

JESUS CHRIST: OUR SAVIOR AND REDEEMER

*For there is one God, and there is one mediator
between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony
to which was borne at the proper time.*

—1 TIMOTHY 2:5-6

SCRIPTURE READING

*Either before you arrive or as you wait for class to begin, find this short passage
from Sacred Scripture in your Bible or through an online search. Reading it
will prepare you for this week's material.*

—Philippians 2:5-11

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty Father, you sent your only begotten Son into the world to redeem the human race from sin. Give us the grace to believe in Jesus Christ, the one true mediator between God and men, so that recognizing your mercy, we may come by his grace to the promise of eternal life. Amen.

SESSION 8 VIDEO LESSON: JESUS CHRIST: OUR SAVIOR AND REDEEMER

As you watch the video lesson, refer to these key highlights. Feel free to use the space provided to take notes.

- ♦ The suffering and death of Christ are mysteries that reveal to us who God is, his solidarity with us and love for us, and his victory over the powers of evil.

- ♦ The atonement is the reconciliation of God and man effected by Christ's sacrificial death. Christ offered himself to the Father in reparation for human sins.

- ♦ Christ suffered during his passion in both his body and soul. His spiritual grief stemmed especially from his confrontation with the gravity of human sinfulness and his contrition of heart by which he mourned for all human sins.



- ♦ Christ's resurrection entails a reunion of body and soul such that Christ can no longer suffer or die but will live forever as man in both body and soul.

- ♦ Christ's resurrection is the first moment in God's new creation, or "re-creation," of the world. His resurrection announces and anticipates the final re-creation of all things and the universal resurrection of the dead.

Wisdom of the Saints



There is no virtue that did not have its example on the Cross. So if you seek an example of charity, then, “greater love than this no one has, than to lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). . . . If you seek an example of patience, you will find it in its highest degree upon the Cross. Great patience is exemplified in two ways: either when one suffers intensely in all patience, or when one suffers that which he could avoid if he so wished. . . . He could have avoided this suffering, but He did not. . . . The patience of Christ upon the cross, therefore, was of the highest degree. . . . If you seek an example of humility, look upon Him who is crucified; although He was God, He chose to be judged by Pontius Pilate and to be put to death. . . . “He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8).

—St. Thomas Aquinas

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Take a moment to answer these questions with a partner or with the group.

1. Why did God become human? Why did Christ suffer the passion and make himself subject to death for our sake?

2. How does Christ's obedience and love as man make reparation for sin?

3. How did Christ suffer during the passion? How was he consoled?



4. What does it mean to say that Christ is resurrected from the dead?

Catechism Connection



Christ's Resurrection was not a return to earthly life, as was the case with the raisings from the dead that he had performed before Easter: Jairus' daughter, the young man of Naim, Lazarus. These actions were miraculous events, but the persons miraculously raised returned by Jesus' power to ordinary earthly life. At some particular moment they would die again. Christ's Resurrection is essentially different. In his risen body he passes from the state of death to another life beyond time and space. At Jesus' Resurrection his body is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit: he shares the divine life in his glorious state, so that St. Paul can say that Christ is "the man of heaven" (1 Cor 15:35–50).

—CCC 646

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Discuss these questions with a partner or the group, or meditate on your own.

1. What does it mean for you that God has suffered a human death like ours? How can that comfort you when you ponder your own mortality?

2. What does it mean for each of us that Christ has atoned for human sins? Concretely, how can you have access to this mystery?

3. Is the victory of the Resurrection of practical importance for your life? How so?



WITNESS TO CONVERSION

After concluding your group discussion, return to watch the second video where converts to the Catholic faith discuss their conversion and how they live today as Catholics.

Rome to Home

In the human nature united to Himself the Son of God, by overcoming death through His own death and resurrection, redeemed man and re-molded him into a new creation. By communicating His Spirit, Christ made His brothers, called together from all nations, mystically the components of His own Body. In that Body the life of Christ is poured into the believers who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified.

—Pope Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 7

KEY TERMS

Paschal Mystery: The suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ by which he has revealed himself to us in an ultimate way, reconciled us to the Father, and redeemed the world.

Atonement: The reconciliation of God and man brought about by Christ's suffering and death, and the reparation made by Christ for human sins.

Resurrection: The glorification of Christ's body and soul that took place on Easter night. This is a mystery that endures forever, since Christ lives perpetually as man and is no longer subject to death.





God's Word

Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 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. . . . But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

—1 Corinthians 15:12–14, 20–23

CLOSING PRAYER

Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus, while before Your face I humbly kneel and, with burning soul, pray and beseech You to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope, and charity; true contrition for my sins, and a firm purpose of amendment. While I contemplate, with great love and tender pity, Your five most precious wounds, pondering over them within me and calling to mind the words which David, Your prophet, said to You, my Jesus: "They have pierced My hands and My feet, they have numbered all My bones." Amen.

AT HOME REVIEW

Read this review of the material. Write down any questions you still have after doing so.

True God and True Man: Understanding Jesus Christ as Savior

The Catholic Church confesses that Jesus Christ is true God and true man. The Church also professes in the Nicene Creed that Jesus was “crucified under Pontius Pilate, died and was buried.” Why would God become man and suffer death by public crucifixion? Why would he allow himself to be humiliated and in agony, and be unrecognized by many of his contemporaries?

There are a number of interrelated answers to this question. A first answer is that God became man and suffered the mystery of the Cross in order to reveal to us who he truly is: the Holy Trinity, a communion of Persons, and as the God of love. The Father manifests himself to us by sending the Son into the world to redeem us from our sins. The Son reveals himself to us through his human self-offering to the Father on our behalf, in holiness and love. The Spirit is revealed to us when he is sent by the Father and the Son upon the human race, after the Resurrection, to heal and sanctify us.

A second answer is that God, in his human suffering on the Cross, shows us his solidarity with us, especially his preferential love for those who are forgotten, oppressed, or downtrodden. God identifies with the lowly of this world in humility. A third answer is that the Crucifixion manifests God’s hidden power as Creator and Redeemer, since he was able to take upon himself what was worst (death and the consequences of our human sin) and to triumph over it in the power of the Resurrection and in the forgiveness of sins. Consequently, nothing can separate us from the love of God (see Rom 8:38–39).

We can also speak about the mystery of the “atonement” effected by Christ’s self-offering. *Atonement* is an English word from the sixteenth century meaning “at-one-ment” or “reconciliation.” Christ’s death reconciles us to God. How is this the case? The most prominent theory in Catholic

tradition comes from St. Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century. Anselm notes that man's sin has alienated him from God. We have forsaken God and given offense to his infinite goodness and justice. God does not abandon us, however, but takes upon himself a human nature in Christ, so as to live out a human life of obedience, charity, and justice on our behalf. In other words, Christ as true man is our brother, one of us, but unlike us he is without sin and can offer his life to God on our behalf in reparation for our sins. But Christ is also true God and so his human self-offering to the Father has an infinite dignity and worth. Therefore, his love and obedience as man restores the communion between God and man, making "satisfaction," or proportionate reparation, for all human sins.

We should note that this Catholic understanding differs greatly from that of "penal substitution theory," which was central to the thought of both Martin Luther and John Calvin. On that view, Christ was deemed by God as the guilt-bearer for our sins, taking upon himself the wrath of God at the Cross, even experiencing the pains of hell for our sake.

This is not a mainstream Catholic view. The Catholic Church traditionally maintains in accord with Scripture that Christ did submit to some of the punishments of original sin for our sake (namely our human form of suffering and death), and it is in this sense that he was made sin for us (see 2 Cor 5:21). Furthermore, he did "substitute" himself for our sake, but this substitution is positive: he offers his love and obedience to the Father in sinlessness, where we have failed to do so. Christ himself cannot suffer rupture with God (the state of damnation) or be deemed a true subject of guilt or wrongdoing.

Christ suffered greatly in his passion for the sake of the human race. Thomas Aquinas notes that Jesus suffered in his bodily senses, his emotions, his mind, and his will. He suffered intense physical pain in the tortures of crucifixion, where nails pierce very sensitive parts of the body. He suffered emotionally from the agonies of death, the fact that he was rejected by the religious leaders of his people, from the betrayal of his disciples, and from the pain inflicted upon his mother and other loyal friends. Most of all, he suffered interiorly, in his mind and heart. With the mysterious, elevated knowledge Christ possessed as man, "he knew all men and needed

no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man" (Jn 2:25).

On the Cross, Christ confronted the magnitude of our sin and the "hell" of human beings who separate themselves from God. St. Thomas teaches that the contrition of heart that he experienced on behalf of human beings was greater than that of any contrition for sins present in any saint. In other words, Christ knew us and knew our sins, and he grieved in charity for the human race, interceding on our behalf. Imbued with a divine love for sinners, he willingly "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb 12:2). At the same time, Christ was consoled by the peace of his immediate knowledge of God and his union with the Father. He was able to offer his life for the world in majestic peacefulness. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). "Into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

Christ died on the Sabbath, a Friday afternoon, and was buried in the tomb that day. During the time that he was dead, his body and soul remained the body and soul of the incarnate Word; that is to say, the body and soul of the divine Son, who truly experienced death. On Easter night, by the power of God who is omnipotent, Christ was raised bodily from the dead. What does this mean? In the resurrection, Christ's body and soul are reunited so that he enjoys forever a unity of body and soul. His body is glorified; that is to say, transformed and exalted. He still possesses a physical human body, but it now enjoys a state of being that is far more elevated. It is the first beginning of our universe being remade, a sign of new creation, in the age that is to come. This is why St. Paul describes him as the "last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45). He is now free from suffering and death. His body is perfectly subject to his soul, and in this way, it is more perfectly "spiritualized." Christ, risen from the dead, appeared to his disciples over the course of fifty days, under mysterious circumstances, so as to teach them the reality of his bodily resurrection. Christ resurrected is present mysteriously to the Church, especially in the sacrament of the Eucharist, so that we too can encounter his presence as one risen from the dead.

Our Christian baptism and the grace that it gives us invites us to conform our lives to the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. In this

life, we are subject to suffering and death, but we can now pass through these experiences united to Christ and fortified by his grace. Furthermore, the Catholic Church teaches that we can and should offer both our joys and our sufferings to God out of love, motivated by the charity of Christ poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. In other words, we can be united to Christ in our suffering and death, one with him in faith, hope, and charity, as members of his mystical body. He alone has atoned for human sins, once and for all, but he communicates his life of grace to us precisely in and through our own experience of death so as to invite us into the life of the resurrection. “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5).

I STILL HAVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

DIGGING DEEPER

White, Thomas Joseph. *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017. See esp. chap. 4, “Incarnation and Atonement.”