

# SEVEN BEFORE EASTER

A series of dialogues for Lent

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# SEVEN BEFORE EASTER

These dialogues were planned to occupy roughly the time of the sermon (about 20 minutes maximum) in the evening services of the seven Sundays of Lent, Passiontide and Easter Day; or for the seven evenings from Monday in Holy Week to Easter Sunday, since many churches hold meditations daily at that season.

## **Characters**

Enquirer, Caiaphas, Judas (Martha), Pilate, Herodias, Longinus (a soldier), Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene.

## **Staging**

The Enquirer stands at the lectern (especially if it has a mike) or other suitable vantage-point. The Witness is seated among the congregation to begin with and when called goes up into the pulpit (or, for instance, while still topical, a "Mastermind" chair and mike could be used). The speakers should, of course, memorise the lines but they can have their scripts on the reading desks before them if the director thinks fit. The Enquirer has a Bible to hand.

## **Dress**

Ordinary modern dress is envisaged but not too particularised, e.g. Caiaphas might wear some kind of cassock, but not the insignia of any identifiable denomination; Longinus could wear battledress but not be obviously of any known regiment or even army.

## **Music**

Each dialogue is linked to a movement of Gustav Hoist's "The Planets" suite which could, if found effective, be used to introduce and conclude the appropriate sequence. Other music could also be used. The dialogues do not attempt to be sermons, or even history, since every detail of the Passion story is subject to strong and endless debate and presumably always will be. I have tried, when a point is notoriously open to several interpretations, not to make too definite an assertion, but it ought to be explained from the beginning that so much must be a matter of guesswork, of wondering. What were they really like? What really did happen?

# SEVEN BEFORE EASTER

## Introduction

*(The ENQUIRER goes to the lectern)*

ENQUIRER: The story of the Passion puts itself over in very few words. Often the Gospels are as bare as a telegram. They didn't waste time on background details about people or places. Their readers knew about those already - only too well; they could fill in the picture for themselves. We can't expect to do that.

So during *(appropriate time)* we have asked some members of the congregation each to represent a character in the Passion story, and try to give that character's point of view, as far as we can guess at it. Of course, a lot of what they say is bound to be very much a matter of opinion. So we can do no more than try a few opinions. If you agree, good. If you disagree, good too. Let us begin.

## FIRST WITNESS: CAIAPHAS

*(Music: "The Planets " - Uranus)*

ENQUIRER Who could get us off to a better start than the king-pin in the political wheel - the High Priest Caiaphas? I call the Right Reverend Joseph Caiaphas. Who will speak for him?

*(A prosperous middle-aged man rises in his pew. A politician, and a practiced talker)*

Thank you. Will you take the witness stand, please?

*(CAIAPHAS goes up into the pulpit)*

Your Reverence, how long were you High Priest of Israel?

CAIAPHAS 19 years. From the year 18, as you count it, to the year 37.

E Quite a record.

C It was.

E So you were in office right through the year of Jesus of Nazareth, from his early twenties till after his death ... as far as he did die.

C Unfortunately.

E Why?

C Because someone would have been in office. It had to be me. Worse men have been forgotten or forgiven. I, Caiaphas, go down through history as Villain Number One. This is monstrously unfair. What else could I as a statesman have done with him? I was in an impossible position.

E The country was occupied, of course, by the Roman Army.

C I had to try to represent the people to the Occupying Power, and the Occupying Power to the people. They hated each other; and they both hated me, for being the middle man.

E Your Reverence, why were you chosen?

C The High Priesthood is a family affair, like Royalty.

E That doesn't quite answer the question.

C I followed my father-in-law.

E On whose orders? (*CAIAPHAS hesitates*) Weren't they the Roman Governor's: Valerius Gratus's?

C Actually, yes.

E Would you care to comment?

C That is just the kind of insinuation I had to live with. No, I was not a kind of agent for the Romans. They thought I would be. My father-in-law, Annas, was getting too old for the job, they thought. I sat tight and let them think what they liked. Result; the Governor kicked Annas out, and installed me in his place. I was grateful. I wanted power, fool that I was. But I was nobody's puppet . . . except God's, it seems to me.

E I was wondering where God came into it.

C Get it out of your mind that the appointment of High Priests had anything to do with religion. In the old days, perhaps, though I doubt it. When I took office there were generations behind us of sheer politics and dirty work. Do you know that King Herod the Great once foisted a young boy out of his kinsmen on to the High Priesthood, and then when it suited him to make

a change, he had the boy drowned? No, I thought you didn't.

E Charming family, the Herods. Why did the nation stand for it?

C Herod was efficient. He held us together, and held off Roman aggression - only while he lived, but he succeeded.

E Was it worth the price?

C Yes, it was. Our first need is to survive.

E. Not easy for Israel, planted at the crossroads of the world: greedy empires on every side . . .

C Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Rome . . . I know your Christmas tale of angels, singing Peace on Earth. They could hardly have chosen a more war scarred place to do it in.

E (*wonderingly*) I believe you love Israel.

C Never admit to love.

E Is love a weakness?