

Holy Thursday
Seven Churches Pilgrimage
~ Meditations ~

Introduction to the Pilgrimage – Reflections on the
Passion of Christ

One of the cherished customs of Holy Week, which many people describe as one of the highlights of their entire year, is the practice of visiting Christ in the Blessed Sacrament at seven churches on the night of Holy Thursday. In recent years, many people have discovered or rediscovered this ancient and beautiful custom, one which speaks deeply to the heart on a most holy night which is filled with graces and blessings.

The Seven Churches Pilgrimage began in Rome with St. Philip Neri (1515 – 1595). He led groups of faithful to visit each of the Seven Basilicas of Rome on Holy Thursday night as a way of keeping watch with Christ at the Garden of Gethsemane before His Passion.

Today, each church visit calls on the faithful to reflect on the seven final places Jesus went from His arrest on Holy Thursday to His death on Good Friday. At each church, pilgrims kneel before the Altar of Repose, meditate on a scriptural excerpt, and offer prayers and adoration.

Meditations for Each Visit at the Altar of Repose

First Visit – Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

Scripture reflection – Luke 22:39-46

He then left to make His way as usual to the Mount of Olives, with the disciples following. When He reached the place He said to them, “Pray not to be put to the test” Then He withdrew from them, about a stone’s throw away, and knelt down and prayed “Father”, He said, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, let Your will be done, not Mine.” Then an angel appeared to Him, coming from heaven to give Him strength. In His anguish He prayed even more earnestly, and His sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. When He rose from prayer He went to His disciples and found them sleeping for sheer grief. And He said to them, “Why are you asleep? Get up and pray not to be put to the test”.

At the first church, the faithful recall Jesus going from the upper room, where He celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He earnestly prayed and sweated blood in His agony over what was about to take place.

Second Visit – Jesus before Annas

Scripture reflection – John 18:19-22

The high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teachings. Jesus answered, “I have spoken openly for all the world to hear; I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple where all the Jews meet together; I have said nothing in secret. Why ask me? Ask my hearers what I taught; they know what I said.” At these words, one of the guards standing by gave Jesus a slap in the face, saying “Is that the way you answer the high priest?”

In the second church, the pilgrims meditate on Jesus being taken from the Garden of Gethsemane by the armed crowd to the house of Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest, where He was interrogated and slapped in the face.

Third Visit - Jesus before Caiaphas

Scripture reflection –Matthew 26:63-65

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.” Jesus answered him, “It is you that say it. But, 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” Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has blasphemed”.

In the third church, the prayer focuses on Jesus being brought to the house of Caiaphas, where He was beaten, spat upon, insulted, and endured a painful night in captivity.

Fourth Visit – Jesus Before Pilate

Scripture reflection – John 18:35-37

Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? It is Your own people and the chief priests who have handed You over to me: what have You done? Jesus replied, “Mine is not a kingdom of this world; if My kingdom were of this world, My men would have fought to prevent My being surrendered to the Jews. As it is, My Kingdom does not belong here”.

The focus of the reflection for the fourth church is the first time Jesus was brought before Pilate, the Roman governor of the region. There Jesus was accused by the Jewish religious authorities of being a rival king to Caesar.

Fifth Visit – Jesus Before Herod

Scripture reflection – Luke 23: 8-9, 11

Herod was delighted to see Jesus; he had heard about Him and had been wanting for a long time to set eyes on Him; he was hoping to see some miracle worked by Him. So he questioned Him at some length, but without getting any reply Then Herod, together with his guards, treated Him with contempt and made fun of Him; he put a rich cloak on Him and sent Him back to Pilate.

In the fifth church, the pilgrim follows the Lord as He is taken to King Herod, who along with his guards mock Him.

Sixth Visit – Jesus Before Pilate again

Scripture reflection – Matthew 27: 27-31

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium and collected the whole cohort round Him. And they stripped Him and put on a scarlet cloak round Him, and having twisted some thorns into a crown they put this on His head and placed a reed in His right hand. To make fun of Him they knelt to Him saying "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat on Him and took the reed and struck Him on the Head with it. And when they had finished making fun of Him, they took off the cloak and

dressed Him in his own clothes and led Him away to crucifixion.

The sixth church recalls Jesus being taken from Herod and brought before Pilate for the second time and then scourged, crowned with thorns, mocked, and condemned to death.

Seventh Visit – Crucifixion and Death of Jesus

Scripture reflection – Matthew 27: 22-26

Pilate said to them, “But in that case, what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let Him be crucified!” He asked, “But what harm has He done?” But they shouted all the louder, “Let Him be crucified!” Then Pilate saw that he was making no impression, that in fact a riot was imminent. So he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood. It is your concern.” And the people, every one of them, shouted back, “Let His Blood be on us and on our children!” Then he released Barabbas for them. After having Jesus scourged he handed Him over to be crucified.

The last church commemorates Christ carrying the cross on His shoulders from the Praetorium, where Pilate yielded to the crowd’s demand for His crucifixion, to Mount Calvary where He suffered excruciating pain, died,

and was laid to rest in a nearby tomb until His resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday.