

THE FIRST SCRIPTURAL STATION - JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE  
By Fr Robbie Low

(Mt 26 v 36-46. Mk 14 v 32 -42. Lk.22 v 40-46)

It begins in a garden.

It ends in a garden.

In that same garden it begins again.

In between these two gardens of the destiny of Man, there is another garden.

This is it.

It is not like any English garden that you know. There are no blowsy borders of radiant marigolds or top-heavy toppling hollyhocks. No regimented glory of the scented extravaganza of the rose beds. No fragile explosions of the starburst of clematis across the fence or ancient brickwork.

It is a garden only in the Eastern sense, a place of blessed respite from the relentless sun. It is a place of grey green, the home of olive groves, the ancient trees of the estate at the foot of Olivet. Gat semani – the olive press. Gethsemane.

Here is a place familiar to the disciples, a place of return and rest and repose, near but far from the beating heart of the city and its restless demands, its burrowing crowded alleys, the bustle and the bedlam of urban living. A little Galilee in the suburbs of the city.

Here is a place they come with Jesus, quiet, retreating from the demand of the day. Under a night sky of velvet black and strung with necklaces of stars, the myriad constellations wherein the desert traveller may reorientate himself. A shining depth of infinite space wherein, so long ago, God took Abram to stand and see the unthinkable multitude of his descendants - the old man promised the fatherhood of the faithful, the patriarchy of the chosen, the long line of those who would dwell again in the Paradise of God.

Here, on this fateful night, fresh from the Supper, the Last, the Final Passover - which echoes down the millennia, revisiting the altars of the sacrifice, refuelling the faithful, reconnecting the temporal with the eternal - the Lamb

of the offering will come, the Manna of the Pilgrim will be proved in the heat of adversity.

Who would not want to rest under the stars, post prandial, pre Passover? So much excitement. So much anticipation. So much mystery. A day or two away from glory. So much to speculate and hope and relish. Sleep calls the dreams of the excited and weary and long-travelled disciples. For Christ there is no rest. He enters the storm. The battle has begun.

‘Watch with me while I go yonder and pray.’

The prayer of accompaniment is hard. We watch, we wait, we are told nothing, not even when to stop or what we pray. Just be there. Just hold the other before God in silent supplication. Hard to address. Hard to remain wakeful with so little purchase on the imagination of the soul.

Yonder Christ prays. Alone but accompanied and then alone as sleep overwhelms his weary guardians. Yonder Christ is torn. The first wounds of the Passion mark His soul.

How attractive now that memory of Satan’s desert contract – the power, the bread, the miracles, the imperium of this world.

Contrast this, the Godward road, the Lamb caught in the thicket, The Lord’s provision of His only Son, the torture and the blood sacrifice, this agony that will pale this into insignificance beside what is to come, the trust that death will be redeemed, that all that’s lost will be re-found and more.

The Angel of the Agony attends his Lord. The sweat of human fear of blood’s intensity in face of death, of recoil from the inhumanity of Man, of good seeking to reject the doorways of the dark - and yet that fragile light that darkness cannot overcome.

And you sleep on while destiny unfolds beyond your drowsy ken.

One hour, that’s all.

‘If it is your will’ .....the central question of the Godward heart.

Let me be faithful but let me not suffer on the way. Take this cup away. Remove this chalice of bitterness and pain. Let me ride the easy way to glory.

And all those years ago, in nowhere Nazareth, a humble maid, another garden, answered for Him, answered to Him, answered for all the faithful down the centuries of Man's brief mortal stay, 'Be it unto me....'

And so it goes. The Sovereign Son of Man and Son of God must answer for Himself and for his Mother and for the Church.

The prayer He gave to His disciples now lived out in deep finality.

The promise kept. The journey near its end. The hill of death awaits.

Salvation within reach, the entrance to the garden beckoning Man home – all hangs on this response....

'Not my will but thy will be done.'

Ultimate conformity of Man to God in Christ – reconciliation and reunion in this long night and longer day.

The olives must be pressed to give the oil which will anoint, Christ-en, the sleepy sons of Adam and bring healing to the wounded world.

Watch and pray.

Gethsemane is calling.