

The Trial Of Jesus

A PARISH-WIDE ACTIVITY

St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Mission

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Introduction

This enactment of Jesus' Trial was conceived during a church school class with young adults. It was planned for Lazarus Saturday as a Church School Retreat to which the whole parish was invited. We would highly recommend this timing, as many reported back that the services of Holy Week were more alive through the recollection of the figures represented through the trial.

All Church School children and young adults prepared during the Great Lenten season by looking up some of the many figures in Jesus' life, presented in the Gospels. The particular references were written on cards with the name of the figure. These cards were then distributed to those participating. They were to study these texts speaking of their character, and come prepared to represent that person. Very little was done in terms of costuming. The high priest and others wore robes, and Jesus needs a purple robe. Soldiers may be given some kind of cardboard sword. All are given little hanging name cards identifying who they are.

Roles

The trial sequence itself was followed closely as presented in Scripture. We did, however, take license in adding many other figures that may not have participated in the trial. Examples included: the Mother of God (take care in choosing person to play this role), the couple in Cana of Galilee where Jesus changed water into wine, Zacchaeus, Mary, Martha, Lazarus. This can be creatively developed to include as many parishioners and young people as are available. Special care should be taken in choosing a person to portray Jesus, and also Pilate, as he figures prominently in second scene of the trial. In our case, the priest did not play Jesus (may even recommend against it, in favor of someone gaining the perspective of standing in silence during all the questioning, yet able to carry dialogue in the section with Pilate. (This pastor actually took Pilate's role, gaining increased perspective on his inability to stand on his own.). You also need a guard who stands by Jesus. We included Peter, who was brought in denying Jesus, and yet recognized by all as one of his followers.

In addition to the above characters, we had a high priest (one of our very well-educated young people), a panel of Pharisees and Sadducees (to make up the Sanhedrin) as prosecutors, and Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus as the defense team. They each asked questions of each witness, with the high priest continually getting impatient for some real evidence, and ruling on any impasses occurring during questioning.

Scene I

Two scenes were included. The first is Jesus before the Sanhedrin, and the second is with Pilate. The space was set as a courtroom for the first case, with chairs in the back for all who are not actively participating at any point. After all

are brought in, the first scene ends as the false witnesses enter to give their testimony (Matt. 26:60-68). After the false witnesses testify against Jesus, the high priest directly questions Jesus who responds as in the Bible text. You may want to have the denial of Peter outside the gates, but we did not. Instead, we had him testify inside, and later the servant girl came in reporting his denial.

Scene II

A brief break was given between the two scenes for further preparation (putting Jesus in a scarlet robe, taking down the courtroom and replacing it with Pilate's Praetorium. The pastor prepared brief Narratives (enclosed), both to set each scene, and to conclude the trial.

In the second scene, Pilate is positioned at a distance from the crowd, and Jesus is brought back and forth from where he is, out to where the high priest and others stand, so as not to be defiled before the Passover. Enclosed is a brief outline of lines for this section. The one addition we would suggest for this second scene is to expand Pilate's role to include "thinking out loud" in his deliberation over what to do. The dialogue runs much too quickly by itself. In the end the crowd is enlisted (through cue cards) to respond. Herod is included in this scene too, as holding Jesus.

Finally, no rehearsals were held for this. We were simply and yet deeply moved at how people prepared for their roles. One of our elder parish women took Mary's role and deeply portrayed her love for her son, proclaiming him as God, and yet holding all the events of his life in her heart. A young person (about 10 years of age) took the role of Zacchaeus, who carried in a cash register, plunked it down, and loudly proclaimed: "Jesus is my friend." After the trial sequence was concluded, some time for reflecting upon the experience was offered, which also proved fruitful. We all got so much out of this that we plan to use a similar format for other Scriptural accounts in future years.

Narration

The chief priests of the Temple in Jerusalem had been hearing reports of Jesus' teaching throughout Judea, and they conspired with the scribes to kill Him, because they feared the people. Jesus was becoming too popular with the people, especially when they greeted Him as a King as He entered Jerusalem, the Holy City, and they shouted "Hosannas" to Him.

Now the Feast of Passover was drawing near (it was known as the Feast of the unleavened bread). It was the most holy day for the Jews, for on this feast day they remembered how God had set them free from the hands of the Egyptians.

Two days before the Passover, the chief priests and elders were looking for a way to arrest Jesus secretly and kill Him. Then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples. Judas asked the chief priests: "What will you give me if I betray Jesus and give Him to you. They were glad for this opportunity and agreed to give Judas money. Judas promised to seek an opportunity to turn Jesus over to the soldiers when no crowd of people was present. (Luke 22:1-6)

As the holy day drew near, Jesus sent his disciples to prepare a place for them to eat the Passover in an upper room. When the hour had come, the twelve sat down and began the meal with Him. During the meal, Jesus said the words that instituted the Eucharist that we celebrated on Holy Thursday, and on every Sunday—the Lord's Day. (Luke 22:14-23) After sharing the blessed bread and

the cup of wine, Jesus told them that His betrayer was there with them at the table.

After the supper ended, Jesus rose from the table, set aside his garments and put a towel around His waist. He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciple's feet, and wipe them with the towel. (John 13:2-17)

Judas then left the company and plotted with the high priests to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Meanwhile, the supper ended. After singing a hymn, Jesus and the disciples went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, a short distance away. Jesus tells His disciples that they will all run away when He is taken prisoner. Peter disagrees, but Jesus says Peter will deny Him—three times! The disciples take two swords along to protect them.

When they arrive at the Mount of Olives, Jesus asks His disciples to watch and pray with Him. He then took Peter, James and John a bit further, and went off by Himself and knelt down and prayed. (Matt. 26:36-46) The disciples were not able to stay awake and they fell asleep. Finally the moment of betrayal was at hand.

Scene I

The Trial before the Sanhedrin

(See Scene II for format if you wish to write dialogue to dramatize this section for a longer presentation.)

Judas told the soldiers that the person to whom he would give a kiss would be Jesus. Judas drew near to Jesus and kissed Him, and the soldiers arrested Jesus and took him away. (Matt. 26: 47-56) As Jesus was taken into custody, His disciples scattered. Jesus was led to Caiaphas, the high priest, and the scribes and elders.

[Note: See Matthew 26:57-68 for events and dialogue to dramatize the trial before Caiaphas, the high priest, and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious court. Peter's denial of Jesus can be found in Matthew 26:69-75.]

Matt 27:1ff. When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. When they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, the governor. As they did so, Judas was remorseful at what he had done and tried to return the thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 27:3-ff) to the chief priests and elders. When he was turned away, Judas threw down the pieces of silver and went and hanged himself. The silver later was used to buy the potters field to bury strangers in, and became known as the "field of blood".

As Jesus was brought before Pilate, the chief priests and elders remained outside the Praetorium, so as not to defile themselves before the Passover. In the meantime, when Pilate discovered that Jesus was a Galilean, he sent Him also to Herod, the king who ruled the territory for the Roman emperor. (Luke 23:6-12).

Scene II

The Trial before Herod and Pilate

The Roman trial takes place both within the Praetorium where Jesus is being held by Herod's men, and outside where the chief priests and elders were

assembled, and where a crowd was gathering. Pilate released to them Barabbas, the one they requested, who had been thrown in prison for rebellion and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will. (Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28-19:16)

Text of Scene II

Pilate begins by questioning the chief priests about what Jesus had done. They explain that they cannot put Him to death.

(John 18:34) Pilate enters the Praetorium complaining about how early it is and whatever is going on better be important. He asks Jesus if He is the King of the Jews?

Jesus answers, "Are you speaking for yourself about this or did others tell you this concerning me?" Pilate responds, "Am I a Jew?" Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have you done?"
Jesus: "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world."

Pilate: "Are you a king then?"

Jesus: "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

Pilate: "What is truth?" (and returns outside; then, speaking to the high priests):
"I find no crime in him. You have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

They all cry out: "Not this man, but Barabbas."

(Pilate returns inside, scourging Jesus. Herod's band of soldiers mock Jesus, plaiting a crown of thorns on His head and adorning Him with a purple robe. Herod and Pilate become friends this day. Then the adorned Jesus is brought out.)

The soldiers say: "Hail, King of the Jews" as He is brought out, and strike Him with their hands."

Pilate: "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you that you may know that I find no fault in Him. Behold the man!"

All: "Crucify Him!"

Pilate, to high priests: "You take Him and crucify Him, I find no crime in Him."

Chief priests: "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die because He made Himself the Son of God.

(Jesus is brought back inside.) Pilate, now more afraid, returns inside to speak to Jesus. "Where are you from?"

Jesus: (remains silent)

Pilate: Are you not speaking to me? Do you know that I have power to crucify You, and the power to release You?"

Jesus: "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."

Pilate seeks to release Jesus, but the Jews cry out, "if you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend." He comes out to the judgment seat (set before the high priests). As he sits there, his wife comes to him saying: "Have nothing to do with this righteous man as I have suffered much over him in a dream."

Pilate: (Turns to the crowd and points to Jesus) "Behold your King!"

Crowd: (Priests and people cry out) "Away with Him, away with Him, Crucify Him!"

Pilate: "Should I crucify your King?"

All: "We have no king but Caesar!"

(Pilate washes his hands) saying: "I am innocent of this man's blood."

All: "His blood be on us and on our children!"

(Barabbas is released, and Jesus is taken away to be crucified.)

[Rest of the Crucifixion (Matt. 27:32-61) is paraphrased and summarized.]

Incomplete listing of witnesses:

Defense:

Peter, James, John

Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Lazarus speaks of what occurred, and his sisters concur. This causes no small stir, even now.

Mary, the Mother of God

Mary Magdalene

Blind man of Jericho

Leper (the one who returned)

Zacchaeus

Woman who was healed touching Jesus' robe

Couple from Cana of Galilee

Prosecution:

Pharisee

Townfolk of the Geresene village

Money changers whose tables were overturned

Herod's soldier

Servant Girl

The false witnesses.