

Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in all four Gospels as the person who provided for the burial of Jesus (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42). The four accounts vary in detail and in indications of Joseph's sympathy for Jesus' mission, but the broad picture is clear. Joseph came from the town of Arimathea, north-west of Jerusalem. He became a member of the Jewish Council, and was sufficiently well-to-do to build a new burial place for himself near Jerusalem. This also suggests that Joseph had moved from Arimathea to Jerusalem and done well there, since any family plot would presumably have been in Arimathea.

The Gospels indicate some sympathy on Joseph's part for the mission of Jesus, and Luke adds that he had not supported the Sanhedrin in their demand for the death sentence on Jesus (Luke 23:51). In that case, it could have been as a favour to the disciples that Joseph approached Pilate for the body of Jesus and provided it with decent burial. It is also possible that he was concerned for the ritual defilement that would have ensued if the dead body had remained unburied (Deuteronomy 21:23). For whatever reason, it was a gracious act, the memory of which has been treasured by the church. According to the first three Gospels, the women who had been with Jesus were with Joseph when he saw to the burial, but John says that Joseph was assisted by Nicodemus.

Around this simple account various legends grew up from the second century, including Joseph's involvement in the founding of the church in Lydda and the suggestion that it was he who provided for Jesus' mother Mary after the resurrection. The legend of Joseph's journey to Glastonbury in England with the Holy Grail is a late medieval invention, fostered by Glastonbury in the interests of enhancing its own declining importance in England.

For Liturgical Use

Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Jewish Council who graciously provided a tomb for the burial of Jesus. He came from the town of Arimathea, north-west of Jerusalem. He was well-to-do and is presented in the Gospels as sympathetic to Jesus' mission, though not an open disciple. These simple facts were later embellished with various legends, including the late medieval story of his journey to Glastonbury with the Holy Grail.

Sentence

The righteous are a light in the darkness for the upright; they are gracious, compassionate and just.
Psalm 112:4

Collects

God of mercy and compassion,
your servant Joseph of Arimathea
prepared the body of Jesus for burial
and provided for it a resting place;
give us courage to take risks in your service
and follow Jesus our whole life long;
through the same Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Jesus,

greater than Joseph could realise,
greater than the dead, lamented prophet
to whom he lent his tomb;
accept our gratitude that you are pleased
with what we do for you.

Psalms 4 101

Readings

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| Genesis 49:33-50:7a | The burial of Jacob |
| Acts 13:32-39 | He did not see decay |
| Luke 23:50-56 | The burial of Jesus |

Post Communion Sentence

To this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.
Romans 14:9