



LESSON EIGHT

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY: JESUS DELIVERS US FROM EVIL

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

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?

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?

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

“I have given thee the stigmata which are the insignia of My Passion.”³³

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.³⁴

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.”³⁵

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

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

Have 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?

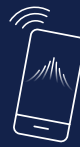
The word "paschal" comes from the Hebrew word *pesach*, meaning "**PASSOVER**." In the Old Testament, the Passover was the defining moment of Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt. By the blood of a sacrificial lamb, God saved the Israelites from death and led them to freedom (see Exodus 12:1–31).

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).

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).

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

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).

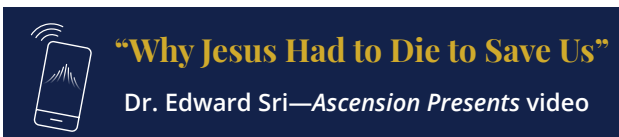
Jesus said, “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). He came to rescue us by a self-emptying love so deep it embraced even death and so powerful it destroyed the power of sin. This is why the *Catechism* affirms that Christ’s whole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



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).



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

(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).

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

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.

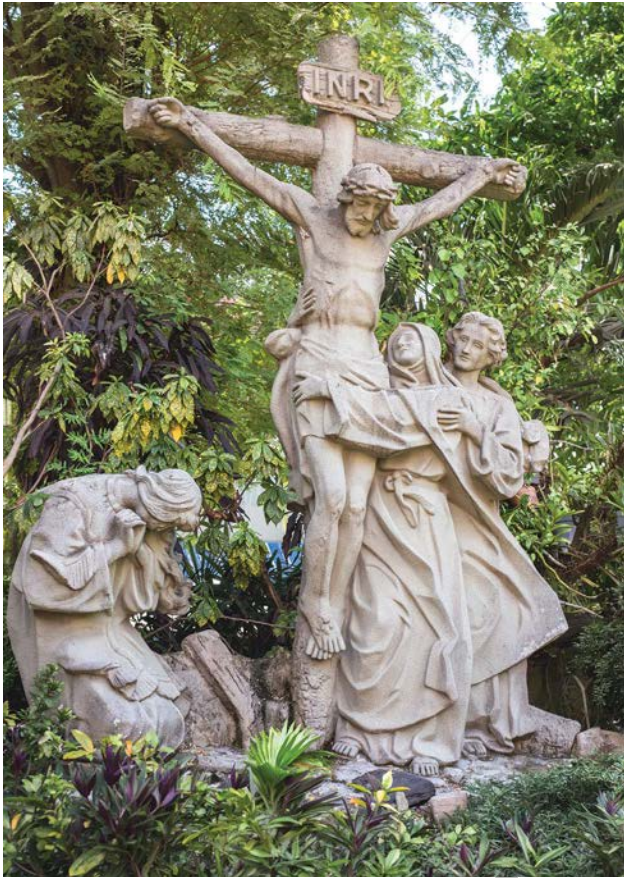
Living It Out

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.

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:
