. He possessed honor, rank, wealth, the favor of Rome—everything he wanted except the respect of decent people.

Annas made no headway in his questions so after a servant slapped the Saviour's face He was led across the palace courtyard to the apartment of Caiaphas, still before dawn, where drowsy priests and members of the supreme Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, were waiting.

Caiaphas was one of those career men who adapts quickly to the needs of the moment. He held his office a total of 28 years, somewhat of a record in those turbulent times. He would not permit an upstart from the hill country to upset the comfortable status quo. Politics was the reason; religion would be the pretext to dispose of this Man in chains before him.

Caiaphas staged his questions carefully and climaxed with his query if Jesus claimed to be "the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus answered in the affirmative and sealed His own death warrant.

The courtyard between Annas and Caiaphas dwellings had its usual guards, gossip, servants and hangers-on. Peter, recovered from his panic, joined his motley crowd only to disgrace himself the more by denying he even knew his Master.

A church stands on that site today called St. Peter in Chains (at Gethsemani)—the only church in the world dedicated to the memory of a sin, or rather his forgiveness for Jesus. Scripture says, looked on Peter and we know that God looks with mercy on His creatures.

Jesus was now left to the disgusting filth and brutal sport of the prison guards who needed little encouragement to vent their vulgar humor on this gentle Man.

The full Sanhedrin met at daybreak. They had no

right to execute a man for their religious opinion of him. The charge of blasphemy when Jesus claimed to be the divine Messiah would have to be altered when the case was taken to the Roman governor Pilate. The alteration is an admission.

GOOD FRIDAY dawned as a beautiful spring day—later an eerie shadow would cover the sun—and the Gospel writers give us for this day in even greater detail the events of each hour—the trial before Pilate and Herod and back to Pilate again, the dream of Pilate's wife and the bandit Barabbas preferred instead of Christ, the scourging and crowning with thorns, a scene which artists refuse to depict with realism.

The crown of thorns was not a mere circle but a full cap which pressed its spikes into every portion of the Saviour's head.

When Pilate gave way to the demands of the crowd, he gave the signal for the death parade to begin. A centurion with at least four soldiers escorted the Prisoner to execution. Since the streets were narrow and filled with Passover pilgrims, more soldiers probably were mobilized for this procession.

Jesus was made to carry His own cross, a weight of at least 30 pounds and perhaps as much as 70. In His weakened condition, the weight pressed Him into the dust many times. Cruelty attracts the curious so five days after His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus now pined mocked by "a great multitude" (Luke 23:27) many of whom undoubtedly changed their "vires" of Sunday to their taunts of today.

The place to which Jesus was led to His death is called

## Medal Honors Mothers Of Priests, Sisters

Chestnut Hill, Mass.—(RNS)—Mothers of Roman Catholic nuns are honored by a sterling silver medallion created by the Vineyard Workshop here.

A similar brooch for mothers of Catholic priests was produced by the workshop in 1937. Both were designed by Carl Link of New York, famed for his religious paintings.

THE NEW MEDALLION may be worn both as a pin or a pendant. A leaflet describing the emblem carries an "Impressatur" by Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston.

Appropriate designs in the brooch include a ring, symbolizing the spiritual betrothal of the young nun to Christ; three nails, representing the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; a candle, portraying the bright light of faith; and a book, signifying the Holy Rules to which the nun conforms her manner of life.

Enveloping the symbols is the Catholic People's Party emblem, a cross, representing purity. At the bottom are the Latin words: Sponsa Christi (Bride of Christ).

## Ten Thousand Fatima Masses

Fatima—(RNS)—Nearly 10,000 Masses were celebrated at Our Lady's shrine here during 1938, according to newly released statistics.

During the year 289,000 Communions were distributed, 720 couples were married and 104 infants were baptized at the shrine.

## Catholic Party First In Holland

The Hague—(RNS)—The Catholic People's Party emerged as the largest single party in the 150-member Second Chamber (House of Representatives) of the Netherlands' Parliament by retaining its 49 seats, according to unofficial returns in the national elections.

Calvary, the "place of the skull." The Aramaic word Gethsemani means the same.

Actually what we picture as quite a steep hill was probably little more than a bump of rock in the middle of a cemetery where reeking corpses were vultures' food.

Cicero says crucifixion was the "most cruel and most terrible of torments." The body fastened by nails con-

tracted in rigid pain, wounds became swollen, lungs, heart and head became congested and an atrocious thirst wracked the victim. As a final insult, the festering bleeding wounds promptly swarmed with flies and insects buzzing and bickering for a taste of the warm blood.

This was the death which He endured who had preached in life a message of pity and love. And from this strange throne, He repeated with His dying breath that same message, "Father, forgive them."

He closed His eyes in death and the world crept along its way in darkness. He was buried in a borrowed tomb but His Mother, who stood beneath the cross, knew that Sunday would be Easter.

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