

Jesus' Passion

The Story of Redemptive Suffering



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Guidelines



Suggestions for Using This Bible Study

Jesus' Passion: The Story of Redemptive Suffering can be used by individuals or for a group Bible study. All that's needed are the lessons, a Bible, a pen or a pencil, and a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (access it online at <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>).

General Guidelines

- Begin and end your study with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to increase your understanding of the Scripture passages that you're reading.
- Use the *Summary* section to review previous lessons.
- Don't hurry. You might want to read the biblical text and the *Points to Ponder* section first, then go back and work on the *Questions for Reflection and Study* at another time.
- Look up the meaning of words you don't know.
- Write down questions you have about the story, the characters, and the setting.
- Take advantage of the *Catechism Connection* section to explore how Church teaching relates to the Scripture passages in each lesson.
- Meditate on the suggested memory verse, or keep your heart open for another passage that has special meaning for you and memorize that instead.
- Don't neglect the *Rome to Home* and *Voices of the Saints* sections, which highlight papal quotes and quotes from Catholic saints that relate to each lesson.
- As part of your personal study, consider watching the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. Each lesson covers approximately 25 minutes of the film.

For Use in a Group

- Begin and end your discussions with prayer.
- Participants should read the biblical text and commentary and respond to the questions before meeting with their groups.
- Large groups will want to break into smaller groups of 8 to 10 people to facilitate discussion.
- Appoint a discussion leader to help keep your group on track and focused on the reflection and study questions.
- Respect the wishes of participants who don't want to share their responses to the reflection questions.

Supplemental Reading

- *Salvifici Doloris* Apostolic Letter on the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering
by Pope John Paul II
www.vatican.va/.../john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html

Jesus' Passion Study Guidelines Supplemental Reading

- *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*
according to the meditations of Anne Catherine Emmerich, North Bay Books
http://www.jesus-passion.com/DOLOROUS_PASSION_OF_OUR_LORD_JESUS_CHRIST.htm
- *A Guide to the Passion: 100 Questions about The Passion of the Christ*
by the editors of Catholic Exchange, Ascension Press
- *Inside the Passion: An Insider's Look at The Passion of the Christ*
by John Bartunek, L.C. 2005, Ascension Press
- *The Blood and the Shroud*
by Ian Wilson, The Free Press

Watching *The Passion of the Christ*

Participants may want to watch the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, as part of their personal preparation before they meet with their discussion groups. Each lesson in *Jesus' Passion: The Story of Redemptive Suffering* corresponds to a segment of the film lasting about 25 minutes.

Lesson 1—Agony in the Garden

from the opening of the film
to just after Mary says, “So be it.”

Lesson 2—The Son of Man before the Chief Priests

from Pilate standing with a scroll
to Jesus being taken from Herod's court

Lesson 3—‘What Is Truth?’

from Pilate and his wife discussing truth
to Pilate washing his hands and saying, “Do as you wish.”

Lesson 4—*Via Dolorosa*: The Way of Suffering

from the Roman centurion riding away from Pilate
to the flashback of Jesus saying, “No one comes to the Father but by me.”

Lesson 5—Crucifixion, Death, and Resurrection

from Mary Magdalene burying her head in her hands
to the end of the movie

Jesus' Passion: The Story of Redemptive Suffering
was created by Catholic Scripture Study International,
which offers full-length Bible studies on Exodus, the Gospel of John, and Revelation.
A shorter study is available on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians.
This fall, CSS will introduce a study on the Gospel of Matthew and a children's program.
For information about how to start a CSS group at your parish, visit www.CatholicScriptureStudy.com.
If you are enjoying this study, please consider making a donation that will allow CSS
to offer more free on-line Bible studies. To make a donation please [click here](#).

Introduction

Jesus' Passion

The Story of Redemptive Suffering



For God So Loved the World

Early World	Patriarchs	Egypt & Exodus	Desert Wanderings	Conquest & Judges	Royal Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Messianic Fulfillment	The Church

A Lenten Bible Study by Jennifer Phelps

Jesus Christ's life, death, and Resurrection have been inspiring artists and writers for the past 2,000 years, but not even Jesus' many miracles have drawn more interest and speculation than the events of his Passion, the term used to describe the extreme suffering that the Son of God willingly underwent for the salvation of all humankind. *Salvifici Doloris*, the apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II on the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering, explains why Jesus' Passion is such a popular theme: "Human suffering evokes compassion; it also evokes respect, and in its own way it intimidates." Particularly realistic depictions of the brutal treatment that Jesus endured trigger instinctive reactions of aversion and horror at humanity's capacity for cruelty—natural responses to the story of Jesus' agony and betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane; his trials before the Jewish religious leaders, Herod, and Pontius Pilate; his scourging; his carrying of the Cross; and his crucifixion and death. All of these events are recorded in some detail in the New Testament, and all are vividly portrayed in the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. The emotional experience of watching this movie or other visual dramatizations of the events of Holy Week can lead Christians to reflect on Jesus' suffering in a more intimate way than often is possible when simply reading about his Passion.

It's not necessary to watch the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, in conjunction with this Bible study, but it's been designed so that participants may view segments of the film as part of their preparation for each week's lesson if they wish. The study focuses on the Scriptural texts that inspired the movie, and it also looks at the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other Church documents to examine how 2,000 years of Church teaching relate to various scenes in the film that aren't specifically described in Scripture. It's not at all unusual for artists and authors to exercise creative license when depicting biblical events—Michelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel contain elements not found in either the Old or the New Testament, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* is fictional poetry based on his personal vision of heaven, hell, and purgatory. Since the earliest days of the Church, devout Christians have made use of artistic works to meditate on biblical themes, especially themes connected to the life of Jesus, and a number of popular Catholic devotional prayers are based on Jesus' Passion—including the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross. No matter how many inspirational books are written and how many films are made about the Son of God, however, there's no substitute for reading the Bible—the inspired Word of God—to learn about Jesus' life and his teachings.

Mysterious and Liberating Love

The gruesome facts recorded in the Gospels about Jesus' Passion frequently cause confusion about God's plan for salvation. Why is Jesus required to undergo such dreadful suffering? Is all that brutality really necessary? Scripture itself provides the answer. Shortly after his Resurrection, the risen Jesus explained to his disciples that his Passion and death had been prophesied in the Old Testament and that suffering is the means God chose to reveal his love for humanity: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (*Lk 24:25-26*). Centuries later, through Scripture and the Church, Jesus still is explaining the important link between suffering and love to contemporary Christians. Paragraph 260 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls God's amazing plan to bring about the salvation of the world the divine economy, and teaches that "the ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity."

It's no accident that the Church uses the term paschal mystery to refer to Jesus' redemptive suffering and death. The Passion is the fulfillment of the Jewish religious feast of the Passover. It commemorates the original Passover in which an unblemished paschal lamb was slain and its blood used to identify the homes of the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel. In the tenth and final plague against the Egyptians, death "passed over" the Israelites whose dwellings had been marked with the blood of the lamb (*Ex 12:1-29*). In the New Testament, Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God who's slain to free all of humanity from slavery to sin and death. St. Paul writes about the mystery of Jesus Christ in his Letter to the Ephesians: "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (*Eph 3:8-9*).

Salvifici Doloris sheds light on this mystery hidden for ages, explaining that the oft-quoted New Testament passage, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn 3:16*), describes how God gives his Son to free men and women from slavery to sin and evil, "which bears within itself the definitive and absolute perspective on suffering." It's for this reason that Jesus willingly cooperates in God the Father's plan of liberating love for all men and women—love for "the world." Salvific or redeeming love enables Jesus to die on the Cross. Such supernatural behavior is called a theological virtue. The power of God's love is the only thing capable of ransoming humanity from bondage to sin.

Redemptive Suffering: What's in It for Us

One of the most amazing aspects of the Christian faith is Jesus' repeated assurances to his followers that they'll be able, by the grace of God available through the sacraments of the Church, to develop the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Indeed, Jesus goes so far as to require that his disciples participate in his own loving sacrifice: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (*Mt 16:24*). Paragraph 618 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* focuses on the mysterious way in which men and women willingly accept redemptive suffering: "Because in his divine person [Jesus] has in some way

united himself to every man, ‘the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery’ is offered to all men.” When Christians exercise the theological virtues, they enter into a partnership of sorts with God—the ultimate goal of this partnership is entering into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity.

In *Salvifici Doloris*, Pope John Paul II explains: “In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also *human suffering itself has been redeemed*. . . . Every man has his own share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed.”

One of the best biblical accounts of redemptive suffering to be found in the early Church is St. Paul’s description of his own personal experience and the hope that springs from it: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Cor 7-10).

A study of the Gospel accounts of the Passion of Jesus amounts to a detailed primer about love. By closely observing the way in which Jesus approaches his suffering, Christians obtain practical instructions about how to share in the kind of redeeming love that manifests the power of God at work in the world. This incredible mystery continues to fascinate men and women in every generation. Jesus’ Passion is inseparable from God’s love.

Voices of the Saints

Apart from the Cross, there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.

—**St. Rose of Lima, first canonized saint born in the Americas**

Catechism Connection

- To learn the three criteria the Church teaches for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Holy Spirit, see paragraphs 112-114 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*.
- For more information about how Jesus' violent death wasn't the result of chance in an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, but instead was part of the mystery of God's divine plan for the salvation of all men and women, see *CCC* 599.
- *CCC* 601 describes how Jesus himself explained the meaning of his life and death as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant.
- By giving up his own Son for our sins, God manifests that his plan for us is one of benevolent love, prior to any merit on our part. To learn more, see *CCC* 604.
- For more information about how Jesus' sacrificial death completes and surpasses all other sacrifices, see *CCC* 614.

Rome to Home

Pope John Paul II wrote that love is the key to understanding the power of Jesus' redemptive suffering.

In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering, following the revealed word of God, we must open ourselves wide to the human subject in his manifold potentiality. We must above all accept the light of Revelation not only insofar as it expresses the transcendent order of justice but also insofar as it illuminates this order with Love, as the definitive source of everything that exists. Love is also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

—*Salvifici Doloris*

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to offer more free on-line Bible studies. To make a donation please [click here](#).

Lesson 1

Jesus' Passion



Agony in the Garden

Early World	Patriarchs	Egypt & Exodus	Desert Wanderings	Conquest & Judges	Royal Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Messianic Fulfillment	The Church

Introduction

In Christian tradition, Jesus' Passion refers to the suffering that leads to his death. It begins with the Last Supper and continues with his agony and betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, his trial before Pontius Pilate, his scourging at the pillar, and his carrying of the Cross; it culminates with Jesus' crucifixion and death. The Church relives Jesus' Passion each year in the Triduum liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. These same events are depicted in the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. The word Christ used in the title of the film comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*, which means anointed. This name is applied to Jesus because he perfectly fulfills the divine mission of Savior foretold by the Old Testament prophets. The Bible itself is the primary source of evidence about Jesus Christ, and it's also the primary source for the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. Not every event depicted in the film occurs in Scripture. Filmmakers took creative license to portray some situations as they might have happened, for example, the flashback scenes of Jesus' life in Nazareth. The focus of this study is the Scriptural basis for the Passion events portrayed in the movie, and the first lesson looks at Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Of utmost importance is the reason that the Son of God willingly underwent such extreme suffering, foretold by the prophet Isaiah about 500 years before the birth of Jesus. The movie opens with Isaiah's messianic prophecy concerning the Suffering Servant: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (*Isa 53:5*).

Matthew 26:36-54

26 ³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go yonder and pray." ³⁷And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." ³⁹**And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, "My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."** ⁴⁰And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Matthew 26:36-54

⁴²Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done.” ⁴³And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him.” ⁴⁹And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Hail, Master!” And he kissed him. ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, “Friend, why are you here?” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. ⁵¹And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear. ⁵²And Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Do you not think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”

[Please Note: One of the best ways to meditate on God’s Word is through memorization. A suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the Scripture text, or you may choose a verse of your own.]

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John 18:1-14

18 ¹When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ²Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas, procuring a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” ⁵They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶When he said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷Again he asked them, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth. ⁸Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he; so, if you seek me, let these men go.” ⁹This was to fulfil the word

John 18:1-14

which he had spoken, “Of those whom thou gavest me I lost not one.” ¹⁰Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s slave and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. ¹¹Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?”

¹²So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him. ¹³First they led him to Annas; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴It was Caiaphas who had given counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

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Questions for Reflection and Study

It’s best to read the biblical texts and *Points to Ponder* before responding to the questions. To aid in discussion, please note Scripture verses where you find your responses

He Was Wounded for Our Transgressions

Isaiah 53:5

1. The movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, opens with a reference to Old Testament prophecy found in Isaiah 53:5: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.” How does Church teaching connect this prophecy to the main theme of the film, Jesus’ redemptive suffering, which also is central to the Christian faith (see paragraphs 571 and 1505 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*)?
2. Sin is behind all the human “transgressions” for which Jesus underwent his Passion and death. How does the Church define sin (see *CCC* 1849 and *CCC* 1850)? Who is behind sin’s entrance into the world (see *CCC* 391)?

In the Garden of Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-54

3. **Reflection:** In Matthew 26:41, Jesus urges Peter to watch and pray, and he warns Peter that “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Think of times when you’ve felt that your flesh was weak—even though you’ve sincerely wanted to overcome some temptation. What is the best help that you’ve found when struggling against temptations? What kind of assistance does the Church provide to those facing such difficulties?

4. The movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, uses creative license to depict a fifth figure in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus and his three disciples. All four of the Gospels describe the devil tempting Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. What details does Luke include in his account and elsewhere in his Gospel that imply Satan might also have been present in the Garden of Gethsemane to tempt Jesus again (see *Lk* 4:1-13 and *Lk* 22:3-4)? What does the Church teach regarding the existence of Satan (see *CCC* 2851)?

5. During the agony in the Garden, Satan is depicted in the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, as unleashing a serpent that slithers toward Jesus. Jesus’ response is to stomp on this serpent. How does this symbolically relate events in the Garden of Gethsemane to the account of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (see *Gen* 3:14-15 and *CCC* 410)? In his first Letter to the Corinthians, how does St. Paul emphasize this connection (see *1 Cor* 15:22)?

6. **And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, “My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”** In Matthew 26:39 (our suggested memory verse), what is the “cup” to which Jesus is referring (see *CCC* 612)? How is this cup related to Old Testament prophecies (see *Isa* 51:17 and *Ezek* 23:31-34)?

7. **Reflection:** Apparently Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane many times to pray. In Luke 21:37, St. Luke records that Jesus taught in the Temple during the day and spent his nights in the garden. Where are some of your favorite places to pray, and what makes them conducive to prayer? Paragraph 2612 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that in prayer “the disciple keeps watch, attentive to Him Who Is and Him Who Comes, in memory of his first coming in the lowliness of the flesh, and in hope of his second coming in glory.” What practical steps can you take to increase this spirit of watchfulness in your own prayers?

Betrayed by Judas

John 18:1-14

8. In John 18:4, Jesus steps forward and initiates contact with the Temple guard who’ve come to arrest him. In the synoptic Gospel accounts of the arrest in the garden, what sign does Judas give the soldiers (see *Mt* 26:49, *Mk* 14:45 and *Lk* 22:47-48)? According to Scripture, what facet of Judas’ character may have motivated him to betray Jesus (see *Jn* 12:6)?
9. Judas betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. How do these 30 pieces of silver identify the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel as slaves to sin, and point to Jesus’ role as shepherd of God’s flock (see *Ex* 21:32 and *Zech* 11:12)?
10. John 18:10 recounts how Peter, in his attempt to protect Jesus, cuts off the high priest’s servant’s ear. Some additional information about this incident is provided in the Gospel of Luke. What did Jesus do other than admonish Peter (see *Lk* 22:50-51)? What words of Jesus in response to this incident are recorded in Matthew’s Gospel (see *Mt* 26:52)?

Voices of the Saints

God is the principal efficient cause of man's salvation. But since Christ's humanity is the instrument of his divinity, all Christ's acts and sufferings work instrumentally in virtue of his divinity in bringing about man's salvation.

—St. Thomas Aquinas, known as the “angelic doctor”

Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder—*Matthew 26:36-54; John 18:1-14*

He Was Wounded for Our Transgressions

The movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, opens with a quote from Isaiah 53:5: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.” That prophecy, written about 500 years before the birth of Jesus, foretells the redemptive suffering through which the Messiah would accomplish his mission as Savior of the world. This is the central message of the New Testament.

It's also the theme of the film, *The Passion of the Christ*, which opens with a depiction of Jesus praying in eerie moonlight in the Garden of Gethsemane. Three of his disciples—Peter, James, and John—sleep nearby. The words of Jesus' prayers are translated into English along the bottom of the movie screen: “Hear me, Father.” “Rise up, defend me.” “Save me from the traps they set for me.” “Shelter me, O Lord.” “I trust in you.” “In you I take refuge.” Moviegoers familiar with the Old Testament will recognize that this language repeats ideas about God as a supreme protector that are found in many of the Psalms, especially Psalms 71 and 91.

In Psalm 71:1-4, the author begins with this entreaty to God: “In thee, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame! In thy righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline thy ear to me, and save me! Be thou to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for thou art my rock and my fortress. Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man.” Psalm 91:1-4 praises God's behavior toward the person who loves him: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.’ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.” Jesus' prayers indicate his total trust in God the Father, as well as a clear understanding of the evil nature of the forces with which he's contending.

The Garden of Gethsemane and the Garden of Eden

Although the Gospel writers make no mention of the presence of Satan in the Garden of Gethsemane, Scripture is clear about the devil's previous efforts to tempt Jesus (*Mt* 4:1-11, *Mk* 1:12-13, and *Lk* 4:1-13). Luke observes that "when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (*Lk* 4:13), indicating that Satan would be returning later to tempt Jesus again. In the film, *The Passion of the Christ*, Satan appears in middle of Jesus' anguish and seductively insists that no one can bear the full burden of sin. Jesus falls on his face in prayer, and Satan unleashes a serpent that slithers ominously toward Jesus' head. In one of the most dramatic scenes in the movie, Jesus rises and stomps the serpent underfoot.

The rich symbolism of this action is rooted in Scripture and connects the events taking place in the Garden of Gethsemane with Adam and Eve's fall into original sin in the Garden of Eden. Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, records God's words to the serpent, who'd tempted the first humans to sin: "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (*Gen* 3:14-15). The "seed" of the woman represents both humankind and Jesus, who as the "Son of man" is representative of all humanity. When Jesus crushes the serpent, he foreshadows his final victory over the devil and over sin and death.

The sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, is called original sin, and as a result all humanity inherits a natural tendency toward sin. The devil continues to try to tempt humans to sin, just as he tempted Adam and Eve, by making sin appear glamorous and desirable. Human sin is rooted in pride, anger, envy, greed, lust, gluttony, and laziness—the seven capital or "deadly" sins. Satan advertises sin as something that will be liberating for men and women, but the reality is the direct opposite—all sin is enslaving.

Why Is This Night Different from Every Other Night?

The Gospel of John describes the Incarnation as "The Word became flesh" (*Jn* 1:14), and the Church teaches that in the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish the salvation of all men and women. Although the early Church fought against many heresies that denied the true divinity and true humanity of Jesus Christ, belief in the Incarnation remains the distinctive sign of Christian faith. In his first Letter, John writes that God "loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (*1 Jn* 4:10).

Jesus' willingness to suffer and die in order to free men and women from their enslavement to sin is critical to understanding the meaning of his Passion, which is the fulfillment of the Jewish Passover. This connection to the Passover is introduced in the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, in a scene in which the Blessed Virgin Mary awakens in the middle of the night and asks: "Why is this night different from every other night?" Mary Magdalene replies: "Because once we were slaves, and we are slaves no longer." That question-and-answer exchange is part of the ritual observed at the beginning of the Seder meal celebrating the Jewish feast of Passover.

The Church refers to Jesus' work of redemption as the Paschal mystery, associating his saving death and its memorial in the sacrament of the Eucharist with the Paschal lamb slain at the first

Jesus' Passion Lesson 1 Points to Ponder

Passover. Before Moses led the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel out of bondage, the ancient Hebrews were required to sprinkle the blood of a lamb on their doorposts as a sign for God to “pass over” their homes during the tenth plague, the death of all the first-born in Egypt (*Ex 12:1-14*). The original Passover that preceded the Exodus out of Egypt is a foreshadowing of Jesus’ death on the Cross. The blood of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, is shed for all men and women. Jesus begins his Passion by celebrating the feast of Passover with his disciples, and transforming that Jewish memorial into the Church’s celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The result of Jesus’ Pascal sacrifice is that men and women now receive his Body and his Blood each time they participate in the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist. It’s through this participation in the Mass that the people of God are liberated from the slavery to sin and death and are given a share in eternal life.

Catechism Connection

- *CCC* 385 urges Christians to approach the question of the origin of evil by fixing eyes of faith on Jesus Christ, who alone conquers evil, sin, and death.
- *CCC* 443 describes the difference between the way that Jesus taught his disciples to address God in prayer and the way that he himself addresses God the Father.
- *CCC* 607 teaches that the desire to embrace God's plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus' entire life, and that his redemptive Passion was the very reason for his Incarnation.
- The Messiah's characteristics are revealed above all in the "Servant songs" that proclaim the meaning of Jesus' Passion and show how he'll pour out the Holy Spirit to give life to the many. To learn more about Jesus as the Suffering Servant, see *CCC* 713.
- In *CCC* 2340, the Church teaches that the means for resisting temptation consist of self-knowledge, ascetical practices, obedience to God's commandments, exercise of moral virtues, and fidelity to prayer.
- *CCC* 2849 teaches that it's through prayer that Jesus vanquishes the tempter, both at the outset of his public mission and in the ultimate struggle of the agony of his Passion.

Rome to Home

Pope John Paul II encouraged Christians, armed with God's grace, to persevere in the battle against "the prince of this world."

The Second Vatican Council declared itself very clearly on this subject: "The whole of man's history has been the story of our combat with the powers of evil, stretching, so our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding himself in the midst of the battlefield, man has to struggle to do what is right, and it is at great cost to himself, and aided by God's grace, that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity." In another passage the Council expresses itself still more explicitly, speaking of the struggle "between good and evil" which is fought out in every person: "Man finds that he is unable of himself to overcome the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though bound by chains." But to this strong expression the Council sets out in juxtaposition the truth about redemption with an affirmation of faith no less strong and decisive: "The Lord himself came to free and strengthen man, renewing him inwardly and casting out 'the prince of this world' (*Jn* 12:31), who held him in bondage of sin."

—general audience, December 10, 1986

Summary

In this lesson, we observed that:

1. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah foretold of a Messiah who would be “wounded for our transgressions,” and Jesus is that Suffering Servant of God.
2. Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane with his disciples to pray.
3. Jesus tells Peter, James, and John that his soul is sorrowful, even to death, and he asks the three disciples to watch and pray—but instead they fall asleep.
4. Jesus agony in the Garden is based on his knowledge of the suffering and death he’s to endure, and Satan tries to tempt Jesus to avoid trying to save the souls of all humankind.
5. The first Biblical hint of a Savior occurs in Genesis 3:15 when God tells the serpent in the Garden of Eden that the “seed” of the woman will bruise his head; Jesus is the “seed” of the woman.
6. Jesus prays that if it’s possible, God allow him to avoid the suffering to come, but nevertheless Jesus remains totally obedient to his Father’s will.
7. Judas arrives with soldiers and officers of the chief priests and Pharisees, and he betrays Jesus with a kiss.
8. Peter cuts off the ear of a slave of the high priest.
9. Jesus restores the slave’s injury and warns that those who live by the sword will perish by the sword.
10. Jesus’ Passion is fulfillment of the original Old Testament Passover in which the blood of a lamb was used as a sign for death to “pass over” the homes of God’s chosen people, the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Jesus’ Passion: The Story of Redemptive Suffering
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Lesson 1 . . . Agony in the Garden

Jesus' Passion



Suggested responses to Matthew 26:36-54; John 18:1-14

Note: Be sure to answer all the questions yourself before reading the suggested responses in order to make the most of this study.

1. Paragraph 571 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that Jesus' redemptive suffering is at the heart of Christian belief: "The Paschal mystery of Christ's cross and Resurrection stands at the center of the Good News that the apostles, and the Church following them, are to proclaim to the world. God's saving plan was accomplished 'once for all,' by the redemptive death of his Son Jesus Christ." Paragraph 1505 teaches: "Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.' But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the 'sin of the world,' of which illness is only a consequence. 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."
2. Paragraph 1849 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that "sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods." Paragraph 1850 further teaches: "Sin is an offense against God: 'Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight.' Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it. Like the first sin, it is disobedience, a revolt against God through the will to become 'like gods,' knowing and determining good and evil. Sin is thus 'love of oneself even to contempt of God.' In this proud self-exaltation, sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation." Paragraph 391 explains: "Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called 'Satan' or the 'devil.' The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: 'The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing.'"
3. *Answers to this Reflection question will vary.*
4. Luke 4:1-13 describes how at the beginning of his ministry Jesus was tempted by the devil. Luke 4:13 records: "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time," implying that the devil is going to tempt Jesus again. Luke 22:3-4 recounts that as the feast of Unleavened Bread (the Passover) drew near, "Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and captains how he might betray [Jesus] to them." Paragraph 2851 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that "evil is not an abstraction, but refers to a

Jesus' Passion Lesson 1 Responses

person, Satan, the Evil One, the angel who opposes God. The devil (*dia-bolos*) is the one who 'throws himself across' God's plan and his work of salvation accomplished in Christ."

5. In the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, Jesus stomps on the serpent Satan has unleashed. Immediately following the story about the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3:14-15 records God's words to the serpent, who'd tempted the first humans to sin against God: "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Paragraph 410 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "After his fall, man was not abandoned by God. On the contrary, God calls him and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and his restoration from his fall. This passage in Genesis [3:15] is called the *Protoevangelium* ('first gospel'): the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the Woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers." In 1 Corinthians 15:22, St. Paul compares Jesus and Adam to emphasize the connection between events in the Garden of Gethsemane and the Garden of Eden: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."
6. In Matthew 26:39, Jesus is referring to his "cup" of suffering. Paragraph 612 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "The cup of the New Covenant, which Jesus anticipated when he offered himself at the Last Supper, is afterwards accepted by him from his Father's hands in his agony in the garden at Gethsemani, making himself "obedient unto death." Jesus prays: 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. . . .' Thus he expresses the horror that death represented for his human nature. Like ours, his human nature is destined for eternal life; but unlike ours, it is perfectly exempt from sin, the cause of death. Above all, his human nature has been assumed by the divine person of the 'Author of life,' the 'Living One.' By accepting in his human will that the Father's will be done, he accepts his death as redemptive, for 'he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.'" Isaiah 51:17 and Ezekiel 23:31-34 both record Old Testament prophecies involving a cup of God's wrath; Jesus understood that he was taking on himself the wrath of God in regard to the sins of the world.
7. *Answers to this Reflection question will vary.*
8. Matthew 26:49, Mark 14:45, and Luke 22:47-48 describe the way that Judas greets Jesus with a kiss in order to identify him for the Temple guards who've come to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest him. John 12:6 indicates that Judas was a thief, and that passage records that Judas controlled the disciples' money box and "used to take what was put into it."
9. The 30 pieces of silver identify the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel as slaves to sin by linking Judas' betrayal of Jesus with Exodus 21:32, which records that amount of silver is the precise price of an injured slave stipulated by Moses: "If [an] ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver . . ." The 30 pieces of silver also point to Jesus' role as shepherd of God's flock, since that's the exact amount of money specified in the Old Testament as the wages given the prophet Zechariah for his duties as a

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shepherd. In Zechariah 11:11-12 the prophet writes: "Then I said to [the peoples], 'If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.' And they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver."

10. Luke 22:50 recounts that one of Jesus' followers cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, and Luke 22:51 describes Jesus' response: "But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him." Matthew 26:52 records Jesus' telling the disciple who cut off the servant's ear: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

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Notes