



# Parish of Mother of Unfailing Help

## Leeds Cathedral & Holy Rosary

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### LENTEN REFLECTIONS

#### **Palm Sunday – 24<sup>th</sup> March - Fleur Dorrell**

Fleur Dorrell is Catholic Scripture Engagement Manager for the Catholic Bishops' Conference and for Bible Society and the National Co-ordinator of the 'God Who Speaks' initiative.

*'The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.'* (Matthew 26:14–27:66)

The Taking of Christ by Caravaggio. C. 1602. National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Taking\\_of\\_Christ-Caravaggio\\_\(c.1602\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Taking_of_Christ-Caravaggio_(c.1602).jpg)

#### **Light and dark in Matthew 26:14 – 27:66**

Matthew's gospel shifts between light and dark with a similar deftness to Caravaggio's use of *chiaroscuro* in 'The Taking of Christ', heightening the range and intensity of betrayal. We've leapt from Palm Sunday joy to Judas betraying Jesus with a single kiss. It's easy to blame everything on Judas since his treachery is the turning point of the Passion. Yet, he is not the only one to fail Jesus as He walks towards His death.

The Passover meal is filled with clues, but the disciples have still not understood. Who would betray their Lord and friend? The Garden of Gethsemane is no longer a place of peace but of extreme stress and exhaustion. Jesus begs God to forgo His imminent suffering while James, John and Peter are fast asleep. They provide no back-up when His life is hanging by a thread.

Suddenly Jesus is surrounded by violent crowds wielding swords and clubs, so unlike the gentle palms that greeted him days ago. While He has nowhere to run the disciples disappear before the Scriptures can be fulfilled. Desperate to bring Him down, the Chief Priests and Council accuse Him of blasphemy. Meanwhile, Peter hides in the courtyard unaware that his own judgement by cock-crow is imminent.

In the civil court Pilate is confused and conflicted - which is dangerous for the agent of imperial justice. His decision changes history as light and dark continue to battle it out amid images of 30 pieces of silver, a crown of thorns and a total eclipse. The people under instruction from their leaders reject the Messiah in exchange for a common thief and Jesus humbly surrenders to their will. Women are wailing, stricken with grief but unlike the disciples they stay the course.

There is blood everywhere: the blood of the covenant drunk from the Passover cup; the blood from the servant's ear sliced off in the garden; the blood-money returned by Judas before hanging himself; the blood of innocence and blessing from the tortured body of Christ crucified.

Amid all this drama as the Temple curtain tears apart there's a challenge: do we stay with Christ to the bitter end? Can we see the presence of God in a new light?

In Caravaggio's painting, look at how Jesus locks His hands ready to be bound as Judas kisses Him to His death. There is moonlight but the darkness of deceit dominates the scene.

The guards press in to secure His arrest, they cannot afford to get this wrong. There are seven figures: left to right they are -

- John in despair as he rushes away – his scarlet cloak flying high as a
- Soldier snatches it back
- then Jesus as he looks down upon His destiny while clutched by
- Judas unable to look him in the eyes
- two other soldiers
- and a lantern held by a man who is possibly Peter.

In the sheen on the soldiers' armour Caravaggio invites us to reflect on this event and see ourselves within the picture.

*When* Jesus dies on the cross, He forgives the world its sin and offers forgiveness to all who will come after Him.

Outstretched and outcast He is not outdone.