

As we turn our thoughts towards Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter can I invite you to join in with an activity for us all to share, even though we cannot physically be together?

First, find a place in your home that you will designate as your 'Sacred Space', to be the focus of your Holy Week and Easter. It could be a small table, a mantelpiece, a windowsill or a shelf, whatever seems suitable for your home and family setting. **IT DOES INVOLVE A LIGHTED CANDLE SO DO BE AWARE OF FIRE HAZARD!**

You can do this activity alone, or (with suitable adjustments for the age of your children), as a family. I have included bible readings below, but if you are doing this with children, you could share the story in a children's bible. We will be sending out a separate sheet with lots of ideas for Easter activities.

I am sending instructions of how to make a Palm Cross out of a strip of paper. It is quite tricky, so give yourself time, you might need to have couple of goes. If you plan to do it as an activity with your child you will definitely need to try it out first on your own! Any paper will do.

Find yourself a couple of new candles, ideally a larger one, and a night-light type, but whatever you have indoors is fine.

Then go to your garden, if you have one, and collect some stones – a selection of smooth pebbles and rougher stones, wash them and place them in a suitable basket or bowl placed near your 'Sacred Space'

On Palm Sunday

Arrange the paper cross, and the smaller of your two candles in your 'Sacred Space'

Read the gospel of Jesus Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem. *Matthew chapter 21 verses 1 to 11*

Each day through Holy Week

Light your little candle and spend a few moments at your Sacred Space, in quiet prayer, holding one of your stones from your basket or bowl of stones. At the end of your prayer, place your stone in the space. You might like to write the name of someone you have a particular concern for on a scrap of paper and place it among the stones.

On Maundy Thursday

Take a piece of bread in your hand, and recall the Last Supper, when Jesus inaugurated the Communion we share. Read the gospel account in *Matthew chapter 26 verses 17 to 30*. Eat the bread.

On Good Friday

Light your little candle again, as you read the Gospel narrative of the Crucifixion. It is quite lengthy, so you might want to do it in several sections through the day. *All of John chapter 19*

As you finish, blow the candle out.

Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday is traditionally a day of withdrawal and quiet preparation for Easter Day. You might like to reduce the amount of distractions and entertainment you engage in on that day and ensure that your house is as tidy and in order as you can make it, as you focus on Jesus. You could also write down some thoughts about how you have been aware of God's presence with you in these last weeks – or perhaps how you have found it difficult. Don't feel you need to share this with anyone else – this is between you and God.

Psalm 22 expresses this sense of desolation but ends on a note of hope.

On Easter morning

Perhaps at the time you would have been gathering with your brothers and sisters for worship, light your second, new and bigger candle, and add some simple fresh flowers or foliage.

Read the Resurrection gospel *Matthew 28 verses 1 to 10*

You may want to listen to one of the services broadcast on radio, TV or online.

During the week, or on Easter Sunday, if you would like to share a photo, by WhatsApp, or email, or just ring me or someone else from church, to describe what you have done, please do that. We plan to put a collage onto Facebook.

Let's share our Sacred Space and connect with each other and with God.

Matthew chapter 21 verses 1 to 11

¹ As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.'

⁴ This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ 'Say to Daughter Zion,

"See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"^[a]

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

'Hosanna^[b] to the Son of David!'

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'^[c]

'Hosanna^[d] in the highest heaven!'

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?'

¹¹ The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Matthew chapter 26 verses 17 to 30

¹⁷ On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?'

¹⁸ He replied, 'Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, "The Teacher says: my appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house."' ¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

²⁰ When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹ And while they were eating, he said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.'

²² They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, 'Surely you don't mean me, Lord?'

²³ Jesus replied, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.'

²⁵ Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, 'Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?'

Jesus answered, 'You have said so.'

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the^[e] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

³⁰ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

John chapter 19

Jesus Sentenced to be Crucified

¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ² The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe ³ and went up to him again and again, saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' And they slapped him in the face.

⁴ Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.' ⁵ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!'

⁶ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!'

But Pilate answered, 'You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.'

⁷ The Jewish leaders insisted, 'We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.'

⁸ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, ⁹ and he went back inside the palace. 'Where do you come from?' he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ 'Do you refuse to speak to me?'

Pilate said, 'Don't you realise I have power either to free you or to crucify you?'

¹¹ Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.'

¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.'

¹³ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). ¹⁴ It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

'Here is your king,' Pilate said to the Jews.

¹⁵ But they shouted, 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!'

'Shall I crucify your king?' Pilate asked.

'We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered.

¹⁶ Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

The crucifixion of Jesus

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, 'Do not write "The King of the Jews"', but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.'

²² Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written.'

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ 'Let's not tear it,' they said to one another. 'Let's decide by lot who will get it.'

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

'They divided my clothes among them

and cast lots for my garment.'^[a]

So this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman,^[b] here is your son,' ²⁷ and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

The death of Jesus

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken,'³⁷ and, as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced.'

The burial of Jesus

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about thirty-five kilograms. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was near by, they laid Jesus there.

Psalm 22

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?
- ² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.^[b]
- ³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.^[c]
- ⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
- ⁵ To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
- ⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
- ⁷ All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
- ⁸ 'He trusts in the LORD,' they say,
'let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him.'
- ⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.
- ¹⁰ From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.
- ¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.
- ¹² Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
- ¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.
- ¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.
- ¹⁵ My mouth^[d] is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.
- ¹⁶ Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce^[e] my hands and my feet.
- ¹⁷ All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.
- ¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.
- ¹⁹ But you, LORD, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.
- ²⁰ Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.
- ²¹ Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.
- ²² I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.
- ²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honour him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
- ²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;

he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.

25 From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you¹ I will fulfil my vows.

26 The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him –
may your hearts live for ever!

27 All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,

28 for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.

29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him –
those who cannot keep themselves alive.

30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.

31 They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

EASTER SUNDAY
HE IS RISEN!

Matthew chapter 28 verses 1-10

¹ After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him." Now I have told you.'

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'