

JESUS' PASSION: THE STORY OF REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING

Introduction: *For God So Loved the World*

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Nihil Obstat
the Very Reverend Aquinas Nichols
Censor Librorum

Imprimatur
✠ the Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
February 18, 2014

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FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD
that he gave his only-begotten Son,
that whoever believes in him
should not perish but have eternal life.
—the *Gospel According to John* 3:16



FOREWORD

Jesus' *Passion: The Story of Redemptive Suffering* is an excellent resource which goes well beyond a study of the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. While designed to be a tool for Lenten reflection, this study brings together elements from Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and quotations from the saints. Within these pages, the reader will discover a rich reservoir of tools with which to delve into the totality of Jesus' Passion.

Jennifer Phelps appropriately quotes the words of Pope St. John Paul II regarding "love as the key to understanding the power of Jesus' redemptive suffering": "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."

However, that love, expressive as it is in the suffering of Jesus, must move each of us to a renewed vitality of love in our daily lives. the late Pope Francis reminds us that "when we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize that Jesus' gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people." May our reflection on the Passion be the impetus through which we reach out in love to the people of God we encounter in the passing of each day.

I am pleased to recommend *Jesus' Passion: The Story of Redemptive Suffering* as a valuable tool for your study and reflection. Its power also will lead to transformation and the reality of love embedded in the giving of ourselves.

The Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Des Moines

JESUS' PASSION

THE STORY OF REDEEMPTIVE SUFFERING FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

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.

Pope St. John Paul II's apostolic letter [*Salvifici Doloris \(On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering\)*](#) 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 Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the Jewish religious leaders; his scourging; his carrying of the cross; and his Crucifixion and death. All of these events are recorded in detail in the New Testament, and all are vividly portrayed in the 2004 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 is possible when simply reading about his Passion.

It is not necessary to watch the movie *The Passion of the Christ* in conjunction with this

Bible study, but the study has been designed so that participants who wish may view segments of the film as part of their preparation for each week's lesson. *Jesus' Passion: The Story of Redemptive Suffering* focuses on the texts from the Scriptures that inspired the movie, and it also looks at the [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) and other Church documents to examine how 2,000-plus years of Church teaching relate to various scenes in the film that are not specifically described in the Scriptures.

Artists and authors frequently exercise their 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 visions of heaven, hell, and purgatory.

Since the earliest days of the Church, devout Christians have made use of such artistic works to meditate on biblical themes, especially themes connected to the life of Jesus. A number of popular Catholic devotional prayers are based on Jesus' Passion—including the Sorrowful Mysteries of 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 simply is no substitute for reading the Bible—the inspired Word of God—to learn about Jesus' life and his teachings.

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

—[St. Rose of Lima](#) (1586–1617)
first canonized saint born in the Americas

MOVIE NOTES

WATCHING THE FILM IS OPTIONAL

Each lesson in *Jesus' Passion: The Story of Redemptive Suffering* corresponds to a segment approximately 25 minutes long in the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. Although written to stand alone, this Bible study may be used in conjunction with the movie. (Turning to God's Word has no part in licensing of the film. Check elsewhere online to learn options for watching *The Passion of the Christ*.)

Lesson 1: Agony in the Garden covers material from the opening of the film until Mary says, "So be it."

Lesson 2: The Son of Man Before the Chief Priests continues from Pilate standing with a scroll to Jesus being taken from Herod's court.

Lesson 3: What Is Truth? covers the portion of the movie 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 Sorrows corresponds to the section of film beginning with the centurion riding away from Pilate to the flashback of Jesus saying, "No one comes to the Father but by me."

Lesson 5: Crucifixion, Death & Resurrection covers the final section of the movie beginning with Mary Magdalene burying her head in her hands at Jesus' Crucifixion.

MYSTERIOUS & LIBERATING LOVE

The gruesome facts recorded in the *Gospels* about Jesus' Passion frequently cause misunderstanding about God's plan for salvation. Why is Jesus required to undergo such dreadful suffering? Is all that violence really necessary? The Scriptures themselves provide the answer. The [Gospel According to Luke 24:25–26](#) records that shortly after his Resurrection, the risen Jesus explains 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 divine 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?"

Centuries later, through the Scriptures and the Church, Jesus still is explaining the link between suffering and love. The Church calls God's plan to bring about the salvation of the world the "divine economy." [Paragraph 260 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) teaches: "The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity."

The Church uses the term Paschal mystery to refer to Jesus' Passion as the fulfillment of the Jewish religious feast of the Passover. That feast commemorates the original Passover recorded in the [book of Exodus 12:1–29](#), in which an unblemished Paschal lamb was slain and its blood used to identify homes of the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel. In the final plague against the Egyptians, death "passed over" the Israelites whose dwellings had been marked with the blood of a lamb. In the New Testament, Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God slain to free humanity from slavery to sin and death. Paul writes about the mystery of Jesus Christ in his [Letter to the Ephesians 3:8–9](#): "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."

Pope St. John Paul II's [Salvifici Doloris \(On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering\)](#) sheds light on this spiritual mystery, explaining that the oft-quoted passage from the [Gospel According to John 3:16 \(RSVCE\)](#)—"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"—describes how God gives his Son to free humanity from slavery to evil, "which bears within itself the definitive and absolute perspective on suffering." It is for this reason that Jesus willingly cooperates in God the Father's plan of liberating love for all men and women, who constitute "the world." Salvific love enables Jesus to die on the cross. Such supernatural behavior is the result of theological virtue. God's infinite love is the only thing powerful enough to ransom humanity from bondage to sin.



REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING: WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?

One of the most incredible aspects of the Christian religion is Jesus' repeated assurances to his followers that we will 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, in the [Gospel According to Matthew 16:24](#), 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."

[Paragraph 618 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) focuses on the mysterious way in which men and women can come to share in Jesus' redemptive suffering: "But because in his incarnate 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.

One of the best biblical accounts of redemptive suffering is the [Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 4:7–10](#), which describes Paul's personal experience and the hope that springs from it: "But 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."

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



“ 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 as it illuminates this order with love, as the definitive source of everything that exists. Love is 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. ” —Pope St. John Paul II

[Salvifici Doloris](#)
(On the Christian Meaning
of Human Suffering)

re·demp·tion to repurchase or to buy back

The word **redemption** comes from the Latin *re-* meaning “back” and *emere* meaning “take,” “buy,” “gain” or “procure.” The “mystery of universal **redemption**” is addressed in [paragraph 601 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), which looks at the teaching in the [First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 15:3](#): “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.” The Church elaborates on the belief that Jesus Christ's death constitutes the ransom necessary to **redeem** or free humanity from the slavery of sin.

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*Psalms reflect the numbering system followed in *The Abbey Psalms and Canticles*. Numbering in other translations may vary.

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all Scripture is inspired by God

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

—the Second Letter of Paul to Timothy 3:16–17

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CCC 144: An explanation of the link between listening and the obedience of faith.

CCC 260 (page 7): The need to prepare now for the ultimate goal of the divine economy.

CCC 272: The mystery of God's reliance on the apparent powerlessness of Jesus to conquer evil.

CCC 392 (page 31): About the devil's sinful desire to mimic God the Father.

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CCC 443: The difference between the way that Jesus prays and the way that he taught his disciples to pray.

CCC 457–460: The four positive effects for humanity that result from Jesus' Incarnation.

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CCC 460: An examination of Jesus' use of the title "Son of man."

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CCC 506 (page 37): The importance of Mary's virginity as a sign of her faith.

CCC 591: About why religious leaders in Jerusalem were unable to believe in Jesus' divinity.

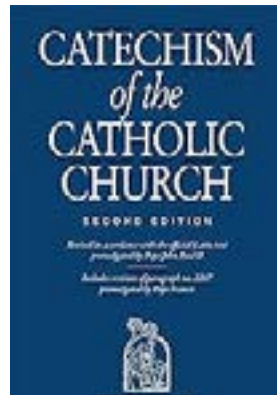
CCC 598 (page 19): Church teaching regarding the responsibility of all sinners for Jesus' death.

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