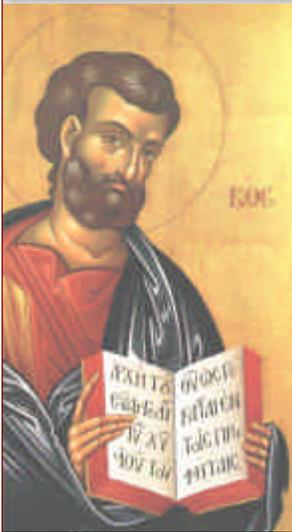


# FOLLOW ME

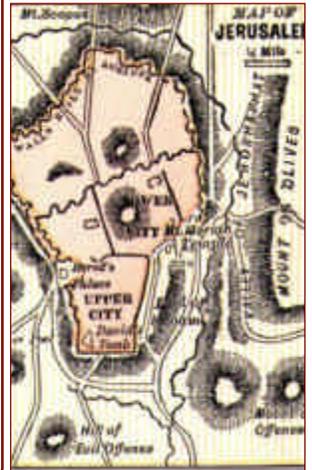
## LESSON NINETEEN: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 15



### FAST FACTS

- In St. Mark's Gospel account, Jesus said nothing in response to Pilate's interrogation.
- The crowd chose to free Barabbas instead of Jesus.
- The Roman soldiers mocked and beat Jesus.
- St. Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus' Cross to Golgotha, the "Place of the Skull."
- The soldiers offered Jesus wine and myrrh (which He refused), and cast lots for His garments.
- Jesus was crucified at the third hour, and was mocked by the crowds as a false prophet and false messiah.
- At the sixth hour darkness filled the land, and at the ninth hour Jesus died.
- When Jesus died, the Temple veil was torn in two.
- His death was witnessed by a centurion, and Ss. Mary Magdalene, St. Mary, and St. Salome.
- Jesus was buried by St. Joseph of Arimathea.

### MAP



## MARK 15:1-15

The other Gospel accounts (Matthew 27:1, 2, 11-26; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28-19:16) provide far more detail about Pontius Pilate's interrogation of Jesus: Pilate's washing his hands to symbolize his lack of guilt in Jesus' death (Matthew 27:24); Pilate and Herod becoming friends (Luke 23:12); and the full conversation between Pilate and Jesus (John 18:33-38). It is nonetheless clear from St. Mark's account that Pilate viewed Jesus as a religious fanatic, rather than a political revolutionary, and therefore not deserving of death.

Barabbas was a political revolutionary. His name means "Son of the Father," and is a messianic title which many scholars believe he adopted to highlight his political goals. In some manuscripts Matthew 27:17 calls Barabbas "Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ," meaning that it is possible both Jesus and Barabbas were named Jesus; in this case, the crowd expressed their support for the experienced revolutionary instead of the One Who was truly "Son of the Father."

## MARK 15:16-32

As with many of the incidents in Jesus' life, St. Mark greatly condenses His account of Jesus' suffering and death. His focus is primarily on the mockery and humili-



## TIME TRAVEL

Pontius Pilate was procurator (governor) of Judea from 26-36 AD. In his reign he was largely known for his general insensitivity and cruelty toward the Jews; Philo of Alexandria describes him as inflexible, merciless, and obstinate. Among the outrages attributed to him was killing a large number of Jews — most likely Zealots — in the Temple area (Luke 13:1). Pilate was removed from his position after Roman troops slaughtered a large number of Samaritans on Mount Gerizim.

Pilate's wife, St. Claudia Procula, attempted to convince him to free Jesus, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him" (Matthew 27:19). She later became a Christian, and is commemorated by the Church on October 27<sup>th</sup>.

## OUR FAITH TEACHES

St. Ephrem the Syrian writes: "[Jesus] was not silent over that which was exalting us, but He did not struggle against those who were provoking Him...He kept silent so that His silence would make them shout even louder, and so that His crown could be made more beautiful through all this clamor."

ation Jesus endured: mocked by the Roman soldiers as a failed political figure, mocked by the crowd as a false prophet, and mocked by the religious leaders as a failed Messiah.

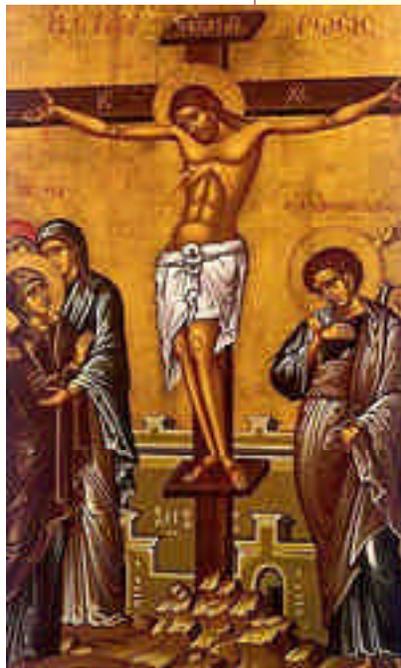
Crucifixion was horrifically painful: nailed to a cross and held upright with one's lungs constricted, the crucified person usually died from the inability to continue breathing. Crucifixion was also shameful: only the worst criminals were executed in this manner. It is for this reason that Eusebius writes: "What death is more shameful than to be crucified? What death worse than this condemnation is conceivable? Even now He remains a reproach among all who have not yet received faith in Him!" In His death Jesus was truly "numbered with the transgressors" (v. 28; cf. Isaiah 53:12).

## MARK 15:33-47

Jesus' Crucifixion and death is a scene of the separation between humanity and God. At noon, the brightest time of the day, darkness came over the land (much as it did during God's judgment upon Egypt in Exodus 10:21-29). Jesus, in His humanity, cries out and asks why He has been forsaken. Finally, when Jesus dies, the veil of the Temple — which had enclosed the Holy of Holies, the presence of God — was torn in two. "The veil was rent," Blessed Theophylact writes, "as a sign from God that the grace of the Holy Spirit had departed from the Temple."

At the same time, however, the tearing of the veil *also* represents Jesus restoring the relationship between humanity and God the Father (see Hebrews 10:12-22). St. Gregory the Theologian teaches, "[Jesus] surrenders His life, yet He has power to take it again. Yes, the veil is torn, for things of heaven are being revealed, rocks split, and dead men have an earlier awakening (Matthew 27:51-53)." It is therefore not surprising that not only did one of the centurions who witnessed these miracles convert to Christianity, but so did some of the Temple priests (Acts 6:7).

We should notice that, rather than the Disciples (with



## OUR FAITH TEACHES

Orthodox Christians greatly venerate the Cross. St. John of Kronstadt asks,

*Why do we honor the Cross with such reverence that we make mention of its power in our prayers after asking for the intercession of the Mother of God and the Heavenly Powers, before asking for that of the Saints, and sometimes even before asking for that of the Heavenly Powers? Because after the Savior's sufferings, the Cross became the sign of the Son of Man, that is, the Cross signifies the Lord Himself, incarnate and suffering for our salvation.*

Do you fully appreciate the sacrifice that Jesus made for you, and the great gift that He gives to you of eternal life through and in Him? Everything that you are, and everything that you can hope to be, is God's gift to you. Do you love and honor Him as He deserves?

When you contemplate Jesus' great sacrifice, it may be helpful to remember this prayer from the Matins for Great and Holy Friday:

*Every day I will bless you, and praise your name for ever and ever. I said, Lord, have mercy upon me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you. Lord, I have run to you for refuge; teach me to do your will for you are my God. For with you is the source of life, and in your light we shall see light. O continue your merciful kindness toward those who know you.*

the exception of the Holy Apostle John (John 19:26)), it was a group of women who faithfully stood near Jesus as He was crucified. St. John Chrysostom explains, "For what reason then was He being supported by women? For women, it is said, followed Him and ministered to Him. It was to teach us from the first that He is ready to receive those who do the good."



### WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

- Pilate tried to free Jesus, but was too afraid of the people to do the right thing. Do I allow peer pressure to cause me to act against my conscience?
- There are many people who mock Jesus and Christianity.

Do I stand up for what I believe, or am I afraid of being embarrassed?

- Do I truly appreciate what Jesus has done for me? Do I worship Him as my Savior, or do I take His sacrifice for granted?

