

## Good Friday 2026 — First Meditation (John 18:1–27)

We are so familiar with the events of arrest and trial of Jesus that we overlook the message of the Gospel of John's story. Each of the key figures, Peter, Caiaphas and Judas, shared the misconception that Jesus intended to overturn the ruling powers and establish the kingdom of God as a this-world theocracy.

Let's start with Peter. Peter's "denial" was not an act of cowardice or abandonment, but an act of dashed certainty and confused devotion. Peter evidently shared the common view that the messianic kingdom was a revolution in this world. When the armed authorities came to take Jesus, Peter's role was obvious: draw his sword and lead the army of God against the forces of evil. But he was put down by Jesus: "Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me." In confused devotion, Peter followed the arrest to the indictment, an act involving substantial risk for a Galilean recognized as one resisting the officials. So Peter told little lies to remain near at hand to Jesus — in confusion about the messianic kingdom and his role.

Then there was Caiaphas, the high priest of the Temple authorities. Caiaphas was a politician. His every thought and action sought order in the community. Anyone preaching a new kingdom, a religious revolution, was not just blasphemous but dangerous — inviting social disorder and a violent response from Rome. Caiaphas was not moved by those in the Sanhedrin who argued that Jesus was a holy man. In the words of Caiaphas, "Better that one man should die for the good of the people."

Finally, Judas. Judas may have gotten a bum rap from Christian tradition. A late 2nd century gospel rejected by tradition, the Gospel of Judas, described his betrayal as, not an act against Jesus, but an act on Jesus' instructions. Judas thought he was assigned to start the confrontation that would bring on the messianic kingdom. Remember, Judas was the Treasurer and social activist of the disciples, who protested Mary's lotion for Jesus's feet as money better given to the poor. This Judas took it on himself to start the apocalypse against the worldly powers.

On this Good Friday, we are reminded that the kingdom of God is not a theocracy tailored to our preferences and expectations, but a call to follow Jesus in bringing a revolution of love to an unruly world.

## Meditation on the Trial of Jesus

by R. Lisle Baker – Good Friday, 2026:

The trial and execution of Jesus is a familiar story. What is not so familiar is the legal context for how it came about.

The religious leadership of the Jews wanted Jesus punished for the religious crime of blasphemy for claiming to be the son of God. However, under Roman law, the religious leadership lacked the power on its own to order it. Only Pilate, as the Prefect of Rome, had the power to decide who could live and who could die. The Scriptures report that Pilate could find no fault in Jesus that would justify his execution for committing a secular crime. So here we have a religious crime without a punishment and a secular punishment without a crime.

Should not then Jesus have been set free? Yet Pilate condemns Jesus to die anyway.

Is this just the case of a magistrate scared of an angry mob and puts Jesus to death for no cause other than that he has the power to do so? There's more to the story.

The persecutors of Jesus secularized his crime by claiming that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews. The problem was that Emperor Tiberius was the ruler of Judea and Pilate was his agent. There was no room for anyone else to claim legal authority over Roman subjects like the Jews.

When confronted with this claim, Jesus said that his Kingdom was not of this world. Without diminishing its divinity, it is like saying that the Magic Kingdom at Disney World is no threat to the sovereignty of the state of Florida, much less the United States.

However, even if his kingdom were only spiritual, being cast as a King made Jesus sound like a traitor to Rome. Pilate could prove his worth by allowing no scent of sedition on his watch. Therefore, Pilate sent Jesus to the cross, notwithstanding his good defense, for the risk he posed to Pilate's reputation, a crime against Pilate but not against Rome.

While from our comfortable pews we can condemn Pilate for his wrong, his example can be instructive.

How many of us have unwritten rules that others unwittingly violate at their peril? For example, there is no commandment that thou shalt not leave thy grass uncut or thy leaves unraked, but woe unto those who do not tidy up their lawns.

Therefore, if we are not to be like Pilate, it is worth asking what are our unwritten rules for which others can be prosecuted, tried, found guilty, and punished with personal contempt in an instant?

The trial of Jesus reminds us not to be so quick to judge, but instead, as he said on the Cross, to forgive. That is hard to do, but if we wanted an easy religious life, we could have chosen another faith. Instead, we are called to do better, indeed, to love, not judge, one another.

So, at this Easter season, let us reflect – will we follow Jesus the merciful or Pilate the judge in the lives we lead?

### Third Meditation

Diego Garrido Barreto

The Crucifixion — Gospel of John 19:16b–30

Jesus Wounded — John 19:31–37

“Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.”

Let us return to this precious moment.

While in the Gospel of Mark Jesus is profoundly alone—again and again, the story emphasizes abandonment. It is there that we hear the cry: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Yet this cry is not found in John. Nor, at the peak of his suffering, does Mark give us the words: “Woman, behold your son... Son, behold your mother.”

In the Gospel of Luke, by contrast, Jesus is not alone—but he is deeply misunderstood. Even those closest to him cannot fully grasp what is going on.

But here, in John, we encounter something different. Jesus is neither abandoned as in Mark, nor misunderstood as in Luke. Instead, we are given a moment of closeness we are allowed to witness.

Here is a son who, even at the edge of death, sees his mother, his mamá, his madrecita. And perhaps more than that: here is a disciple given a sacred responsibility: to care, to stay close, to carry on taking care of a mother that bears the most infinite pain of seeing her son die before her.

Why does Jesus choose these final moments to speak of his mother? Was it fear? Was it urgency or avoidance? Was it a weight placed on the disciple? Or was it love refusing to leave things undone?

Our theologies are often shaped by our contexts, our feelings, the ideas around us, even by the people we most spend time with. And yet, this scene invites us to ask:

What, in our own lives, are we leaving to the end?

What responsibilities should we start to entrust to others?

What is it that we keep saying we will do tomorrow?

Perhaps, community, this meditation is to remember what Jesus did, about what we are invited to do:

To prepare what needs to be prepared,  
to entrust what we cannot carry alone,  
and to seek the wisdom to know the difference.

Dear God, prepare us to see your death in the deaths of all those who have died searching for justice and liberation. Prepare us for what is coming next in our country and in our communities.

Mother, behold your community in Chestnut Hill.

Community, behold your mother church—

and care for her like Jesus' favorite disciple would.