

Easter 2020



THE LAST 24 HOURS

The Descent from the Cross, by Caravaggio (1571-1610).
PHOTO: CNS, VATICAN MUSEUMS

THE
Catholic Weekly

I am the Resurrection and the Life

We've all heard the Gospel passages describing Christ's Passion so often. Yet how much do we really understand about what they mean, or the true significance of what happened? Historian Warren Carroll brings alive the event which Christians believe is not merely a point along an historical continuum in time, but the centre of history itself ...

- BY WARREN CARROLL -

On the evening of Thursday 6 April, 30 AD, Jesus celebrated the paschal meal with the Twelve. A celebrated controversy, extending through almost the entire history of the Church, arises because the first three gospels, clearly describing the Last Supper as a Passover meal, seem to contradict St John who states in his Gospel that Jesus died on the day before the Passover, the "preparation day," in which case the paschal meal would normally have been eaten on Friday evening rather than on Thursday evening.

Now the Passover was always celebrated on the 15th day of the Jewish month Nisan; and all four gospels are unanimous, as is the entire tradition of the Church, that Christ died on a Friday. If He died on the Passover, therefore, it must have been in a year when the 15th Nisan fell on a Friday. Two separate, detailed, and highly accurate calculations have been made of the days of the week on which the 14th and 15th Nisan fell during these years. Both agree that the 15th Nisan did not fall on a Friday in any year from 28 through 33 AD.

Since almost all commentators have concluded that the Crucifixion must have occurred in one of those six years, this means that John must be right.

Why then did Jesus eat the paschal meal with the Twelve a day early? Obviously, since He knew He was to die the next day, this was the only time He could have eaten it; and we probably need look no further than this for the explanation. While it is true that the gospels do not report any surprise on the part of the Apostles that they were eating the paschal meal with their Lord that particular night, by this point they were obeying His commands instantly and unquestioningly; and His words at the beginning of the Supper quoted by Luke clearly indicate that this Passover is not to be completed on earth, and carry a suggestion of a special modification of the normal conduct of the great feast so that He may share it with the Apostles before He dies:

I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

The Last Supper was held at a U-shaped table in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem which may have belonged to the parents of Mark the Evangelist Peter and John had the places next to Jesus; this had given rise to a petty argument among the Twelve about precedence, which Jesus had terminated in unforgettable fashion by washing the feet of all of them beginning with Peter and including Judas-as a sign both of the humility to which Christians are so urgently called, and of purification for the forthcoming Eucharist. The prescribed ritual of the paschal meal was in all probability followed without change; but during it, Jesus announced that one of those present would betray Him.

"Is it I, Lord?" each of the Twelve asked fearfully, their then

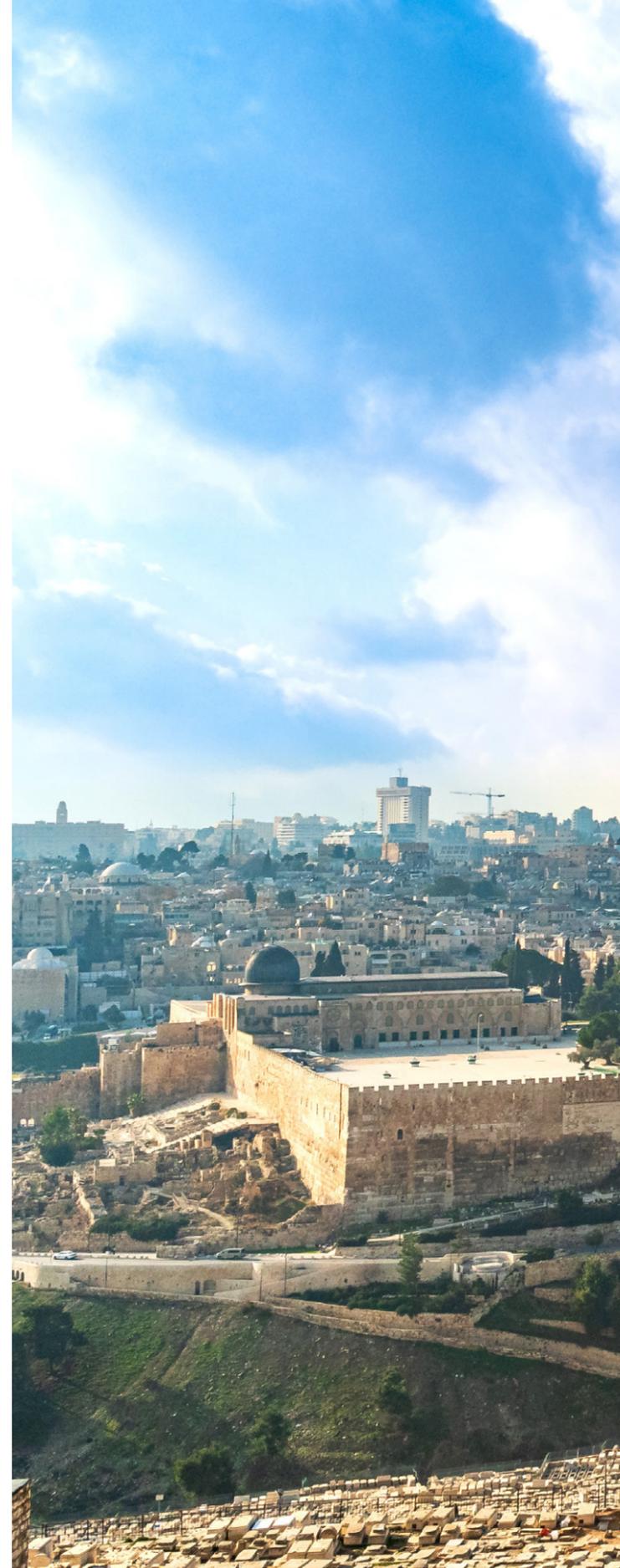
still characteristic presumption for once in abeyance as they contemplated the magnitude of the crime and the certainty with which the Lord had predicted it. Judas joined in the question; to him alone Jesus replied, inaudibly to the others: "You have said it." Then John, leaning against Jesus with his head on His breast - as the historian Prat well says, "the memory of that privilege was to sweeten his whole life"- at the prompting of Peter, asked Jesus who the traitor was, and to him alone Jesus identified Judas Iscariot. "What you are going to do, do quickly," Jesus then told Judas, who went out at once; John's Gospel adds starkly, "and it was night."

Only the faithful remained. More than a year ago, at the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus had scandalised many of His hearers and puzzled His Apostles by declaring His flesh to be real food, the Bread of Life, which men must eat to have divine life in them; it seems to have been then that Judas abandoned Him in spirit. Now that promise was to be fulfilled in the Christian feast of love, the Eucharist, in which Jesus Christ gives His own Body and Blood to His disciples to unite them more closely with Him. He took some of the remaining unleavened Passover bread, blessed and broke it, and said: "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then He took the cup of wine and said: "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." The meaning of the verb is not "signifies," but is.

Thus the central rite of Christianity was inaugurated. The words of institution, repeated in St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians less than twenty-five years later, in the context of participation by all the faithful make it very clear that Jesus intended not that the Apostles partake of His Body and Blood only on this unique occasion, but that they and their successors should continue to partake of it until the end of time. The repetition of the words of institution as the heart and centre of an ongoing rite (later to be called the Mass) show also that Christ had given the Apostles the power to transform bread and wine into His real, actual Body and Blood by saying those words in union with the Church and for the purposes for which the Lord had first spoken them at the Last Supper, thereby re-enacting (in an unbloody manner) His sacrifice on Calvary. That is to say, Jesus at the Last Supper instituted

and administered what came to be called the sacrament of holy orders, empowering the Apostles as priests to make and celebrate the Eucharist as He had done. The sacrificial character of the rite is vividly evident in St Paul's words to the Corinthians: "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

In His discourses that followed, Jesus spoke over and over again of love, though declaring that in the coming hour of apparent disaster to Him they would scatter and flee, that Peter would deny Him three times, that all would seem totally lost and hopeless, yet still He proclaimed that He loved them "to



the end" and would keep them safe; that He had prayed to His Father that Peter's faith would not fail under Satan's temptation, and that after his fall Peter would recover and confirm his brethren; and that "in a little while" the Apostles would see Jesus again.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another.

The discourse of the Lord recorded by St John, reaching if possible even greater heights than this was climaxed by His last sublime prayer to the Father for the Apostles and their mission.

Then He set out with them, through the night into which Judas had gone, for the Garden of Gethsemane. Gnarled, ancient olive trees-some of which may have grown from the stumps of those there that night, later cut down by the Roman soldiers who destroyed Jerusalem-still cast their crooked shadows on Gethsemane's stony soil. There is a formal garden around them now; it is most unlikely that there was anything of the sort then. Now as then, beyond the immediate vicinity of the trees, the soil is hard, gritty, rock-studded, almost lifeless where not artificially watered. The site lies in the deep gully of the Kedron wadi, which is a "brook" or "torrent" only for a few weeks in the rainy season. The word Kedron comes from the Hebrew *qadar*, meaning dark or muddy. Though the paschal moon was full, down at the bottom of the canyon there were many areas of almost total darkness; the air was cold.

Far above towered the walls and buildings of Jerusalem. They



That Peter would deny Him three times, that all would seem totally lost and hopeless, yet still He proclaimed that He loved them "to the end"

loomed even higher that night than they do today - the Holy City, become the domain of the killers of the Son of God.

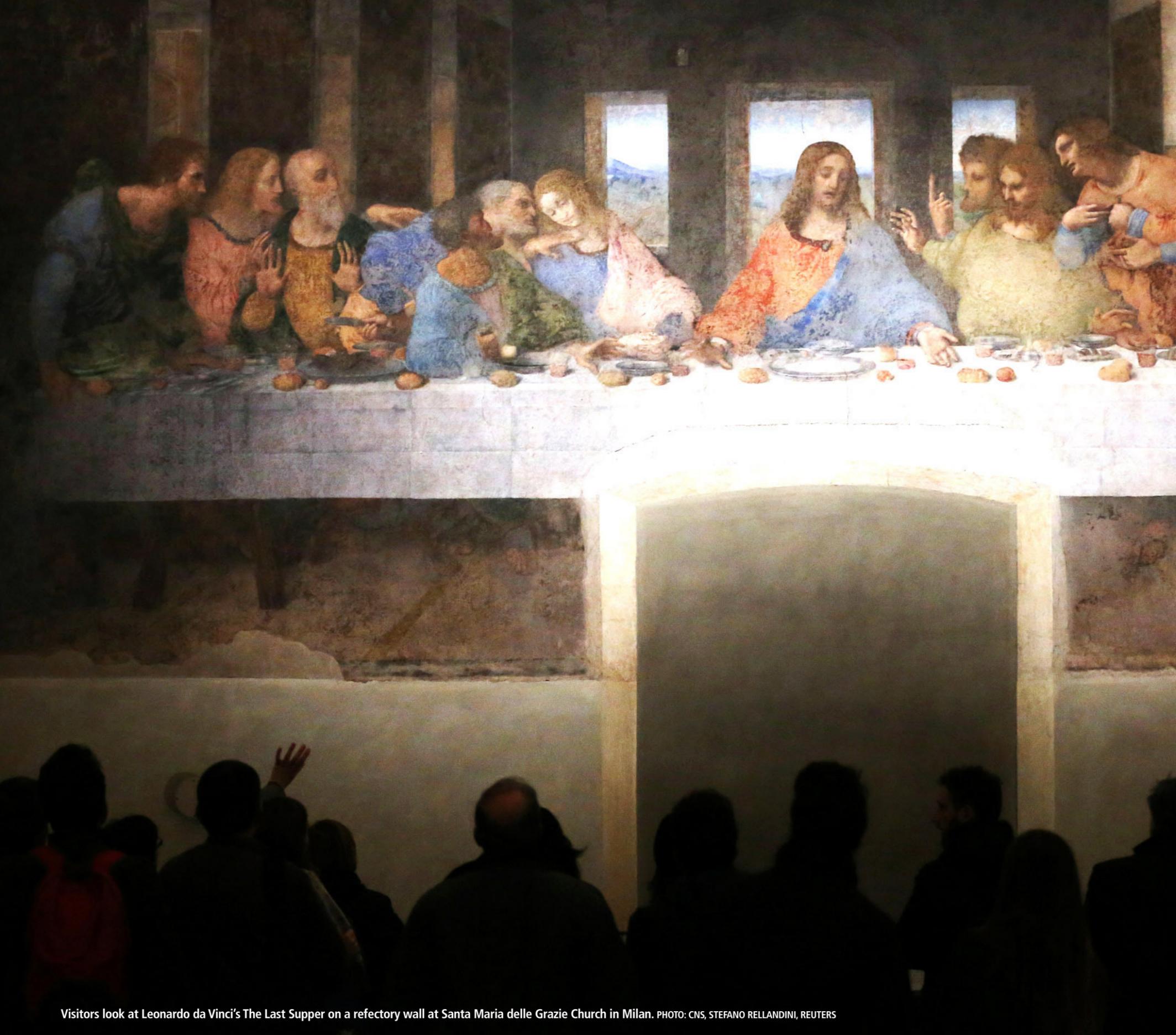
Taking Peter and James and John with Him-the witnesses of His Transfiguration and, with Andrew, the recipients of His final teaching about the end of the world-Jesus went off a little way from the others to pray. In a few minutes He had flung Himself face down on the harsh ground. The cruel rocks must have cut into His flesh like rasps.

Foreseeing in every detail what would be inflicted upon Him the next day, His human will recoiled, and He prayed to the Father to let this cup pass from Him-but only if it were the Father's will. It was not the Father's will. The Apostles, worn out with grief and apprehension, fell deeply asleep; they "could not watch for one hour" with their Lord. In some way it seemed that the Father Himself withdrew from the Son.

All was abandonment; all was pain. Upon Jesus Christ face down upon the rock-laced grit of Gethsemane fell the appalling weight of innumerable human sins, the vivid awareness of the despair of lost souls, the future sufferings of the good, the endless war that would be waged against Him and His with undying ferocity through all the centuries of the Christian era. The historian can imagine the array of great malefactors and human monsters who gibbered at Him that night out of the years to come, after His blood had been poured out for the salvation of mankind: the Emperor Nero; the terrible Romula, harpy of the



Veronica wipes the face of Jesus in the sixth Station of Cross at Lourdes in southern France.
PHOTO: CNS/PAUL HARING



Visitors look at Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* on a refectory wall at Santa Maria delle Grazie Church in Milan. PHOTO: CNS, STEFANO RELLANDINI, REUTERS

Great Persecution of the Christians which bears the name of the Emperor Diocletian; Attila the Hun; al-Hakim the mad Caliph, destroyer of the Holy Sepulchre; the Old Man of the Mountain, founder of the Assassins; Genghis Khan; Tlacaelel, architect of the Aztec system of mass human sacrifice; Caesar Borgia, the son of a Pope; the Anabaptists of Munster; the Marquis de Sade; Marat and Robespierre and Saint-Just of the French Revolution and the guillotine; Rasputin and Lenin and Stalin; Hitler and Heydrich and Adolf Eichmann. But no man can begin to imagine the additional weight of those secret and personal sins which history cannot chronicle. All of it fell on Him. The bloody sweat burst from His pores, and God sent the Angel of the Agony to strengthen Him.

From the black wadi came the scrape of many feet on the rocks, the clank and clash of arms, the gleam of lanterns. Against eleven exhausted, bewildered men armed with exactly two swords-and the Son of God-came marching a force of several hundred including temple guards armed with swords and clubs and led by members of the Sanhedrin, and more than 100 fully armed Roman soldiers commanded by no less a personage than the officer in charge of the Jerusalem garrison.

Just ahead of them was Judas Iscariot. He went up to Jesus and kissed Him. It was the identifying signal to the captors.

Jesus defied the Sanhedrin's men momentarily, as He had done before when physically threatened, by a look which caused them to fall to the ground, but only long enough to identify Himself to them. Then he submitted: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Peter swung a sword wildly, striking off the ear of the high priest's servant Malchus; Jesus healed Malchus by a touch. (History tells us no more of Malchus, but one wonders about him. Was he so blinded by hate that even the totally unmerited blessing of Jesus' last healing miracle failed to impress him? Did he remember in the future, as he touched his restored ear, the Per-

son who had healed it? Did he become, at length, a Christian? It is possible, perhaps even likely.)

The Apostles fled. Jesus was hustled out of the deep dark valley and up into the looming city to confront the High Priest who ruled in His Father's name. Annas and Caiaphas and their adherents in the Sanhedrin had long since resolved on Jesus'

Peter did not go to the Mount of Golgotha with John, because he was ashamed to face the beautiful and stricken innocence of the Blessed Mother whose Son he had denied. But he loved Jesus, now in his remorse more than ever; and it is inconceivable that he could have torn himself away from the knowledge of what was happening to Him.

death. But for them to put a man to death required confirmation of the sentence by the Roman governor, the Procurator Pontius Pilate, a man who detested them-and, indeed, all Jews and their religion.

He was quite likely to refuse to endorse their death sentence on a purely religious charge. But Pilate was very much on his

guard against agitators claiming to be the Messiah the Jews were expecting to bring them world-wide political power. To accuse Jesus to Pilate as such an agitator was a most promising course of action for the Sanhedrin. At the same time they must find at least some appearance of legal justification for what they were doing; as the world knows, the Pharisees set great store by appearances.

Consequently, it is the trial before the Sanhedrin-probably held in the last hours of the night, around three or four o'clock in the morning. It was at first attempted to convict Jesus by perjured testimony. When this failed because the perjurers did not agree, Caiaphas himself took charge. Face to face with Jesus, he hurled the decisive question, intended to condemn the accused simultaneously in Jewish and Roman eyes, so put that Jesus, Who had been almost completely silent up to that point, could not fail to answer in loyalty to His Father:

"I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus answered: "I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

As previously explained, despite some minor differences of detail each of the four gospels makes it unmistakably clear that Jesus was condemned to death by the supreme council of Judaism for claiming Divinity for Himself. He had said the same publicly, and been threatened with death for it, at the Feast of Tabernacles six months before and at the Feast of Dedication three months before. Now the Sanhedrin condemned Him with a unanimous shout, and the Temple guards and servants who had been holding Him in custody began to beat Him.

Meanwhile Peter and another apostle, probably John, had managed to make their way into the courtyard of Caiaphas' palatial residence where the Sanhedrin was meeting. They must have heard the shouts of condemnation and abuse, perhaps the

A post mortem on the death of God



The surgeon acknowledged that other physicians and historians have suggested that Jesus might have died from asphyxiation because breathing was so difficult on the cross. Others say perhaps he had a heart attack after the hours of physical exertion and trauma.

Dr Timothy Millea, an orthopaedic surgeon, gives a presentation titled "The Passion and Crucifixion: A Medical Perspective."

PHOTO: CNS/TOM DERMODY, THE CATHOLIC POST

Jesus likely died from excessive blood loss, a Catholic surgeon said during a 2019 talk that examined the 18 hours of Christ's passion and crucifixion from a medical perspective.

"Christ emptied himself," Dr Timothy Millea told about 100 people at his home parish of St Paul the Apostle in Davenport, Iowa, last Easter. "As a surgeon, two words that make our hair stand on end are 'bleeding out,'" he said. "If you can't stop it, you can't keep that patient alive."

Millea, an orthopaedic surgeon, is president of a local chapter of the Catholic Medical Association.

He said an adult male has about 5.7 litres of blood and that the loss of 40 per cent of that blood can lead to hypovolemic shock, a life-threatening condition. Jesus likely surpassed that threshold after repeated beatings through the night, an intense scourging at the hands of Roman soldiers that included wearing a crown of thorns and having nails driven through his upper wrists and feet.

"Some people ask, did Jesus really die of physical factors, or did he - as God - say, 'OK, my work is done,'" said Millea. After taking his audience hour-by-hour through Jesus' physical and emotional suffering from the Agony in the Garden to his death on the cross, Millea countered that "how he lived this long is one of the biggest divine mysteries."

He said his interest in researching this topic began in 1986 when he read an article "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ" in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. His subsequent research showed that Jesus' medical condition has been discussed since the 16th century.

Among the latest sources he quoted was the 2014 book *A Doctor at Calvary: The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ* by Dr Pierre Barbet. Millea also referenced modern research on the Shroud of Turin, believed by many to be Jesus' burial cloth.

For example, he said the man whose image is seen on the shroud was 5 feet 10 inches tall (178 centimetres) and weighed about 80 kg. While tradition says Jesus was whipped 39 times in his scourging, nearly 400 wound marks are counted on the shroud and "every one of them (was) bleeding" on the day of his death.

While he promised his talk would not be "like watching Mel Gibson's movie again" - a reference to the graphic depictions of Jesus' sufferings in the 2004 biblical drama *The Passion of the Christ* - there came a time in his description of the crucifixion when he paused and asked his audience to "bear with me, we're going to get through this. I don't like this part, either, but it's pretty important."

He described Jesus' passion and death as "a tragic story, a horrible story, a painful story," but ended his presentation by showing an image of the resurrected Christ on the

screen to illustrate that "this story doesn't end with where we finish tonight."

The surgeon acknowledged that other physicians and historians have suggested that Jesus might have died from asphyxiation because breathing was so difficult on the cross. Others say perhaps he had a heart attack after the hours of physical exertion and trauma.

But Millea feels the blood loss theory is not only medically likely but it also corresponds with the theological teachings of atoning sacrifice, with Jesus taking the place of the slaughtered lambs of the Old Testament. Sacrificed animals also died from blood loss.

"Jesus was literally the sacrificial lamb," he said.

Other medical and historical evidence the surgeon cited included:

- A rare medical condition that matches the description in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus' sweat during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane "became like drops of blood." The condition, called hematohidrosis, causes blood to be released through the skin and "is almost always associated with intense emotion or physically challenging episodes."
- The whip used in the scourging was likely a flagrum, with leather cords 2 feet long that contained metal objects, glass and lead balls. "It was a very diabolically effective means of harming the tissues down to muscle depth," said Millea.
- The crown of thorns likely more resembled a helmet than the laurel wreath depicted in art. "Every time the soldiers hit the thorns, they impaled in his scalp," said Millea. "If you've ever had a cut on your scalp, you know it bleeds like crazy."
- Jesus probably only carried the horizontal beam of the cross, because both beams would have weighed 300 pounds. "You've got a 175-pound man who has been beaten, he's bleeding, he hasn't eaten or slept or had anything to drink, and he's going to carry 100 pounds for 600 yards. He fell three times? It's a miracle he didn't fall more often."
- The nails in Jesus' hands likely would not have been in the palms, which could not have held his weight. There is a space in the upper wrist where ligaments are strong. "The problem, for those of you who have had carpal tunnel problems, is that the median nerve travels through there," said Millea, meaning the pain would have been intense.

Millea went through Jesus' last seven recorded phrases - including "I thirst" and "It is finished" - which he said were necessarily short because of the difficulty in breathing that Jesus was experiencing.

He said the crucifixion was a public spectacle and Jesus' followers most likely thought it was the worst thing that could have happened not knowing that it would later prove to "be the best thing that ever happened."

- CNS

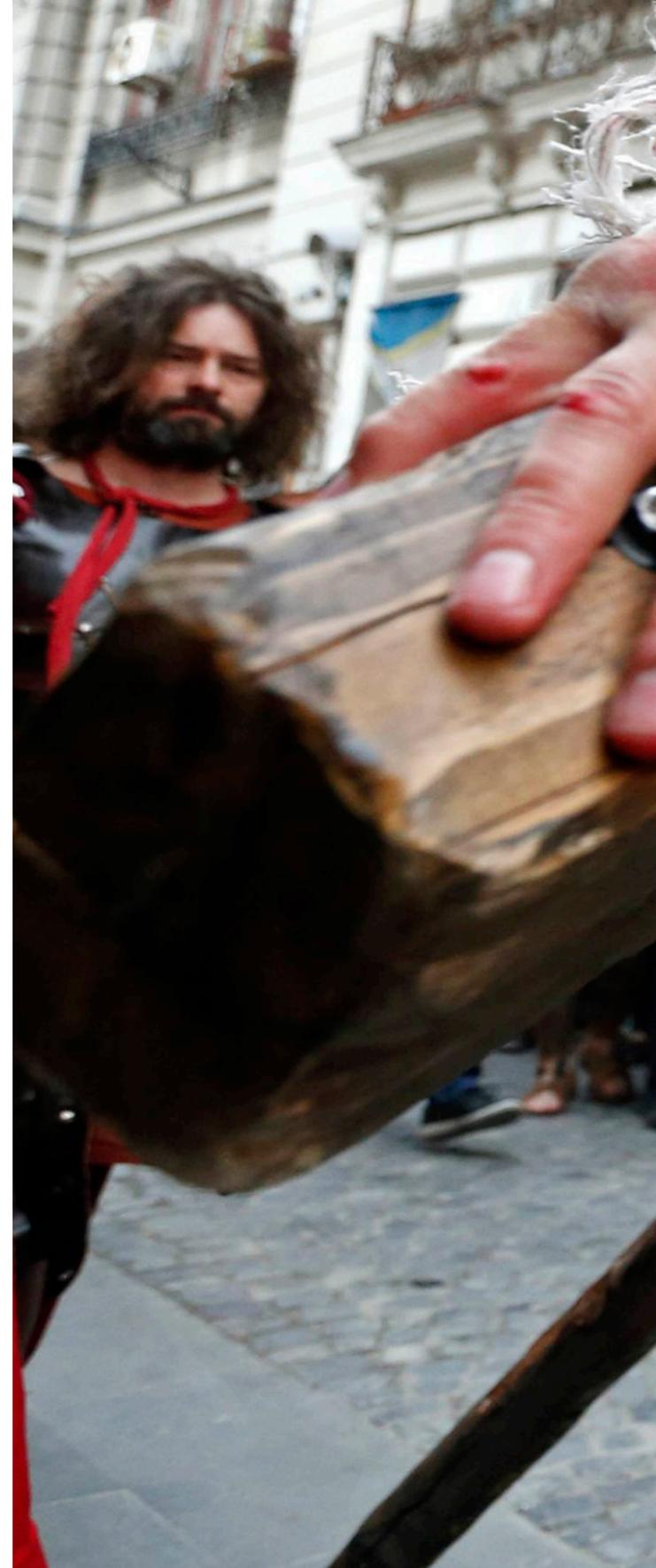
sickening crack and thud of the blows falling on Jesus' body. Suspicious looks and questions had already been directed at Peter, a big man with a marked Galilean accent who found it hard to hide. Up to this point Peter may well have been expecting some new exertion of Christ's miraculous power.

But as the curses and blows began falling unrestrained, he must have realised that no such powers would now be used. As at the time of Christ's arrest when he had fled with the other Apostles, fear overwhelmed Peter; but from the enclosed courtyard it was not easy to flee. Then one of the men who had been with the arresting party in the Garden of Gethsemane, a relative of Malchus, suddenly realised that the burly man near the fire was the man who had swung the sword in defence of Jesus.

"Did I not see you in the garden with him?" he cried; and Peter was challenged on all sides as a follower of the condemned man. He was literally in the enemy's camp, and it seemed that his Lord had surrendered. So he began to curse and swear that he did not even know Christ

At that moment, in the half-light of earliest dawn, the long crow of a rooster rang out; and Christ appeared in the clutches of His captors and looked across the courtyard at Peter, who broke down in bitter weeping. **As William Thomas Walsh memorably comments:**

Years later, when men saw deep furrows on his cheeks, they said they had been worn by the tears he had never ceased to shed for that moment. Those tears themselves were evidence that he had not lost the faith which Jesus Himself had promised at the supper to pray for. When divine grace had been withdrawn to let him be humbled for his rash presumption and to teach him many lessons for the future, he had yielded, under a sudden and irresistible temptation, to a fear that he might have to share the suffering accepted by his Lord. Cowardice made him lie and curse. And with those falsehoods and imprecations already smothered by sobs of remorse, he stumbled out of the



court into the street and was swallowed up by the vast obscurity of that hellish night.

Where he went or what he did no one has ever known. For some 48 hours or more he disappears from the history of the Passion. . .

He did not go to the Mount of Golgotha with John, because he was ashamed to face the beautiful and stricken innocence of the Blessed Mother whose Son he had denied. But he loved Jesus, now in his remorse more than ever; and it is inconceivable that he could have torn himself away from the knowledge of what was happening to Him. The chances are that when the cold wind failed, and a brazen dawn brought back the parched breath of the Dead Sea and the desert to Jerusalem, Peter was somewhere at the edge of the crowd that saw the trial before Pilate in front of the Citadel Antonia.

As for Judas Iscariot, he felt remorse as terrible, but in the unfathomable mystery of iniquity, no genuine repentance and no hope for forgiveness. He hanged himself. His shattered body was buried close by Tophet, in the valley of Gehenna, where Satan's own had made Israelite children into burnt offerings in the Prophet Jeremiah's time.

In his hall of judgment, the Praetorium, Pontius Pilate commenced the day's business, as was customary among Romans and Greeks, at sunrise.

It was, in all probability, April 7, 30 A.D. There was nothing in the least distinguished about Pontius Pilate. He was a very ordinary Roman official-arrogant, narrow minded, unimaginative, affecting a rough "practical" scepticism, yet still possessing both in himself and as a living tradition of government some of that sense of natural justice and law that had brought the Roman peace to the Western world. There is no doubt that, left to himself, Pilate would have acquitted Jesus immediately and unreservedly. He recognised His innocence and the malice of His accusers. The Sanhedrin could put various kinds of pressures on him, and in the course of that murderous morning they tried them all; but none succeeded until the last one, because all that was good in Pontius Pilate revolted against what they wanted him to do. In one dialogue Jesus explicitly told His executioner that his was far from the greatest sin in this matter.

Hoping to appeal to the pity of the crowd that was clamouring for Jesus' death by giving Him a lesser though severe punishment, Pilate at length ordered Him scourged with some sixty lashes of a bone-studded whip, after which his soldiers "crowned" Jesus with a crude cap of thorns pressed against His head by a circlet of rushes, inflicting approximately 20 bloody lacerations on His scalp. Pilate then showed Him to the crowd, saying: "Behold the man!" But there was no pity in the crowd

that morning, at least in any who dared to speak. The spectacle of Jesus' whip and thorn wounds may well have further convinced some who had acclaimed Him just five days before on Palm Sunday that He could not be the Messiah-because He was obviously not the kind of Messiah they were expecting-and so must be an impostor deserving death.

Still Pilate held out against the Sanhedrin and the mob. He only gave way when their spokesmen finally invoked the prospect of the wrath of Tiberius - Tiberius the world's ruler and victim, so terribly alone on Capri with his accumulated hatreds and desires for vengeance, Tiberius whom all the world feared because so much of the world had wronged him, Tiberius who so desperately needed the love of Christ Whom he was never to know on this earth, Who was killed in his name: Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar." When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, and in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour [close to noon]. He said to the Jews, "Behold your king!" They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!"

Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

Crucifixion was the most terrible death inflicted in the ancient world-the most painful and the most degrading. It was a "development" of impalement; there is reason to believe that it was originally invented by those masters of satanic cruelty, the Phoenicians and their descendants the Carthaginians.

Posts were set up at the place of execution and the victim, stripped naked, was forced to carry a hundred-pound beam to that place, where he was put

on his back and his wrists were nailed to the beam. There was a small space where a nail could easily be driven through a hollow just back of the heel of the hand, so that it would support much of the weight of a hanging body-but on its way through this space the nail pierced a major nerve, causing very intense pain. The victim was then "lifted up" and the beam attached as a crossbar to the post, into which his feet were nailed by a single nail driven either through the middle of both feet or through the heels. The weight of the lower body rested either on a wooden projection called a *sedile* or simply upon-the ankle-bones above the ail in the feet. If there was a *sedile* the victim lived considerably longer, for the immediate cause of death in crucifixion was asphyxiation; after a time breathing was only possible by raising the body to take some of the weight off the arms, and this could be done for a longer time on an external support than on the an-

There is no doubt that, left to himself, Pilate would have acquitted Jesus immediately and unreservedly. He recognised His innocence and the malice of His accusers.

kle-bones of nailed feet. In either case, each raising of the body produced great pain in the extremities, and each sagging of the body great pain in the chest. The torture was constant. Most crucified men took a full day to die. Death could be hastened by breaking their legs, causing almost immediate asphyxiation.

The Holy Shroud of Turin gives clear proof that all these tortures were endured by Jesus Christ-and He had no *sedile*. In 1968, for the first time, the skeleton of a man who had been crucified, with the nails still in his feet, was found just outside Jerusalem, confirming in many respects the data from the Shroud on the manner of crucifixion and the place of the wounds inflicted.

Upon "The Pavement" outside the Antonia fortress Jesus, bloody from the scourging, His face ravaged by blows from a two-inch cudgel which had broken His nose and battered His eyebrows and cheeks, staggered under the weight of the beam of His Cross as He set out surrounded by a troop of Roman soldiers under a centurion, and followed by the bloodthirsty crowd.

The destination was Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, just outside the city walls perhaps a thousand yard's from the Antonia. The Via Dolorosa led downward into the Tyropoeon valley, then upward out of it; toward the end, therefore, Jesus had to climb uphill under the weight of the beam bearing down upon shoulders that had been scourged after having first sweated blood. He could not do it; He fell.

We know from the Shroud as well as from the gospels that He fell, adding wounds on His knees to all His other wounds.

The procession would now have been approaching a gate in the walls; the centurion in charge saw a man named Simon, originally from the African city of Cyrene, coming in from work in the fields. The centurion requisitioned Simon to carry Jesus' cross. "Take up your cross and follow me!" Jesus had told His disciples; and here was a man to do exactly that, though under duress. We are not told that a single word was exchanged between Jesus and Simon of Cyrene; but later Scriptural references make it almost certain that Simon of Cyrene and his sons, most fittingly, became Christians.

At Golgotha the nails were driven through flesh into the



Actors take part in a re-enactment of the Way of the Cross which commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus during the Orthodox Holy Week celebrations in Bucharest in 2019. PHOTO: CNS/BOGDAN CRISTEL, REUTERS

On each side of Him hung a robber. One reviled Him; the other adored Him. Jesus canonised the penitent thief from the Cross: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

wood of the crosses, and the condemned men were raised up in agony for their long dying. Jesus said: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

On each side of Him hung a robber. One reviled Him; the other adored Him. Jesus canonised the penitent thief from the Cross: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

But there were others, dearest of all to Him, who yet adored, whom He could see even with His dimming human vision at the foot of the Cross: His mother, who now reappears in the gospels for the first time since Cana and Nazareth; her sister-in-law Mary; Mary Magdalen; and St John, the only one of the Twelve to stand by him at the end. “Woman, behold thy son,” said Jesus to Mary of John and all the faithful to the end of time; and “Behold thy mother” to John and all the faithful to the end of time, of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Then there burst from Him the terrible cry: Eloi, “Eloi, lama sabachthani “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” G. K. Chesterton says of this moment:

There were solitudes beyond where none shall follow. There were secrets in the in most and invisible part of that drama that have no symbol in speech; or in any severance of a man from men. Nor is it easy for any words less stark and single-minded than those of the naked narrative even to hint at the horror of exaltation that lifted itself above the hill. Endless expositions have not come to the end of it, or even to the beginning. And if there be any sound that can produce a silence, we may surely be silent about the end and the extremity; when a cry was driven out of that darkness in words dreadfully distinct and dreadfully unin-

telligible, which man shall never understand in all the eternity they have purchased for him; and for one annihilating instant an abyss that is not for our thoughts had opened even in the unity of the absolute; and God had been forsaken of God.

He thirsted, and was given vinegar to drink. The sky had grown strangely dark. Jesus’ work was done. He, God and man, had suffered the utmost agony possible to man, both mental and physical; from the beginning of His prayer in Gethsemane to the consummation on Golgotha, He had borne and expiated the sins of men and reconciled the human race with its Creator. Theologians may debate how and why; but the fact is that this is what He did. Isaiah had predicted it in his fifty-third chapter, and David in the Twenty-Second Psalm; He Himself, in the course of His teaching and ministry, had predicted and explained it. The gospels and the Shroud tell us how much He suffered; the gospels and the Shroud then provide the final confirmation of His Godhead through their evidence for His Resurrection.

“It is finished . . . Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

The ground shivered. Across the valley and beyond the wall from Golgotha, the lintel of the great double-winged entrance to the sanctuary or “Holy Place” of the Temple, where stood the altar for incense, the table for the Showbread, and the seven-branched gold candelabrum (the menorah) facing the Holy of Holies, cracked down the middle. The huge ornate curtain hanging from it—a Babylonian carpet in white, purple, blue, and red, 82 feet by 24—tore in two. A brass gate of the inner Temple building that normally required twenty men to move it, swung open by itself. The central light of the great candelabrum went out. Much of this information comes to us from Jewish, not Christian sources (Josephus and the Talmud), substantially and very significantly supplementing the brief reference to the rend-

ing of the Temple curtain in the gospels. The Talmud even dates the strange opening of the brass gate specifically to the year 30 A.D.

Jesus was dead. The mocking crowd had fallen silent at the frightening phenomena in the sky and earth. They began to fear that a great sin had been committed, and “returned home beating their breasts.” And the Roman centurion who had ordered the nails driven into the flesh of Jesus and had commanded His raising up on the Cross, exclaimed: “Truly this was the Son of God!”

Perhaps emboldened by the natural prodigies and this reaction among the people, the two members of the Sanhedrin who are known to have been supporters of Jesus—Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus now stepped forward to see that at least He received an honourable burial. Joseph had a new tomb, never yet used, just 22 yards from Golgotha. He obtained Pilate’s permission to bury Christ there.

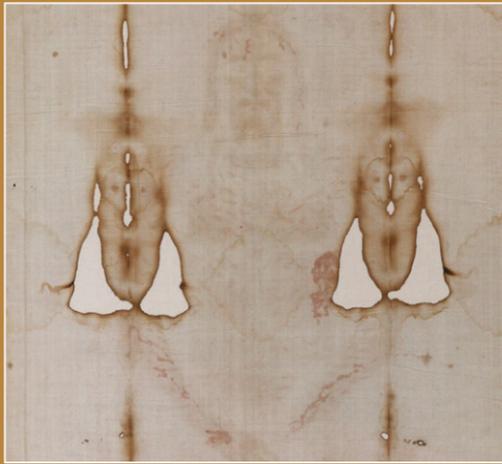
Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so soon; but His death was soon confirmed. One of the troop of Roman soldiers assigned the grisly duty of carrying out crucifixions, ordered to break the legs of the men crucified that day so that they would die more quickly and therefore might be taken down from their crosses before sunset when Pass-over began, found Jesus apparently already dead.

Consequently the soldier did not break His legs; but he made sure of His death by a lance thrust straight into His heart. It left a gaping wound the size of a man’s hand.

We may be sure that the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other women who had been at the foot of the Cross never left His Body for a moment until It was laid in the tomb. It was carried the short distance from Golgotha to the tomb probably by five bearers, two at the ends of the terrible crossbeam to which His

Jesus was dead. And the Roman centurion who had ordered the nails driven into the flesh of Jesus and had commanded His raising up on the Cross, exclaimed: “Truly this was the Son of God!”

Shroud's physics pose a new mystery



The Shroud of Turin is displayed in the Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Turin. PHOTO: CNS/PAUL HARING

In 2005 a world-renowned liturgical artist who was also a theoretical physicist earned accolades for her breakthrough theory "opening new doors of research" at the International Shroud of Turin Conference held that year.

The conference drew 160 scientists, artists and physicians from around the world to share the latest research on the shroud, believed by many to portray a full-length image of the crucified Christ.

At the conference, Isabel Piczek (who passed away in 2016) said she believed the image was left on the shroud at the moment of Christ's resurrection.

Using a statue she created as a visual aid that measures one-third the actual size of the man depicted on the shroud, Piczek presented her explanation of the image's "concealed bas-relief effect." She theorised that the image of the shroud was transported onto a straight and taut linen above and below the man's hovering body.

"One of the puzzling mysteries of the shroud is that the image transported to an absolutely straight, taut surface is not flat. It is semi-three-dimensional, very much the same as a bas-relief is in art," explained Piczek. "In art, the bas-relief image always curves out of a straight background that radically eliminates the rest of the space behind the bas-relief."

Refuting theories that the figure on the shroud was painted, Piczek said the image's strong foreshortening of the body combined with the lack of a continuous film of a paint medium on the cloth's surface are "decisive arguments" that the shroud is not a painting.

According to Piczek, the foreshortening of the legs, reflecting the reclined figure's elevated knees, excludes the possibility of a contact image of any kind.

"An unknown system obeying laws different from optics created the image with strangely similar visual results," she said.

Piczek said she arrived at her theory during the creation of the shroud statue a month before.

"A heretofore unknown interface acted as an event horizon," explained Piczek. "The straight, taut linen of the shroud simply was forced to parallel the shape of this powerful interface. The projection, an action at a distance, happens from the surface and limit of this, taking with itself the bas-relief image of the upper and, separately, the underside of the body."

Piczek, who held degrees in art and particle physics, said her new theory of how the image appeared warranted greater investigation of the nonimage area of the shroud. Such research could yield scientific clues to the "unknown information field" that caused the projection.

"The image of the shroud and its riddle cannot be solved through the science of the past," she said.

Concurring with French physicist and shroud researcher William Wolkowski, Piczek said that the transdisciplinary study of the shroud could give birth to a new scientific age. "The shroud shows the future of science," she said.

During the conference, botany expert Alan Whanger indicated that pollen and flowers on the shroud reveal plants native to Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. Other conference presenters discussed their analysis of the shroud's human bloodstains as well as biblical references to the shroud and an explanation of the cloth's "lost years" before it resurfaced in France in the 13th century.

- CNS



An example of a crown of thorns is seen in an exhibit on the Shroud of Turin at Regina Apostolorum University in Rome. Although the Shroud of Turin has been studied from virtually every scientific angle, no one has been able to fully explain how the image was transferred to the linen cloth. PHOTO CNS/PAUL HARING

hands were still nailed, two supporting the middle of His body with a sheet, and the fifth supporting His right heel. In the tomb His hands were at last withdrawn from the beam, the blood-soaked carrying sheet was discarded, and His body was laid on a linen shroud that Joseph of Arimathea had just bought. His hands and feet were bound (a necessity because the tetanic contraction of muscles in those who died by crucifixion would otherwise have caused them to return to the position of the torture) and His chin was supported by small linen bands.

The Sabbath was very close now. There was not time to wash or properly to anoint the Body. The hundred pounds of spices that Nicodemus had bought were quickly packed tight around It to help preserve and freshen It despite the five great wounds and the many open lacerations from which some of His Precious Blood still seeped. The sun had set; in a moment the appearance of the first three stars would signal the beginning of the Passover Sabbath. The massive blocking stone was rolled in front of the entrance to the tomb. Under the Law, nothing more could be done until Sunday.

Wherever Jesus went that night, it was beyond the bounds of history and of the world. The early Christians firmly believed that as one dead He had joined all the other dead, from Adam to Gilgamesh to the Good Thief, in the place of waiting, the Limbo of Hell, and that night brought forth the just to be with Him. His recorded words from the Cross to the Good Thief provide strong evidence that something of this kind did happen.

Meanwhile His murderers were uneasy. Whatever their public demeanour, they had hardly gone unaffected by what had happened in their precious Temple that afternoon. Very likely they began to remember, and at last to understand more truly, His words: "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

They dared not risk any possibility that the people might come to believe that such a thing had occurred. How easy it would be for His disciples to steal His body and proclaim a resurrection, especially since, in the tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea, It was now directly under their control! So on the Sabbath day the spokesman of the Sanhedrin went to Pilate and obtained a guard of Roman soldiers for the tomb. They went with this guard to the tomb and sealed it, in such a way that any opening would leave clear marks.

Did they look inside before the sealing? Almost certainly they did, though we have no specific testimony to the fact, because they would have felt it necessary to determine that no body-stealing had yet taken place. But there lay Jesus, silent, motionless, untouched, in His Shroud. It seemed death ruled Him, as it had ruled every man since Adam.

The Sabbath ended, the initial Passover celebration completed, and the second night fell upon the Holy Sepulchre. It was Sunday, April 9, 30 A.D., the 16th day of the month Nisan.

Guard detachments of Roman soldiers, such as the one on duty at Jesus' tomb, usually consisted of sixteen men, with four on watch at all times. Sleeping on watch was punishable by death. These were still the same kind of soldiers who had conquered most of the known world for Rome. To imagine all sixteen of them asleep, on duty only six hundred yards from Pilate's praetorium, simply beggars the imagination-however dull and unimportant their curious duty that night may have initially

seemed to them. At the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, Peter and James and John had seen Jesus radiating light from His body and clothes, in a manner outside all earthly experience. The evidence of the Holy Shroud of Turin, analysed scientifically by micro-densitometer, VP-8 image analyser, spectroscope, and other modern scientific instruments and methods, suggests that the extraordinary impressions upon its cloth could only have been formed by a brief scorching flash at a level of energy approaching the thermonuclear.

Let there be light . . ."

Christ had slain death, the last enemy. He had come back from the fathomless abyss from which no man had ever emerged.

The Roman guard lay huddled, prostrate. An angel wreathed in lightnings rolled back the stone at the entrance of the tomb. Before such power, the shields and swords that had won the Western world were toys. When at last the soldiers could struggle to their feet, they fled.

Earliest dawn glimmered in the eastern sky beyond the pinnacle of the Temple. The women who had been at the foot of the Cross were hastening to complete the work upon the Body of their Lord that the coming of the Sabbath Friday evening had interrupted the washing and anointing. Some went to buy spices and perfumes. One ran on ahead, to come back just as quickly as she could to all that remained of her beloved Master. It was Mary Magdalen.

But one was not there at all: the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. As His mother, Mary loved Jesus as no other human being has ever

loved or could ever love Him. Is it conceivable that she would have left others to attend Him in the tomb, if like them she believed Him to be still there? Here is the best evidence for the truth of the ancient Christian tradition that it was to His mother that Christ first appeared after His Resurrection. The Blessed Virgin Mary did not go to the tomb on Easter morning because she knew that her Son had already left it.

Reaching the tomb first, Mary Magdalen found it empty. She ran back to tell Peter and John. They ran at top speed to the tomb, John outrunning Peter because he was much younger and lighter; but at the tomb John waited for Peter, so that they went inside together. They saw, lying on the rock within, the linen bands which had been round Jesus' wrists, ankles and chin, and one burial cloth, which may well have been the Shroud itself, "rolled up in a place by itself."

No grave robbers or body stealers would have done this; they would have taken the Body as it was, in the shroud. John tells us that after beholding the burial linens he "saw and believed." In light of all that we now know about the Holy Shroud, it seems very likely that John saw immediately the unique picture of Jesus on the cloth which, along with its position, convinced him that a super natural event had taken place, that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead as He had predicted, though the Apostles even John had not until then understood just what His prediction really meant.

Jesus had risen in His glorified body, which could pass through walls, move from place to place without traversing space as we know it, and was not always immediately recognizable even to those who had known Him best During that Easter

They saw, lying on the rock within, the linen bands which had been round Jesus' wrists, ankles and chin, and one burial cloth, which may well have been the Shroud itself, "rolled up in a place by itself."



Christians kneel and pray at the Stone of Unction, or Stone of Anointing, in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem's Old City. The area represents where the body of Jesus was prepared for burial after the crucifixion. PHOTOS: CNS/DEBBIE HILL

day He appeared to the ineffably loving Mary Magdalen, to the other women who came a little later to the empty tomb, to Peter alone, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and to all the eleven Apostles except Thomas, gathered in the Cenacle. He took care to impress upon them that He was really, physically present that it was in His own body, flesh and blood, that He stood before them, while also emphasising that He would soon ascend to His Father after a last brief sojourn with them in Galilee. Also that morning, Annas and Caiaphas took the testimony of the bewildered guards, and the Sanhedrin (or its leaders) met to consider what to do. Reason gave them only two choices: to believe the story of the guards, or to disbelieve it. If they believed the guards, they had no rational alternative to admitting that Jesus had risen from the dead by Divine power, thereby giving final proof of truth of His claim to be God, for making which they had killed Him.

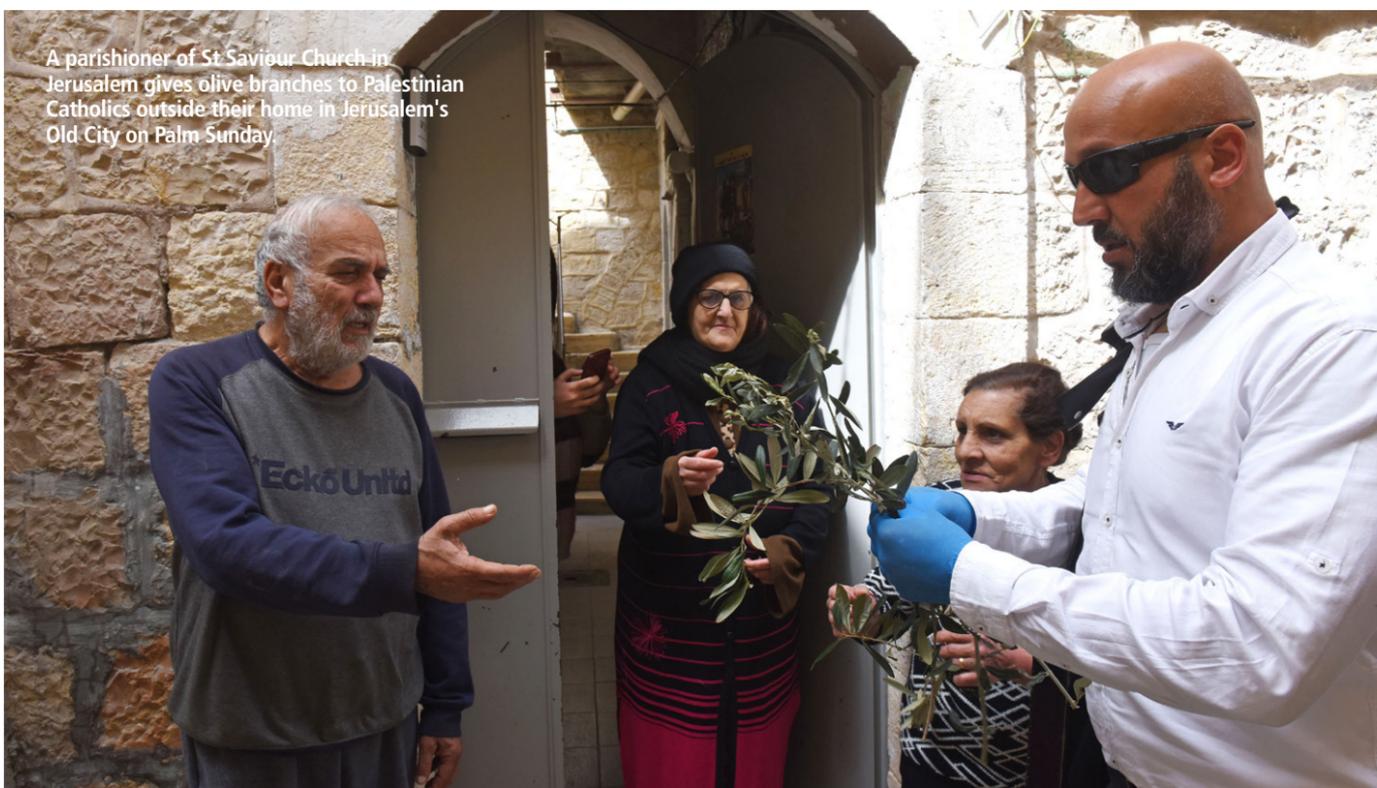
If they disbelieved the guards, then their obvious course was to denounce them to Pilate and arrest the Apostles for stealing Jesus' body either with the complicity of the guards or because of their negligence. Otherwise the very claim of a resurrection which the leaders of the Sanhedrin had posted the guard to prevent, could be very convincingly made. But instead of doing this, Annas and Caiaphas and their immediate associates bribed the guards to say that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body while they slept and promised to protect them from Pilate. The absurdity of such an explanation for what had happened is so patent St Augustine put it best: "How is this? Do you call upon witnesses who were asleep?" - that it speaks volumes that this was the best story these highly intelligent men could devise.

Evidently it was the only story that offered any hope of convincing at least some of the people of a natural explanation for what had happened to the body of Jesus, while preventing any close questioning of the guards that could cause them to tell more people what they had actually seen—a telling that the leaders of the Sanhedrin had evidently concluded was, and would be very persuasive. The whole proceeding casts grave doubt on the sincerity of Annas and Caiaphas, at least It strongly suggests that they knew the guards were telling the truth and that Jesus had risen from the dead by His own power, yet still maintained their adamant refusal to believe in Him.

Among the Apostles, only Thomas had not yet seen the Risen Jesus. Thomas was another Peter, or even more so, in his stubbornly literal mind and outlook. He insisted that he would never believe what the others were telling him about the Resurrection unless and until he not only saw but touched the flesh of the Risen Lord and the marks of His wounds. Such truculent scepticism would have seriously endangered many souls; therefore Christ Said to him, after offering the proof he demanded: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!"

But Thomas had been made for a mission, and for that mission the very qualities he here displayed in an unlovely manner would, when perfected by grace, be indispensable.

The 40 days from Resurrection to Ascension were, above all, the preparation for the Church and its universal mission. Before the followers of Christ could understand the Church and its mission, they must know its Founder in His fullness, understand the Redemption He had wrought, humble themselves



A parishioner of St Saviour Church in Jerusalem gives olive branches to Palestinian Catholics outside their home in Jerusalem's Old City on Palm Sunday.

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

before the Victor over death. All this they achieved, as their preaching on and soon after Pentecost, reported in the Book of Acts, makes very clear. Every one of the eleven had fallen in the hour of trial, except John, and even he had fled from Gethsemane; but now they were restored, Peter above all as he made his humble threefold confession of love at the Mensa Christi rock on the beautiful, quiet little bay of Tabgha of the Sea of Galilee, atoning for his threefold denial of Christ in the courtyard of the high priest Peter's primacy was restored, his commission as head of the Church given by Christ, to continue with God's guarantee of unflinching constancy until the hour of his martyrdom: "Feed my lambs ... Feed my sheep ... Follow me."

Somewhere, during this period, the Risen Jesus appeared to no less than 500 of His followers gathered together. It could have been in Galilee, where His mission had begun,

or in Jerusalem where it ended. Wherever it was, the 500 were made sharers in the cosmic mission which Jesus most explicitly proclaimed to the Eleven on a mountain in Galilee: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

For two thousand years the Word had been confined to the Chosen People. Now it was to go out to all the world.

In His last hour on earth with the Apostles, in response to a thoughtless and backsliding question about when He was going to "restore the kingdom to Israel," Jesus repeated the same universal theme:

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

Then He took them out of Jerusalem and up the Mount of Olives, looking from its highest point across on the one hand to the Holy City where He had died and conquered death forever, and on the other hand to Bethany where He had loved and been loved so much. He raised His arms in blessing, was lifted up into a cloud, and returned to his Father.

From The Founding of Christendom, by Warren Carroll, Christendom Press 1985

The Resurrection, by Cecco del Caravaggio, commissioned in 1619 by Piero Guicciardini, the Tuscan ambassador to Rome.
PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA

