

THE PASSION OF CHRIST

Directed by Mel Gibson

It is always difficult to see a film with an open mind after reading so much about it beforehand. From the beginning, I applauded Mel Gibson's idea to make a film in the original languages – it might make it more difficult to follow but at the same time it seems so much more realistic and avoids applying either English or American accents to first century Jews or Romans. As anyone who can follow the dialogues in Aramaic and Latin would affirm, they were excellent and the actors did a tremendous job in languages that were not their own – with a special mention for the part of Pilate, totally convincing in both tongues.

Perhaps the most repeated comment about the film is related to how bloody it is, and after seeing this comment so many times, maybe it was less bloody than I expected, although the flagellation scene is deeply disturbing and probably one of the most accurate parts of the whole film. There are some extra-biblical scenes included – the incident with Veronica, who wiped Jesus' face and unknowingly at first was given a facial image on the cloth, and the somewhat annoying scene with the crow on the cross of the unrepentant thief. I personally found the various appearances of what must be understood as the devil to be superfluous, and despite the intention of showing Roman soldiers as cruel and heartless in general, it is surely unhistorical to show them constantly drinking on duty.

Despite the general excellence of the film, there remains one question that must be asked of all films related to the passion of Jesus of Nazareth. Why is more not made of the historical information obtained from the Shroud? At the very end of Gibson's film, it is true that the risen Jesus leaves behind the burial Shroud in the otherwise empty tomb, although there could have been so much more. Why are the two wrongdoers portrayed as carrying only the crossbeam of the cross, while Jesus is made to carry the whole structure on one shoulder? Why were the nails driven in through the palms? Why was Jesus still wearing a loincloth? In the otherwise poor film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus was at least crucified naked without showing anything to offend sensitivities of any sort. Why was the burial not shown? This would have been a perfect time to keep on with the

gospel narratives and show how a sudarium was placed over Jesus' head before burial and how the body was placed in a shroud.

This said, the film is still excellent. To my mind, it portrays the essence and nature of Jesus' love and message amidst horrible suffering, and as such is deeply moving and a profound cinematic and spiritual experience.