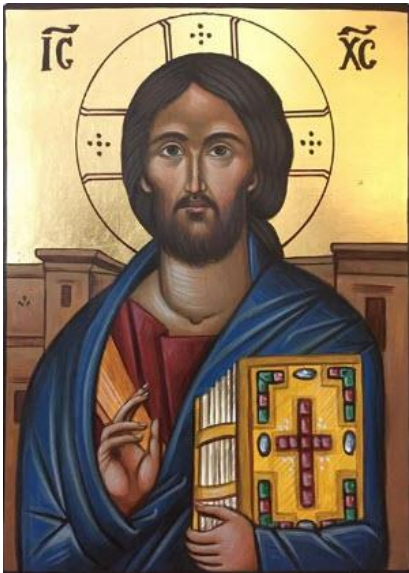

INNOCENCE & JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

A personal reflection on the Gospel of Luke Chapters 22 - 24

by Fr. Gerry Hefferan

INNOCENCE & JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



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This reflection on Luke Chapters 22-24 is offered after listening to some friends, who are seeking to approach the Bible from the perspective of innocence, abuse, betrayal and hope.

As survivors they had not committed any wrong.

They were innocent when they were abused as children and vulnerable adults.

The perpetrators sinned against them and against God.

[How do the Scriptures speak to their deep pain and their innocence?](#)

Some survivors have found welcoming communities and local church healing processes helpful.

Some survivors have given up on Church.

Some survivors have been spiritually devastated by church processes that did not believe their story and did not believe their innocence.

Having relived the intensity of their pain and memory and not being believed.

Being abused all over again by a church process.

By the denial, image protection and insensitivity of church officials.

And devastated once more when the Church

- Did not respond pastorally to them, to their families, and to their friends
- And did not open up the incredible depth of the Bible to them spiritually thus diminishing the power of the written Word.

St Paul reflects on the persecution and hard times that he faced as he writes in Galatians 6:14 of

*'the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,
by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.'*

Such a striking statement. Not only persecuted but also crucified.

Luke's Gospel in particular speaks of the innocence of Jesus in his persecution by religious and civil authorities and by two of his friends.

One trusted friend betrayed him. Another friend denied knowing him.

Let us explore Luke's account firstly of the suffering and death of Jesus from Luke 22:14 to 23:56.

THE EUCHARIST

We begin at the Last Supper Luke 22:14-23.

Jesus is there with his friends. Jesus gifts himself to them in bread and wine.

Such a sacred and central moment in their spiritual life and in our spirituality today.

Then Jesus says,

'But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table.'

Judas is not a stranger, he is inside the group.

He betrays Jesus and he betrays the disciples from within the group.

At this very sacred time of Jesus giving himself in Eucharist, Judas is present in the room.

To be betrayed by someone in your hour of need. A betrayal of trust.

A betrayal of the mission of Jesus. A betrayal of the love that Jesus had for him.

Jesus does not take this lightly. He says,

'woe to that one by whom he is betrayed.'

Jesus continues by addressing a question of culture. Who is the greatest?

Jesus sets the example himself,

'But I am among you as one who serves.'

This reminds the People of God today, of the **cultural change** needed in the Church.

Called to be a church of Service and genuine Love.

Not privilege. Not preserving its image. Not covering up.

The Gospel does not cover up the role of Judas.

The first Eucharist, the first Mass, the Lord's Supper was also an experience of the pain of Jesus, with Judas betraying him.

In our pain, frustration, betrayal, confusion and love,
The People of God come before Jesus in the Eucharist.

We come before Jesus in his innocence. We come before Jesus who loves us and saves us.

Grieving can drain people physically and emotionally.

Jesus goes to pray on the Mount of Olives, as is his custom. The disciples follow him.

They fall asleep while Jesus is praying nearby.

'When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples, and found them sleeping because of grief.'

DENIAL

The Gospel does not cover up the denials by Peter.

Peter, his loyal friend, denies him. He does follow Jesus after his arrest, but at a distance.

To the servant girl in the courtyard he says,

'Woman, I do not know him.'

A little later someone identifies Peter as one of them and Peter replies,

'Man, I am not.'

About an hour later, another identifies Peter because he is obviously a Galilean.

Peter replies,

'Man, I do not know what you are talking about'

Then the cock crows and Jesus turned and looked at Peter.

We try to imagine the look of Jesus.

Jesus does not call out to Peter and endanger his life. He looks at him.

And Peter remembers how Jesus had previously predicted that Peter would deny him.

There are no secrets before God. Jesus is not fooled by denials and cover-ups of authorities.

Peter is devastated. The Gospel continues: *'And he went out and wept bitterly'.*

PROCESS

The Gospel of Luke reveals the **processes** that Jesus endured.

**For those who have not received justice and healing in church processes,
let us journey now with Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and what he experienced.**

Jesus named his betrayer within the family of his disciples - the 'Church'.

'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?'

Jesus identifies the symbolic act by which Judas betrays him.

At his arrest, Jesus says to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police,
and the elders who had come for him

***'When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me.
But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!'***

The groups of perpetrators are named.

Jesus has stressed that they commit this act, not in public in the temple but out of sight of the people. The stealth. The secrecy. Jesus names this the **power of darkness**.

It gives us today an opportunity to name the secrecy,
and to name the power of darkness today in church sexual abuse in all its dimensions.

Jesus is physically abused by being beaten by those holding him.

He is also mocked and insulted many times.

They try to take away his personal power by blindfolding him. The physical and verbal abuse.

Deprivation of light and direction and security.

They take him before the assembly of elders –the chief priests and scribes.

The assembly is not interested in justice or who Jesus really is.

Then he is taken before the next process – before Pilate.

Pilate says,

'I find no basis for an accusation against this man.'

But the chief priests and scribes have a vested interest in not accepting this verdict.

The power of darkness continues to fight.

In the next process we see that Pilate shifts the responsibility to Herod.

Herod finds him not guilty. Yet in the process Jesus is further abused.

Herod and his soldiers

'treated him with contempt and mocked him;

then he put an elegant robe on him and sent him back to Pilate.'

Pilate sums up the judgements of both processes with these words.

'I have examined him in your presence

and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him.

Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us.

Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death.'

The power of darkness pressures Pilate once more. Pilate again replies,

'Why, what evil has he done?

I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death;

I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.'

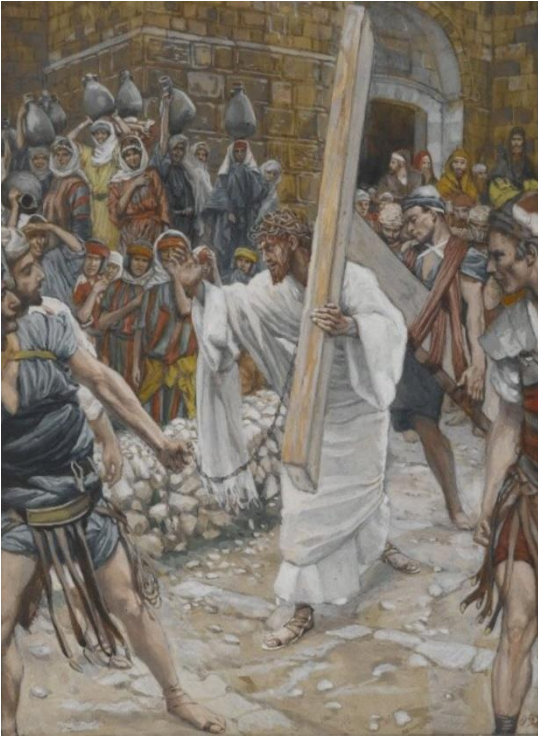
Pilate wants a way out, a way to protect his image and authority.

Even though Jesus is innocent, Pilate decides to subject Jesus to more abuse.

The power of darkness pressures Pilate again.
Pilate walks away from his responsibility and hands Jesus over to them.
Again we are reminded as Church that we cannot walk away from our responsibility.

Simon of Cyrene is seized and made to help Jesus. Jesus is now weak physically.
Sometimes people come to our aid, even if it is initially against their will.

On the journey to the Cross, Jesus encounters women who are weeping for him.
He said to them,



James Tissot | Women of Jerusalem | public domain

'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children'

And Jesus goes on to give a terrifying vision of the future. By the time Luke's Gospel is written, that vision has come true with the Roman army sacking Jerusalem some decades later.

Terrifying visions can also be a part of the experience of survivors.

It is also critically important for survivors to know that genuine safeguarding processes are put in place and that genuine reform of the Church is in place.

Transparency.
Accountability.
Supervision.
Change of Culture.

Otherwise, for a survivor, it can be a terrifying vision, that what happened to them, is going to happen to other innocent people as well.

Again we hear of the innocence of Jesus, this time voiced by a criminal.
Two criminals are led away to death with Jesus. One derided Jesus.
The other said to him about Jesus. *'... this man has done nothing wrong'*

After Jesus breathes his last breath, the army centurion said, *'Certainly this man was innocent'*.
A criminal and a Roman soldier both see the innocence of Jesus.

Luke's Gospel has referred several times to the innocence of Jesus.

How do we as Church uphold the dignity, the rights and the innocence of children and vulnerable adults who have been abused by church members in positions of authority and power?

For many abused, the pain has been a part of them for so long. And when there seemed a chance to move forward, someone or some group has deepened their pain once more.

BURIAL

Joseph of Arimathea intercedes to ensure that Jesus is buried with some dignity. And not only Joseph, but today the families and friends who have grieved and organized the funeral services of someone who had been abused.

As the Gospel continues, we hear of those women who had journeyed with Jesus:

'The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.'

Chapter 24 begins with these words:

'But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb'.

MESSENGERS OF HOPE

Jesus died for us. But the Gospel does not end with the death and burial of Jesus. Jesus accompanies us in our pain and reaches out to heal us. The power of darkness can be overcome.

Two messengers from God reveal to the women that Jesus is risen. The women now become messengers of hope as they carry the good news *'to the eleven and to all the rest'.*

Luke's Gospel names some of those messengers of hope. *'Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.'*

And in following the example of the Gospel, we name, as best we can, the messengers of hope in our lives.



Henry Ossawa Tanner | The Three Marys | public domain

We acknowledge each of them, whether we know all their names or not.

We last heard of Peter when he was weeping bitterly.
Now he runs to the tomb, finds the linen cloths by themselves and is amazed.

We are the People of God, all of us.
Luke's Gospel continues with the appearance of the risen Jesus
to two members of the People of God on the way to **Emmaus**,
though they don't recognize Jesus at first.
They look *'sad'*.

They need to talk and ask questions. They need to express what is within them.
Jesus accompanies them in this journey of understanding and hope.
Jesus takes the time to listen and to teach them.

They recognise Jesus at the meal.

'When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it.'

Jesus vanishes, and they reflect back to their hearts burning as they listened to Jesus.
They say:

*'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road,
while he was opening the scriptures to us?'*

They now become messengers of hope as they go to the eleven and companions.
As they talk about this together, the risen Jesus appears to them and we are told:

'Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.'

St Paul tells us about faith in Jesus in the Second Letter to the Corinthians 4:7

'we have this treasure in clay jars.'

We know that we are vulnerable and brittle, we are like clay jars.
Jesus knows that it can take time to heal.

Yet the Scriptures are a gift from God to the People of God.
They open up a spirituality where Jesus listens and loves and is heard speaking to the innocent
who have been abused and betrayed by those that they trusted.
Jesus listens to the cries of devastation, vulnerability and intense pain, and offers hope and life.
The People of God turn to Jesus to overcome the power of darkness.
The Gospel of Luke calls forth messengers of hope.

Turning elsewhere in the New Testament, to the Letter to the Romans Chapter 8:35-37,
Saint Paul shared that,

- no one can separate us from the love of God.
- and neither can hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness,
or peril, or sword

- He states *'No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.'*

This reflection concludes with another quotation from St Paul to the Romans, Chapter 8.

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.
And God, who searches the heart, knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God'. 8:26-27*

Amen.

Fr Gerry Hefferan, 6 September 2018

This reflection uses the text from the ***New Revised Standard Version.***