

Sing before the service: Psalm 43:3

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Psalm of praise: Ps. 9:1, 9, 10

Prayer

Psalm 18:20

Scripture reading: Luke 22:63 – 23:25

Scripture text: Luke 23:14

You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.

Friday, the day of the cross. The day and its events were inevitable. Everything led to this day.

- It could not be otherwise, for Jesus Christ was born specifically for this purpose – to die.
- Because that Friday truly brought the fulfilment of our salvation, we call it Good Friday.

But do you realise what a terrible day it was for Jesus Christ? It began with His being arrested in Gethsemane and lasted until, 18 hours later, He called out that even God had forsaken Him – and died. Let us go through the last 18 hours of Jesus' life with Him.

Immediately after the Last Supper/ the first Communion/Eucharist, Jesus and His disciples went to Gethsemane. It is an olive grove on the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron valley.

- When they arrived there, Jesus left the disciples at the entrance to the grove. But Peter, John and James then had to accompany Him further.
- Jesus took them with Him so that they could keep watch. He knew that Judas would be coming, and He wanted to pray undisturbed. He had a grave matter to grapple with.

Then followed the prayer, which we find very difficult to understand! How often had Jesus Himself announced that His death was the reason for His coming, and now that it was at hand, He prayed that the cup might pass Him by!

- This proves that what Jesus had to undergo was not to Him a mere duty. It was something terrible.
- He was not just God who came in the form of a man. He was truly flesh and blood like us, and He also feared death.
- He sweated blood!

In those moments we already see the first true signs of our salvation. The disciples were so exhausted that they could not keep watch until Jesus had finished His prayer!

- When Jesus finished His prayer, He then watched over them.

- He let them sleep, and He went without His rest.

Then the arrest followed. Jesus had to be arrested as quietly as they could, with as little uproar as possible.

- For this purpose the temple guard was most useful. Their usual duty was to maintain order at the temple.
- But here they were employed for a purpose that lay quite beyond their range of duty.
 - The Jewish authorities could not ask the Romans to arrest Jesus, because – quite apart from the question of whether they would be prepared to do so – this would arouse too much public concern.
 - And they were still afraid of how the people might react.

But Jesus saw through all the deceit!

- Judas's kiss.
- And the clubs and swords. They were armed as when a robber had to be apprehended. Because that was the impression they wished to give regarding Jesus.
- That is why Jesus said: "I was with you every day in the temple!"

In these moments, in the dark, Peter drew His sword, struck out wildly with it in the dark at someone, and cut off Malchus's ear. The victim was the slave of the high priest (John 18:10).

- Jesus immediately displayed His Priestly character – merciful grace.
- He performed His last miracle, and restored Malchus's ear.
- As when He washed the disciples' feet, He put Himself at the service of others, here of His enemies.

After this, everyone took to flight. Jesus was alone in the dark among His enemies.

Then the trials began.

- Trials characterised by numerous irregularities.
- The irregularities were proof that the trials were merely a formality, since the outcome had been determined in advance.
- The trials were rushed through during the night – completely out of normal working hours.

There were three trials before the religious leaders. We can say these were trials before the Jews themselves.

- **The first trial took place before Annas.**
 - He was a former high priest.
 - He was Caiaphas's father-in-law.
 - He was the most influential member of the Jewish Council.
 - Apparently he conducted a kind of preliminary investigation.
 - The aim was that he should present certain unfavourable recommendations to the Sanhedrin.
 - This was clearly a strategy to ensure from the beginning that Jesus would be judged guilty of the charges brought against Him.

- This trial before Annas gave them enough time at this impossible hour of the night to assemble the Sanhedrin.
- And the fact that Annas was already conducting the trial gave the members of the Sanhedrin the impression that it had to be about a matter of extremely serious concern.
- **Then the trial before the Sanhedrin followed.**
 - This was the Jewish Council.
 - Caiaphas was the chairman.
 - There were **two sessions**. Again, pure deceit and subterfuge.
 - Jewish law at the time did not permit a person to be tried and sentenced at the same trial.
 - It was necessary for some time to pass between trials before sentence, so that the case could be seen in perspective in order to guard against unreasonable or unfair punishment.
 - But that night they held two sessions in immediate succession. By this means they could argue that the trial and verdict took place in two separate sessions.
 - It was thus again an empty formality to hold the two sessions so directly after one another.
 - There were also other irregularities.
 - For instance, they held the last trial before sunrise. This was against the law.
 - Furthermore, the trial was convened to investigate a charge against Jesus – there was none!
 - And then they would have been seriously embarrassed if they could find no charge against Him.
 - All the accusations they could scrape together collapsed so clearly that they themselves had to admit it.
 - Eventually there was a charge: blasphemy. But this was very much a forced matter, because the high priest laid the words in Jesus' mouth.
 - On these grounds they decided on the death sentence.
 - Again they found themselves frustrated, because their power was limited. They were not authorised to sentence a person to death. Now they had to find assistance somewhere!

Between the two trials it happened that Peter denied Jesus and that Judas committed suicide. Then the religious leaders went to the heathen authorities.

Now there followed three trials before the heathen authorities.

- **The first was the trial conducted by Pilate.**
 - Pilate immediately found himself in a dilemma.
 - Pilate had a long history. He was a weakling with a rather unsavoury past.
 - But with the assistance of friends and contacts he obtained a governorship in Palestine.
 - It was also largely because the government in Rome wished to get Pontius Pilate out of their way – that is why he was given the post specifically in

Palestine.

At the time of this trial, there was already a charge against him which was under investigation.

- The charge related to alleged misgovernment in Palestine.
- That is why Pontius Pilate found himself in a dilemma. He could not afford to have another charge brought against him.
- If he did not do as the Jews demanded, they could make things unpleasant for him.
- He seized upon the first channel of escape with both hands. Jesus came from Galilee, which was in Herod's jurisdiction. Therefore he considered it expedient that Herod conduct the trial.
- **The second trial took place before Herod.**
 - At that time Herod was in Jerusalem, and it was very convenient to send Jesus to him under guard.
 - Again, an irony. Herod was an Idumean.
 - He was descended from Esau. He was a son of the Herod who ordered the massacre of the infant children at the time of Jesus' birth, by his wife Malthace.
 - Before him stood Jesus, a descendant of Jacob.
 - The lineage of grace, set against the lineage of perdition.
 - Jesus' innocence was so obvious that not even he could find any guilt in Him; nevertheless he ordered his soldiers to treat Jesus with scorn and mockery.
 - Herod had heard much about Jesus, and he was disappointed that Jesus did not entertain him with a miracle.
 - Furthermore he greatly enjoyed the embarrassment of the Jews.
 - He appreciated Pilate's recognition of his authority by sending Jesus to him so that he could share in his trial. Before this occasion, the two of them could not get along well, but from this time on they were close friends.
 - In this way all the forces at Satan's command were united. Against God there is no disunity.
 - But because he found Jesus innocent, he sent Him back to Pilate.
- **Then the sixth trial took place. The third before the heathen. Pilate would now have to take the final decision himself.**
 - He had really tried all possible alternatives out of his dilemma – except the correct one.
 - First he tried to shift the responsibility back on the Jews. They, however, refused to deal with the matter, because they wanted Jesus to receive the death sentence. They were not empowered to pronounce such a verdict, nor to carry out such a sentence.
 - After that Pilate tried to shift the burden upon Herod. But he sent Jesus back, because he could find no guilt in Him.
 - Now, with the second trial before him, he tried appealing to their emotions and sensibilities.
 - Are you certain that your people want a Roman to crucify the King of the Jews?
 - He tried to appease the crowd and to awaken their sympathy. He

thought that if he continued to torture Jesus, the people would eventually begin to pity Him.

- He placed a crown of thorns on Jesus' Head.
- The soldiers then struck Him over the head with reeds and rods, thereby driving in the thorns of the crown into the flesh of His head.
- He had a purple cloak hung around Jesus.
- He put a staff of reed into His hand.
- The intention is quite clear: he tried to present Jesus as a caricature of a king, so that the Jews might regard it as a ridiculous matter, and then let Jesus go.
- The people had to be given the impression that their accusation was ridiculous, because he would show them that Jesus was merely a pathetic figure, and not dangerous.
- The Jews, however, stuck to their position.
- Then he gave the people a choice. It was customary to set one prisoner free at Passover.
- He gave them the choice between the worst one he had in the prison and Jesus.
 - Barabbas was a robber and a murderer.
 - His real name was Jesus Barabbas.
 - Against him Pilate put the innocent one: Jesus Christ.
- Then the people chose the scoundrel and murderer. The Righteous One had to be crucified against all principles of justice.
- Eventually the cheap farce: Pilate washed his hands to affirm that he was innocent of His death. He was too weak a person to maintain law and order, and thereby allowed the people to violate justice.

So Jesus was crucified after hours in trial after trial, with torture in between.

- You can realise how rapidly everything must have happened if you consider that Jesus was crucified at nine o'clock in the morning.
- The legal processes must have been rushed through to fit in six trials during the night and in the morning!

And then the cross.

- This punishment was invented and applied by the old Persians and Phoenicians.
- The Romans adopted this form of punishment and implemented it in the case of the very worst criminals.
- Roman Law forbade the crucifixion of a Roman citizen.
 - Not even if he was the worst of criminals!
 - Jesus was a Roman citizen by birth, yet He was crucified with all possible haste.

The physical suffering during crucifixion is tremendous.

- Persons who were crucified mostly got sunstroke as they hung in the bloody heat of the sun.
- Furthermore they slowly smothered.
- Their internal organs tore.

- Many hung dying on the cross for up to three days before they finally died.

Psychologically crucifixion was devastating to the victim.

- A normal person who suffers pain, or who is ill, has the prospect of being helped by others and that he might get better, or even recover.
- For the one crucified there is only one prospect – death.
- The mockery of the bystanders was just as bad, for he hung naked.

Spiritually, these people had an extremely poor moral sense.

- To them it was a symbol of God's curse. Deuteronomy 21:23 and Galatians 3:13 state: "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."

The law of the Romans also required that two days must pass between the passing of the sentence and its implementation. But here it was different.

- From the court where sentence was passed, Jesus was flogged and then taken to Golgotha.
- The people **and** Satan wanted Jesus out of the way.
- The Son of God had to be destroyed as quickly as possible.

These are the things which comprise the Easter weekend:

- Suffering in the extreme.
- Exhaustion past the point of despair.
- Ruthlessness unto death.
- Hatred of men towards the Son of God.
- The mockery of soldiers and even of a fellow victim on the cross.
- Sour soldiers' wine when the sun and pain made Jesus thirsty and broke His strength.

All for you.

- Every one of us shares the burden of guilt for this death – so that from it life can be born for us.
- Because it was also the suffering for your and my sins that was visited upon Christ.
- Hence He bore the burden of God's wrath to obtain for us and restore to us righteousness and life.

Amen.

Closing prayer

Closing hymn: Psalm 107:3, 10

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.