

HOLY THURSDAY

Scriptures to Read:

Last Supper – Ex 12; Mt 26:17-29; Mk 14:12-25; Lk 22; 1-23; Jn 13 - 17

Gethsemene – Mt 26:30-56; Mk 14:32-50; Lk 22:39-53; Jn 18:1-12

St. Peter Gallicantu – Mt 26:57-75; Mk 14:53-72; Lk 22:54-71; Jn 18:12-27; Ps 88



Cenacle - the Upper Room



Olive Trees in Garden of Gethsemane



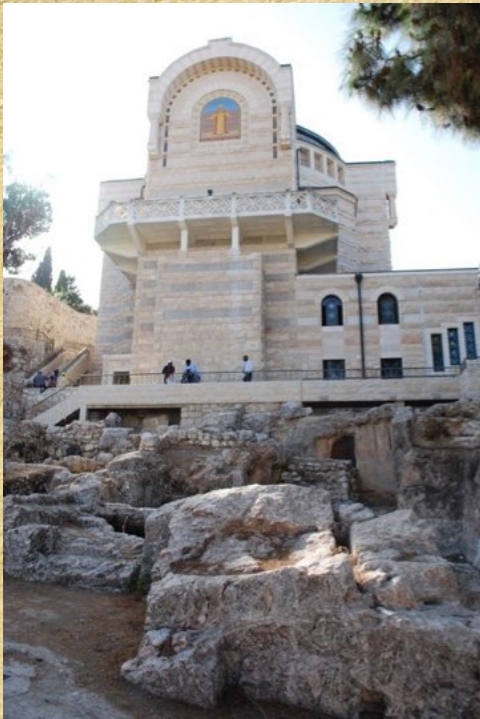
Rock of Christ's Agony in the Garden

Just outside the southwestern wall of Jerusalem's Old City is the Cenacle – the Upper Room. Here is remembered Jesus' Last Supper Passover meal where he instituted the Eucharist. Israel and the Jews celebrated the Passover to remember and give thanks for God's deliverance of his people from slavery and death in Egypt at the time of the Exodus. At the Last Supper Jesus not only celebrated and recalled that first Passover, but he also gave thanks for the deliverance that he knew his heavenly Father would bring from his approaching suffering and death on the Cross (a deliverance that happens gloriously at the Resurrection). Interestingly there is no mention of a lamb at this Passover meal, a detail that reminds us that Jesus himself is the sacrificial lamb, just as John the Baptist had proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:36).

This first Eucharist, and Jesus' Passion, is re-presented in each Mass, where Christians are called to join the offering of their own lives to Christ's offering and to give thanks for the deliverance from sin which he won for us on the Cross. Just as manna in the desert sustained the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings, so the bread of Christ's Body in the Eucharist sustains Christians as they journey to the Promised Land of Heaven.

After celebrating the Last Supper in the Upper Room, Jesus leaves the city with the Apostles and walks along the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane at the base of the Mt of Olives. In this place where "Jesus often met ... with his disciples" (John 18:2), there is a cave in which Jesus and his disciples likely stayed, protecting them from the cold spring nights and allowing Jesus to sleep outside the city, away from those who were seeking a way to put him to death. From the cave, Jesus takes Peter, James and John a short distance to "watch and pray" with him. Withdrawing a

stone's throw apart, Jesus prays to his Father, suffering the Agony in the Garden, offering himself so that the Father's will might be accomplished. Here in the Garden of Gethsemane, not only do Jesus' three closest disciples fail to "watch and pray" with him, but Judas will also betray him with a kiss.



*The Church of St. Peter Gallicantu,
built over ruins of Caiaphas' house*

The Church of St. Peter Gallicantu (“cockcrow”) is built over the site of the house of Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest. After his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is brought here before the chief priests and scribes who sought witnesses to testify against him. While Jesus endures harsh treatment inside, Peter warms himself near a charcoal fire in the outer courtyard. When questioned whether he was with Jesus, Peter denies Jesus three times before the cock crows, just as Jesus foretold.

As a prisoner of the high priest, Jesus likely spent the remaining hours before dawn in a cistern below Caiaphas’ house. Here Jesus likely recalled Psalm 88.

O LORD, my God, I call for help by day;
I cry out in the night before thee.

Let my prayer come before thee, incline thy ear to my cry!
For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.

... Thou hast put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep. Thy wrath lies heavy upon me,
and thou dost overwhelm me with all thy waves.
Thou hast caused my companions to shun me;
thou hast made me a thing of horror to them.

I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
my eye grows dim through sorrow.

Every day I call upon thee, O LORD;
I spread out my hands to thee. (Ps 88:1-3,6-9)



*Reliefs of Jesus walking the ancient stairs
next to Caiaphas' house*

Running next to Caiaphas’ house are ancient steps that would have been the highly traveled path out of the city and down to the Kidron Valley and the Mt of Olives. After the Last Supper, Jesus would have walked down these steps in friendship with his Apostles on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. But once Jesus is betrayed by Judas, and his Apostles flee, Jesus is bound and roughly led up these same steps to be interrogated at Caiaphas’ house. Two beautiful stone carvings at the top of these stairs recall these scenes.

Some thoughts for your reflection and *lectio* on these passages and events of Scripture:

- “This is my body. ... This is my blood of the covenant.” God gives his very self. How much he desires to be with us.
- Jesus calls us, like he called Peter, James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane, to “watch and pray” with him. Have I spent time with him today?
- Jesus’ closest friends, the Apostles, all fled when Judas and the guards entered the Garden of Gethsemane. What daily sacrifices am I making so as to grow in fortitude and perseverance and remain always faithful to Christ?