

23. The Mystery of the Cross – Sacrifice & Salvation.

After our first parents sinned, the Father redeemed humanity through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus on the cross. Therefore, the cross is an instrument of our salvation.

“The Cross is our trophy raised against the demons, our sword against sin, and the sword Christ used to pierce the serpent. The Cross is the Father’s will, the glory of the Only-begotten, the joy of the Spirit, the pride of the angels, the guarantee of the Church, Paul’s boast, the bulwark of the saints, and the light of the entire world.” (St. John Chrysostom)

Key terms:

Paschal mystery:	The central events of Christ’s redemptive work, specifically his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension.
Redemption:	Jesus’ saving actions that ransomed us from sin and reconciled us to the Father.
Salvation:	The plan of God to free us from the slavery of sin and reconcile us to himself.
Sacrifice:	An offering presented to God as a token to express thanksgiving, to acknowledge guilt, and to restore good relations with him. Starting with Abel, humans offered various voluntary sacrifices, including animals, until the Mosaic Law covenant made them a requirement. Animal sacrifices were no longer needed after Jesus gave his own life as a perfect sacrifice, though Christians continue to offer spiritual sacrifices to God.
New Covenant:	The New Covenant is the promise that God will forgive sin and restore fellowship with those whose hearts are turned toward Him. The New Covenant was predicted while the Old Covenant was still in effect—the prophets Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all allude to the New Covenant. The New Covenant was ratified by Jesus when he instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, and ratified in His blood on Good Friday as a sacrificial offering.

THE FATHER’S PLAN IS PREFIGURED AND REVEALED IN STAGES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (Heb. 10:1-22)

- God asked Abraham to offer his beloved son Isaac.
- In Egypt, the blood of the innocent lamb saved the Israelites from death.
- God required of the Israelites blood offerings for sin, although animal sacrifices could not expiate the sins of the people as is possible under the New Covenant.
- In the Psalms, Jesus’ suffering was prophesied.
- In the Servant Songs of Isaiah, Jesus’ life and redemptive suffering were prophesied (Is. 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12).
- In the various covenants, God prepared for the final covenant in Jesus’ Blood (Lk. 22:20).

OLD TESTAMENT – SACRIFICE

Gen. 4:2-5	The sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel.
Gen. 8:20	Sacrifices offered by Noah
Gen. 12:7-8; 13:4, 18; 22:13	Sacrifice of Abraham
Gen. 26:25	Sacrifice of Isaac
Gen. 31:54; 33:20; 35:1-7; 46:1	Sacrifice of Jacob
Job 1:5; 42:8	Sacrifices of Job
Ex. 3:18; 5:3, etc.; cf. 17:15	Having delivered Israel from Egypt, they offer sacrifice to him.
Ex. 12	By sacrifice, they are delivered.
Ex. 20ff	Details of the sacrificial system that becomes the hallmark of Israel's worship.

OUR REDEEMER IS THE SON OF GOD, WHO BECAME ONE OF US

(Rom 5:18-21; Phil 2:5-11)

- As God, only Jesus could heal the rupture of sinful humanity with the Father.
- The immensity of our redemption shows the profound depths of God's awesome love for us.
- The immensity of the Paschal mystery reveals the terrible gravity of sin.
- The first Adam brought sin and death; the second Adam, Jesus, brought redemption and life.
- The first Adam was disobedient, the second was completely obedient.
- The first Adam sinned out of pride, the second came humbly and died a humiliating Death.

THE EUCHARIST AS THE SACRAMENTAL RE-PRESENTATION OF THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

- The unbloody sacrifice of the Eucharist is the bloody sacrifice of Calvary made present in the mysterious presence of Christ in the consecrated host, in virtue of the heavenly priestly ministry of Jesus, and as a pledge of the Church's union with Him as His body. (Heb. 7:27; 9:28)
- As the sacrament of our ongoing relationship with God through Christ, the Eucharist stands in the tradition of the meals at which ancient covenants were ratified.
- The Eucharist represents the sacrifice of the cross because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover.
- The sacrifice of Christ is made present in the eucharist so that the sacramental act which makes it present shares the same sacrificial nature of the cross.
- The sacrifice of Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present.
- As the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, the altar becomes the cross on which his body is sacrificed for the salvation of the world.

OUR RESPONSE TO THE INFINITE GOODNESS OF THE REDEEMER

- We must believe in Jesus (Jn. 6:40).
- In gratitude and love, we must desire and strive for perfection through his gift of grace (Mt. 5:48).
- Jesus must come before all others (Mt. 10:37).
- We must obey Jesus' commandments and show our faith in our works (Jn. 14:21; Jas 2:24).

UNDERSTANDING THE CROSS

- The cross is a Trinitarian event. (Eph. 1:3-4; Phil 2:6-11)
- The cross redefines power in the Kingdom. (Gen 3:5; Phil 2:5-6; Phil. 2:9-11)
- The cross inaugurates the New Covenant. (Jer 31:33-34)
- The cross conquers sin and death. Col. 2:14; 1Pet 2:24; Gal 3:13; 1Cor 15:54-55)
- The cross is substitutionary – Jesus is our replacement on the cross where he took on himself the sin of the world. (Jn. 1:29; Gen 22:13; Gal 3:13)
- The cross is foolishness to the world. (1Cor 1:23)
- The cross brings peace, reconciliation and unity. (Eph. 2:14; Col. 1:20)
- The cross is the banner for Christians. (Mt. 16:24; 2Cor 2:14-17; Phil 2:5; Phil 2:8)

WHY CHRISTIANS MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

- To profess our faith.
- To proclaim our discipleship.
- To renew our baptismal commitment.
- To renounce selfishness.
- To suffer for Jesus.
- To defend ourselves against evil.

THE DEATH OF CHRIST AS A SACRIFICE

New Testament writers employ the following language to justify the Lord's death in sacrificial terms:

- “give my life as a ransom” (Mk. 10:45)
- “ransom in his blood” (Rom 5:9)
- “by his blood”
- “the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20)
- “my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt. 26:27-29)
- “reconciled by his blood” (Col 1:19-20)
- “justified by his blood”
- “propitiation by his blood”
- “through the death of his cross” (Eph. 2:16-18)
- “made peace through the blood of his cross”
- “Christ our Passover has been sacrificed” (1Cor 5:6-8)
- “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:2)
- “him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (Rev. 1:5-6)
- “the lamb which takes away sin” (Jn. 1:29-31)
- “he bore our sin” (1 Pet 2:24)
- “was made sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21)
- “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law having been made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13)

EXPLORE!

- Explore with the candidates the correlation between the rod of Moses and the cross of Christ.
- Discuss the sequence and meaning of the Paschal Triduum as 're-presenting' God's plan of redemption for fallen humanity.
- If the cross reveals that Jesus willingly died for us, how should that change the way we live and treat others?

The Mystery of the Cross — Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. What does God's willingness to enter the world, embrace our humanity, and die for our sins tell us about God's love for us? How can Jesus' self-sacrificial love be an example for our lives?
 2. When did God first promise salvation? What evidence is there that the world needs salvation?
 3. Does my redemption rest solely on the actions of Jesus?
 4. If we are all reconciled to God by the death of Jesus, why do we need to respond and follow the way of Jesus to be saved?
 5. Do you see faith as something personal, communal, or both? How does the cross influence that perspective?
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STATIONS OF THE CROSS

- (1) Jesus is condemned to death
- (2) Jesus takes up his cross
- (3) Jesus falls the first time
- (4) Jesus meets his mother
- (5) Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry His cross
- (6) Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
- (7) Jesus falls the second time
- (8) Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
- (9) Jesus falls the third time
- (10) Jesus is stripped of his garments
- (11) Jesus is nailed to the cross
- (12) Jesus dies on the cross
- (13) Jesus is taken down from the cross
- (14) Jesus is placed in the tomb

PRAYER

Psalm 118 or Psalm 130

or

Gospel Reflection:	Year A	Jn. 9:1-41
	Year B	Jn. 3:14-21
	Year C	Lk. 15:1-3, 11-32

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

The Mystery of the Cross – Sacrifice & Salvation

Scripture

Gen. 3:15	God promises a saviour born of “the woman” who will conquer Satan.
Gen. 22:1-12	Abraham offers his son Isaac to God.
Is. 53: 1-11	Prophecy of the Suffering Servant who will bear our sins and intercede for us.
Ps. 40:6	Sacrifice and burnt offering you did not desire – but an open ear.
Mt. 16:21-23	Jesus prophesies his suffering and Death, and rebukes Peter when he protests.
Mk. 10:45	Jesus did not come to be served, but to give his life as a ransom for many.
Lk. 1:26-38	God invites a creature, Mary, to play an essential role in his plan of salvation.
Lk. 9:23	A disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.
Jn. 1:29	“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!”
Jn. 3:16-17	Out of love, God sent his Son to save the world and give us eternal life.
Jn. 10:18	Jesus has the power to lay down his life and to rise again; he freely gives himself.
Jn. 12:27-33	Jesus came to suffer and die by crucifixion and will draw us to himself.
Acts. 2:22-23	Jesus’ crucifixion and Death was according to God’s plan.
Acts 4:10-12	The crucified Jesus has become the cornerstone and is our only salvation.
Rom 4:24-25	Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead for our justification.
Rom 5:8	God shows his love for us while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Rom 5:18-21	Adam’s sin condemned all of us, and Jesus’ death acquits us and gives us life.
1Cor 15:3	As prophesied in Scripture, Jesus died for our sins.
Eph. 5:2	Out of love for us, Jesus gave himself to God as a sacrificial offering.
Phil 2:6-8	Jesus humbled himself, being obedient to the point of death on a cross.
Gal. 2:20	I have been crucified with Christ, who gave himself for me.
1 Tim 2:4-5	God wants us all to be saved, and Jesus is the ransom for us all.
Heb. 10:12	Christ had offered a single sacrifice for sins, he sat at God’s right hand.
Heb. 9:1-10:22	Blood is a sin offering, and Jesus redeemed us by the perfect offering of his blood.
Heb. 9:28	Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.
1Jn. 4:10	God sent his Son to atone for our sins.

Catechism

410-412	After our first parents sinned, God promised salvation.
488	God chose a creature, Mary, to freely cooperate with him in his plan of salvation.
539	In his faithful obedience, Jesus was the New Adam and the perfect servant of God.
557, 560	Jesus goes to Jerusalem to suffer and die, and thus inaugurate his kingdom.
599-617	Jesus’ redemptive Death accomplished the plan of God for our salvation.
618	The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the “one mediator between God and men”.
619	Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures (1Cor 15:3)
627	Christ’s death was a real death in that it put an end to his earthly human existence, but divine power preserved Christ’s body from corruption and his Resurrection was the sign of this.
629	To benefit humanity, Jesus, the Son of God, made man, died and was buried.
1168	The economy of salvation is fulfilled in Jesus’ Paschal mystery; through the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of God has already begun.

- 1323 The Eucharist perpetuates the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages.
- 1362 the Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice.
- 1366 The Eucharist is a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross.
- 1367 The sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice.

(Source: Adapted from RCIA Catechist's Manual, Association for Catechumenal Ministry, Maryland, 2007)