

The Paschal Mystery

Jesus's work of redemption,
accomplished principally through his
Passion,
Death,
Resurrection and
Ascension into Heaven,
is the Paschal Mystery.

The word Paschal refers to Jesus's offering of his life as the new Passover (or Paschal) lamb for our salvation.

“Behold....

Jesus warned his followers that pain and death would be an essential part of his mission.

When Peter protested this possibility, Jesus rebuked him, “You are thinking, not as God does, but as human beings do”.

Jesus predicted his Passion again after the Transfiguration.

Not only would Jesus accept the Cross, he expected the same willingness from his disciples.

Jesus said that the greatest expression of love is to die for the beloved.

Christ's suffering and death was the instrument of our salvation.

We needed to be saved from sin and its damaging effects.

Jesus, Son of God, was sent by the Father to restore the harmony between himself and humanity that had been disrupted by sin.

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.

Fully human,

Jesus can represent the human family and offer a gift of love on behalf of all humanity.

Since he is also fully divine,

his gift of love takes on infinite value--offering the perfect, redemptive sacrifice for all

Jesus was the only one who could restore our relationship with God.

We cannot bestow on ourselves what we do not have!

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** 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** for our sins, meaning that **God takes the initiative** in bringing about reconciliation to himself.

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.

After his death and burial, Jesus descended into Sheol.

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.

The Paschal Mystery is 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 tell of the same 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"

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, 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.

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”**
- **Two disciples walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus and recognized him in the Breaking of the Bread.**
- **All the Apostles saw Him.**
- **St. Paul tells us he met the Risen Lord on the Road to Damascus**
- **He also writes that five hundred people saw Jesus on a single occasion**

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. In this light, their testimony that the Resurrection was a historical event is more convincing.

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 is seen 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, teaching now in the light of His Resurrection.

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.

If Jesus had not risen, our faith would mean nothing.

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 now see the fullness of Jesus' glory as Son of God and Savior.

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.**

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”**

Jesus “was lifted up and a cloud took him from their sight”

**Christ’s ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus’ humanity into God’s heavenly
domain, whence he will come again**

**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 heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the
mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit.**

Jesus invites us to participate in the mystery of his Death and Resurrection

by uniting our entire lives

—our daily works, joys, and sufferings—

with the Cross of Christ.

The weaknesses of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's Cross.

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.