

ST MATTHEW'S PASSION

Matthew's account is based on the Passion in Mark's Gospel, but Matthew adapts and adds to Mark.

In Matthew's Gospel, the disciples and especially Peter, have clearly professed that Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, their abandonment of Jesus and Peter's three-fold denial of knowing Jesus is particularly significant.

Matthew's Passion gives prominence to the trial before the Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin. At the same time Peter is interrogated in the courtyard and denies knowing Jesus. Matthew also includes details of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas.

In Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus, the Magi, who are gentiles (non-Jews) recognize Jesus as the Messiah. They are contrasted to Herod who is seeking to kill the child.

In the Passion, it is another gentile, Pilate's wife, who has a dream and recognizes that Jesus is innocent and seeks his release. Only in Matthew's Passion does Pilate wash his hands to distance himself from the cry of the crowd to crucify Jesus.

To further emphasize that the Jewish leaders were responsible, Matthew alone has the people cry out "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mt 27:25). Throughout history, and particularly in Christian Europe, that verse led to the persecution of the Jewish people each year when the Christian communities celebrated Good Friday.

It is not accurate to place the blame for the death of Jesus on countless generations of the Jewish people. For that reason, that verse is now omitted when Matthew's Passion is proclaimed on this Sunday.

A central theme of Matthew's Gospel is that Jesus, as the promised Messiah, fulfilled the Scriptures. There are also many references in Matthew's Passion to events fulfilling the Scriptures.

Like Mark, Matthew's Jesus at the end cries out, quoting a verse from Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

Paul Crowley

Published in St Mary's Parish Concord Bulletin April 2023