

## Suggested Reading

*This week you may wish to read the following passages from the Bible.*

### A Recommended Reading

*Matthew 26:1 - 28:20*

### B Read Carefully

Matthew	27:3 - 10	The Death of Judas
Matthew	27:62-66	Guards at the Tomb
Matthew	28:11-20	The Resurrection
Matthew	28:11-15	Bribing the Soldiers
Matthew	28:16-20	Commissioning the Disciples

### C Background Reading

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12.	The Suffering Servant.
Psalms 22(22)	My God, why have you forsaken me

## Prayer

O God, who by the pages of both Testaments  
Instruct and prepare us to celebrate the Paschal Mystery,  
Grant that we may comprehend your mercy,  
So that the gifts we receive from you this night  
may confirm our hope of the gifts to come.  
Through Christ our Lord Amen.  
*(From the Easter Vigil)*

PFP v6 2/2020

## Sacred Heart Catholic Church

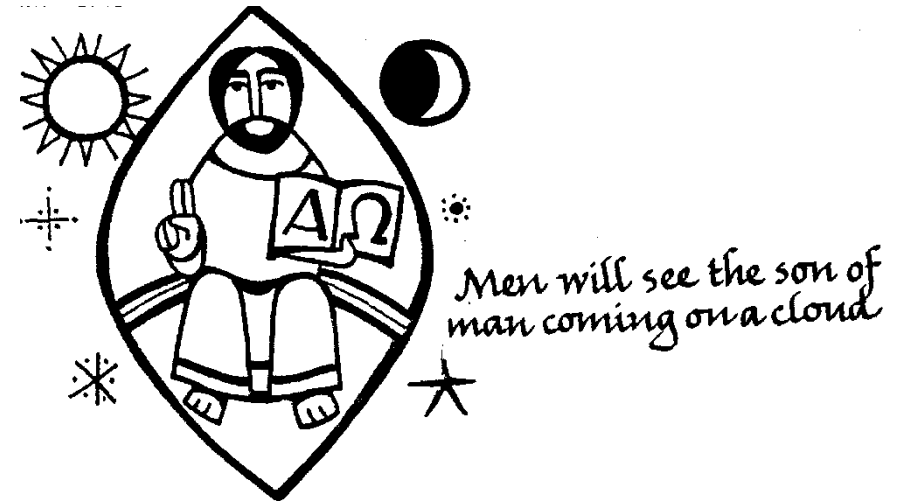
Henley on Thames



## The Final Sermon.

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*Matthew 19:1 - 25:46*



This section of the Gospel concerns Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and the subsequent events and controversies that occur there. These are followed by the sermon on the last things, which takes place on the Mount of Olives. Matthew portrays Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David who enters his own city, fulfilling the scriptures. He silences all those who would question his authority. The Last Sermon looks forward to the immediate future of this city, and the future coming of the Son of Man, as well as the present concerns of the Christian community.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is understood by Matthew to fulfil the prophecy of *Zachariah 9:9-10*. Jesus is the Messiah, the lowly King who enters his own city on a Donkey. By this action Jesus leaves Galilee behind to enter the spiritual and political centre of the nation. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus travels directly to the Temple, where he begins to 'cleanses' the Temple which causes immediate controversy with the Chief Priests and the Scribes.

The Chief Priests and Elders, (those who later would form the Sanhedrin) challenge the authority of Jesus. His response silences them and leads to three parables of judgement: the Two Sons, the Tenants in the Vineyard, and the Marriage Feast. (*Mtt 21:28-22:14*)

The common theme within these parables is judgement upon the chosen people of God and the inclusion of the Gentiles. These parables are addressed to the Chief Priests and Elders, and their conclusion is directed to them. '*The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.*' (21:43 - found only in Matthew).

There follow four controversy stories against the Jewish leaders: Pharisees and Herodians, the Sadducees, and a Lawyer, upon differing subjects: taxation, resurrection, the greatest commandment, the Son of David. In each case the Jewish leaders are reduced to silence. This example of the failure of their teaching authority, (magisterium) precipitates the attack upon the Scribes and Pharisees which follows.

Jesus has already rejected their teaching authority, which he has given to Peter and the Church. *Chapter 23* represents the complete rejection of this authority. They are described as hypocrites because they do not practice what they preach. There follow seven woes, the seven-fold attack upon the Scribes and Pharisees which may contrast the seven-fold blessing of the Beatitudes which concern the followers of Jesus. This chapter concludes with a lament over Jerusalem which introduces the final discourse.

Jesus leaves the Temple for the final time and proceeds to the Mount of Olives from where he teaches his disciples '*privately*' about the last things. This location is significant because it overlooks Jerusalem: its first concern. The Mount of Olives, according to Jewish belief is the place where the Messiah will come first: the theme of the sermon.

*The Final Sermon* falls into two sections with the description of the coming of the Son of Man at its centre. (*Mtt 24:29-31*) The material prior to this is parallel to *Mark 13*, concerning the future of Jerusalem and the Church community. The material following the central section, stresses the necessary requirement of vigilance and patience.

This style of literature is called '*Apocalyptic*' and its subject '*Eschatology.*' Apocalypse derives from the Greek = '*revelation.*' Eschatology is the doctrine of the four '*last things*' = death, judgement, heaven and hell. This literature

seeks to speak of the final things in a language and with images which familiar to the reader.

Next Week

## The Passion according to St Matthew

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Next week we will conclude Matthew's Gospel by studying the Passion Narrative. The Passion and Resurrection have a primary place within each Gospel. It is here that the Evangelist seeks to draw out the themes within his Gospel. As we study the Passion narrative, it would be helpful to note how Matthew refers to the themes he has introduced previously.

Our study of the Passion according to Mark was an important foundation for our examination of the passion of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. We may now identify those passages which are unique to Matthew, which will enable us to identify Matthew's priorities.

These passages include the Death of Judas, the Guards at the Tomb, the Bribing the Soldiers and the Commissioning the Disciples after the Resurrection. What conclusions may we draw from the inclusion of these passages?

The Old Testament is an important theme of Matthew's Gospel. He has consistently shown how Jesus has fulfilled the scriptures at important junctures in his ministry. His death and resurrection are of the greatest significance to the disciple. How does Matthew use the Old Testament in the section? You may wish to study the context of each of the passages he uses in the Old Testament.

## IN BRIEF

1051 *Every man receives his eternal recompense in his immortal soul from the moment of his death in a particular judgement by Christ, the judge of the living and the dead.*

1052 *'We believe that the souls of all who die in Christ's grace . . . are the People of God beyond death. On the day of resurrection, death will be definitively conquered, when these souls will be reunited with their bodies' (Paul VI, CPG § 28).*

1053 *'We believe that the multitude of those gathered around Jesus and Mary in Paradise forms the Church of heaven, where in eternal blessedness they see God as he is and where they are also, to various degrees, associated with the holy angels in the divine governance exercised by Christ in glory, by interceding for us and helping our weakness by their fraternal concern' (Paul VI, CPG § 29).*

1054 *Those who die in God's grace and friendship imperfectly purified, although they are assured of their eternal salvation, undergo a purification after death, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of God.*

1055 *By virtue of the 'communion of saints', the Church commends the dead to God's mercy and offers her prayers, especially the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist, on their behalf.*

1056 *Following the example of Christ, the Church warns the faithful of the 'sad and lamentable reality of eternal death' (GCD 69), also called 'hell'.*

1057 *Hell's principal punishment consists of eternal separation from God in whom alone man can have the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.*

1058 *The Church prays that no one should be lost: 'Lord, let me never be parted from you.' If it is true that no one can save himself, it is also true that God 'desires all men to be saved' (1 Tim 2:4), and that for him 'all things are possible' (Mt 19:26).*

1059 *'The holy Roman Church firmly believes and confesses that on the Day of Judgement all men will appear in their own bodies before Christ's tribunal to render an account of their own deeds' (Council of Lyons II [1274]: DS 859; cf. DS 1549).*

1060 *At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. Then the just will reign with Christ for ever, glorified in body and soul, and the material universe itself will be transformed. God will then be 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28), in eternal life.*

Often their purpose is to speak of a current reality in the language of a future event. In this section of the Gospel each of these images can be related to a three-fold situation: 1. The **past** experience, (Jerusalem & the Prophets) 2. The **present** experience of the Church in 85AD (the destruction of Jerusalem, the persecution of Christians) 3. The **future** (the return of Jesus at the end of time)

At the beginning of the sermon the disciples ask a three-fold question: *Tell us when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?' (Mtt 24:3)* Much of this discourse seeks to address these questions.

Jesus begins by speaking of the beginning of the tribulations. We may understand each of these prophecies of Jesus as addressed to the future, However, this may not necessarily mean the end of time. Wars, Famines and Earthquakes have been the experience of every generation since Jesus. For Jesus (33AD) these events would be in the future. For Matthew (85AD) these events would be in the present.

The destruction of the Temple had taken place in 70AD. Persecution was a reality. The fear was that *'love in most men will grow cold.'* (Mtt 24:12) The Church, whose martyrs are known to us today, had many who betrayed it, whom we have not taken into account.

The *'disastrous abomination'* of which Daniel spoke is a reference to the pagan statue Antiochus Epiphanes placed in the Temple in 168BC. This desecration of the Temple was the beginning of the Maccabean War. Such hindsight would be the basis of the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. Such knowledge would prepare the believer for the coming trial. It is a partial answer to *verse 3*.

The central passage within this apocalyptic section is *Mtt 24:29-31*. This seeks to address the question in detail. Matthew describes the coming of the Son of Man in terms which are common with the prophet Daniel. In this sense the title *'Son of Man'* does not suggest Christ's humanity, but rather his divinity which is expressed in the greatest means possible. It looks forward to the second coming of Jesus at the end of time, as King and Judge. This passage stresses his triumph over evil more than his judgement over all.

In the early Church it was believed that Jesus would return soon. The delay caused a dilemma for some Christians. Matthew addresses this dilemma with his call for vigilance and patience. Christians should not speculate upon the 'day' or the 'hour' but rather concentrate on being 'ready' and 'prepared' when that day comes.

The three parables which follow reinforce this motif. The insistence upon the need for vigilance and the uncertainty of the time of Christ's coming stand in tension and corrects the image of the surety of Christ's coming. These parables stress the theme of delay, the need to be faithful and prudent, the reward of greater responsibility, the punishment of the wicked who do not keep watch. These themes are particularly directed at church leaders.

The last judgement is the climax and highpoint of this final discourse. It concerns the tension between living soberly in the present, while having one's attention firmly fixed on the life of the world to come. How we act during this apparent lull between the two comings of Christ will determine our position in this great event.

Ironically the way to prepare for the second coming of Christ is to focus on his presence within those around us. To recognise Christ in our neighbour today, will be how we will recognise Christ in the future when he returns. It is Christ who we serve, Christ who we minister to. It is as if it *were* done to him. This is a personal action in our relationship with Jesus. If we serve *him*, *he* will thank us. If we neglect *him*, *he* will condemn us.

This is all he wishes to say. (*Mtt 26:1*) There is nothing else to add. This concludes his teaching ministry. Now the time has come to suffer and to die.

**Deliver us, Lord, from every evil,  
and grant us peace in our day.  
In your mercy keep us free from sin  
and protect us from all anxiety  
as we wait in joyful hope  
for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

1040 The Last Judgement will come when Christ returns in glory. Only the Father knows the day and the hour; only he determines the moment of its coming. Then through his Son Jesus Christ he will pronounce the final word on all history. We shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation, and understand the marvellous ways by which his Providence led everything towards its final end. The Last Judgement will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God's love is stronger than death.<sup>626</sup>

1041 The message of the Last Judgement calls men to conversion while God is still giving them 'the acceptable time, . . . the day of salvation'.<sup>627</sup> It inspires a holy fear of God and commits them to the justice of the Kingdom of God. It proclaims the 'blessed hope' of the Lord's return, when he will come 'to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all who have believed'.<sup>628</sup>

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