

## LESSON EIGHT

# THE PASCHAL MYSTERY: JESUS DELIVERS US FROM EVIL

### GETTING READY

Lesson Eight introduces the Paschal Mystery—the redemptive work of Christ. Through Scripture, Tradition, and Church teaching, we explore how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Passover as the true Paschal Lamb, who offers himself in love to save humanity from sin and death. We see that the Paschal Mystery is not only historical but also deeply personal. It is made present today in the Liturgy, especially the Eucharist.

#### ► Catechist's Prayer

*"In the cross is salvation and life;  
in the cross is defense against our enemies.*

*Through the cross heavenly sweetness is poured into our souls,  
our minds are strengthened, and we experience spiritual joy."<sup>16</sup>*

*Amen.*

#### ► Grounding the Lesson

Take time to read and pray with these texts before you teach the lesson:

- Catechism paragraphs 571, 602–605, 613, 619–623, 656–658
- Exodus 12:1–31
- 1 Corinthians 5:7
- Luke 22
- John 20:1–20

#### ► Gathering Supplies for the Group Meeting

You will need the following:

- This Leader's Guide
- The Lesson Eight slide deck
- The video disc or link for streaming
- Pens or pencils
- Snacks and drinks
- Name tags for everyone
- A crucifix in the room where you meet
- A small crucifix for each participant, if possible

### PREPARING THE CONTENT

#### ► Lesson Overview

Lesson Eight leads participants into the Paschal Mystery—Christ's work of redemption through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. It opens with a reflection that address common misunderstandings about Catholic devotion to the crucified Christ and skepticism about the Resurrection. The life of St. Francis of Assisi is featured as a powerful witness to living a life conformed to Christ in both suffering and joy.

Through Scripture, Tradition, and Church teaching, participants explore how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Passover as the true Paschal Lamb, offering himself in love to save humanity from sin and death. The lesson unpacks each aspect of the Paschal Mystery, emphasizing that it is not only historical but deeply personal, and it is made present today in the Liturgy, especially the Eucharist.

Participants are invited to reflect on how it is possible to live the Paschal Mystery in daily life by uniting their own crosses to Christ's, trusting in the hope of the Resurrection. Key concepts such as redemption, grace, and conversion are defined and discussed. Participants are reminded that the Cross is not the end of the story but the path to eternal life.

## ► Lesson Objectives

Participants will

- **Become familiar with the Paschal Mystery as Christ's saving work in his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension**, the central events of salvation history and the Christian Faith.
- **Recognize Jesus' sacrificial death and Resurrection as the source of our redemption** and the fulfillment of God's plan to save humanity from sin and open the gates of heaven.
- **Understand salvation as a gift from God**, inviting a response of faith and love.
- **Acknowledge the Resurrection as a historical event** that confirms Christ's divinity and gives meaning to Christian hope.
- **Identify the key events of Holy Week**—Palm Sunday, the Last Supper, and the Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ—and understand their liturgical and theological significance.
- **Reflect personally on the Paschal Mystery**, which brings about redemption, offers grace, and calls each person to ongoing conversion and deeper union with Christ.

## ► Pastoral Accompaniment

### When It's Hard to Accept Forgiveness and Redemption

When encountering the radical love and mercy of God, it's not uncommon for some to inwardly respond, "But I don't deserve this." And they're right ... in a way. None of us "deserves" grace. As the centurion humbly declared in the Gospels, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof" (Matthew 8:8). And yet Jesus comes anyway.

For some, this lesson may stir up old wounds, past sins, or shame. The catechist must gently remind participants that Christ does not wait until we are worthy. He died for us while we were still sinners (see Romans 5:8). Jesus told St. Teresa of Ávila that he would create the universe again just to hear her say she loved him.<sup>17</sup> That's the personal depth of God's love for each of us.

If this comes up, encourage participants to bring their burdens, weaknesses, or feelings of unworthiness to Jesus. St. Paul says he gladly boasts of his weaknesses because Jesus' power is made perfect in our weakness (see 2 Corinthians 12:5, 9).

This subject may point to the lesson on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is a real and grace-filled encounter with the mercy that flows from the Cross.

### When Personal Sufferings Obscure the Cross

Some participants may be wrestling with unresolved pain: the death of a loved one, illness, trauma, betrayal, or even long-standing anger toward God. Talking about the Cross can stir these emotions. Some may struggle to understand why Jesus' suffering was necessary, why a loving God would require his brutal death to save us. And why do people in the world experience suffering? These are honest and important questions that often arise from real and sometimes traumatic experiences of personal suffering.

Be ready to explain that the Cross isn't about punishment but about radical love: Jesus lays down his life freely (see John 10:18), embracing our sin and suffering to heal and redeem us from within. The video for Lesson Eight and

the additional resource by Dr. Edward Sri (“Why Jesus Had to Die to Save Us,” *Ascension Presents* video—noted in the Participant’s Guide) explain this well.

Regarding personal sufferings, be prepared to listen with compassion and gently remind participants that Christ does not abandon us in suffering; he enters it with us. Avoid phrases like “Everything happens for a reason” and instead emphasize Christ’s loving solidarity with us in our suffering. Our difficulties and pain can either draw us closer to Jesus and his suffering heart or away from it. God gives us the grace for our pain to be transformative, but it is ultimately up to each person how he or she responds.

## ► Teaching Toolbelt

### The Catholic Understanding of Suffering

The Church’s teaching on redemptive suffering is a beautiful one! There are many beliefs surrounding the topic of suffering. In the main doctrinal content about “Sharing in the Paschal Mystery” (see the Participant’s Guide, p. 88), consider pausing and expanding more on the teaching of redemptive suffering.

There are many beliefs regarding the topic of suffering. Some common ones are that Jesus suffered so that we would never have to. Another, found within fundamentalist communities, is that suffering is a punishment for those not holy enough. This is simply not the case. In fact, Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew that to be his disciple means taking up a cross (16:24). This is the very first mention of the Cross in the Gospels, and it isn’t even about *his* suffering; it’s about ours. He invites us to unite our suffering to his, making it redemptive.

This is not suffering for suffering’s sake. Scripture tells us,

- “To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).
- “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).
- “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake ... for the sake of his body, that is, the Church” (Colossians 1:24).

Suffering is not a punishment but a great gift. God does not *cause* suffering, but when he allows it in our lives, it is always for a greater purpose. He calls us closer to the suffering heart of Christ. If we allow his grace to move us, these valleys can really be transformative.

The Catholic Church teaches that our suffering can help sanctify us and become a powerful prayer for others. We unite our own suffering to that of Jesus Christ. In this way, we know his love more deeply and help others along the path to salvation through our prayers and sacrifice.

### Abraham’s Ram, God’s Lamb

Lesson Six mentions that the account of Abraham and the binding of Isaac (see Genesis 22) prefigures the sacrificial death of Christ. Now, as we focus on the Paschal Mystery, this story deserves a closer look. Its details form one of the clearest typological connections in Scripture. It’s a powerful foreshadowing of God the Father’s sacrifice of his only Son for the salvation of the world.

Consider reading Genesis 22:1–14. Abraham, in obedience to God, takes his “only son” (Genesis 22:2)—a phrase strikingly echoed in John 3:16—and leads him to be sacrificed. Isaac carries the wood for his own offering, just as Jesus carries the wood of the Cross to Calvary. This detail also suggests that Isaac is a young man, not small child. He is old enough to carry wood for a burnt offering and old enough to ask, “Where is the lamb?” This suggests that he is strong enough to resist, and yet he does not. He allows himself to be bound, just as Jesus submits to the will of the Father and delivers himself to be sacrificed (see John 10:17–18).

Abraham tells Isaac, “God will provide himself the lamb.” But what is caught in the thicket is not a lamb; it’s a ram. A ram is not a lamb. A lamb is a young sheep under one year of age, while a ram is a grown, uncastrated male sheep. The lamb Abraham spoke of would not appear until centuries later, when John the Baptist points to Jesus and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Even the ram’s head caught in the thorns echoes the crown of thorns Jesus would wear, emphasizing again that God himself would provide the sacrifice.

Abraham names the place “The Lord will provide”—not “did provide,” because the ultimate sacrifice is still to come. On that same mountain range (Mount Moriah, traditionally associated with the region of Jerusalem), the Father would one day offer his Son, the true Paschal Lamb.

This moment on Mount Moriah is a lens through which we understand Calvary: the beloved son, the willing victim, the wood, the thorns, the substitute sacrifice. It culminates in the Paschal Mystery. Jesus is the Lamb that Abraham knew God would provide.

## **PRESENTING THE LESSON**

The following pages provide teaching tips and discussion questions keyed to each page of the Participant’s Guide. The boxed text on these pages will guide you through the lesson, giving you tips for presenting the content, answering questions, and leading discussions.

### **OPENING PRAYER**

#### **◆ Prepare the Space**

Make sure there is a crucifix in the room where your group meets. It should be there for all the lessons, but especially for this lesson on the Paschal Mystery. If possible, have a small crucifix for each participant, too.

#### **◆ The Gospel Always on Your Lips**

This lesson is the center of our Faith and all that we believe! Pope Francis writes that in catechesis, the proclamation of the Gospel “needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal. ... On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: ‘Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.’”<sup>18</sup> By Jesus’ death he frees us from sin; by his Resurrection he shows us the path to new life (see CCC 654).

What does that mean for your teaching? It means all of it should point back to the love of Jesus and his death and Resurrection for the salvation of the world.

### **ENGAGING THE HEART**

Give each participant a crucifix to hold or ask them to look at the crucifix on the wall for a few moments.

*Ask: What do you see when you look at the Cross? Pain? Love? Hope? Embarrassment? Sacrifice?*

Let them reflect in silence for about a minute, then invite them to turn to the person next to them and share one or two words that came to mind. Then transition to the lesson.

*Say: The Cross is central to our Faith, but what does it reveal about God’s heart? Today, we’re going to explore that.*



## LESSON EIGHT

# THE PASCHAL MYSTERY: JESUS DELIVERS US FROM EVIL

◆ Welcome everyone and pray the Opening Prayer out loud together.

Lesson Eight introduces the Paschal Mystery—the redemptive work of Christ. Through Scripture, Tradition, and Church teaching, we explore how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Passover as the true Paschal Lamb, who offers himself in love to save humanity from sin and death. We see that the Paschal Mystery is not only historical but also deeply personal. It is made present today in the Liturgy, especially the Eucharist.

### Opening Prayer

#### *Anima Christi*

*Soul of Christ, sanctify me.  
Body of Christ, save me.  
Blood of Christ, embolden me.  
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.  
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.*

*O good Jesus, hear me.  
Within your wounds hide me.  
Let me never be separated from you.*

*From the wicked enemy defend me.  
At the hour of my death call me  
and bid me come to you,  
that with your saints I may praise you  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

# BURNING QUESTIONS

◆ Give everyone a few minutes to write or review their responses. When they are done, invite them to share their thoughts with the group.

How does the Cross save us? Couldn't God just forgive humanity?

God could have forgiven us without the Cross. What does it say to you that he chose to do it this way?

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The Resurrection seems unlikely and physically impossible. How do we know the disciples didn't make it up or imagine it?

Skepticism about the Resurrection is not new. This question opens the door to historical, scriptural, and spiritual reflection. What would it mean in your life if the Resurrection were true?

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## HOME PREPARATION CHECK-IN

- Ask:
- How did the Home Activity from Lesson Seven go? If you did the Scripture activity, what would you ask Jesus if you were sitting with him right now? If you did the journaling activity, what some ways you might like to use your talents to serve the Kingdom?
  - How did your home preparation for Lesson Eight go? What worked well for you this week? What didn't?

## ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

*“I have given thee the stigmata which are the insignia of My Passion.”<sup>33</sup>*

Many people have heard of St. Francis. Some know him as a holy man; some know him more as a friend of animals or a lover of the poor. He began life as the indulged son of a wealthy merchant, a party boy who wanted to achieve worldly fame as a knight. Instead, he was called by Christ to renounce his father’s wealth and live as a beggar. He became a saint and toward the end of his life received the **STIGMATA**, a living testament to the life and the **PASSION** of Christ.

While visiting the rundown Church of San Damiano as a young man, Francis looked at Jesus on the crucifix there and heard him speak. Jesus said, “Francis, go and rebuild my Church, which, as you see, is falling into ruin.” Francis obeyed and began to restore the derelict church. But as he worked, he came to understand that Jesus’ call was broader than he realized. Jesus wanted Francis to rebuild the universal Church.

Francis renounced his inheritance and adopted a rule of life based on the Gospel message of poverty, generosity, humility, love, and sacrifice. He lived as close to the ways of Jesus as possible. His powerful preaching and example drew many to follow him, and in the year 1210, the Franciscan order was founded.

Francis prayed to Jesus that before his own death he would feel “as far as possible, both in [his] soul and body, that pain which thou, sweet Lord, didst endure in the hour of thy most bitter Passion.” In 1224, two years before Francis’ death, Jesus responded in love to this heartfelt prayer, and Francis became the first person we know of to receive the stigmata.<sup>34</sup>

On Mt. Alvernia, Italy, Jesus appeared to Francis in the form of an angel bearing the image of his crucifixion, and Francis received the wounds of Christ’s Passion. His hands and feet appeared to have been pierced with nails, the heads of the nails showing on his palms and the soles of his feet. An unhealed wound appeared on his right side, like the wound where Jesus was pierced by a lance.

Jesus, answering Francis’ prayer, said to him, “Knowest thou ... what I have done to thee? I have given thee the stigmata which are the insignia of my Passion, that thou mayst be my standard-bearer ... that so thou mayst be conformed to me in death, as thou hast been like to me in life.”<sup>35</sup>

Thus St. Francis came to embody Christ’s life and Passion. This humble beggar gave up worldly riches and comforts to follow God’s call; he welcomed suffering and hardship to know Jesus’ heart. Eight hundred years later, he continues to inspire others to a life of poverty, love, and penance, rebuilding God’s Church even today.



### Lived:

c. 1181–October 3, 1226

### Birthplace:

Assisi, Italy

### Feast Day:

October 4

### Patron Saint of:

- Animals
- The environment
- Merchants

#### ◆ Relating to the Saint

*Ask: Has anyone ever heard of St. Francis of Assisi? What do you know about him?*

Read aloud or review the saint testimony.

*Ask: Was there something in this testimony of Francis that stood out or surprised you?*

# THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

## Essential Vocabulary for the Catechist

### SALVATION

The restoration of our communion with God, our friendship with him, by the forgiveness of our sins through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**H**ave you ever wondered why the Cross and the **RESURRECTION** are at the very center of our Faith? Perhaps you've heard the phrase "Paschal Mystery" and weren't quite sure what it meant. In this lesson, we are diving deep into the fundamental truths of Christianity—God's plan of salvation for all people and the personal invitation he extends to each of us.

## What Is the Paschal Mystery?

The word "paschal" comes from the Hebrew word *pesach*, meaning "**PASSOVER**." In the Old Testament, the Passover was the defining moment of Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt. By the blood of a sacrificial lamb, God saved the Israelites from death and led them to freedom (see Exodus 12:1–31).

In the New Testament, Jesus becomes the true and perfect **PASCHAL LAMB**—the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (see John 1:29). He accomplishes a new Passover, not from physical slavery but from the slavery of sin and death (see 1 Corinthians 5:7).

## Essential Vocabulary for the Catechist

### ASCENSION

The entry of Jesus into heaven in his humanity, body and soul, forty days after the Resurrection.

Remember that, in the Christian sense, the word "mystery" refers to a divine truth that surpasses our full understanding, but we know it to be true because God has revealed it. The **PASCHAL MYSTERY** refers to the saving events of Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

It is through the Paschal Mystery that God's eternal plan for our salvation is carried out in human history. Through her worship, the Church remembers and makes present the Paschal Mystery "by which Christ accomplished the work of our salvation" (CCC 1067).

In short, the Paschal Mystery is the heart of our Faith, our salvation, and our life in Christ.



## "Why Did Jesus Have to Die?"

Dr. Edward Sri—*Every Knee Shall Bow* podcast, episode 124

## The Center of the Good News

The Paschal Mystery is the fulfillment of all God's promises. The entire Old Testament points toward this act of salvation. The Exodus, the binding of Isaac, the covenant with David, the Passover lamb: All these events foreshadow Christ, the true Paschal Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. As St. Paul writes, "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4–5).

## Essential Vocabulary for the Catechist

### TYOLOGY

An approach to Scripture in which we recognize "types" in the Old Testament that prefigure or foreshadow the person of Jesus (see CCC 128). Through typology, we see the perfect unity of God's divine plan for salvation as various figures in Scripture point forward to the fulfillment of that plan in Jesus Christ.

◆ For a closer look at the biblical account of the binding of Isaac, see "Abraham's Ram, God's Lamb" under Teaching Toolbelt on page 147.

◆ Sacred Art

Before you teach the main content, reflect silently on “The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb” from the Ghent Altarpiece. Allow one or two minutes of silence without providing an explanation. Then lead a short, open reflection using the following prompts.

Ask:

- What did you notice first?
- What stands out to you about the Lamb?
- Who is surrounding the Lamb? What are they doing?
- What emotions or thoughts does this image stir in you?
- What might this image be saying about Jesus and his sacrifice?

After some responses, offer this short transition into the teaching.


Say:

*This image was painted nearly six hundred years ago, and it captures something timeless: the Lamb of God, offered in sacrifice, at the center of God's plan for our salvation. Just as the blood of a lamb marked the doors of the Israelites at the first Passover, the Blood of Jesus, the true Lamb, is poured out for the salvation of the world. Today, we'll explore this sacrifice, known as the Paschal Mystery, which is at the heart of our Faith.*



Jesus entered the world with this very purpose: to heal the divide that sin had created between God and humanity. From the moment of his birth, Christ was moving toward this great hour of redeeming love.

Through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension, Christ accomplished the work of salvation in a way that is real, historical, and deeply personal. The Paschal Mystery thus stands at the center of the Good News (see CCC 571) and the center of our life in Christ. The Incarnation, the Word made flesh, can only be fully understood in light of the Cross and Resurrection.



**“It Is Finished”**  
Dr. Edward Sri—*All Things Catholic* podcast, episode 242

◆ Some participants may struggle to receive the message of redemption because of deep-seated guilt or a sense of unworthiness. For pastoral help, see “When It’s Hard to Accept Forgiveness and Redemption” under Pastoral Accompaniment on page 146.

### God’s Indescribable Love for Us

When humankind chose sin over God, we broke the original communion we were created for. Yet God never ceased reaching out to us to bring us back to him. All history was a preparation for the moment when God himself, in the person of Christ, would enter the world to save it. “For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). It was not because we earned it. It was not because we deserved it. It was because God loves us (see 1 John 4:8).

Jesus said, “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). He came to rescue us by a self-emptying love so deep it embraced even death and so powerful it destroyed the power of sin. This is why the *Catechism* affirms that Christ’s whole life is an offering to the Father (see CCC 606).




◆ This teaching may stir difficult emotions for participants dealing with unresolved pain and for those who may have been taught that God the Father took out his rage against the human race on Jesus. It is important to caution against this belief. For help with responding pastorally, see “When Personal Sufferings Obscure the Cross” under Pastoral Accompaniment on page 146.

### Christ’s Passion and Death: Triumph over Sin

In obedience to the Father, Christ willingly embraces suffering and death. At the Last Supper, he institutes the Eucharist: “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).

That same night, he enters into his agony in the garden of Gethsemane, where he prays, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Notice that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve said, “Not your will, but mine.” In Gethsemane, sweating blood, Christ says, “Not my will, but yours.” His obedience heals the disobedience of the Fall (see CCC 612).



**“Why Jesus Had to Die to Save Us”**  
Dr. Edward Sri—*Ascension Presents* video

As Isaiah prophesied, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities”

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(Isaiah 53:5). On the Cross, Jesus bears the full burden of sin. He takes on himself the consequence of every human sin—past, present, and future. St. Paul says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13).

Jesus does not passively endure his death: He actively chooses it, and by it, he accomplishes the extraordinary work of our redemption, taking away the sin of the world and restoring us to communion with God (see CCC 613).

## **The Resurrection: Triumph over Death**

The story does not end at the tomb. Jesus descends to the dead to proclaim victory to the righteous who await him there (see CCC 632–635). Then, on the third day after his death, Jesus rises from the dead, fulfilling the Scriptures and shattering the finality of death for all. By his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to new life (see CCC 654).

The Resurrection is a historical event, firmly rooted in eyewitness testimony. St. Paul writes, “He was buried, [and] he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and ... he appeared to Cephas [St. Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time” (1 Corinthians 15:4–6).

The apostles, who had fled from Gethsemane in fear when Jesus was arrested, later proclaimed this truth even to the point of martyrdom. Their lives bear witness to the fact that the Resurrection is not a metaphor but an event that changed their lives.

The *Catechism* explains, “The Resurrection above all constitutes the confirmation of all Christ’s works and teachings” (CCC 651). In rising from the dead, Jesus proves that he is truly the Son of God.

The Resurrection gives us hope not only for eternal life after death, but also for the transformation of our lives here and now. We can live with the confident assurance that “death no longer has dominion” over those who are in Christ (Romans 6:9).

## **The Ascension: Jesus Reigns in Glory**

For forty days after the Resurrection, Jesus appears to his disciples, teaching them about the Kingdom of God and commissioning them to teach in his name. On the fortieth day, he meets them on the Mount of Olives; as they watch, Jesus ascends into heaven. His Ascension is not simply his departure from earth but his enthronement in glory. “God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet” (Psalm 47:5).

In the Ascension, Jesus has opened heaven to us. This is an extraordinary act:

Left to its own natural powers humanity does not have access to the “Father’s house,” to God’s life and happiness. Only Christ can open to man such access that we, his members, might have confidence that we too shall go where he, our Head and our Source, has preceded us. (CCC 661)

Fully human and fully divine, seated at the right hand of the Father, Christ now reigns in glory, interceding for us (see Hebrews 9:24; CCC 667) and pouring out the Holy Spirit upon his Church (see Acts 2:33). He has given us access to the Father and now prepares a place in heaven for those who belong to him (see John 14:2–3).

## **Sharing in the Paschal Mystery**

Our participation in the Paschal Mystery begins at the Sacrament of Baptism (see CCC 1214–1216), when we are united to Christ in his death and Resurrection: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead ... we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

The Christian life is a continual dying and rising—dying to sin, rising to new life; dying to selfishness, rising to love. This growth in conformity to Christ continues throughout our lives. Through these transformations, we are called as Christians to remain firm in hope, trusting that the grace of God will sustain us to the end (see CCC 2016).

The Church itself springs from the side of Christ, opened in his death on the Cross (see CCC 766). It is

the steward of the mysteries of God (see 1 Corinthians 4:1), bringing the graces of the Paschal Mystery to every generation in the Word and the sacraments.

## The Eucharist: Our Participation in the Paschal Mystery

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we encounter the Paschal Mystery anew: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). The Mass makes truly present the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. As the *Catechism* explains, “The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it *re-presents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross” (CCC 1366). In each celebration of the Eucharist, we are drawn into the eternal offering of love between the Son and the Father.

When we receive Holy Communion, we are united with Christ’s offering. We stand with Mary at the foot of the Cross, offering our lives with his (see CCC 1370). The Eucharist is at the center of the Church’s life because it is the outpouring of Christ’s love for us: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

## Living the Paschal Mystery

◆ Consider pausing here to talk more about redemptive suffering. See “The Catholic Understanding of Suffering” under Teaching Toolbelt on page 147.

In every Mass, every sacrament, and every act of love, we glimpse the Paschal Mystery. We live it by allowing Christ’s death and Resurrection to shape our lives. We live out the Paschal Mystery whenever we choose to love sacrificially, forgive freely, and serve humbly.

We also live it out when we unite our suffering to his. The *Catechism* teaches that “by his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion” (CCC 1505).

We call this **REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING**. When we take up our own crosses willingly—our struggles, challenges, and pain—we can unite our sufferings to

Christ’s Passion and can participate in his redemptive work for all people. Our suffering becomes a source of grace for ourselves and others.

We also live the Paschal Mystery in the joyful confidence that love is more powerful than sin and death is not the end (see 1 Corinthians 13:4–7; 15:55–57; 2 Thessalonians 3:3). Death does not have the final word, for Christ’s Resurrection has changed everything. The Cross has become the door to eternal life. Loss and suffering are nothing compared with the joy of knowing Christ and “the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10).



### Additional Resources in the Ascension App

#### “God’s Plan of Salvation”

Fr. Mike Schmitz—*Catechism in a Year* podcast, day 86

#### “7 Things Catholics Should Know About the New Covenant”

Dr. Andrew Swafford—Ascension Guide

#### “Holy Thursday: From the Old Covenant to the New”

Michael Ruzala—Ascension blog, April 13, 2017

## Reflection

Here are questions to think about as you pray and study.

- The Paschal Mystery invites a response of faith. What might it look like in practical ways to live as someone redeemed by Christ’s sacrifice?
- Think of a hardship you’ve experienced. If you united it to the sufferings of Christ, how would it gain new meaning or purpose?
- St. Paul writes in the first letter to the Corinthians, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (15:14). What if Jesus had not risen from the dead? Why do you think the Resurrection is essential to the Catholic Faith and to your own life?

◆ Encourage your group to reflect on these questions silently or journal with them at home.



◆ Review the terms with your group.

## Clarifying Concepts

### Paschal lamb

The perfect, unblemished lamb whose blood, on the first Passover, was placed on the doorposts of the Israelites' homes, marking them for protection, so the angel of death "passed over" them (see Exodus 12). This led to their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. In the New Testament, Jesus is revealed as the true Paschal Lamb—the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (see John 1:29).

### Paschal Mystery

The saving work of Jesus Christ, accomplished through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. By it, Jesus conquered sin and death and opened the way to new and eternal life.

### Passion

The suffering and death of Jesus. It is remembered and celebrated every year during Holy Week, which begins on Palm Sunday and culminates in the Easter Vigil.

### Passover

The Jewish feast that commemorates God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. On the night of their liberation, each family sacrificed a lamb and marked their doorposts with its blood so the angel of death would "pass over" their homes (see Exodus 12). This event foreshadows the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, which delivers us from sin and death.

### Redemptive suffering

The voluntary acceptance and offering of our personal trials, pain, and hardships to God in union with Christ's saving Passion. In this we participate in his work of redemption for the salvation and spiritual benefit of ourselves and others, particularly the remission of sin and the sanctification of souls. (See Colossians 1:24.)

### Resurrection

The bodily rising of Jesus from the dead on the third day after his death and burial. The word can also refer to the resurrection of all people at the end of time.

### Stigmata

The mysterious appearance of the wounds of Christ's Passion on the body of a living person, typically on the hands, feet, and side. The Church has recognized this phenomenon in the lives of some saints—such as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Padre Pio, and St. Catherine of Siena—as a rare and extraordinary grace. The Church does not view the presence of stigmata as proof of holiness in itself but carefully discerns such cases, ensuring that they are not caused by medical or psychological factors.

### Faith and Fun

According to the Gospels, who was the first person to see the risen Jesus?

- a. Peter
- b. John
- c. Mary Magdalene
- d. Thomas

◆ **Answer:** (c)  
Mary Magdalene

### FATH AND FUN TEACHING MOMENT

In the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb where Jesus was laid and finds that the stone has been moved. Afraid that Jesus' body has been taken or moved, she runs to tell Peter and John—a.k.a., "the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved" (John 20:2). The three of them return to the tomb, and after Peter and John look inside, they return home. But Mary Magdalene stays at the tomb weeping. A man asks her why she is weeping and says, "Whom do you seek?" She thinks at first that he is the gardener, but when he says her name, she realizes with joy that it is the risen Lord (see John 20:1–18).

## STATIONS OF THE CROSS

The Stations of the Cross, also known as the *Via Crucis* or Way of the Cross, is a powerful devotion that draws us into prayerful reflection on the suffering and death of Jesus. It is a way to spiritually walk with Christ on the road to Calvary.

The practice began when early Christian pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem to trace the steps that Jesus took from his condemnation to his burial. For those early pilgrims (as for many people today), it was a moving experience to walk the very path Christ had taken. Over time, the Church, through the work of the Franciscans, began promoting ways for the faithful to make this journey spiritually without going to the Holy Land. Outdoor shrines in Europe became places of pilgrimage. Eventually, churches were permitted to construct devotional “stations” on their grounds or on the inside walls of the nave, each station representing a specific moment of Christ’s Passion. These were not dramatic reenactments but sacred representations for meditation and prayer.

The tradition spread through the Catholic world. The Church encouraged the practice, granting indulgences (see the “Indulgences” sidebar in Lesson Fourteen) to those who prayed the Stations with devotion, as if they had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The fourteen stations most used today were standardized in the eighteenth century, though various alternative versions exist, including scriptural alternatives approved by the Church.

◆ Consider doing the Living It Out activity as a group if you have time.

### Living It Out

Choose one small sacrifice to make this week as an offering of love in union with Christ’s Passion. Here are some examples:

- Giving up a comfort (like a favorite drink, snack, or extra screen time)
- Doing an act of kindness in secret
- Bearing a small inconvenience without complaining

Just as Jesus’ sacrifice was offered as a gift for each of us, offer your small sacrifice for someone who is suffering.





When we walk the Stations of the Cross, we are doing more than observing. We are entering into the mystery of Christ’s suffering and love. With each station, we pause to meditate on what Jesus endured physically, spiritually, and emotionally. We consider his falls, his encounters with others, his silence, his sacrifice. As we do, we bring our own wounds, sins, burdens, and griefs to the foot of his Cross.

The Way of the Cross is traditionally prayed on Fridays during Lent and on Good Friday, but it can be prayed at any time of year. You may pray it alone or in a group. Many churches offer booklets to guide your prayers. They usually include the traditional refrain at each station: “We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.”

Praying the Stations of the Cross gives us a chance to accompany Jesus in his suffering and reminds us that our own sufferings are not meaningless. Through them, we learn to carry our own crosses with faith, hope, and love.

## TRADITIONS AND TREASURES SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT

### STATIONS OF THE CROSS

For many Catholics, the Stations of the Cross are associated with Lent, solemn music, and perhaps childhood memories of walking slowly around the church on Friday evenings. But for those who are new to the Church, this devotion is likely to be unfamiliar. It is important that we do not limit it to a seasonal ritual. The Stations are a powerful spiritual encounter with Jesus—his suffering, his love, and his invitation to each of us to take up our own cross and follow him (see Luke 9:23).

The Stations are a participation in the mystery of redemption, a way to enter more fully into Christ’s Passion and allow his suffering to give meaning to our own. When participants understand this, the devotion becomes a personal encounter with the sacrificial love of God.

#### ► Teaching Tips

##### *Introduce the History with a Light Touch*

Do not overwhelm participants with historical detail, but offer enough context to help them see that the Stations are rooted in centuries of faith and pilgrimage. Many will find it helpful to know that this is not a new or “extra” devotion but one that connects them to the early Church and to Catholics throughout the world.

Say (optional): *For centuries, Christians have wanted to follow Jesus more closely by meditating on the roads he walked on the way to his Crucifixion. The Stations allow us to make that journey in our own hearts, right here in our parish.*

### **Connect the Devotion to Scripture and the Liturgy**

Several stations are drawn directly from the Gospels, while others are traditional meditations that help us reflect more fully on Christ's suffering. Consider reflecting on one or more Scripture passages before praying the Stations:

- John 19:17—"So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross."
- Isaiah 53:5—"He was wounded for our transgressions."
- Philippians 2:8—"He humbled himself and became obedient unto death."

Also explain how the Stations align with the liturgical rhythm of the Church, especially during Lent, a season of penance and preparation (see CCC 1163, 1438). But remind your group that the devotion can be prayed at any time of year.

### **Pray the Stations Together**

If it's possible during your group meeting, pray the devotion together at the stations in your parish. You will need a booklet or printout of the prayers for each participant.

- Use a booklet or script with a consistent format: short Scripture, reflection, response.
- Encourage participants to offer their intentions, especially for their own sufferings or those of others.
- When possible, move physically from station to station. If someone cannot walk, encourage them to journey in spirit.
- Encourage participants to respond together.
- Offer a moment of silence after each meditation.

### **Don't Just Watch—Walk with Christ**

Help participants see that the Way of the Cross is less about observation than participation. At each station, as we recall the events of Jesus' Passion, we are also bringing our own crosses to him.

Invite them to reflect on these questions:

- What in my life feels heavy right now?
- What personal cross do I resist carrying?
- Who has helped me the way Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus?
- Where have I fallen, and how has Jesus lifted me up?

Encourage silence during the devotion. Let the weight of each moment sink in.

### **Encourage Personal Devotion**

If your parish has stations displayed in the church or outside, encourage participants to return and pray them during the week. For those who cannot get to the church easily, suggest praying them from home using a booklet or video, or they can use images from a missal or online.

Remind them of the importance of uniting our sufferings with those of Christ.

### **► Final Encouragement**

The Way of the Cross is about remembering what Jesus endured and entering into these events to better live as he did. It forms our hearts, strengthens our compassion, and deepens our hope. As catechists, our goal is to teach devotion and to help our participants encounter Christ through it.

## Closing Prayer

*"We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,  
because by your holy Cross you  
have redeemed the world."*

*Amen.*

What prayer intentions do you have to share during your group meeting? Write them here:

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### ◆ Reminders and Announcements

Share your Reminders and Announcements with your group before praying the Closing Prayer.

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◆ Share the following information about the Closing Prayer before reciting it together.

*Say:*

*St. Francis is credited with introducing this prayer, which he and his followers would recite when they entered a church as an expression of profound reverence for Christ's sacrifice. The prayer later became widely known through the Stations of the Cross devotion.*

## HOME ACTIVITY

◆ Remind your group to do the Home Activity soon, while Lesson Eight is still fresh in their minds.

Do this activity after your group session, while Lesson Eight is still fresh in your mind.

Choose one:

### SCRIPTURE

Read John 11:1–45. This is the account of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead. What stands out to you about Jesus' patience, his plan, his emotions, or his ability to bring life from death?

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### JOURNAL

Journal with the following reflection question:  
*The Resurrection shows that God can bring life from death. Is there an area of my life right now that feels broken or lifeless, where I need God's new life?*