

JESUS' PASSION:

THE STORY OF REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING

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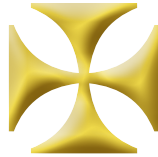
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FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD
that he gave his only-begotten Son,
that whoever believes in him
should not perish but have eternal life.
—the *Gospel According to John* 3:16



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 REDEMPTIVE 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.

AGONY IN THE GARDEN

Apparently Jesus often went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. The *Gospel According to Luke 21:37* records that Jesus taught in the Temple during the day and spent his nights on Mount Olivet. The Garden of Gethsemane is located at the base of Mount Olivet. Where are some of your favorite places to pray? What makes these places especially conducive to prayer?

In the *Gospel According to Matthew 26:41*, Jesus urges Peter to watch and pray, and Jesus warns that “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Think of times when you have felt weakness of the flesh—even though you sincerely wanted to overcome some temptation. What is the best help you have found when struggling against temptations?

Paragraph 2612 in 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 prayer?

MATTHEW 26:36–54

26 ³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then 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 chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” ⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” ⁴³ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then 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. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

⁴⁷ While 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. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him.” ⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Hail, Master!” And he kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, “Friend, why are you here?” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. ⁵¹ And 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. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”

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. ²Now Judas, 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 which he had spoken, “Of those whom you gave 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 chalice 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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1 Read the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:36–39*](#). Who is with Jesus when he goes to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane? What does Jesus ask of them? The [*Gospel According to Matthew 14:22–23*](#) records another instance in which Jesus went off alone to pray. What might explain why Jesus asks for companionship now?

2 The events in the Garden of Gethsemane can be understood as an occasion in which Jesus is in agony, a word that implies he is struggling with a contender in connection with some sort of a contest. Against whom does it seem likely that Jesus is competing? Consider whether that the primary nature of this contest is physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. What is the prize?

3 A misunderstanding about Jesus’ agony is that as God, Jesus had no choice about accepting his suffering. In that case, Jesus’ anguished prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane would be a mere formality. How might this sort of thinking be dangerous to Christian faith? Refer to [paragraph 475 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) to explain how Church teaching addresses this issue.

MOVIE NOTES

BIBLICAL FACTS
& FILM FICTION

The Bible is the definitive source of information about Jesus’ Passion, death and Resurrection. In the film *The Passion of the Christ*, the filmmakers took creative license to portray some situations as they speculate these events might have happened—for example, scenes of Jesus’ life in Nazareth before he began his ministry. Questions in this study are based on the Scriptures and Church teaching.

4 Read the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:40–44*](#). How do the disciples respond to Jesus’ request that they watch with him? Jesus attributes his followers’ failure to weakness of the flesh—despite their willingness of spirit. [*Paragraph 2733 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) teaches that acedia is a form of spiritual depression “due to lax ascetical practice, decreasing vigilance, [and] carelessness of heart.” In his [*Letter to the Romans 8:26–27*](#), what help does Paul suggest for Christians seeking to overcome acedia?

5 Read the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:45–46*](#) in which Jesus announces that “the hour is at hand.” The [*Gospel According to John 12:23–27*](#) describes another instance of Jesus discussing his “hour.” What light does the passage in the *Gospel According to John* shed on the meaning of Jesus’ “hour” that now is at hand?

JESUS’ RELATIONSHIP TO THE PSALMS

MOVIE NOTES

In *The Passion of the Christ*, the words of Jesus’ prayers in the moonlit Garden appear in English at the bottom of the screen. Some moviegoers will recognize in that language an echo of prayer themes found in many of the *Psalms*, especially those depicting God as a supreme protector.

The Church teaches that in praying the *Psalms* Christians participate in prayer with Christ. The Scriptures abound with examples of Jesus praying the *Psalms*, which provide surprisingly intimate examples of prayer. [*Psalms 71:1 \(RSV2CE\)*](#), begins with this entreaty: “In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame!” [*Psalms 91:1–2 \(RSV2CE\)*](#) praises God’s behavior toward one who loves him: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, and abides in the shade of the Almighty, says to the LORD, ‘My refuge, my stronghold, my God, in whom I trust!’” These prayers indicate total trust in God the Father, as well as an understanding of the evil nature of the forces with which humanity must contend.

Pas•sion suffering leading to death

The Greek root of **passion** is πάσχω (*pascho*), which means “to have happen” or “to be affected,” and from the Latin *passio* which means “suffering.” In Christian tradition, Jesus’ **Passion** refers to the suffering that leads to Jesus’ death on the cross. The Church relives Jesus’ **Passion** each year in the combined Triduum liturgies of the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord’s Supper, the Good Friday memorial of Jesus’ death, and the Easter Vigil Mass.

MOVIE NOTES

DATE DISCREPANCIES

The opening Scripture passage shown at the beginning of *The Passion of the Christ* is from the description of God’s Suffering Servant in the [*Book of 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.” The movie dates this prophetic passage to 700 BC, but most scholars believe that the *Book of Isaiah* was written by three different authors over a period of about two centuries.

[*First Isaiah \(chapters 1 through 39\)*](#) is thought to have been written by Isaiah of Jerusalem around 700 BC. [*Second Isaiah \(chapters 40 through 55\)*](#) is dated about 150 years later by an author now referred to as *Deutero* (Second) *Isaiah*. A third author is credited with writing [*Trito \(Third\) Isaiah \(chapters 56 through 66\)*](#), about 200 years after *First Isaiah*. Serious Scripture scholars almost unanimously agree that the [*Book of Isaiah 53:5*](#) from *Deutero Isaiah* was written around 550 BC.

This can be a touchy subject with non-scholars. Many argue that any suggestion of multiple authors discredits Divine Revelation as the source of the messianic prophecies found in the *Book of Isaiah*. That position, however, seems to suggest limitations on the ways in which humans are willing to accept that God works in history.

6 Read the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:47–50*](#). A great crowd of people with swords and clubs accompanies Judas Iscariot when he comes to the Garden of Gethsemane to betray Jesus. What might explain why Judas brings so many people with him? What sign does Judas arrange beforehand to identify Jesus? The Scriptures indicate that Jesus knew Judas was going to betray him. Consider what purpose Jesus has for asking Judas why he has come.

ag•o•ny extreme suffering

The Greek root of **agony** is ἀγῶνία (*agonia*), meaning “contest” or “struggle.” It originally was used to describe athletic competitions and later to describe mental anguish. Jesus’ **agony** in the Garden of Gethsemane represents a contest between Jesus’ divine and human natures. That Jesus is in **agony** over the ordeal to come is obvious when he asks God to let the chalice of suffering pass (the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:39*](#), [*26:42*](#), and [*26:44*](#)). Jesus’ divine nature is obvious when he agrees to do his Father’s will, but that in no way undercuts Jesus’ human suffering.

ORIGINAL SIN & DISOBEDIENCE

To understand Jesus’ Passion, it is necessary to look closely at original sin. [*Paragraph 397 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) teaches: “Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command. This is what man’s first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.” Although obedience is a much neglected virtue, it is through obedience that Jesus is able to redeem sinful humanity.



TEMPTATIONS IN TWO GARDENS

The Scriptures are clear about the devil’s efforts to tempt Jesus at the beginning of his ministry (the [*Gospel According to Matthew 4:1–11*](#), the [*Gospel According to Mark 1:12–13*](#), and the [*Gospel According to Luke 4:1–13*](#)). The [*Gospel According to Luke 4:13*](#) includes the information that “when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him [Jesus] until an opportune time.” A connection between Jesus’ later agony in the Garden of Gethsemane with Adam and Eve’s Fall into original sin in the Garden of Eden is rooted in Scripture.

The [*book of Genesis 3:14–15*](#) records God’s words to the serpent, who 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.” The “seed” of the woman symbolizes both humankind and Jesus, who as the “Son of man” is representative of all humanity. Jesus’ crushing of the serpent 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 men and women inherit 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 and freeing for humanity, but the reality is exactly opposite—all sin is enslaving.

MOVIE NOTES

In the film *The Passion of the Christ*, Satan appears during Jesus’ anguish in the Garden and 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.



7 Read the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:51–54*](#), which describes one of Jesus’ followers cutting off the ear of the high priest’s slave. The [*Gospel According to John 18:10–11*](#) identifies that follower as Simon Peter. Compare Jesus’ response to the situation in the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:51–54*](#) with his response in the [*Gospel According to John 18:10–11*](#). What might account for the different emphasis? What additional information does the [*Gospel According to Luke 22:50–51*](#) provide about the same incident?

8 Read the [*Gospel According to John 18:1–6*](#). When the soldiers come to arrest Jesus, he steps forward and asks whom they are seeking. They reply: “Jesus of Nazareth.” How does Jesus’ response suggest his unique relationship to God (see the [*book of Exodus 3:13–14*](#))? What evidence in the *Gospel According to John* indicates that the prospect of arresting Jesus frightens the crowd?

MOVIE NOTES

BLESSED ANNE CATHERINE EMMERICH

Many dramatic non-scriptural scenes in *The Passion of the Christ* were suggested to the filmmaker by visions attributed to [*Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich*](#), a German Augustinian nun (1774–1824). She bore the stigmata (wounds of Christ) for five years, and she is said to have lived on nothing but the Eucharist for the final 11 years of her life. Authorities who opened her grave six weeks after her death found her body intact. Toward the end of her life Blessed Anne Catherine was befriended by the poet Clemens Brentano, who recorded details of her mystical visions and later published these as *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ* and *The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Brentano’s work has inspired many sincere followers, but it also has been criticized as “devout fiction” and “well-intentioned fraud” by many others. Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich was beatified by Pope St. John Paul II in 2004. At that time a Vatican spokesman issued the following statement about Brentano’s books: “Since it was impossible to distinguish what derives from Sister Emmerich and what is embroidery or additions, we could not take these writings as a criteria. Therefore, they were simply discarded completely from all the work for the cause.”

A HISTORY OF COMBAT WITH EVIL

“The Second Vatican Council very clearly declared: “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.”

The Council speaks of the struggle “between good and evil” that 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.”

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 ruler of this world’ (the [*Gospel According to John 12:31*](#)), who held him in bondage of sin.”

—Pope St. John Paul II
10 December 1986

VANQUISHING THE TEMPTER

Paragraph 2849 in the [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) teaches that it is through prayer that Jesus is able to overcome Satan, both at the outset of Jesus’ public mission recorded in the [*Gospel According to Matthew 4:1–11*](#), and in the ultimate struggle of his agony recorded in the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:36–42*](#). In the Our Father, Jesus unites Christians to his battle and his agony, and he urges men and women to vigilance of the heart in communion with his own vigilance. [*Paragraph 2849 in the Catechism*](#) then goes on to describe vigilance as “custody of the heart.”

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](#) (1225–1274)
known as the “Angelic Doctor”

9 Read the [Gospel According to John 18:7–11](#). In this passage, Jesus asks his disciple Peter: “Shall I not drink the chalice which the Father has given me?” What other instances in the biblical texts accompanying this lesson point to the fact that Jesus not only knew what was about to happen but that he also regarded the Passion as fulfillment of his filial duty to God the Father? Consider why it is that Jesus seems to place such a high priority on fulfilling Old Testament prophecies.

10 Read the [Gospel According to John 18:12–14](#). Since Jesus has given every indication that he intends to cooperate with the soldiers—and he has discouraged his followers from fighting—consider what reason the soldiers have for binding Jesus before leading him away. Where is Jesus first taken, and what does this suggest about the hierarchy of power among Temple priests? What might Caiaphas originally have intended with his statement that it is expedient that one man should die for the people? How can that same statement be interpreted as a prophecy related to salvation?

WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT?

The [Gospel According to John 1:14](#) describes the Incarnation as “the Word became flesh,” and the Church teaches that in the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to offer the possibility of salvation to all men and women. The early Church fought against many heresies that denied either the true divinity or the true humanity of Jesus Christ. Belief in the Incarnation remains a distinctive sign of Christian faith. In the [First Letter of John 4:10](#), John writes that God “loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.”

Jesus’ willingness to suffer and die in order to free men and women from our enslavement to sin is critical to understanding the meaning of his Passion, which is the fulfillment of the Old Testament 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 Passover. The [book of Exodus 12:1–14](#) records that before Moses led the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel out of bondage, the ancient Hebrews were required to slay a spotless lamb and put its blood on their doorposts as a sign for God to “pass over” their homes during the tenth plague, the death of all the firstborn in Egypt.

The original Passover that preceded the Exodus out of Egypt foreshadows 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 he then transforms that Jewish memorial into the Church’s celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

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

MOVIE NOTES

The connection between Jesus’ Passion and the Passover is introduced in *The Passion of the Christ* in a scene in which the Blessed Virgin awakens 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 by Jews at the beginning of the Seder meal celebrating the feast of Passover.

THE SON OF MAN BEFORE THE CHIEF PRIESTS

Following his arrest, Jesus' enemies quickly move to eliminate him. After he is questioned by the chief priests and elders in Jerusalem, Jesus is taken to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Pilate, trying to avoid a political uprising, sends Jesus to Herod—a man who is not an actual Jew but who has been functioning as the regional king of Judea.

Everyone who interviews Jesus has one question in mind: Who is this Galilean? Is Jesus the long-awaited Messiah—"the Son of God"? Throughout the *Gospels*, the title that Jesus most frequently uses to identify himself—and one that no one else uses—is "Son of man," a reference to Old Testament prophecy. In the *Book of Ezekiel*, the term describes the prophet as a human being, while the [Book of Daniel 7:13–14](#) uses the same term to describe a mysterious figure closely identified with God himself.

Primary heresies of the early Church centered on this question of Jesus' true identity. Some erred on the side of the Jewish religious leaders who could not believe in Jesus' divinity, while other heresies refused to allow for Jesus' humanity. The same problems plague the present-day Church. What dangerous consequences do you see arising for Christians who might be tempted to accept either of these false understandings about Jesus' nature? In what ways are Jesus' humanity and his divinity important to you?

MOVIE NOTES

In *The Passion of the Christ*, Satan is depicted in the garden exhibiting an extremely keen interest in Jesus' true identity. He asks: "Who is your father?" and "Who are you?" Caiaphas, Pontius Pilate, and Herod also are keenly interested in Jesus' answers to these questions.

MARK 14:53–65

14 ⁵³ And they led Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes were assembled. ⁵⁴ And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, and warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. ⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against him, and their witness did not agree. ⁵⁷ And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, ⁵⁸ "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" ⁵⁹ Yet not even so did their testimony agree. ⁶⁰ And the high priest stood up in their midst, and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" ⁶¹ But he was silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" ⁶² And Jesus said, "I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." ⁶³ And the high priest tore his clothes, and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? ⁶⁴ You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. ⁶⁵ And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards received him with blows.

MATTHEW 27:3–7

27 ³ When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” ⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. ⁶ But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.” ⁷ So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in.

JOHN 18:12–38

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

¹⁵ Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, ¹⁶ while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The maid who kept the door said to Peter, “Are not you also one of this man’s disciples?” He said, “I am not.” ¹⁸ Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves; Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together; I have said nothing secretly. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said.” ²² When he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” ²⁴ Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, “Are not you also one of his disciples?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” ²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” ²⁷ Peter again denied it; and at once the cock crowed.

²⁸ Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the praetorium. It was early. They themselves did not enter the praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went out to them and said, “What accusations do you bring against this man?” ³⁰ They answered him, “If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over.” ³¹ Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” The

Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” ³² This was to fulfil the word which Jesus had spoken to show by what death he was to die.

³³ Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” ³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.” ³⁷ Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.” ³⁸ Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

LUKE 23:1–12

23 ¹ Then the whole company of them arose, and brought him before Pilate. ² And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king.” ³ And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” ⁴ And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, “I find no crime in this man.” ⁵ But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ And when he learned that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. ⁹ So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then, clothing him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹² And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.



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1 Read the [*Gospel According to Mark 14:53–59*](#). What specific testimony against Jesus is recorded in this passage? The [*Gospel According to John 2:13–22*](#) contains an account on which this false testimony probably was based. What are Jesus’ actual words in that account? Consider what might be motivating these false witnesses to attempt to use Jesus’ words against him. What are some examples of ways that our present-day culture distorts Jesus’ teachings in order to discredit Christianity? What could explain why some people might wish to discredit Christianity? How should Christians respond to distortions of the truth about our faith? What might be a present-day situation that calls for a defense of the faith?

2 Read the [*Gospel According to Mark 14:60–65*](#). Most of the time that he is being questioned, Jesus remains silent. It is only when directly asked if he is the Christ that Jesus responds. Consider what prompts the high priest to ask Jesus this question, What answer might the high priest be expecting? In addition to replying in the affirmative, what other information does Jesus offer? What things might be standing in the way of the high priest's acceptance of Jesus' claim to be the "Son of man"?

3 What does the title "Son of man," borrowed from prophecy in the [*Book of Daniel 7:13–14*](#), suggest about Jesus' relationship to God? What other evidence in Jesus' response to the high priest might reinforce Jesus' claim to be the Messiah?

PROPHECY!

After Jesus is condemned for blasphemy, the [*Gospel According to Mark 14:64–65*](#) records that the Jewish religious leaders abuse Jesus by challenging him to prophesy. The irony is that Jesus has just issued a potent prophecy, recorded in the [*Gospel According to Mark 14:62*](#): "You will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

blas·phe·my

the act of speaking sacrilegiously about God

The word **blasphemy** derives from the Greek Βλασφημέω (*blasphemeo*), which means "to slander" or "to speak ill of." In the context of the [*Gospel According to Mark 14:64*](#), the Jewish leaders accuse Jesus of **blasphemy** because the idea that a human could be on the same level as God is inconceivable to them. They find Jesus' claim impossible to believe and deeply offensive. Under religious laws of the Old Testament found in the [*book of Leviticus 24:10–16*](#), **blasphemy** is a crime punishable by death.



GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY: WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

The members of the Sanhedrin, the council of Jewish religious leaders, have motives for wanting Jesus out of the way. Although not a priest, scribe, or elder, Jesus has been performing incredible miracles. Jesus speaks out openly against the hypocrisy of the priests. Jesus repeatedly heals people on the sabbath, something that flies in the face of the Pharisees' understanding of the Law. Jesus' popularity threatens the spiritual leaders of his time.

The thing that the Jewish religious leaders find impossible to accept, however, is Jesus' insistence that he is the Son of God. Jesus claims the ability to forgive sins in the [*Gospel According to Mark 2:5*](#). Jesus accepts such messianic titles as "Son of David" in the [*Gospel According to Luke 18:38–39*](#) and as the "Holy One of God" in the [*Gospel According to John 6:69*](#). In the eyes of the Jewish religious leaders all of this is unthinkable.

The [*Gospel According to Mark 14:62*](#) records that when Jesus is asked if he is the Messiah, he

states definitively that he is indeed the "Son of man," and then Jesus deliberately applies the name of God revealed in the [*book of Exodus 3:13–14*](#) to himself: "I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." At this pronouncement, Caiaphas tears his own clothing, declaring that Jesus has committed the extremely serious offense of blasphemy.

The incredible irony is that the charge of blasphemy only applies if Jesus is lying. In fact, Jesus is the Son of God, so Jesus is telling the truth when he claims divinity.

The [*book of Leviticus 24:16*](#) records that under Jewish Old Testament law the penalty for blasphemy was death, but because of the Roman occupation of Judea, Jewish religious leaders are forbidden to exercise the death penalty. Caiaphas and the other priests and elders take Jesus before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, because only the Romans are permitted to execute criminals.



4 Read the [*Gospel According to Matthew 27:3–7*](#). What reason does Judas Iscariot give for returning the 30 pieces of silver he received as payment for betraying Jesus? How do the Jewish religious leaders react? The [*Gospel According to John 12:1–6*](#) records that Judas was known to steal from the disciples' money box, suggesting that perhaps Judas was financially motivated to betray Jesus. Consider whether Judas' behavior in returning the money is consistent with this motivation. Is there anything else that might have motivated Judas to betray Jesus? What does Judas do after he leaves the Temple?

JESUS' ENEMIES

The Scriptures are clear that the council of Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem was behind the plot to arrest and kill Jesus. Called the Sanhedrin, the council consisted of the chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people, and it was led by the high priest, Caiaphas. The *Gospels* indicate that Caiaphas played a pivotal role in persuading the council to condemn Jesus to death. The [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:3–4*](#) records that "the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and took counsel together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him." The [*Gospel According to John 11:49–50*](#) records Caiaphas' words to the chief priests and Pharisees concerning Jesus: "You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."

These passages do not justify anti-Semitism, however. The teaching of the Church concerning the question: "Who is responsible for the death of Jesus?" is unequivocal. Although some Christians hold the notion that the Jews collectively are responsible for the death of Jesus and that the Jews alone are to blame, this idea was repudiated by the Second Vatican Council. [*Nostra Aetate \(The Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christians\)*](#) clearly teaches: "Neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during [Jesus'] Passion."

MOVIE NOTES

JUDAS' DEMONS

Although Judas Iscariot repents after his betrayal of Jesus and returns the 30 pieces of silver, this action is not enough to banish his demons. The [*Gospel According to Matthew 27:3–7*](#) recounts that Judas is so upset after Jesus' arrest that he hangs himself. The demons that appear at Judas' death in the movie *The Passion of the Christ* do not appear in the pages of the New Testament, however. Purely dramatic representations, these demons apparently are intended to indicate something of the spiritual torture Judas was undergoing. It is not unreasonable to imagine Satan looking on as Judas hangs himself. By portraying children at play in such a twisted and terrifying manner, the film underscores the way that the consequences of sin can distort human perception of the good and the beautiful. Such distortion reflects the entrenched selfishness of the contemporary secular world in which many people have come to view children as a burden rather than a treasure, and as a curse rather than a blessing.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

[*Paragraph 598 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) teaches in no uncertain terms that all Christians are to be considered responsible for Jesus' death: "... the Church has never forgotten that 'sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured.' The *Roman Catechism* of 1566 also

is cited in the [next paragraph](#): "We must regard as guilty all those who continue to relapse into their sins. Since our sins made the Lord Christ suffer the torment of the cross, those who plunge themselves into disorders and crimes crucify the Son of God anew in their hearts ... and hold him up to contempt."

5 What do the chief priests and elders decide to do with the 30 pieces of silver that Judas throws down before leaving the Temple (see the [Gospel According to Matthew 27:9–10](#))? This same passage records that the religious leaders’ action fulfills prophecy, apparently referring to two Old Testament passages related to a potter and a potter’s field—the [Book of Jeremiah 18:1–11](#) and [32:6–15](#). What is the prophet’s message in each of those passages? Consider how those prophecies might apply to Judas’ betrayal of Jesus.

6 Read the [Gospel According to John 18:12–27](#). Where do Simon Peter’s denials of Jesus occur? The Scriptures do not identify the disciple known to the high priest, though tradition holds him to be John. What might explain how this disciple could be known to the high priest? Consider whether this disciple also was questioned by onlookers about his relationship to Jesus, and if so, how he might have responded, and why.

7 Compare Judas’ betrayal of Jesus with Simon Peter’s denials of Jesus. What might have motivated Simon Peter to deny Jesus? Consider how the author of the *Gospel According to Matthew* knew about Judas’ act of repentance or about the conversations among the chief priests when Judas returned the 30 pieces of silver. What might explain why the author of the *Gospel According to John* fails to record Simon Peter’s emotional state immediately following his three denials of Jesus? What might have prevented a remorseful Simon Peter from hanging himself as Judas did?

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

“Christ teaches that the acceptance of truth is the condition for authentic freedom: ‘You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’ (the [Gospel According to John 8:32](#)). This is truth which sets one free in the face of worldly power and which gives the strength to endure martyrdom. So it was with Jesus before Pilate: ‘For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth’ (the [Gospel According to John 18:37](#)). True worshipers of God must thus worship him ‘in spirit and truth’ (the *Gospel According to John* 4:23): In this worship they become free.”

—*Veritatis Splendor*
(The Splendor of Truth)

MOVIE NOTES

MARY, MODEL OF OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

In the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, the Blessed Virgin Mary, realizing that Jesus’ suffering has begun, announces: “So be it.” These words are closely related to Mary’s fiat in the [Gospel According to Luke 1:38](#): “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” They emphasize Mary’s understanding of Jesus as Savior. [Paragraph 969 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) teaches: “This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect.”

The film repeatedly focuses on Jesus’ Mother’s reactions to the disturbing events of his Passion. In a haunting scene after Jesus has been imprisoned, Mary walks through the courtyard of the high priest until she senses the presence of her Son, and she

then lies down on the pavement above his cell. This event is not found in the Bible, but it reflects Catholic teaching that Mary’s role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Jesus. [Lumen Gentium \(The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church\)](#) explains: “This union of the Mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ’s virginal conception up to his death.”

Mary’s role as intercessor is underscored in the movie when Peter confesses to her that he has denied Jesus. This scene is not recorded in the Scriptures but is consistent with the Church’s teaching that it is acceptable for Christians to appeal to Jesus’ Mother when they have offended God. *The Solemn Profession of Faith: Credo of the People of God* by Pope Paul VI states: “We believe that the Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven to exercise her maternal role on behalf of the members of Christ.”

Christ Anointed One The word **Christ** comes from the Greek χριστός (*Christos*), meaning “Anointed One.” This Greek word is used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for Messiah and also is used to refer to the Messiah in the Greek New Testament. **Christians** identify themselves with Jesus **Christ** the Savior and are anointed when they receive the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. The sacraments of Holy Orders and Anointing of the Sick also include anointing.

8 Read the [*Gospel According to John 18:28–38*](#). Pontius Pilate asks the Jewish religious leaders what accusations they are bringing against Jesus. Consider whether they offer a satisfactory response. What might explain why Pilate presses the Jews to have Jesus judged by their own laws? What reason do the religious leaders give for why they are unable to judge Jesus?

9 Read the [*Gospel According to Luke 23:1–12*](#). What three accusations do the Jews bring against Jesus? What might explain why Pilate questions Jesus about only one of these accusations? Consider why Pilate apparently shows no interest in the charge that Jesus has been forbidding the Jews to pay tribute to Caesar.

10 What might explain why the details of Pilate’s encounter with Jesus differ in the *Gospel According to Luke* and the *Gospel According to John*? What question does Jesus ask Pilate in the *Gospel According to John*? Consider what might be Jesus’ purpose in asking such a question of the Roman procurator. How does Pilate apparently regard the Jews, and how does Jesus seem to regard them in this exchange? The *Gospel According to Luke* instead focuses on Pilate sending Jesus to Herod. Compare Jesus’ responses to Pilate and to Herod. How does Herod have Jesus clothed before returning him to Pilate? What about their experiences with Jesus might have led to Pilate and Herod becoming friends?

WHAT HAS JESUS BEEN SAYING?

The [*Gospel According to John 18:32*](#) discloses that the Jews’ refusal to judge Jesus by their own laws fulfills Jesus’ prophecy about the way he was to die. The [*Gospel According to Matthew 20:18–19*](#) records Jesus saying: “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.” What evidence can you find in the Scriptures to indicate whether the disciples believed Jesus’ statement that he was going to be crucified?

*Lord, you drew all things to yourself so that the devotion
of all peoples everywhere might celebrate,
in a sacrament made perfect and visible,
what was carried out in the one Temple of Judea
under obscure foreshadowings.
Now there is a more distinguished order of Levites,
a greater dignity for the rank of elders,
a more sacred anointing for the priesthood,
because your cross is the source of all blessings, the cause of all graces.*

—[Pope St. Leo the Great](#) (1225–1274)

WHAT IS TRUTH?

At the core of all of the antagonism toward Jesus is a failure to understand the truth. In the [*Gospel According to John 18:37*](#), Jesus clearly states that he has come “to bear witness to the truth.” The Jewish religious leaders have refused to accept Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah—even though Jesus has performed numerous signs pointing to his identity. These chief priests and elders have their own ideas about how a spiritual leader should act, and Jesus does not fit the bill. Pontius Pilate’s concern for maintaining political order blinds him to the Truth. Similar attitudes are not uncommon today. Where do you see evidence that an awareness of secular consequences tied to accepting religious truth might contribute to confusion about what actually constitutes truth? What can you do to be more courageous in living in accordance with the truth?

MOVIE NOTES

The Passion of the Christ portrays Pilate as a ruler unable to figure out how an obscure backwater prophet has ended up at the center of an intense political drama.

JOHN 18:33–19:16

18 ³³ Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” ³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.” ³⁷ Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.” ³⁸ Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again, and told them, “I find no crime in him. ³⁹ But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover; will you have me release for you the King of the Jews?” ⁴⁰ They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

19 ¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him. ² And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and clothed him in a purple robe; ³ they came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands. ⁴ Pilate went out again, and said to them, “Behold, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him.” ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” ⁶ When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him.” ⁷ The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.” ⁸ When Pilate heard these words, he was even more afraid; ⁹ he entered the praetorium again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave no answer. ¹⁰ Pilate therefore said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you

not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" ¹¹ Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."

¹² Upon this Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; every one who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar."

¹³ When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, and in Hebrew, Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" ¹⁵ They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." ¹⁶ Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

MATTHEW 27:15–31

27 ¹⁵ Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. ¹⁶ And they had then a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸ For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. ¹⁹ Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream." ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹ The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²² Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified." ²³ And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified."

²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this righteous man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵ And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶ Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸ And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, ²⁹ and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.



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1 Read the [*Gospel According to John 18:33–40*](#), part of which also was included in the biblical text for Lesson 2. In this passage Pontius Pilate asks if Jesus is King of the Jews. What is there in Jesus' response in the [*Gospel According to John 18:36*](#) to indicate that Jesus might not consider himself King of the Jews? Consider why Pilate persists in asking whether Jesus is a king. What point is it likely that Jesus is trying to make about truth? How might Pilate expect Jesus to respond to the question: "What is truth?"

2 If Pilate finds no crime in Jesus, what might explain why Pilate does not release Jesus himself instead of asking the crowd to request Jesus' release? What might be behind Pilate's presenting Jesus to the crowd as "King of the Jews"? Consider whether it is likely that Pilate expects the crowd to ask for Barabbas.

ec•ce ho•mo behold! the man!

When Pontius Pilate presents Jesus to the Jews, he announces: "Behold! The man!" (The Revised Standard Versions Catholic Editions translates the [*Gospel According to John 19:5*](#) as "Here is the man!") In Latin, Pilate's words are **ecce homo**, which call to mind the curse of Adam, whose name means "the man." Although Pilate understands that Jesus is innocent, he fails to recognize that the suffering human standing before him is the Son of God, the new Adam. Through his Passion and death, Jesus will cleanse all humanity of sin.

THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

“Jesus Christ, the great king, chose the crown of thorns rather than a royal crown. Was not Pilate right when—as he showed Christ to the people who were awaiting his condemnation in front of the praetorium “so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover”—he did not say “Behold the king” but “Behold the man” (the [*Gospel According to John 19:5*](#))? In this way Pilate disclosed the program of Christ's kingdom, which is to be free from the attributes of earthly power in order to reveal the thoughts of many hearts (the [*Gospel According to Luke 2:35*](#)) and to bring near to them the Truth and Love that come from God.”

—Pope St. John Paul II
13 April 1979

JESUS IS SCOURGED AT THE PILLAR

The *Gospels* mention Jesus' scourging, but their authors choose not to dwell on all of the horrible details. The movie *The Passion of the Christ*, on the other hand, leaves little to the imagination. The Scriptures do not record the number of lashes Jesus actually received, but Old Testament law set a limit in the [*book of Deuteronomy 25:2–3*](#): “Then if the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence with a number of stripes in proportion to his offense. Forty stripes may be given him, but not more; lest, if one should go on to beat him with more stripes than these, your brother be degraded in your sight.”

The Romans were not bound to administer punishment according to limitations set by Jewish law, however. In the film, Jesus first is beaten 32 strokes with trimmed wooden branches. When it appears that the scourging might have come to an end, Jesus struggles to his feet, an act that inflames the hostility of the Roman soldiers. They switch to using a particularly cruel instrument of torture, the flagrum, which consisted of several long, thick thongs to which pieces of metal and bits of bone were attached. The flagrum was designed to cause deep wounds and severe blood loss. In the film, when the soldiers begin beating Jesus again, they also start counting over again.

MOVIE NOTES

The graphic portrayal of Jesus' brutal beating by the Roman soldiers is almost impossible to watch. The scene in *The Passion of the Christ* takes up about the same amount of time that would have been needed for such a scourging, and the visual and auditory effects are horrifying.

JESUS IS CROWNED WITH THORNS

Crowns developed to distinguish rulers, often referred to as “heads” of state. The shape of the human skull suggested adornment with a circular crown. The crown originally signified that God’s power had been imparted to the person wearing it, and that person then was considered to be governing as God’s representative. The points on a crown symbolize the light that accompanies power emanating from God.

Crowns usually are made of gold or other precious metal and are worn as a sign of honor. Jesus’ crown of thorns is intended as an insult, however. The Roman soldiers are mocking Jesus’

followers’ hope that as Messiah Jesus also would be an imposing King of the Jews, like David, and therefore able to wield great political and military power. Instead, Jesus appears to be powerless before his enemies.

The truth of the matter remains hidden from the soldiers attempting to humiliate Jesus. Despite the soldiers’ mocking, the crown of thorns has become one of the most recognized symbols in all of religious art and is present on almost every depiction of Christ crucified. It clearly identifies Jesus as a heavenly king—one who reigns through his shameful suffering on the cross.

3 Read the [*Gospel According to John 19:1–4*](#). After scourging Jesus, the soldiers crown Jesus with thorns. This crown can be understood to be related to the curse of Adam in the [*book of Genesis 3:18*](#) and to the thicket in the account of the sacrifice of Abraham in the [*book of Genesis 22:12–13*](#). Consider Jesus’ role in relation to these Old Testament figures. What relationship to another Old Testament figure also might be suggested by the purple robe? What reason does Pilate give for why he is bringing Jesus out to the crowd?

4 Read the [*Gospel According to John 19:5–6*](#). How does Pontius Pilate introduce Jesus to the crowd? How does this differ from the way that Pilate previously introduced Jesus? What might have motivated Pilate to change his introduction? What statement does Pilate repeat regarding how he has judged Jesus? What might explain why Pilate repeats this statement so many times?

*We cannot be the Lord’s equals
by bearing witness to him
to the extent of shedding our blood.
He had the power of laying down his life;
we by contrast cannot choose
the length of our lives,
and we die even if it is against our will.
He, by dying, destroyed death in himself;
we are freed from death only in his death.*

—[St. Augustine](#), Doctor of the Church (354–430)

PILATE WASHES HIS HANDS

The [*Gospel According to John 19:6*](#) records that the crowd displays little sensitivity when Pontius Pilate brings Jesus out and announces: “Here is the man!” They see Jesus beaten, covered in blood, and crowned with thorns. Instead of choosing to release the man they hailed as king a few days earlier, the unsympathetic crowd insists that Pilate release a notorious prisoner named Barabbas—and that Jesus be crucified.

Pilate attempts one last time to change the course of events, asking the crowd: “Shall I crucify your King?” The [*Gospel According to John 19:15*](#) records the chief priests’ response: “We have no king but Caesar.”

The [*Gospel According to Matthew 27:24*](#) describes how Pilate then washes his hands, saying: “I am innocent of this righteous man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” Pilate then turns Jesus over to be crucified.

5 Read the [*Gospel According to John 19:7–9*](#). What reason do the Jews give Pontius Pilate for why they want Jesus executed? Many ancient religious myths involved stories of gods or goddesses coming to earth disguised as human beings. Consider how this might contribute to Pilate's fear after he learns that Jesus has "made himself the Son of God"? What might explain why the Jews did not say that Jesus "claimed to be" the Son of God? What might be behind Jesus' refusal to answer Pilate?

6 Read the [*Gospel According to John 19:10–11*](#), in which Pontius Pilate asks Jesus: "Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" What is the extent of Pilate's actual power over Jesus? What power does Pilate have over the Jewish religious leaders seeking to have Jesus crucified? Although Israel is occupied by Rome, what political power might the Jews nevertheless hold over Pilate?

MOVIE NOTES

A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

When the disturbing scourging scene in the film *The Passion of the Christ* finally comes to an end, the severely beaten Jesus is dragged away. The camera angle allows moviegoers to experience the event from Jesus' point of view. Christians know that the devil only temporarily has been able to turn the world upside down.



MOVIE NOTES

One of the most moving scenes in the film *The Passion of the Christ* envisions the Blessed Virgin Mary on her hands and knees wiping up her Son's blood with towels given her by Pontius Pilate's wife. A pagan, Pilate's wife cannot possibly understand the sacramental overtones of the actions the filmmakers are including here, but it is no stretch to think pagans could realize the precious nature of all human life.

PRECIOUS BLOOD

Although not recorded in the *Gospels*, the sacramental overtones of the Blessed Virgin Mary's wiping up of her Son's blood are obvious. On the eve of his Passion, Jesus transformed his Last Supper with his disciples into the memorial of his voluntary offering of his Body and Blood for the salvation of all humanity: "And he took a chalice, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" These words from the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:27–28*](#) form the basis for the prayers of the Mass, in which Catholics receive the Body and Blood of Jesus in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The Church refers to the sacramental wine that has become the Blood of Christ as Precious Blood, and the film's depiction of Mary wiping up Jesus' blood reflects the high value that Christians place on the Blood of Christ.

The ancients considered all blood precious because of the belief that life force resides in blood, and pagan rituals involving the consumption of blood were based on this idea. This is what is behind the Old Testament injunction in the [*book of Leviticus 17:10–11*](#) in which God forbade the ancient Hebrews to consume blood: "If any man of the house of Israel or of the strangers that sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life."

In the [*Gospel According to John 6:53–54*](#), Jesus shocks his followers by announcing: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." This is an outrageous statement for Jews who have been taught to observe God's injunction not to consume blood in the idolatrous worship practices of the pagans.



7 Read the [*Gospel According to John 19:12–16*](#). These events are taking place on “the day of Preparation of the Passover” and introduce a link between Jesus’ Passion and the feast of Passover. Refer to the [*book of Exodus 12:1–14*](#) to explain what the Jews did on the day of Preparation. What is happening now to Jesus? In what way is Jesus becoming a fulfillment of this Old Testament feast?

8 Read the [*Gospel According to Matthew 27:15–23*](#). Pilate’s wife sends word that she has “suffered much” over Jesus in a dream. The *Gospel According to Matthew* is the only place this detail appears. Refer to the [*Gospel According to Matthew 1:20–21*](#); [*2:12–13*](#); and [*2:22*](#) to learn under what other circumstances dreams are described in that *Gospel*. How is Pilate’s wife’s dream similar?

9 Read the [*Gospel According to Matthew 27:24–26*](#). When Pilate washes his hands, the crowd responds: “His blood be on us and on our children!” In the sacrament of the Eucharist, wine becomes the Precious Blood of Jesus. Refer to the [*book of Revelation 7:13–17*](#) to explain what makes Jesus’ Blood “precious,” and why Christians long to wash their robes “in the blood of the Lamb.”

10 Read the [*Gospel According to Matthew 27:27–31*](#). The soldiers mock Jesus as “King of the Jews.” In the [*Gospel According to Matthew 27:11*](#), Pilate asks if Jesus is “King of the Jews.” Refer to the [*Gospel According to Matthew 2:1–2*](#) to describe an instance in which this title refers to Jesus with respect. In the [*Gospel According to John 19:15*](#), the priests insist that they have no king but Caesar. The [*book of Deuteronomy 17:14–17*](#) sets out laws for kings who rule over the tribes of Israel. How does the chief priests’ recognition of Caesar as their king fly in the face of those laws?

MOVIE NOTES

MARY’S FAITH

The Passion of the Christ shows many onlookers watching as Jesus is scourged—including Satan, Caiaphas, the chief priests, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, the apostle John, and Pontius Pilate’s wife. The Jewish religious leaders leave the scene before the soldiers switch to using the flagrum. In the film, Mary quietly asks: “My Son, when, where, how will you choose to be delivered of this?” indicating her complete faith in Jesus. This is consistent with Church teaching. [Paragraph 968 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) explains Mary’s role in relation to the Church and all humanity: “In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior’s work of restoring supernatural life to souls.”

MOVIE NOTES

SON OF SATAN

Satan’s gruesome baby in *The Passion of the Christ* is another example of creative license. Satan’s desire to mimic God can be seen in the words that the serpent uses to tempt Eve in the [*book of Genesis 3:5*](#): “For God knows that when you eat of [the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God.” The desire to be like God is at the root of all sin. If God has a Son, the devil also wants to have a son.

HATRED, HOSTILITY & HOPE

In a flashback scene in the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, Jesus remembers washing his disciples’ feet, an act described in the [*Gospel According to John 13:1–20*](#). This opens a section in which Jesus describes what is about to happen to him, warns his disciples of their own coming persecutions, and gives them instructions about how to face hatred and hostility.

In the [*Gospel According to John 14:15–17*](#), Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to guide and comfort his disciples: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.” In the [*Gospel According to John 15:18*](#), after repeating his commandment that they love one another, Jesus gives his disciples this assurance: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”

VIA DOLOROSA: THE WAY OF SORROWS

The route Jesus carries his cross is known as *Via Dolorosa*, or the Way of Sorrows. On Good Friday, Catholics gather to pray the Stations of the Cross, meditating on events of Jesus' Passion through a series of penitential prayers. The number of times that Jesus fell, his meeting with his Mother, and Veronica's wiping of Jesus' face with her veil have been contemplated by Christians since the early days of the Church, but these are not recorded in the *Gospels*. In [*Rosarium Virginis Mariae \(Rosary of the Virgin Mary\)*](#), Pope St. John Paul II taught that by meditating on such individual moments of Jesus' Passion, Christians can find "the culmination of the revelation of God's love and the source of our salvation." Praying Stations of the Cross is participating in the Way of Sorrows as the path to holiness. Consider how your own spiritual life resembles a journey in which you are being invited to join Jesus on his road to Calvary.

MOVIE NOTES

In *The Passion of the Christ*, the filmmakers use creative license to fill in many details of events that traditionally are associated with Jesus' sorrowful walk to Calvary.

LUKE 23:26–32

23 ²⁶ And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ And there followed him a great multitude of people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. ²⁸ But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed!'" ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' ³¹ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

³² Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.

MARK 15:21–22

15 ²¹ And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. ²² And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull).

MATTHEW 5:43–46

5 ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"

JOHN 10:14–18

10¹⁴“I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father.”



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1 Read the [Gospel According to Luke 23:26](#). The synoptic *Gospels* all record that Simon of Cyrene was compelled by the Romans to help Jesus carry the cross. In the [Gospel According to Matthew 5:41](#), what advice does Jesus give to his disciples about how they should respond to being forced into temporary service? What limits does Jesus place on the degree to which a disciple should be willing to extend service beyond what originally is demanded by another?

2 Read the [Gospel According to Luke 23:27–32](#). Compare what Jesus tells the weeping women with the language used in the [book of Revelation 6:15–17](#). Consider whether these two passages are describing the same future event. The cross frequently is depicted as green, based on the [Gospel According to Luke 23:31](#). In what ways might this color be seen to represent the virtue of hope?

Gol·go·tha place of a skull

Golgotha in Aramaic is תלגלג, a word that means “skull.” Greek and Latin versions of the New Testament offer a translation of the Aramaic as “place of a skull,” which in Latin is *Calvariae locus*. *Calvaria* is Latin for “skull” and the root of the English word for Calvary.

MOVIE NOTES

In *The Passion of the Christ*, when Jesus is shown carrying his cross, the camera only occasionally focuses on the faces of women in the crowd—but the sound of their weeping provides an auditory backdrop for this section of the film.

WOMEN ALONG THE SORROWFUL WAY

The [Gospel According to Luke 23:27](#) mentions the women of the holy city lamenting the brutal way Jesus is being treated. The movie shows the women but neglects to include Jesus’ prophetic words to them, recorded in the [Gospel According to Luke 23:28–30](#), foretelling a time of great distress: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’”

The apocalyptic vision of heaven described in the [book of Revelation 6:15–17](#) uses similar language: “Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?’”

3 Read the [*Gospel According to Mark 15:21–22*](#). The name of the place where Jesus is led to be crucified is Golgotha, “place of a skull.” Tradition holds that it was the final resting place for Adam’s remains, often represented artistically by a skull beneath the cross. How might that position of Adam’s bones relative to the cross suggest fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy recorded in the [*Book of Ezekiel 37:12*](#)? In what way might Adam’s remains at Golgotha symbolize salvation made possible for all humanity?

SHARING JESUS’ BURDEN

The distance Jesus had to carry his cross along *Via Dolorosa* is believed to have been about 650 yards, a little more than a third of a mile. This would be no walk in the park for someone recently scourged to within an inch of his life. Roman practice required a condemned criminal to carry only the cross beam to the place of execution, but the movie portrays Jesus carrying his entire cross—in keeping with centuries of Christian art. It is most likely that Jesus carried only the cross beam, but that alone normally would have weighed between 50 and 100 pounds.

The synoptic *Gospels* record that Simon of Cyrene was enlisted by the Romans to help Jesus (the [*Gospel According to Matthew 27:32*](#), the [*Gospel According to Mark 15:21*](#), and the [*Gospel According to Luke 23:26*](#)). Cyrene was an ancient town on the coast of present-day Libya, and Simon undoubtedly was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. Tradition holds that as a result of assisting Jesus, Simon experienced a powerful conversion and became one of the first Christians. The [*Gospel According to Mark 15:21*](#) identifies a Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus, and many scholars believe that this is the same Rufus greeted in the [*Letter of Paul to the Romans 16:13*](#).

In the [*Gospel According to Luke 9:23*](#), immediately after Jesus prophesies his Passion, he describes what his disciples must do if they wish to be his followers: “And he said to all, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’” Simon of Cyrene models the way.

MOVIE NOTES

The film portrays Simon of Cyrene as initially trying to avoid being pressed into service. It also depicts him practically carrying Jesus along the *Via Dolorosa* and giving emotional as well as physical support. At one point in the movie, when Jesus has stumbled to the ground, Simon struggles to prevent the heavy cross from falling on Jesus. As they near Golgotha, Simon seems to understand that Jesus willingly goes to his Crucifixion, and he encourages Jesus by telling him they have almost reached their destination.

TRADITIONAL LENTEN PRACTICES

“Lent is a journey, it means accompanying Jesus who goes up to Jerusalem for fulfillment of his mystery of Passion, death, and Resurrection. It reminds us that Christian life is a “way” to take, not so much consistent with a law to observe as with the very person of Christ....

This journey we are asked to take in Lent is marked by certain practices: fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. Fasting means abstinence from food but includes other forms of privation for a more modest life. However, all this is not yet the full reality of fasting. It is an outer sign of an inner reality, of our commitment, with God’s help, to abstain from evil and to live by the *Gospel*. Those who are unable to nourish themselves with the word of God do not fast properly.

Fasting is closely linked to almsgiving. “All that each Christian is bound to do in every season he must now do with greater solicitude and devotion in order to fulfill the apostolic prescription of Lenten fasting consistently, not only in abstinence from food but also and above all from sin. Furthermore, with this holy fasting that is only right, no work may be more fruitfully associated than almsgiving, which under the one name of ‘mercy,’ embraces many good works,” St. Leo the Great taught.”

—Pope Benedict XVI
9 March 2011

*O my Jesus, I cannot be your friend and follower
if I refuse to carry the cross.
O dearly beloved cross! I embrace you, I kiss you,
I joyfully accept you from the hands of my God.
Far be it from me to glory in anything,
save in the cross of my Lord and Redeemer.
By it the world shall be crucified to me and I to the world,
that I may be yours forever.*

—[St. Francis of Assisi](#), who bore the stigmatic wounds of Jesus (1181–1226)

4 In the [Letter to the Hebrews 13:11–12](#), the location of the Crucifixion is connected to Jesus’ mission. What does the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* see as the reason for Jesus’ death? Consider why that author believes it was necessary for Jesus to die “outside the gate” of Jerusalem. Refer to [paragraph 1544 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) to explain how Jesus’ role in regard to the Old Covenant coincides with the thinking in the *Letter to the Hebrews*.

5 Read the [Gospel According to Matthew 5:43–46](#). Jesus teaches his followers to love their enemies. What other requirements for conversion of heart does Jesus set forth in his Sermon on the Mount, recorded in the [Gospel According to Matthew 5:1–7:29](#)?

OBEDIENCE VERSUS DISOBEDIENCE

MOVIE NOTES

In *The Passion of the Christ*, the Blessed Virgin and Satan appear on opposite sides of the crowd as Jesus begins carrying his cross. Their exchange of gazes is not scriptural, but it does illustrate their complete antipathy toward each other.

The Blessed Virgin Mary’s obedient “yes” to God’s request that she become the Mother of the Messiah stands in stark contrast to the devil’s prideful disobedience and rejection of God’s will.

[Paragraph 392 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) teaches that the devil and other fallen angels “radically and irrevocably rejected God,” while [paragraph 494](#) teaches that Mary, “without a single sin to restrain her, ... gave herself entirely to the person and to the work of her Son ... in order to serve the mystery of redemption with him and dependent on him, by God’s grace.”

MOVIE NOTES

VERONICA’S VEIL

In the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, the woman who breaks through the crowd and gives her veil to Jesus to wipe his face is Veronica, and nothing about her sympathetic response to Jesus’ suffering is recorded in the *Gospels*. In the film, Veronica also offers Jesus a cup of water, although he is unable to drink it because one of the soldiers knocks it away.

In Christian tradition, Veronica kept her veil, believed to have retained the image of Jesus’ face, and she discovered that it had curative properties. It is said the veil was used to cure the Roman emperor Tiberius from illness, then left in the care of Pope Clement, the third successor of Peter.

Church documents from the 4th century confirm the existence of the veil, but there is speculation that Veronica’s veil might have disappeared in 1608 during reconstruction of St. Peter’s Basilica.

6 Veronica's offer of water to Jesus in the film, though not scriptural, nevertheless recalls Jesus' teaching in the [Gospel According to Matthew 25:31–36](#). What blessing does Jesus promise to those who treat others charitably? Refer to [paragraphs 2443–2447 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) to list the works of mercy and to explain the Church's preferential love for the poor.

7 Read the [Gospel According to John 10:14–15](#). What about the way Jesus shepherds his flock makes him “good”? In Jesus' time many people looked down on the occupation of shepherd, but there are many shepherds favored by God in the Old Testament. Who are some of these shepherds, and in what ways are they blessed by God? (See the [book of Genesis 4:2–4](#); [31:3–13](#); and [37:2–11](#) as well as the [book of Exodus 3:1–6](#) and the [First Book of Samuel 16:1–13](#).) Read the [Gospel According to Luke 2:8–20](#) and explain how Jesus' role as a good shepherd is foreshadowed at his birth.

8 The [Book of Isaiah 40:11](#) uses the image of a shepherd in one of the most comforting descriptions of the Messiah found in the Scriptures. What promises about the Messiah does the prophet make? In the New Testament, how are these promises echoed in the [book of Revelation 7:13–17](#), and what event do they describe?

as•ce•sis

self-discipline

Asceticism is from the Greek ἀσκησις meaning “exercise,” “practice,” and “training,” and so the word comes into English as self-discipline. Many Christians take on extra ascetic practices during Lent to foster the way of perfection by embracing the way of the cross. **Asceticism** is difficult, but the Church teaches that it has its rewards. [Paragraph 2015 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) explains: “Spiritual progress entails the **asceticism** and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes.”

MOVIE NOTES

The Passion of the Christ juxtaposes Mary running to her Son when he trips as a toddler and when he falls beneath the weight of the cross as an adult. Neither event is described in the *Gospels*, but these scenes in the film provide an emotional context for Jesus' meeting his Mother along the Sorrowful Way, an event also not directly described in the Scriptures.

ALL THINGS NEW

Jesus' words to the Blessed Virgin Mary: “See, Mother, I make all things new,” are not recorded in the *Gospels* but appear to be taken directly from the [book of Revelation 21:5](#), which describes an apocalyptic vision of heaven: “And he who sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’”

The transforming power of God's love is a crucial aspect of Christianity. For a follower of Jesus, all things are made new through the grace of the sacraments. The details of Jesus' New Covenant are spelled out in the pages of the New Testament. The [Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 5:17](#) records: “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” The apocalyptic vision of heaven seen in the final book of the New Testament includes this description of the holy city as the new Jerusalem, found in the [book of Revelation 21:1–2](#): “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

[Paragraph 1010 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) teaches the importance of new life in Christ: “What is essentially new about Christian death is this: Through Baptism, the Christian has already ‘died with Christ’ sacramentally, in order to live a new life; and if we die in Christ's grace, physical death completes this ‘dying with Christ’ and so completes our incorporation into him in his redeeming act. . . .”

9 Read the [*Gospel According to John 10:16*](#). Jesus teaches that he has other sheep. Read [paragraph 60 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#), which includes a reference to this passage. What people might be represented by these “other sheep”? What responsibility might the Church have toward people in these other folds?

10 Read the [*Gospel According to John 10:17–18*](#). The [*Letter to the Hebrews 13:20–21*](#) refers to Jesus as “the great shepherd of the sheep.” According to this passage, how are Christians enabled to do God’s will? In the *Gospel According to John*, Jesus insists that he is able to lay down his life of his own accord. Refer to [paragraph 609 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) to explain Church teaching about why Jesus freely accepted his Passion and death.



THIS IS MY BODY

The film shows bread being brought to the table and unwrapped at the Last Supper. There is no dialogue, and the next scene focuses on Jesus being stripped of his garments in preparation for his Crucifixion. Both events serve as clear references to the biblical foundation for Church teaching about the sacrament of the Eucharist, which Jesus institutes at the Last Supper with his disciples in the [*Gospel According to Mark 14:22*](#): “And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’”

[Paragraph 1329 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) teaches that the sacrament of the Eucharist is referred to as the “Breaking of Bread” because “Jesus used this rite, part of a Jewish meal, when as master of the table he blessed and distributed the bread, above all at the Last Supper.”

The Passion of the Christ interrupts the Crucifixion with flashbacks of Jesus teaching his disciples how to approach their own coming persecutions, recorded in the [*Gospel According to John 15:12–13*](#): “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus does more than talk about love, and he does not merely describe the way to love. In the [*Gospel According to John 14:6*](#), Jesus promises that he himself is the way: “No one comes to the Father, but by me.”

There is no denying the truth that Jesus’ way is redemptive, or that it will involve suffering. As the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus is the perfect model of holiness for Christians. [Paragraph 459 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) picks up on the idea of newness of life to explain that Jesus himself is the “norm of the new law: ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’ This love implies an effective offering of oneself, after his example.”



GOOD & BAD SHEPHERDS

MOVIE NOTES

Just before a flashback of Jesus teaching that he is the good shepherd, the film shows the face of Caiaphas, high priest of the Jews.

As religious leaders of the Jews, Caiaphas and the chief priests are shepherds of God’s chosen people. The Old Testament writings in the [*Book of Ezekiel 34:2–4*](#) have little good to say about these shepherds:

“Thus says the Lord GOD: Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.”

In the [*Book of Ezekiel 34:15*](#), God promises: “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD.”

The contrast is obvious. The shepherds of Israel are falling down on the job. In the [*Gospel According to John 10:14–15*](#), Jesus says that he is the good shepherd, and he promises that he is prepared to lay down his life for his sheep.

CRUCIFIXION, DEATH & RESURRECTION

The Resurrection is central to the Christian faith. Disbelief in Jesus' claim to be divine is what leads to his Crucifixion. Throughout his Passion, Jesus is challenged to prove that he is indeed the Messiah. Nowhere is this more apparent than after he has been nailed to the cross. The [*Gospel According to Luke 23:35*](#) records: "And the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!'" Although Jesus refuses to silence the taunts of onlookers by coming down from the cross, the Resurrection confirms his divinity.

This is the good news that Catholics repeat every Sunday in the Nicene Creed: "For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father."

The same people who have had difficulty believing in the divinity of Jesus before his death also have difficulty accepting that he has risen from the dead. In the centuries since Jesus' Passion, death and Resurrection, belief that Jesus did not die has remained a stumbling block for many people.

Paul addresses this difficulty when he writes in his [*First Letter to the Corinthians 15:13–14*](#): "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." Paul's point is well taken. The thing that distinguishes Christianity from other religions is Jesus' promise that those who believe in him gain a real share in his eternal life, fully revealed in his Resurrection.

How do you think others might be able to see Christ alive in you?

MATTHEW 26:26–29

26 ²⁶Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷And he took a chalice, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

JOHN 19:17–20:8

19 ¹⁷So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹The chief priests of the Jews then said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²²Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; ²⁴ so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfil the Scripture,

“They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

²⁵ So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold your son!” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

²⁸ After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the Scripture), “I thirst.” ²⁹ A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished”; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; ³³ but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled, “Not a bone of him shall be broken.” ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on him whom they have pierced.”

³⁸ After this Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him leave. So he came and took away his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who had at first come to him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds’ weight. ⁴⁰ They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid. ⁴² So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, as the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

20 ¹ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. ⁴ They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; ⁵ and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, ⁷ and the napkin, which had been on his

head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.



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1 Read the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:26–29*](#). What additional information about the institution of the Eucharist does Paul provide in his [*First Letter to the Corinthians 11:23–29*](#)? What warning does he issue in regard to reception of the Eucharist? Refer to [*paragraph 1385 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) to explain how this warning is reinforced in Church teaching.

2 Regarding the Eucharist, St. Thomas Aquinas taught that an understanding that the true Body of Christ and his true Blood are in this sacrament is possible only by faith. List ways in which Catholics are nourished by receiving the Eucharist

JESUS IS LIFTED UP

MOVIE NOTES

In *The Passion of the Christ*, as Jesus is being nailed to the cross, the Blessed Virgin Mary watches every move, but John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” closes his eyes, and Mary Magdalene buries her face in her hands. The Scriptures do not record these details, nor do the *Gospels* mention the soldiers turning the cross over on its face after Jesus has been nailed to it.

When Jesus’ cross is raised, two interesting things that are not recorded in the *Gospels* are depicted in *The Passion of the Christ*. The Blessed Virgin Mary stands and lets the gravel she has been clutching fall to the ground in a gesture that echoes her Son’s surrender to God’s will. Mary Magdalene, who has been watching Jesus intently as though she expected him to bring his Passion to an abrupt end at any moment, rises and covers her head. The two women’s apparent acceptance of the inevitability of Jesus’ death reflects an understanding of his teaching recorded in the [*Gospel According to John 12:32*](#): “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” He said this to show by what death he was to die.” Before Jesus can rise from the dead in the Resurrection, it is necessary that he be lifted up on the cross to die. To accomplish the coming of Jesus’ kingdom, it will also be necessary for Jesus to ascend into heaven.

SUFFERING OPENS US TO SALVATION

“ Jesus and, in his footsteps, his Sorrowful Mother and the saints, are witnesses who show us how to experience the tragedy of suffering for our own good and for the salvation of the world.

There is more. Because the Son of God wanted freely to embrace suffering and death, we also are capable of seeing God’s image in the face of those who suffer. This preferential love of the Lord for those who are suffering helps us to see others more clearly and to give them, above and beyond their material demands, the look of love that they need. This can only happen as the fruit of a personal encounter with Christ.

Every human being is called to the greatness of showing compassion and loving concern to the suffering, just as God himself did. In a mysterious yet real way, the presence of the suffering awakens in our often hardened hearts a tenderness that opens us to salvation. Christians offer the Lord their lives, cooperating with him and becoming part of the treasury of compassion so greatly needed by the human race.”

—Pope Benedict XVI
20 August 2011

3 Read the [*Gospel According to John 19:17–22*](#). The sign Pilate has placed on the cross raises several questions. What might have motivated Pilate to have the sign written? What would explain why he wanted to ensure that almost everyone who saw it would be able to read it? Consider what is behind the Jews' request that Pilate change the sign? Consider why Pilate refuses this request.

4 Read the [*Gospel According to John 19:23–24*](#), which describes the division of Jesus' clothing as fulfillment of the Scriptures. Consider how the soldiers' actions fulfill [*Psalms 22:18**](#). Read the [*book of Exodus 28:32*](#), and consider ways that this passage might be fulfilled by the soldiers, especially in not tearing Jesus' cloak. What might explain why the author of the *Gospel According to John* seems to want to emphasize scriptural fulfillment?

5 Read the [*Gospel According to John 19:25–27*](#). If Jesus had brothers in his family, it seems unlikely that he would have assigned his Mother's care to one of his disciples. How does Jesus' action recorded in this passage reinforce Church teaching about the perpetual virginity of Mary? Refer to [paragraphs 501](#) and [963 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) to explain how Jesus' words emphasize Mary's role as Mother of the Church. See [paragraph 506 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) to explain how Mary's role as virgin establishes her as a symbol of the Church.

MOVIE NOTES

MARY & JESUS

In *The Passion of the Christ*, as Jesus' death becomes imminent, the sky turns ominous, a detail recorded in the [*Gospel According to Mark 15:33*](#): "There was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." Onlookers, including the chief priests, begin leaving the scene. The Blessed Virgin Mary and John approach the cross, and Mary kisses Jesus' bloody foot. This is not scriptural, nor are the words that Mary speaks, although most people instinctively will recognize the normal response of a parent whose child is suffering: "Flesh of my flesh, heart of my heart, my Son, let me die with you."

MOVIE NOTES

The Passion of the Christ emphasizes the link between Jesus' Paschal sacrifice and the forgiveness of sins by showing a flashback to Jesus pouring wine at the Last Supper. This scene calls to mind Jesus' New Covenant in which wine becomes his own blood poured out for forgiveness of humanity's sins.

FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Jesus' words at the Last Supper are recorded in the [*First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 11:25*](#) and in the [*Gospel According to Matthew 26:26–28*](#). They form the biblical foundation for the Church's teaching about the sacrament of the Eucharist. [Paragraph 781 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) explains the connection of Jesus' New Covenant to the Old Covenant between God and the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel: "[God] therefore chose the Israelite race to be his own people and established a covenant with it. ... All these things, however, happened as a preparation for and figure of that new and perfect covenant which was to be ratified in Christ ... the New Covenant in his blood."

The synoptic *Gospel* writers record that as Jesus is dying he is taunted by onlookers urging him to come down from the cross. They remind Jesus that he said he could rebuild the Temple in three days. The [*Gospel According to Mark 15:31–32*](#) records that the chief priests and scribes mock Jesus, saying: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Jesus' response in the film is taken from the [*Gospel According to Luke 23:34*](#): "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Indeed, they do not. No one aware that Jesus is God would want any part in his Crucifixion. God's mercy, however, is infinite.

*See the **Index of Scripture Citations** beginning on page 42 for different verse numbering in some translations of the *Psalms*.

6 Read the [*Gospel According to John 19:28-30*](#), in which Jesus is offered vinegar (sour wine) to quench his thirst, and afterward he announces: “It is finished.” What might Jesus be referring to as finished? With what sacrament is thirst frequently associated in the Scriptures? Why might it be fitting that Jesus thirsts once all is finished (see [*Psalms 63*](#), the [*Gospel According to Matthew 5:6*](#), and the [*Gospel According to John 4:7-26*](#))?



REMEMBER ME, LORD

The good thief makes only a brief appearance in the [*Gospel According to Luke 23:40-43*](#), yet he forever is linked with a basic tenet of the Christian faith as a result of his rebuke of the thief who has been mocking Jesus: “‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power.’ And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’” Jesus’ promise is extended to all who are sincerely sorry for their sins, but his comforting words also point to the urgent and immediate need for repentance.

This idea appears in an Old Testament prophecy that the Church includes in the liturgy for Ash Wednesday from the [*Book of Joel 2:12-13*](#): “‘Yet even now,’ says the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and tear your hearts and not your garments.’ Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy, and repents of evil.” The same idea also appears in a New Testament passage read at the start of Lent, from the [*Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 6:2*](#): “For [God] says: ‘At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation.’ Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

MOVIE NOTES

The Passion of the Christ portrays a crow pecking at the eye of the “bad” thief, a detail not included in the *Gospels*. This grisly attack symbolizes the thief’s unwillingness to see the truth about Jesus. It also underscores that Crucifixion was reserved for common criminals with no standing in the Empire. Roman citizens condemned to death were beheaded, including the Apostle Paul, who was martyred outside the walls of Rome.



INRI

Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews

The [*Gospel According to John 19:19*](#) describes a sign that the Roman soldiers placed on the cross: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” The author records that Pontius Pilate had this written in the three most common languages in Jerusalem at that time—Hebrew, the language of the Jews; Latin, the language of the Romans occupying Judea; and Greek, the language in common use throughout the Roman Empire.

This sign appears on many modern depictions of the crucifix as the acronym **INRI**, representing the Latin *Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*, which certainly was spelled out at the time of Jesus’ Crucifixion. (The Greek version reads INBI, Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὁ Βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.)

Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Passover, so nearly everyone who passed by the site of Jesus’ Crucifixion would have seen the sign and been able to read it.

The movie *The Passion of the Christ* neglects to mention the Jewish religious leaders’ objection to Pilate’s choice of words, recorded in the [*Gospel According to John 19:21-22*](#): “The chief priests of the Jews then said to Pilate, ‘Do not write, “The King of the Jews,” but, “This man said, I am King of the Jews.”’ Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written.’”

*As we progress in this way of life and in faith,
we shall run on the path of God's commandments,
our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.
Never swerving from his instructions ... until death,
we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ
that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom.*

—[St. Benedict of Nursia](#), founder of Western monasticism (480–543)

7 Read the [Gospel According to John 19:31–42](#). Compare this passage to the [book of Exodus 12:43–49](#), in which God gives instructions regarding the Passover lamb. Refer to [paragraph 1225 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) to explain what sacraments are represented by the blood and water that flow from Jesus' side. How might events described in the [Gospel According to Matthew 27:51–54](#) have led those present at Jesus' death to become Christians? What is the centurion's response to seeing the Crucifixion?

8 The [Gospel According to Matthew 27:46](#) records Jesus quoting [Psalm 22:1](#)* from the cross. Read all of [Psalm 22](#)* and list ways that it applies to Jesus' Passion. How can the difference in tone between the opening and the conclusion be reconciled? Is it very likely that Jesus feels abandoned by God?



THIRST IN THE SCRIPTURES

The [Gospel According to John 19:28–29](#) records Jesus saying: “I thirst,” and it then describes how vinegar is held to his mouth in fulfillment of [Psalm 69:21](#)*: “They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Like many of Jesus' final words from the cross, “I thirst” also appears to be a reference from [Psalm 63:1](#)*: “O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you . . .”

In [Psalm 63:9–11](#)*, the besieged Psalmist ends his song on a hopeful note: “But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword, they shall be prey for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult; for the mouths of liars will be stopped.”

Thirst is a recurring theme in the Bible, mentioned in the [Gospel According to Matthew 25:34–](#)

[36](#) among the charitable works of mercy associated with those who will inherit the kingdom. It also is a key idea in the Beatitudes in the [Gospel According to Matthew 5:6](#). One of the most significant references to thirst occurs in the [Gospel According to John 4:7–26](#). There Jesus requests a drink when he initiates the conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well and reveals to her that he is the Messiah.

In a commentary on the passage from the [Gospel According to John](#), St. Augustine writes that “the one who was asking for a drink of water was thirsting for her faith” and that Jesus “is in need, as one hoping to receive, yet he is rich, as one about to satisfy the thirst of others.”

[Paragraph 694 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) teaches that the Holy Spirit is “personally the living water welling up from Christ crucified as its source and welling up in us to eternal life.”



*See the **Index of Scripture Citations** beginning on page 42 for different verse numbering in some translations of the *Psalms*.

9 Read the [*Gospel According to John 20:1–8*](#). Refer to [*Acts of the Apostles 20:7*](#) to explain how the early Church commemorated the first day of the week. Read [paragraphs 2180](#) and [2186 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#). What is the “Sunday obligation”? In what ways are Christians expected to consecrate Sundays?

10 Refer to [paragraph 1021 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) to explain how Jesus’ words to the good thief in the [*Gospel According to Luke 23:43*](#) are related to the final destiny of the soul. In his parable about Lazarus and the rich man in the [*Gospel According to Luke 16:19–31*](#), what warning does Jesus issue that implies not everyone will be capable of believing in the Resurrection? Read the [*First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 15:3–8*](#). Consider whether that passage supports the Christian belief that the Resurrection is a real event that actually occurred in history.

INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT

The [*Gospel According to John 19:30*](#) describes Jesus’ words before death: “It is finished.” The [*Gospel According to Luke 23:46*](#) records a slightly different version of the story: “Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last.” These final words recounted in the *Gospel According to Luke* appear to be yet another quotation from the *Psalms*, this time from [*Psalms 31:5*](#)*: “Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”

It is believed that *Psalms 31** was taught to Jewish children as a bedtime prayer, an ancient equivalent of “Now I lay me down to sleep...” This *Psalms*, like others that Jesus recites, describes a soul in distress and ends on a customary note of hope with [*Psalms 31:23–24*](#)*: “Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but abundantly requites him who acts haughtily. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all who wait for the LORD!”

MOVIE NOTES

SCREAMING & CRYING

It is little wonder, given the Church’s understanding about the ultimate meaning of Jesus’ Passion and death, that the movie *The Passion of the Christ* depicts Satan screaming in hell when Jesus dies. The Scriptures are silent about Satan’s reaction, however. In the film, Jesus’ death also is marked by a single tear from heaven that sets off an earthquake. This is not scriptural, either. The tear is a creative representation of the filmmakers’ imaginary vision of God the Father’s reaction to his Son’s death.

THE TORN CURTAIN

MOVIE NOTES

There is no historic evidence or *Gospel* description of the Temple being damaged by an earthquake at the time of Jesus’ Crucifixion.

All three synoptic *Gospels* report that the curtain of the Temple is torn in two at Jesus’ death (the [*Gospel According to Matthew 27:51*](#), the [*Gospel According to Mark 15:38*](#), and the [*Gospel According to Luke 23:45*](#)).

The curtain veiled the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the Temple and the dwelling of God (the [*book of Exodus 26:31–34*](#)), an area that only the high priest could enter—and he only once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement ([*Letter to the Hebrews 9:3–7*](#)).

The torn curtain does not represent God’s vengeance against the Jewish religious leaders but rather his love for all people. After Jesus’ willing sacrifice in atonement for the sins of all men and women, God is able to dwell with human beings in a more intimate way.

The veil is torn because the Spirit of God explodes outward from the heart of the Temple into human hearts, which have become the new Temples of the Holy Spirit. The [*First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 3:16*](#) asks: “Do you not know that you are God’s Temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

*See the **Index of Scripture Citations** beginning on page 42 for different verse numbering in some translations of the *Psalms*.

MOVIE NOTES

The Passion of the Christ shows several Roman soldiers undergoing conversion as a result of witnessing Jesus' death—including the centurion who seems to be in charge of the executions—but the most interesting representation is of the soldier given the task of thrusting a spear into Jesus' body to make certain that he is dead. Christian tradition has held that this man's name was Longinus, although the movie calls him Cassius. Throughout the film, this soldier is shown becoming more and more sympathetic to Jesus and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and his complete conversion is apparent when he falls to his knees in the shower of blood and water that pours out of Jesus' wounded side.

THERE CAME OUT BLOOD & WATER

The author of the *Fourth Gospel* is believed to be the apostle John, and he describes in detail the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' side, writing in the [Gospel According to John 19:34–35](#) that this can be believed because he personally witnessed the event: “But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe.”

Devotions to the Divine Mercy and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus are related to this passage of the Scriptures. The Church celebrates God's Divine Mercy on the Sunday following Easter, and the Divine Mercy portrait shows Jesus with rays of blood and water streaming from his heart. [Paragraph 478 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) explains that Jesus “has loved us all with a human heart. For this reason, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced by our sins and for our salvation, ‘is quite rightly considered the chief sign and symbol of that . . . love with which the divine Redeemer continually loves the eternal Father and all human beings’ without exception.”

In the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' side the Church sees types of Baptism and Eucharist, the sacraments of new life. St. Ambrose taught: “See where Baptism comes from, if not from the cross of Christ, from his death. There is the whole mystery: He died for you. In him you are redeemed, in him you are saved.”

THE MORNING STAR THAT NEVER SETS

The closing scene in *The Passion of the Christ* calls to mind the joyful words of the Exultet, which dates to the 4th century. This hymn is sung just after the lighting of the Paschal candle at the beginning of the Easter Vigil, the time when adults are brought into the Church through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist: “May the Morning Star which never sets find this flame still burning; Christ that Morning Star, who came back from the dead, and shed his peaceful light on all mankind, your Son who lives and reigns for ever.”

MOVIE NOTES

In *The Passion of the Christ*, most of the soldiers flee during the earthquake, but three remain to help remove Jesus' body from the cross. The camera focuses on the nails and crown of thorns cast aside before closing in on the heartbreaking sight of the Blessed Virgin holding the body of her Son. Most people are familiar with Michelangelo's white marble Pieta in St. Peter's Basilica, which depicts Mary looking down at Jesus' dead body. Its counterpart in the film is a bloody Pieta that shows Mary numbly staring in grief at the world, her posture indicating that she accepts God's will. After a long moment, the screen goes dark. Moviegoers next see the heavy stone rolling away by itself from the tomb, and the light of Easter entering the darkness. Burial cloths billow in a corner of the dim cavern. The risen Jesus stands up and walks out into the world. The final thing the camera focuses on are the holes in his hands.

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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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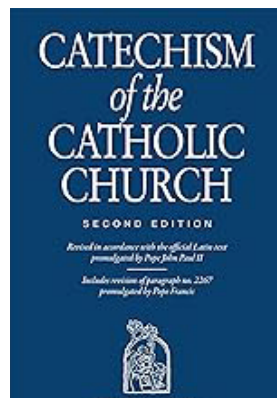
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