

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW
Lesson 19 – Study Questions
Matthew 26:57-75; 27:1-31

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

DAY ONE

Read Matthew 26:57-68

NOTE: As today's lesson begins, Jesus is taken to the house of Caiaphas. Caiaphas was the high priest during Jesus' public ministry. Some scribes and elders, along with some chief priests, have assembled in Caiaphas' house. Since it is the middle of the night at the beginning of Passover, such a gathering is highly unusual. Presumably after Judas reported that Jesus was in Gethsemane and could be arrested, a meeting of those who were intent on getting rid of Jesus hastily convened. *Martin*

Peter followed at a distance Jesus and those who arrested him, going so far as to go into Caiaphas' courtyard. Jesus will meet with the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was made up of chief priests, elders, and teachers of the Law. Counting the high priest, there were seventy-one members. Under Roman law, they were given a great deal of authority, but could not impose the death penalty without Roman approval. *Cavins and Christmyer*

1. In verse 58, Peter is afraid to follow the crowd of people around Jesus into Caiaphas' house, so he stays in the courtyard with the servants. What are some reasons Peter may have been afraid?

2. The Sanhedrin accused Jesus of threatening to destroy the Temple, then of being a blasphemer (verses 61-63). Jesus is first silent, then answers with words from Psalms 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14. Read these verses and briefly describe what happens to the Son of Man.

3. Although Matthew writes as if the entire Sanhedrin has convened, it is more likely that it includes just a few. The meeting took place in the house of Caiaphas, not in the Sanhedrin's normal meeting hall, and at night. What might this imply?

4. Jesus remained silent (verse 63) when asked to answer those who accused him of saying he would destroy the temple. The silence of Jesus evokes the posture of the Servant in Isaiah 53:7. Read and record this prophetic verse.

5. CONNECTION: In verses 65-68 Matthew records the high priest tearing his robes and accusing Jesus of blasphemy. (The tearing of robes was an unholy act for priests, forbidden in Leviticus 21:10.) The high priest drew the crowd in by asking their opinion and they responded by spitting, slapping and mocking Jesus. Going along with the crowd is often easier than standing up for your beliefs. What helps you stay strong in your faith, in situations where you don't agree with the crowd?

Read and record Exodus 23:2 and let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

DAY 2

Read Matthew 26:69-75

6. In verses 69-75 Matthew returns his focus to Peter. This is the last mention of Peter in Matthew's Gospel. What is Peter's reaction when he recognized his part in the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy from Matthew 26:34?

7. Peter's denial is not only of Jesus but of his identity as a disciple and friend. Have you ever been in a situation when you had to explain your belief in Jesus or your Catholicism? If so, or in preparation for a time when you might need to, share some brief comments you might make.

8. Record Luke 22:61-62 and note the added detail in Luke's version.

9. What is there about your lifestyle or behavior that identifies you as a disciple of Jesus?

10. CONNECTION: Many of us, at some time or another, have regretted "what we have failed to do." We may plan to call an older relative or offer to drive a friend who needs assistance; yet the busyness of living sometimes gets in the way of serving Jesus through serving others. Is there a prayer, hymn or saying with which you could begin or end the day to help remind you to serve Jesus in those around you?

Read and record 1 Peter 4:10. Let your prayer today be to serve others as Jesus did.

DAY THREE

Read Matthew 27:1-10

11. Matthew begins chapter 27 by reporting the conclusion of the Sanhedrin's "trial" and the delivery of Jesus to Pilate. Perhaps it is this condemnation that moves Judas to deeply regret his actions saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." Briefly note what happened next (verses 3-8) according to the references below:

To Judas:

To the 30 Pieces of Silver:

What the field was then called:

NOTE: A "Potter's Field" is a cemetery where poor or unidentified people are buried at the public expense. While there are a number of theories on where the term "potter's field" originated, *Sacra Pagina* simply states that, "The money that Judas tried to return to the temple-treasury was used to purchase the field of a potter."

12. Our Commentary notes the various scripture verses (Zechariah and Jeremiah) which could be the source of the prophecy recounted by Matthew regarding the Potter's Field. Read Zechariah 11:12-13 and record verse 13. Briefly note the prophetic significance.

NOTE: When Matthew combines words from Jeremiah and Zechariah, it provides yet one more piece of evidence that Jesus' death fulfilled ancient prophecies and thus, despite all appearances, was mysteriously consistent with God's plan. *Perrotta*

13. Acts 1:15-20 recounts a different version of the tragic end of Judas' life. Read and briefly note the difference(s).

14. After reading Matthew's account of Judas before the Sanhedrin (verses 3-10), what reason did they give for not keeping the 30 pieces of silver for temple use?

NOTE: Unlike the Sanhedrin, Peter repents and weeps bitterly. The real continuation of the story of Peter's denial is the story of Judas' end in Matthew 27:3-20. Matthew puts before Christians, and especially before their leaders, the two possibilities open to sinful Christians: repentance or despair. *Meier*

NOTE: While the religious leaders admit that they cannot put the money in the temple treasury (Matthew 27:6), this admission underlines their corruption. They implicitly acknowledge Jesus' innocence yet express more concern about the ritual defilement of the temple treasury. *Perrotta*

15. CONNECTION: “Peter’s mourning—while painful—brings him to the truth and ultimately repentance... the key difference between Peter and Judas is that Peter’s mourning includes a glimmer of hope and a sense of God’s infinite mercy. And this gives Peter the chance to start over... now he is ready to let God work through him in an even more powerful way.” (*Pope Benedict, “The Tears of Peter and the Despair of Judas”*) In what way does Peter’s repentance inspire you?

Pope Benedict also wrote: “...He (Peter) burst into healing tears that plow up the soil of his soul. He begins anew and is himself renewed.” With thoughts of God’s infinite mercy, write a prayer of thankfulness.

NOTE: The Greek word we translate as “repentance” is *metanoia* (the verb “to repent” is *metanoeo*), and it means “to change your mind.” In the Catechism of the Catholic Church (*CCC 1431*) “Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed.”

DAY FOUR

Read Matthew 27:11-14

NOTE: Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea and the adjacent regions of Samaria and Idumea from about A.D. 26-36. Pilate was a member of the lower Roman nobility that Rome drew on for governors of unimportant but sometimes troublesome provinces like Judea. He commanded about twenty-five hundred to three thousand soldiers...some of whom manned the Antonia Fortress adjacent to the Temple in Jerusalem. *Martin, Bringing the Gospel of Matthew to Life*

16. Pilate began to question Jesus. Of what charge does Pilate first accuse Jesus and what was Jesus’ answer?

17. We all have times when we “adjust” our answers to the occasion, taking into consideration the person to whom we are speaking and the effect of our words. How could Jesus’ answer inspire us to rethink how we answer difficult questions?

NOTE: John 18:37 reads, “So Pilate said to him, ‘Then you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the **truth**. Everyone who belongs to the **truth** listens to my voice.’”

18. Pilate’s response to Jesus in John 18:38 was, “What is the truth?” Scholars have debated the answer to this question for many years wondering if Pilate’s question was rhetorical, philosophical or mockery. The irony of the question is that the “Truth” was standing in front of him. Record John 14:6 (Good memory verse).

19. In verse 13, Pilate asked Jesus if he did not hear all the things they were testifying against him. Comment on how Jesus' demeanor contrasts with the accusations made against him.

20. CONNECTION: Pilate was amazed at Jesus' silence, reminding us of the verse from the fourth "servant song" (Isaiah 52:15): "So shall he startle many nations; kings shall stand speechless..." The fact that a Roman governor could be amazed by Jesus leads us to the question, when are we amazed by Jesus? Share some thoughts.

Read and record Habakkuk 1:5 and write a prayer of praise for our amazing God.

DAY FIVE

Read Matthew 27:15-31

NOTE: As we envision this scene, it is early dawn; thus the "vast throngs usually pictured in movies and paintings is misleading...not too many people would be up yet. Very few would even know about the arrest and the swift succession of religious and civil trials. Thirdly, the narrow street in front of Pilate's palace would hardly contain ungainly mobs. Thus, the crowd that actually did gather was probably a picked group of like-minded people quickly assembled by the religious officials to back up their plans." *McBride*

21. Refer to the Commentary, page 137, and list the three unique elements in Matthew which serve to shift the blame, for the death verdict of Jesus, away from Pilate and onto the Jewish leadership.

22. From your reading, for what reason do you think Pilate decided to offer the crowd the release of Jesus verses Barabbas, a notorious prisoner?

23. Pilate washed his hands of Jesus' conviction saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. Look to it yourselves." He is figuratively absolving himself of guilt with respect to Jesus' sentence. In our Passion liturgy, we are placed in the crowd before Pilate when we speak the words of condemnation, "Crucify him." Share how you feel when you speak these words.

NOTE: In Fr. Mike Schmitz' "Catechism in a Year" he shares that all sinners are the authors of Christ's Passion. We do not blame the Jews for the Crucifixion of Jesus as we know that it is our own sins that caused his Passion and death. Fr. Mike tells us that the Jews, as a whole, are not collectively responsible for Jesus' death, and they should not be spoken of as rejected or cursed. We're reminded that when we choose sin and deny Christ by our deeds, we crucify him anew in our hearts. *Catechism of the Catholic Church 595-598*

24. The Roman soldiers then received the scourged Jesus from Pilate, continuing to abuse and berate him, stripping him of his clothes, crowning him with thorns, kneeling before him and mocking him with. "Hail, King of the Jews." How do these verses, so familiar and yet so painful, echo Jesus' instructions to us from Matthew 5:39-41?

25. CONNECTION: Just as the crowd had the opportunity to choose between Jesus and Barrabas, we too have the choice between Jesus and all the alternatives. Read the verse from Tom Booth's hymn, "*I Will Choose Christ*" and using some of the words from this hymn, write a prayer today asking the Lord to help you make right choices.

*I will choose Christ, I will choose love, I choose to serve.
I give my heart, I give my life, I give my all to you.
How many times must he call my name and show to me that he is God,
and as a servant he calls to me: "you must serve too."*

FINAL QUESTION for the WEEK

When have you, or someone you've known, followed Jesus' example of patient, silent and faith-filled suffering?

Read pages 133-138 in the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* by Barbara E. Reid, O.P. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) © 2010, 1991, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.