

The Gospel according to St Matthew

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Meditation

Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples, after which he goes with them to the garden of Gethsemane, out on the Mount of Olives. Here Jesus moved a short distance away from his disciples and asked them to pray with him throughout the night. Twice, however, the disciples fell asleep and Jesus woke them up, asking them to pray for him, for strength to resist temptation. The temptation of Jesus is to go against the will of his heavenly Father, to run away from his impending humiliation and death; This is represented by the chalice, held aloft by the angel in Bellini's painting. It recalls the Passover/Last Supper which they had just celebrated, and looks forward to the Christian Eucharist, or Holy Communion. Jesus is frightened; he knows that his teaching and actions have put him on a collision course with the Jewish leaders and realises that this will ultimately end in his death. Indeed, in the distance we see Judas leading the arrest party to find Jesus. But in the end, Jesus submits to the Father's will; it is necessary for Jesus to undergo such a death in order for humankind to be redeemed and for the Resurrection to take place. The rocky landscape depicts how Jesus felt, – alone, bleak and in a harsh place.