

In a number of ways, Jesus warned his followers that pain and death would be an essential part of his mission. Right after he made Peter the rock on which the Church would be built, he predicted his Passion. “Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Mt 16:21). When Peter protested this possibility, Jesus rebuked him, “You are thinking, not as God does, but as human beings do” (Mt 16:23). Jesus predicted his Passion again after the Transfiguration (cf. Mt 17:22-23). Not only would Jesus accept the Cross, he expected the same willingness from his disciples. “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). Jesus explained this truth further by means of an agricultural image. “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies it produces much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Jesus noted that the greatest expression of love is to die for the beloved. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13).

Because Christ's suffering and death was the instrument of salvation, from what did he save us? We needed to be saved from sin and its damaging effects. God's plan to save us involved having the Son of God enter into this world to be like us in all things except sin. Divine love made this possible. Jesus, Son of God, was sent by the Father to restore the harmony between himself and humanity that had been disrupted by sin. He came to teach and show us love. Jesus was without sin, but in his human nature, he was subject to all that human beings suffer, including hatred from others, torture, and death itself. He proclaimed the coming of God's Kingdom by his words and deeds in obedience to the will of his Father. He showed the full meaning of all that had been revealed in the Old Testament. But some did not want to hear his message. They opposed him and turned him over to the administration of the Roman Empire in Palestine to be put to death.

On the Cross, Jesus freely gave his life as a sacrifice. His sacrifice was an act of atonement, that is, it makes us one again with God by the power of divine mercy extending to us the Father's forgiveness of our sins. His sacrifice is also called an act of satisfaction or reparation<sup>7</sup> because he lives out fully the Father's call to human beings to be faithful to his plan for them, thus overcoming the power of sin. It is also an expiation<sup>8</sup> for our sins, which in the understanding of Scripture means that God takes the initiative in bringing about reconciliation to himself. In the words of Christian Tradition, Jesus' sacrifice merits salvation for us because it retains forever the power to draw us to him and to the Father.

Who is responsible for the death of Jesus? Every one of us from the dawn of history to the end of time who in pride and disobedience has sinned is in some way responsible. Historically, some Jewish leaders handed Jesus over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who condemned Jesus to death on the Cross. It is wrong to blame the Jewish people for the death of Christ in the manner that often has been done in history. “The Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone” (CCC, no. 598). At the Second Vatican Council, the Church made the following declaration regarding the Jewish people: Neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his Passion.... [T]he Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture. (CCC, no.

The Apostles' Creed professes that after his death and burial, Jesus descended into hell. In the language of the early Church, this meant that Jesus went into the realm of the dead, from which he called out all the just people who had lived before him to enter with him into the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. A popular icon of the Eastern Churches pictures the risen Jesus with his hands reaching into the realm of the dead to draw out Adam and Eve. In his human soul united to his divine person, the dead Christ went down into the realm of the dead. He opened Heaven's gates for the just who had gone before him. (CCC, no. 637)

When we speak of the Paschal Mystery, we refer to Christ's death and Resurrection as one inseparable event. It is a mystery because it is a visible sign of an invisible act of God. It is paschal because it is Christ's passing through death into new life. For us it means that we can now die to sin and its domination of our lives, and we pass over into divine life already here on earth and more completely in heaven. Death is conquered in the sense that not only do our souls survive physical death, but even our bodies will rise again at the end of time at the Last Judgment and resurrection of the dead.

The Resurrection narratives in all four Gospels—though differing in details because of varying viewpoints of the different authors—maintain a similar structure in the narration of the events. At dawn on the Sunday after Christ’s death, Mary Magdalene and a companion go to the tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus. They find the tomb is empty. They meet an angel who proclaims the Resurrection of Jesus: “He is not here, for he has been raised” (Mt 28:6). They are told to bring the Good News to the Apostles. Mary Magdalene leads the way and is celebrated in the liturgy of the Church as the first witness to the Resurrection.

Next come the appearance narratives when Jesus appears to the Apostles and disciples in a number of instances. St. Paul summarizes these appearances in his first Letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-8). Finally, the disciples are commissioned to bring the Gospel to the world. While the empty tomb of itself does not prove the Resurrection, since the absence of Christ's body could have other explanations, it is an essential part of the proclamation of the Resurrection because it demonstrates the fact of what God has done in raising his Son from the dead in his own body. When St. John entered the empty tomb, "He saw and believed" (Jn 20:8).



Mary, lingering at the tomb weeps and is fearful. Peering into the tomb she sees this time two angels who wonder why she weeps. Jesus then approaches her from behind. Not looking directly at Jesus, she supposes him to be the gardener. Then he calls her by name, and Mary, recognizing his voice, turns and sees him. Filled with joy she clings to him. (APPEARANCE 1) (Jn 20:16)

The other women have departed the apostles and are on their way possibly back home. Jesus then appears to them ([Mt 28:9](#)) after he had dispatched Mary. He also sends them back to the apostles with the news that he had risen and that he would see them.

Later that Day, two disciples on their way to Emmaus are pondering what they have heard about rumors of his resurrection. Jesus comes up behind them but they are prevented from recognizing him. First Jesus breaks open the word for them, then sits at table with them and celebrates the Eucharist whereupon their eyes are opened and they recognize him in the breaking of the bread. ([Lk 24:13-30](#))

At some point Peter drew apart from the others (perhaps for a walk?) And the Lord appeared to Peter ([Lk 24:34](#); [1 Cor 15:5](#)) who informed the other ten who then believed.

Almost at the same moment Jesus appears to the small gathering of apostles and the two disciples from Emmaus.

Jesus appears once again to the apostles gathered. This time Thomas is with them. He calls Thomas to faith who now confesses Jesus to be Lord and God. ([Jn 20:24-29](#))

The scene is at the Sea of Galilee. Not all the Twelve are present. They have gone fishing, and Jesus summons them from the lakeside. They come to shore and see him . Peter has a poignant discussion with Jesus in this appearance and is commissioned to tend the flock of Christ ([Jn 21](#)).

[1 Cor 15:6](#) Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

[1 Cor 15:7](#) Then he appeared to James.

Matthew ([Mt 28:16ff](#)) and Mark ([Mk 16:14ff](#)). It takes place on "a mountaintop in Galilee." Mark adds that they were reclining at table. For these notes this appearance is referred to as the great commission.

After forty days of appearances and instructions we have a final account of the last appearance wherein he led them out to a place near Bethany, gave them final instructions to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit was sent. And then he was taken up to heaven in their very sight. ([Lk 24:50-53](#); [Acts 1:1-11](#)).

The Resurrection is historical in that it actually took place at a specific time and place, and therefore there were witnesses to its impact. Mary Magdalene met the Risen Christ and embraced his feet. Thomas the Apostle saw Jesus and the wounds and said, “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28). Two disciples walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus and recognized him in the Breaking of the Bread (Lk 24:13-35). All the Apostles saw him (cf. Jn 20:19-23). St. Paul tells us he met the Risen Lord on the Road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:3-6). He also writes that five hundred people saw Jesus on a single occasion (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-8). None of the witnesses to Jesus’ Resurrection expected it. In fact, they were demoralized by the execution of Jesus. Even when they did see him, some had lingering doubts. “When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted” (Mt 28:17). In other words, they were not easily convinced, nor were they caught up in some kind of mystical self-delusion or hysteria. Some of them even died as martyrs rather than deny what they had witnessed. In this light, their testimony that the Resurrection was a historical event is more convincing (cf. CCC, nos. 643-644).

The reality of Christ's Resurrection is also something beyond the realm of history. No one saw the actual Resurrection. No evangelist describes it. No one can tell us how it physically happened. No one perceived how the earthly body of Christ passed over into a glorified form. Despite the fact that the risen Jesus could be seen, touched, heard, and dined with, the Resurrection remains a mystery of faith that transcends history.

Its transcendent quality can also be inferred from the state of Christ's risen body. He was not a ghost; Jesus invited them to touch him. He asked for a piece of fish to show them that he could eat. He spent time with them, often repeating teachings from the days before the Passion but now in the light of the Resurrection. Nor was it a body like that of Lazarus, which would die again. His risen body would never die. Christ's body was glorified; it is not confined by space or time. He could appear and disappear before the Apostles' eyes. Closed doors did not bar his entry. It is a real body, but glorified, not belonging to earth but to the Father's realm. It is a body transformed by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 15:42-44). The Holy Spirit "gave life to Jesus' dead humanity and called it to the glorious state of Lordship" (CCC, no. 648).

What do we learn from Christ's Resurrection? If Jesus had not risen, our faith would mean nothing. St. Paul makes this clear in his first Letter to the Corinthians: "But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty, too, is our preaching; empty, too, your faith" (1 Cor 15:12-14). We also learn that, by raising him from the dead, the Father has placed his seal upon the work accomplished by his only begotten Son through his Passion and death. We see now the fullness of Jesus' glory as Son of God and Savior.

The Paschal Mystery culminates in the Ascension of Jesus. After his appearance here on earth in his risen body, and “after giving instructions through the holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen” (Acts 1:2), Jesus “was lifted up and a cloud took him from their sight” (Acts 1:9): Christ’s ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus’ humanity into God’s heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11).... Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father’s glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever. Jesus Christ, having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (CCC, nos. 665-667)

**The Resurrection makes credible everything Jesus did and taught.**

**It reveals how Jesus accomplished God's eternal plan for our salvation.**

**Through it we taste heavenly gifts and the glory of the age to come.**

**The power of the Resurrection reminds our culture  
that grace is always more powerful and effective  
than sin and evil.**

*Lord Jesus Christ, my Redeemer, the extravagance of divine love is boldly proclaimed in Your passion and death. From the pulpit of the Cross You have spoken to me personally. When I gaze upon You in the midst of Your agonizing passion, I read a love letter written in Precious Blood. You call to my heart in love's unspoken language that is more deeply understood than words. You lay down Your life for me with total liberality. My heart suffers and longs to be consumed by Yours that is opened wide by the Roman soldier's sword. As I venerate the Cross, and Your five holy wounds, I place my suffering inside of Yours. With confidence I unite my suffering to Yours knowing that all human suffering is absorbed into Your holy wounds by which I am healed.  
Amen.*



### **1. How was Jesus able to save all of us?**

No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons and constitutes himself as Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice for all. (CCC, no. 616)

### **2. Why did Jesus die on the Cross?**

Jesus came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). By his loving obedience to the Father, he fulfilled the atoning mission of the suffering Servant, “he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins... by his stripes we were healed” (Is 53:5) (cf. CCC, nos. 599-618).

### **3. How is Christ’s Resurrection a work of the Trinity?**

The three divine persons act together as one.... The Father’s power “raised up” Christ his Son.... Jesus is conclusively revealed as “Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his Resurrection from the dead.” (CCC, no. 648, citing Rom 1:3-4) As for the Son, he effects his own Resurrection by virtue of his divine power.... he affirms explicitly: “I lay down my life, that I may take it again.” (CCC, no. 649, citing Jn 10:17-18)