

PALM SUNDAY or PASSION SUNDAY II

THE PROCESSION OF PALMS & THE MASS

(Mt. 21:1-9, 26:36-75, 27:1-60) TRACK A 047a

[(Poem Vol. 5 pp. 391-400; Gospel, Vol. 9, pp. 351-60)]

There is Zion over there. Go and get the donkey and the colt. Say to the man: « Rabbi Jesus needs them».

[...] It is said: «Here comes your King, the Just One, the Saviour. He is poor, He is riding a little donkey. He will announce peace to the nations. His dominion will be from sea to sea, to the utmost limits of the Earth».

[...] Thomas and Andrew have rushed towards Bethphage to look for the donkey and the colt and take them to Jesus.

[...] He is near the village when the two apostles, who had been sent to get the donkey and the colt, come back. They shout: « We found what You told us and we would have brought the animals. But the owner wanted to curry them and adorn them with the best trappings to honour You. And the disciples, with those who have spent the night in the streets of Bethany to honour You, wish to have the honour of bringing them to You, and we agreed. We thought that their love deserved a reward. »

[...] Jesus has hardly had time to enter into the house blessing its inhabitants, when the joyful sound of harness-bells and jubilant voices are heard. And immediately afterwards the lean wan face of Isaac appears in the opening of the door, and the faithful shepherd enters and prostrates himself before his Lord Jesus.

Many faces are crowding in the frame of the wide-open door, and many more can be seen behind them... They push and throng, wishing to come forward... Some women shout, some of the children cry, caught as they are in the crowd, while the others shout greetings and joyful exclamations: « This is a happy day which brings You back to us! Peace to You, Lord! We welcome You, Master, as You have come back to reward our loyalty. »

Jesus stands up and makes a gesture meaning that He is going to speak. Everybody becomes silent and Jesus' voice is heard clearly. « Peace to you! Do not press together. We shall now go up to the Temple. I have come to stay with you. Peace! Peace! Do not hurt yourselves. Make way, My beloved friends! Let Me come out and follow Me, because we shall enter into the Holy City together. »

Willy-nilly the people obey, and they open out a little so that Jesus can come out and mount the little donkey. In fact Jesus points to the little colt, which had never been ridden before, as His mount, and then some rich pilgrims, who elbow their way through the crowd, lay their sumptuous mantles on its back, and one man kneels down with one knee on the ground and the other placed as a step for the Lord, Who sits on the back of the colt. And the journey begins with Peter walking on one side of the Master and Isaac on the other, holding the reins of the unbroken animal, which proceeds calmly, as if it were accustomed to that task, without

becoming restive or being frightened by the flowers that, thrown as they are towards Jesus, often strike the eyes or the soft muzzle of the little colt, that is not even scared by the branches of olive-trees and palm leaves shaken in front of and around it, or are thrown on the ground to form a carpet with the flowers. It is not even frightened by the shouts of « Hosanna, Son of David! », that are becoming louder and louder as the crowd becomes larger and larger with the arrival of newcomers.

It is not easy to pass through Bethphage, along its narrow twisted streets, and mothers are compelled to take their children in their arms, and men have to protect their women from being pushed too violently, and some fathers carry their little sons astride their shoulders, so that they are above the crowd, while the shrill voices of the children sound like the bleatings of lambs or the screeching of swallows, while with their little hands they throw the flowers and leaves of olive-trees, offered to them by their mothers, as well as kisses, to mild Jesus...

After leaving the narrow passage of the little suburb, the procession stretches out in an orderly manner, and many volunteers go ahead leading the way and keeping it clear, and others follow them strewing the ground with branches. And when a man throws his mantle on the road as a carpet, hundreds of people imitate him. Thus the central part of the road is a multicoloured strip of garments spread on the ground and once Jesus passes by, they are picked up and carried ahead with many more, while flowers, branches and palm-leaves are waved and thrown, and louder cries are uttered around and in honour of the King of Israel, of the Son of David and His Kingdom! [...]

When the procession enters under the vault of the Siloam Gate and then, like a torrent, pours into the town through the Ophel suburb - where every terrace has become a little airy square crowded with people singing hosannas, throwing flowers and pouring perfumes in the street, trying to throw them on the Master, and the air is filled with the scent of flowers crushed under the feet of the crowds and with essences that spread in the air before falling among the dust of the street - the cheers of the crowd seem -to increase and become louder, as if each person shouted in a bugle-horn, because the many archivolts, of which Jerusalem is full, amplify them with continuous echoes. [...]

Perfumes, scents, shouts, waving of branches and garments, colours, cries... It is a bewildering scene.[...]

(Maria observes and describes what she sees)

And - unfortunately - there are faces of Pharisees and scribes, livid with rage because of this triumph, and they overbearingly elbow their way through the circle of love that is pressing round Jesus and they shout to Him: « Make these mad people keep quiet! Make them reason! Hosannas are to be sung to God only. Tell them to be quiet! » And Jesus replies to them kindly: « Even if I told them to be silent and they obeyed Me, the stones would extol the wonders of the Word of God. »

In fact the people - in addition to shouting: « Hosanna, hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to Him and to His Kingdom! God is with us! The Immanuel has come. The Kingdom of the Christ of the Lord has come! Hosanna! Hosanna from the Earth to the highest Heaven! Peace! Peace, my King! Peace and blessings

to You, holy King! Peace and glory in Heaven and on the Earth! Glory to God for His Christ! Peace to the men who know how to welcome Him. Peace on Earth to men of good will and glory in the highest Heaven, because the hour of the Lord has come » (and this last cry is uttered by the whole group of the shepherds who are repeating the Christmas song) - in addition to these uninterrupted cries, the people of Palestine inform the pilgrims from the Diaspora of the miracles they have seen, and to those who do not know what is happening, because they are strangers passing by chance through the town and ask: « But who is He? What is happening? » they reply: « He is Jesus! Jesus, the Master from Nazareth in Galilee! The Prophet! The Messiah of the Lord! The Promised, the Holy Messiah! »

THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

[Mt. 26:36-56] **TRACK D 015**

Then Jesus came with them to a small estate called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, 'Stay here while I go over there to pray.' He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him. And sadness came over him, and great distress. Then he said to them, 'My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here and keep awake with me.' And going on a little further he fell on his face and prayed. 'My Father,' he said, 'if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. Nevertheless, let it be as you, not I, would have it.' He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, 'So you had not the strength to keep awake with me one hour. You should be awake, and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again a second time, he went away and prayed: 'My Father,' he said 'if this cup cannot pass by without me drinking it, your will be done!' And he came back and found them sleeping, their eyes were so heavy. Leaving them there, he went away again and prayed for the third time, repeating the same words. Then he came back to the disciples and said to them, 'You can sleep on now and take your rest. Now the hour has come when the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up! Let us go! My betrayer is already close at hand.' He was still speaking when Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared, and with him a large number of men armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. Now the traitor had arranged a sign with them. 'The one I kiss,' he had said 'he is the man. Take him in charge.' So he went straight up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi,' and kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'My friend, do what you are here for.' Then they came forward, seized Jesus and took him in charge. At that, one of the followers of Jesus grasped his sword and drew it; he struck out at the high priest's servant and cut off his ear. Jesus then said, 'Put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father who would promptly send more than twelve legions of angels to my defence? But then, how would the scriptures be fulfilled that say this is the way it must be?' It was at this time that Jesus said to the crowds, 'Am I a brigand, that you had to set out to capture me with swords and clubs? I sat teaching in the Temple day after day and you never laid hands on me.' Now all this happened to fulfil the prophecies in scripture. Then all the disciples deserted him and ran away.

(*Poem* Vol. 5, pp. 530-39; *Gospel* Vol. 10, pp. 23-35)

(Jesus and His apostles, with the exception of Judas, have left the house of the Last Supper, and arrive at a place below the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus says:)

« Let us part now. I am going further up, to pray. I want Peter, John and James with Me. You others, remain here. And if you should be overwhelmed, call us. And be not afraid.

Not a single hair of your heads will be hurt. Pray for Me. Lay aside hatred and fear. It will only be a moment... then it will be full joy... And once again, thank you for everything, My friends. Goodbye. May the Lord not abandon you... »

Jesus parts from the apostles and goes ahead, while Simon the Zealot gives Peter the torch. (Peter, James and John then follow Jesus)... It grieves me to see Judas Thaddeus cast such an intense and sorrowful glance at Jesus, that the Latter turns round to see who has been looking at Him. But Thaddeus hides behind Bartholomew, biting his lips to control himself.

With His hand, Jesus makes a gesture, which is of blessing and farewell at the same time... They go on until they reach the edge of the first escarpment of the rustic amphitheatre of the olive-grove... Jesus then says: « Stop, wait for Me here, while I pray. But do not fall asleep. I may need you. And I ask you this out of charity, pray! Your Master is *very* depressed. »

He is in fact already in a state of deep depression... His voice is tired and exhausted.

Peter replies on behalf of everybody: « Do not worry, Master. We will keep awake and pray. All You have to do is to call us, and we will come. »

Jesus leaves the three apostles, while they stoop to gather leaves and twigs, and light a little fire to keep themselves awake...

Jesus walks eastwards, so that the moon shines on His face. I see that a deep sorrow dilates His eyes... He climbs with His head lowered, and only now and again He raises it with a sigh... He then casts His eyes, that are so sad, around the peaceful olive-grove. He climbs up a few metres, and then goes round an escarpment...

He stops there... and prays with His arms stretched out crosswise, His face towards the sky... It is a prayer rising from His love, and His need. A true conversation with His Father. « ... I ask You to have mercy on them... Will I save them? That is what I ask of You. This I want: that they be saved from the world, from the flesh, from the demon... »

He turns round, leans with His back against the rock, folds His arms, and looks at Jerusalem. His face becomes sadder and sadder, and He whispers: « She looks like snow... and she is all sin. And how many I cured in her! How much I spoke!... Where are those who seemed loyal to Me? »

He lowers His head and looks fixedly at the ground... I understand that He is weeping, because some tears shine when falling from His face on the ground. He then raises His head, unfolds His arms, and joins them - holding them above His head...

He then... goes back towards the three apostles, who are sitting round the little fire of twigs. And He finds them half asleep...

« Have you not been able to keep awake for one hour? I need your comfort and your prayers so much! »

The three wake up with a start, and are utterly confused: « ... It's the wine... the food... It was only a moment... But we will now pray in loud voices, and it will not happen again. »

« Yes. Pray and be on the alert. For your own sake as well. »

Jesus... goes back to His rock more slowly, and more stooped. He kneels, resting His arms on the rock... Shortly afterwards He feels the coolness of the little corollas growing there, and raises His head. He looks at them, caresses them, and speaks to them: « You are here as well!... You comfort Me! These little flowers were also in My Mother's little grotto... My Mother! Oh! My Mother! » He bursts into tears. His head on His joined hands, and a little reclined on His heels: « ... I brought them to You, Mother. But... who will bring them to You now?... »

He resumes praying and meditating. Then He stands up, and He goes backwards and forwards, whispering words that I do not grasp... To describe it is impossible. To see it is to share His anguish. He makes gestures towards Jerusalem. Then He begins to raise His arms again towards the sky, as if He wanted to invoke help...

His anguish is such that, in order to overcome it, He shouts the names of Peter and John. And He says: « They will come now. They are really loyal! » But "they" do not come...

He runs fast towards the place where Peter and the two brothers are. And He finds them comfortably fast asleep around a few embers... « Peter! I have called you three times!... Are you still sleeping? Do you not realise how much I am suffering? Pray. That the flesh may not win, that it may not overwhelm you. *Not any of you*. If the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. Help Me... »

The three wake up more slowly... and with dull eyes they apologise, and re-ignite the fire... lighting up the poor face of Jesus. It is a face that is so sad, that one cannot look at it without weeping... He says: « I feel an anguish that is killing Me! Oh! yes! My soul is sad even unto death. My friends!... My friends! »... Every word sounds like a sob...

But the three are too heavy with sleep... Jesus looks at them... He does not humiliate them by reproaching them. He shakes His head, sighs, and goes back to the place where He was.

He prays once again, standing, with His arms stretched out crosswise. Then on His knees... He calls His Father.

« ... This cup is too bitter! I cannot! I cannot! It is above My power. I have been able to bear everything! But not this... Father, take it away from Your Son! Have mercy on Me!... What have I done to deserve it? » He then collects Himself and says: « But, Father, do not listen to My voice, if what I ask is against Your will. Do not remember that I am Your Son, but only Your servant. Let Your will be done, not Mine. »

He remains like this for some time. Then He utters a stifled cry... He drops on the ground, with His face on the earth... A worn-out man, overburdened by all the sins of the world...

Jesus moans, having the death-rattle in His throat, and sobbing like one in agony: « Nothing!... Nothing!... Away!... The will of My Father! His will! Only His will!... Your will, Father. Yours, not Mine... In vain you tempt Me, devil, through My Mother, My life, My divinity and My mission... "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass Me by. But let Your will be done, not Mine". Be off, Satan. I belong to God. »

Then He speaks no more, except to say, in a panting voice: « God! God! God! » He calls Him at each heart-beat, and at each beat, blood seems to flow out of Him. The cloth on His shoulders gets soaked through, and becomes dark, notwithstanding the clear moonlight that illuminates it completely.

A brighter light appears above His head, hanging about a metre above Him. It is so bright that even the Prostrate Master can see it filter through His wavy hair, already weighed down by blood... As He raises His head... the angelic light shines more brightly... Then all the dreadful agony appears, in the blood seeping out from His pores... Blood trickles from His temples, blood spouts from the veins of His neck, His hands drip blood. And when He stretches His hands towards the angelic light... Christ's forearms can be seen sweating blood. Only His tears draw two neat lines in the red mask of His face...

Jesus seems on the point of fainting. He unties the neck of His tunic... He takes His hand to His heart and then to His head, and with His mouth half open, He waves it in front of His face, as if He wanted to fan Himself. He drags Himself towards the rock... and leans with His back against it. His arms are hanging along His body, as if He were already dead. His head is bent over His chest...

The angelic light slowly fades away... Jesus reopens His eyes. He raises His head with difficulty, and looks around. He is alone. But He is less anguished... He takes a large leaf... which is all wet with dew - and He cleans Himself with it, wetting His face and hands, and then drying Himself. He does the same several times with other leaves, until He wipes out the traces of His dreadful sweat. Only His tunic is stained... He folds it and lays it on the rock...

Then He stands up, and still staggering a little, He goes to the disciples. His face is... full of divine beauty, although it is deadly pale...

The three are sleeping soundly... Jesus calls them in vain. He has to bend and shake them vigorously...

« Get up, now, and let us go. He who is going to betray Me is close at hand. »

The three, still drowsy, get up. They... follow Jesus without speaking.

The other eight are also more or less asleep around a fire that has gone out. « Get up! » orders Jesus in a thunderous voice. « As Satan is arriving, show him, who never sleeps, and his children, that the children of God are not asleep! »...

The guards, headed by Judas, burst into the little square, with their many torches... It is a horde of bandits disguised as soldiers, who... grin like devils...

All the apostles jump to one corner... Jesus remains where He is.

Judas approaches Jesus... and kisses His right cheek.

In a sorrowful tone, Jesus says: « My friend, what have you come for? Are you betraying Me with a kiss? »

Judas bends his head for a moment, then raises it... He is insensible... to every invitation to repent.

The guards, shouting, come forward with ropes and clubs...

« Who are you looking for? » asks Jesus calmly and solemnly.

« Jesus the Nazarene. »

« I am He. » His voice is thunderous... They all fall to the ground... except Judas, Jesus and the apostles, who take fresh heart again... so much so that they threaten Judas so explicitly, that the latter takes a leap, just in time to avoid a stroke from Simon's sword.... Pursued by stones and sticks... he escapes beyond the Kidron, and disappears in a dark lane.

Then Jesus says: « Stand up. Who are you looking for? I ask you once again. »

« Jesus the Nazarene. »

« I have told you that I am He » says Jesus kindly. Yes, *kindly*. « So, let these others go. I will come. Put away your swords and clubs... »

But while He is speaking, Peter approaches the man who is holding out the ropes to tie Jesus, gives him a clumsy blow with his sword, and cuts off part of his ear... There is chaos, until Jesus says: « Put those weapons away. I order you to do that. If I wanted, I could have the angels of My Father to defend Me. And you, be cured. In your soul first of all, if you can. » And before stretching out His hands to be tied, He touches the ear, and cures it.

The apostles shout very unbecomingly... (and) run away.

Jesus and the guards are left all alone. And His new journey begins...

JESUS IS TAKEN BEFORE CAIAPHAS, THE HIGH PRIEST

[Mt. 26:57-75] **TRACK D 017**

The men who had arrested Jesus led him off to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and elders were assembled. Peter followed him at a distance, and when he reached the high priest's palace, he went in and sat down with the attendants to see what the end would be. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus, however false, on which they might pass the death sentence. But they could not find any, though several lying witnesses came forward. Eventually two stepped forward and made a statement, 'This man said: "I have power to destroy the Temple of God and in three days build it up."' The high priest then stood up and said to him, 'Have you no answer to that? What is this evidence these men are bringing against you?' But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to him, 'I put you on oath by the living God to tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' 'The words are your own' answered Jesus. 'Moreover, I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of Heaven.' At this, the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has blasphemed. What need of witnesses have we now? There! You have just heard the blasphemy. What is your opinion?' They answered, 'He deserves to die.' Then they spat in his face and hit him with their fists; others said as they struck him, 'Play the prophet, Christ! Who hit you then?' Meanwhile Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came up to him and said, 'You too were with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied it in front of them all. 'I do not know what you are

talking about' he said. When he went out to the gateway another servant-girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This man was with Jesus the Nazarene.' And again, with an oath, he denied it. 'I do not know the man.' A little later the bystanders came up to Peter and said, 'You are one of them for sure! Why, your accent gives you away.' Then he started calling down curses on himself and swearing. 'I do not know the man.' At that moment the cock crew, and Peter remembered what Jesus had said, 'Before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly.

(*Poem* Vol. 5, pp. 551-8; *Gospel* Vol. 10, pp. 50-8)

Jesus remains with the torturers, who hit Him with ropes, spit at Him, insult and kick Him, and tear at His hair. This continues until a servant comes to say that the Prisoner is to be taken to the house of Caiaphas.

And Jesus, ill-treated and with His hands still tied, goes out again under the porch, and walks along as far as a lobby. He then passes through a yard in which many people are warming themselves near a fire, because it is now the early hours of Friday, and the night has turned cold and windy. Peter and John are also there, mingled among the hostile crowd. And they must be really brave to stay there... Jesus looks at them, and a faint smile appears on His lips, already swollen because of the treatment He has received. Then a long walk across porches, halls, yards and corridors...

But the crowd does not follow... They are pushed back into the entrance-hall of the house of Annas, and Jesus goes on alone, among guards and priests. He goes into a large hall, with many seats placed in horse-shoe fashion along three sides, leaving an empty space in the middle, beyond which are two or three seats placed on platforms...

Then the session begins...

Caiaphas asks: « What have the holy members of this Council to say with regard to this man? »

A young man, possibly a scribe, replies: « I will tell you. He infringed the Sabbath in my house. God bears witness that I am not lying. Ishmael ben Fabi never lies. »

« Is this true, defendant? »

Jesus is silent.

And another accusation: « I have seen him live with well-known prostitutes. Pretending He was a prophet, He turned His haunt into a brothel, and with heathen women, of all people. [Others] were with me. Am I telling the truth...? Tell me I am a liar, if I deserve it. »

« It is true. Quite true » is the reply.

And Caiaphas asks: « What do You say? »

Jesus is silent.

The accusations continue: « He missed no opportunity to mock us, and have us ridiculed. Common people no longer love us through His fault. »

« Do You hear them? » asks Caiaphas. « You have profaned the holy members. »

Jesus is silent.

Another charge is made: « This man is possessed. After His return from Egypt He has practised black magic. »

« How can you prove it? »

« On my faith, and on the tables of the Law. »

« A **grave** charge. Prove Your innocence. »

Jesus is silent.

(After a little while, some [other] "witnesses" are called, one of whom says:)

« ...He evoked the dead. He taught people to rebel against the Sabbath and to desecrate the altar. We swear it. He said that He wanted to destroy the Temple, and rebuild it in three days... »

Caiaphas comes down from his seat and approaches Jesus. He is small, and very fat - in striking contrast to Jesus Who - although wounded, bruised, dirty and unkempt - is still so handsome and solemn. « Are You not replying? These are horrible charges they are bringing against You! Speak, to clear Yourself of such shame. »

But Jesus is silent. He looks at Caiaphas, but does not speak.

« Reply to me. I am Your Pontiff. I appeal to You by the living God. Tell me: are You the Christ, the Son of God? »

« You have said it. I am. And you will see the Son of man - sitting on the right hand of the power of the Father - come on the clouds of the sky. Moreover, why do you ask Me? I have spoken in public for three years. I have not said anything secretly... »

One of the soldiers who is holding Him, strikes His mouth, making it bleed once again, and he shouts: « Is that how you reply, O satan, to the High Pontiff? »

And Jesus replies, meekly: « If I have spoken the truth, why do you strike Me?...

I am the Anointed One. I am Pontiff and King. I am about to take My sceptre, and with it - as with a winnowing-fan - I will clear the threshing-floor. This Temple will be destroyed and it will rise again, new and holy. Because this one is corrupt, and God has abandoned it to its destiny. »

« **Blasphemer!** » they all shout in chorus.

And Jesus is asked: « Will You do that in three days, You silly, possessed man? »

« Not this Temple. But Mine will rise again, the Temple of the true, living, holy, three times holy, God. »

« **Anathema!** » they howl again in chorus.

Caiaphas raises his voice, tears his linen garments with affected horror, and says: « What else have we to hear from witnesses? He has blasphemed. So what shall we do? »

All in chorus they say: « **He deserves to die.** » And with disdainful scandalised gestures they go out of the hall, leaving Jesus to the mercy of the guards, and to the mob of false witnesses. With slaps, blows, spitting, blinding His eyes with a rag, and then pulling His hair violently, they drive Him here and there with His hands tied, while they ask Him: « Who hit You? Guess.» And several times they trip Him, and as He falls flat on His face, they split their sides with laughter...

Some hours go by, and the tired torturers decide to have a little rest. They take Jesus through many yards, among the insults of the already numerous mobs in the enclosure of the Pontiff's house.

Jesus arrives in the courtyard where Peter is, near a fire. And He looks at him. But Peter does not see Jesus... John is no longer there. I cannot see him. I think he has gone away with Nicodemus...

Dawn is breaking and the sky looks greenish. An order is given: the Prisoner is to be taken back to the Council Hall for a more legal trial. In the greenish dawn light, Jesus' bruises look even more dreadful on His pale face, and His eyes more sunken and glassy. He is a Jesus made dull by the sorrow of the world. It is just at this moment when Jesus is passing by - already marked by sufferings - that Peter, for the third time, denies that he knows the Christ...

A cock-crowing rends the early dawn air. And at this moment of deep silence - brought about by the appearance of the Christ - only Peter's harsh voice is heard to say: « I swear it, woman, **I do not know Him** » It is a resolute and decided statement, to which at once, like a sneer, resounds the cheeky crowing of the cockerel.

Peter gives a start. He turns around to run away, and he finds himself facing Jesus, Who looks at him with infinite compassion, and with such sad, deep sorrow that it breaks my heart. Peter sobs, and goes out, staggering as if he were drunk. He runs away behind two servants, and disappears down the semi-dark street.

Jesus is taken back into the hall. In chorus they repeat the question: « In the name of the true God, tell us: are You the Christ? » And when they receive the same reply as the previous one, they sentence Him to death, and give orders to take Him to Pilate.

Jesus, escorted by all His enemies - except Annas and Caiaphas - goes out, passing once again through those courts of the Temple... and He goes into the streets - more dragged than led - and descends towards the town, which is turning pinkish in the first light of dawn...

The people at market places - buyers and vendors - leave everything to follow the Poor Wretch... The howling train grows bigger every moment... and **features** seem to change

nature, through a sudden epidemic... as they become masks of ferocity in faces green with hatred, or red with anger...

The procession... pours noisily into a wide avenue, built above the hollow between two hills, with wonderful buildings of wealthy people at its ends.

I see the Temple once again on the top of its hill, and they made the Convict go round a vicious circle - to expose Him to the ridicule of the whole town...

Some Roman soldiers, a large number, run out from the Antonia with their lances pointed at the mob, who disperse shouting. Jesus is left in the middle of the street, with the guards, priests, scribes, and elders of the people.

A centurion says: « This man? This sedition? You will answer to Rome for this. »

« He is liable to death according to our law » is the reply.

(Longinus): « And since when has the "jus gladii et sanguinis" been given back to you? » asks, once again, the senior centurion, a real Roman, with a severe face and a cheek marked by a deep scar...

« We are aware that we do not have that right. We are loyal subjects of Rome... »

(Sarcastically) « Listen to them, Longinus » says another soldier. « Loyal! Subjects! Rotters! I would reward you with the arrows of my archers. »

And Longinus replies with ironic coolness: « Too noble a death! The backs of these mules want nothing but the lash! »...

The chief priests, scribes and elders are foaming with poison. But they want to achieve their object, and are silent... Bowing to the two officers, they ask that Jesus be led to Pontius Pilate, so that « he may judge and condemn with the well-known honest justice of Rome. »...

THE TERROR AND DESPAIR OF JUDAS

[Mt. 27:3-10] **TRACK D 022**

When he found that Jesus had been condemned, Judas his betrayer was filled with remorse and took the thirty silver pieces back to the chief priests and elders. 'I have sinned,' he said. 'I have betrayed innocent blood.' 'What is it to us?' they replied. 'That is your concern.' And flinging down the silver pieces in the sanctuary he made off, and went and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the silver pieces and said, 'It is against the Law to put this into the treasury; it is blood money.' So they discussed the money and bought the potter's field with it, as a graveyard for foreigners, and this is why the field is called the Field of Blood today. The words of the prophet Jeremiah were then fulfilled: "And they took the thirty silver pieces, the sum at which the precious one was priced by children of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, just as the Lord directed me."

(*Poem* Vol. 5, pp. 576-80; *Gospel* Vol. 10, pp. 82-6)

(The scene now centres on Judas, who has been running like a madman through the streets of Jerusalem, has been bitten by a dog on his cheek, and has returned to the Garden of Gethsemane where he discovers Jesus' mantle stained with blood, and imagines a sea of blood covering the Earth...)

Judas' face is frightening... He runs away through the olive-grove, without going back the way he came. He looks like someone being chased by wild beasts. He goes back to town. He envelops himself in his mantle as best he can, and he tries to cover the wound and his face as much as possible. He turns his steps towards the Temple.

But while going there, at a crossroad, he finds himself in front of the rabble who are dragging Jesus to Pilate. He cannot withdraw, because other people press him from behind, as they flock to see. And, tall as he is, he sees. He meets Jesus' eyes... They exchange glances for a moment. Then Jesus, tied and beaten, passes by, and Judas falls on his back, as if he had fainted. The crowd tramples on him pitilessly, and he does not react. He obviously prefers to be trodden on by the whole world, rather than meet those eyes.

When the pack has gone by with the Martyr, and the street is empty, he stands up again, and runs to the Temple. He bumps against - and almost overthrows - a guard on duty at the gate of the Temple enclosure. Other guards run to prevent the frantic man from entering. But like a furious bull, he routs them all. One of them - who clings to him to prevent him from going into the hall of the Sanhedrin - is seized by the throat, strangled, and thrown down the three steps. If not dead, he is certainly at the point of death.

Judas stands in the middle of the hall, just where Jesus was previously. « I don't want your money, may you be damned. » He looks like a demon who has come out of hell. Bleeding, unkempt, in a state of delirious fury, slavering, his hands like claws, he shouts and seems to be barking, so shrill and hoarse is his howling voice.

(He then sees blood-stains on the floor...)

« Even here, is there blood even here? Everywhere! His blood is everywhere! But how much blood has the Lamb of God got, to cover the whole Earth like this without dying? And I have shed it! Through your instigation. Cursed! May you be cursed for ever!... Curse me! Keep your money, and may it strangle your souls in your throats, as the halter strangles me. » He throws the purse in Caiaphas' teeth, making his mouth bleed, and goes away howling, while the coins tinkle and spread out on the floor. No one dares to stop him.

He goes out. He runs along the streets. And he fatally meets with Jesus twice again, as Jesus goes to and comes back from Herod.

Judas leaves the town centre, taking the poorest lanes at random, and ends up again at the house of the Last Supper. He knocks again... and again... The mistress of the house comes and half-opens the door. Seeing the man so agitated and altered beyond recognition, she utters a cry, and tries to close the door. But Judas opens it wide with a push of his shoulder, and, knocking down the terrified woman, he goes in.

He runs towards the little door into the Supper Room. He opens it and goes in...

He remains still for some time, until his panting - after so much running - calms down. He then looks up and sees the chalice. And he realises where he is.

He stands up as if he were possessed. But the chalice enchants him. A little red wine is still in the bottom of it, and the sun, shining on the metal (it looks like silver) inflames the liquid. « **Blood! Blood!** Blood also **here! His Blood! His Blood!** "Do this in memory of Me!... Take this and drink it. This is My Blood... I am cursed!... He cannot forgive me... Death! Death to me!... »

He goes out, and suddenly finds himself in front of Mary. She looks as pale as if She had lost all Her blood. Grief has made Her eyes resemble - even more - those of Her Son. Judas meets those eyes that look at him with the same sorrowful conscious knowledge with which Jesus looked at him in the street. And uttering a frightened « Oh! » he leans against the wall.

« Judas! » says Mary, « Judas, why have you come? » The same words as Jesus used. And they are spoken with sad love. Judas remembers them and shouts.

« Judas » repeats Mary « what have you done? To so much love, have you replied by betraying? » Mary's voice is a trembling caress.

Judas is about to run away. Mary calls him with a voice that should have converted a demon. « Judas! Judas! Stop! Stop! Listen! I am telling you in His name: repent, Judas. He forgives... »

Judas has run away...

He meets John, who is going towards the house to get Mary. The sentence has been passed, and Jesus is about to go to Calvary. It is time to take Mary to Her Son. John recognises Judas, although there is little left of the handsome Judas of not long ago. « **You** here? » John says to him with obvious disgust. « **You** here? May you be cursed, you killer of the Son of God! The Master has been condemned. Rejoice, if you can. But get out of the way. I am going to get the Mother. »...

Judas runs away. He has enveloped his head in the tatters of his mantle, leaving only a small opening for his eyes. The few people who are not near the Praetorium avoid him, as if they saw a madman...

He wanders about the country. Now and again the wind carries an echo of the clamour made by the crowds who follow Jesus, cursing Him. Every time such echo reaches Judas, he howls like a jackal.

I think that he has really gone mad... He goes up and down the hills around Jerusalem. And his eyes are irresistibly attracted towards Golgotha. Twice, from afar, he sees the procession wind uphill. He looks, and howls.

The procession is now on the top of a little hill covered with olive-trees. He looks towards Golgotha, he sees the crosses being erected, and he realises that Jesus has been crucified...

Two fine streams of saliva run down from his howling mouth. The cheek that was bitten is livid and swollen, making his face look twisted... And his **eyes!**... They roll, squint, and are phosphorescent. The eyes of a real demon.

He pulls away the cord of thick red wool that encircles his waist three times. He tests its solidity by winding it round an olive-tree and pulling it with all his strength. It resists. It is solid.

He chooses a suitable olive-tree... He climbs the tree. He fastens a noose solidly to the strongest branch, hanging out over the empty space... He looks at Golgotha for the last time. He then puts his head into the slip-knot... and then, with a jerk, he lets himself slip into the empty space...
