

# THE BEGINNING OF THE END ... AND ONLY THE BEGINNING

MINISTRY AND DEATH (Nos. 535-630)



## **SESSION OBJECTIVES**

This session consists of three periods of the life of Christ: his preparation and testing; his preaching of the kingdom; and his trial and death. After this session, you should be familiar with the central events and themes of the public ministry of Jesus:

- His baptism by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan.
- His temptation in the desert.
- His preaching of the kingdom.
- His transfiguration.
- His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
- His trial, crucifixion, death, and burial.

In addition, you should be able to identify Old Testament themes that find expression and fulfillment in these New Testament events.

## **PART 1: GETTING YOUR BEARINGS**

The Creed, like the whole of salvation history, is divided into a trinity of parts. The first focuses on God the Father and speaks of his work of creation; the second focuses on the Son and the events leading to our salvation; and the last focuses on the Holy Spirit and the work of sanctification that he effects in the Church.

As you may recall, Jesus' Incarnation and mission occur at the central point of human history. He casts a brilliant light on all that came before him in salvation history. He also illuminates everything that follows. No other person has so impacted history as to have simultaneously divided our very system of recording time (BC and AD) and united it in a meaningful whole, as did Jesus Christ.

Leaving behind the Nativity with all its sublime beauty, we move into the public life of Jesus with all its struggles and marvels. There is no way that this one session can do justice to the remarkable events of this critical phase in the story. We will have to satisfy ourselves with simply skimming the surface of these events. This reality inspires us to make a regular reading of the four Gospels of the New Testament for a richer, more fruitful understanding of salvation history.

### **The Sign of the Cross**

When Christians begin and end their prayers with the Sign of the Cross, they are recalling their baptism, the moment they were first signed with the cross. This is even more powerfully evident when we bless ourselves with holy water as we enter church. This simple gesture recalls the instrument of death upon which Christ died, the very instrument through which he gained for us eternal life.

As we make the Sign of the Cross, we invoke the Holy Trinity: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" This visible act of prayer boldly pledges our allegiance as followers of Christ. By making the Sign of the Cross, we are reminded of the words of Jesus: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24, NAB). When we respectfully make the Sign of the Cross, we prayerfully renew our baptism, mindful of the presence of the Holy Trinity and his holy assistance in living the Christian life with greater fidelity.

In this session, we will consider the central events of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—from the beginning of his public ministry, when he was baptized by his cousin John in the Jordan, to his passion and death on Calvary. That tragic end of his earthly ministry would yield the beginning of new life for a fallen world. So we study the life of Christ because he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the Way to the Father, the fullness of Truth, and the one who brings us Life eternal in the Spirit. He is Emmanuel, "God with us."

As we learned in the last session, Jesus' "... whole earthly life... is Revelation;" his "... whole life is a mystery of redemption;" and his "... whole life is a mystery of recapitulation" (Nos. 516-518). If we are to follow him on our journey of faith, we must know where he has gone, what he has done, and even how he has suffered and died. We must get a precise picture of the grandeur and majesty of Christ, even as he walks the dusty roads of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Nothing substitutes for the four portraits that the Gospels provide, but the *Catechism* gives us a catechetical summary to help us see not only the general outline of events, but also their interrelation and significance for Christian life.

What the Church believes, she derives from the true story of salvation history; our faith is not made up of a series of doctrines that the Church just made up. Both Judaism and Christianity are historical religions. They are based on the historical record we find in the Old and New Testaments, not on "cleverly concocted myths" (2 Peter 1:16). At the very center of that history, God came among us to live an extraordinary life, to show us by living and dying that time and history matter, and to make a way for us into the eternity of God. We are now at the very heart of that story.

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### **BEGIN WITH PRAYER**

*In your prayer time this week, pray the Luminous and the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary on alternating days. Ask Our Lady to accompany you as your guide in your reflection on the mysteries of Christ's ministry and passion.*

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**THE LUMINOUS MYSTERIES**

- *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan*
- *The Miracle at the Wedding Feast of Cana*
- *The Proclamation of the Kingdom*
- *The Transfiguration*
- *The Institution of the Eucharist*

**THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES**

- *The Agony in the Garden*
- *Scourging at the Pillar*
- *The Crowning with Thorns*
- *The Carrying of the Cross*
- *The Crucifixion and Death*

**MYTH*****The Paradox of Jesus' Baptism: Why Does Jesus, Who Is Sinless, Receive Baptism?***

As the Gospel of Matthew recounts, St. John the Baptist was at first amazed by Jesus' request for baptism. But Jesus tells John that his baptism is necessary to "fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). As John complies, the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove, along with the voice of the Father announcing, "This is my beloved Son" (3:17). Jesus' Baptism inaugurates his public ministry and his role as God's suffering servant, the spotless lamb offered to the Father (see Isaiah 53).

In baptism, a sinless Jesus submits himself to being identified with a sinful humanity. At the proper time, Jesus would lovingly embrace the cross, taking on the sins of humanity; through his passion, death, and resurrection, he would fulfill all righteousness.

When Jesus was baptized by St. John, he showed the new creation that was about to begin through his mission. When he emerged from the water, it is said that heaven opened as the dove appeared, signaling the opening of the heavens that were once closed by the sin of Adam.

**READING THE *CATECHISM***

The presentation for Session Eight will cover *Catechism* Nos. 535-630. If your time is limited, you might want to begin with the essential paragraphs for this session: 535-543, 546, 547, 550, 553, 556, 560, 561, 571, 572, 574, 577, 580, 583, 586, 589, 590, 591, 597-599, 607, 608, 610, 611, 613, 614, 616, 618, 624, 627, and 628.

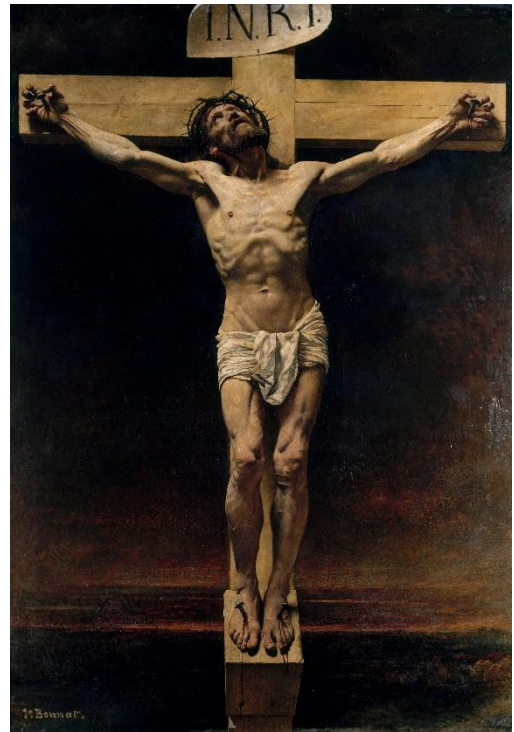
## GLOSSARY TERMS

### Paschal Mystery

The series of events that stand at the center of recorded human history by which Jesus Christ redeemed the whole human race.

A long but beautiful definition is given in the *Catechism's* second pillar:

"The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He accomplished this work principally by the Paschal mystery of his blessed Passion, Resurrection from the dead, and glorious Ascension"



Christ on the Cross | Léon Bonnat | 1874

### Transfiguration

This important event in Jesus' public ministry (see Matthew 17:1-8 and Luke 9:28-36) is one of the "theophanies" or manifestations of the divinity of Christ. At this event, late in Jesus' ministry, Peter, James, and John are given a vision of the divine majesty shining through the humanity of Jesus, strengthening them to endure the trials of faith that they would undergo during Jesus' passion. The significance of the appearance of Moses and Elijah in this vision is twofold: Their appearance at the Transfiguration confirmed not only that Jesus is the God to whom they had previously spoken on Mount Horeb (also called Sinai), but also that he is the fulfillment of all the Law (symbolized by Moses) and the prophets (symbolized by Elijah) of the Old Testament.

**PART 3: PRESENTATION OUTLINE**

**SESSION EIGHT: THE BEGINNING OF THE END ...  
AND ONLY THE BEGINNING  
MINISTRY AND DEATH (Nos. 535-630)**

**I. "The Baptism of Jesus" (see No. 535)**

A. Theology of Jesus' baptism (see Nos. 535-537)

1. An "epiphany" and a Trinitarian manifestation of Father, Son, and Spirit
2. Jesus' baptism as the fulfillment of Old Testament prefiguration
  - a. John's Gospel refers to Jesus as "Lamb of God" (see John 1:29-34)
    - i. Pascal lamb part of annual Passover celebration
    - ii. Morning and evening sacrifice in the Temple
    - iii. The story of Abraham and Isaac: "God will provide the lamb" (Genesis 22:8)
    - iv. "Suffering servant" (Isaiah 53)- "led like a lamb to slaughter"
  - b. Baptism associated with entering into Christ's death (see Mark 10:38, Romans 6:3)
  - c. Evokes Creation story, the Spirit of God hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2)-a new Creation in baptis
  - d. Jesus is the "beloved Son" of the Father and is identified with David (see 1 Samuel 16:13)

B. The Temptation of Jesus

1. The devils attacks "... recapitulate the temptations of Adam in Paradise and of Israel in the desert ... "1 (No. 538)
2. Forty days in the desert (see No. 539)

- a. Jesus= ".. the new Adam who remained faithful ..." (No. 539)
  - b. He" ... fulfills Israel's vocation perfectly ..." (No. 539)
  - c. Jesus' victory over the devil "anticipates victory" over sin and death (see No. 539)
  - d. Significance of number "forty"
    - i. Means "judgment" and "purification" in Jewish numerology
    - ii. 4 = earth; 10 = the Law; thus, 4 x 10 = 40
    - iii. Examples: forty days of the Flood, forty years of desert wandering
3. As recapitulation of the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden
- a. Threefold temptation (see Genesis 3):
    - i. Food (fruit from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil"-Genesis 2:9)
    - ii. Divine power ("You will be like God"-Genesis 3:5)
    - iii. Tempting death ("You will not die"-Genesis 3:4)
  - b. Correlation with the devil's threefold temptation of Christ:
    - i. Food ("Command these stones to become ... bread"-Matthew 4:3)
    - ii. Divine power ("... all the kingdoms of the world ..." -Matthew 4:8)
    - iii. Tempting death ("... throw yourself down ... [from the Temple]" -Matthew 4:6)
  - c. Jesus responds by referencing Israel's temptations in the desert:
    - i. Moses tells Israel not to rely on earthly food (Deuteronomy 8:3)
    - ii. Warns against returning to false gods (Deuteronomy 6:10-14)

- iii. Keep the Law in the battle against the enemy, against death; "do not **tempt God**" (Deuteronomy 6:16-19)
  - d. Also recapitulated in Jesus' life and in the Church
    - i. Gave his apostles his body as bread (food, the Eucharist)
    - ii. Points to the Holy Spirit (divine power, given at confirmation)
    - iii. His death on the cross (death-and thus life-of Christ in baptism)

## II. Preaching the Kingdom

- A. The Church is "the seed and beginning of [the] Kingdom"<sup>2</sup> (No. 541)
  - 1. "Everyone is called to enter the kingdom:" (No. 543)
  - 2. Kingdom includes "... *the poor and lowly* ..." (No. 544)
  - 3. Parables of the kingdom include people traditionally left out (see No. 546)
  - 4. When Jesus uses "kingdom" he means "covenant"

## III. Trial and Death

- A. The heart of Jesus mission: Pascal Mystery-the passion, death, and resurrection (see Nos. 571-572)
  - 1. Critical turning point in human history
  - 2. In this central event "God's saving plan was accomplished" (No. 571)
  - 3. "No one takes my life from me ..." (John 10:18)
- B. Jesus' relations with Israel, its Law, and its Temple
  - 1. "Jesus and Israel" (see No. 574)
  - 2. "Jesus and the Law" (see No. 577)

3. "Jesus and the Temple" (see No. 583)
4. "Jesus and Israel's Faith in the One God and Savior" (see No. 587)
5. Israel-Law-Temple = Central issues of conflict in Christ's ministry
  - a. Sermon on the Mount-"You have heard it said ... but I say ..." (Matthew 5:33-34)
  - b. Jesus in himself is a deepening of the Law and the Temple; he came "... not to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17)
  - c. Jesus is disclosing his "divine identity" (see No. 590)-the whole of Israel's history is coming to fulfillment in him
  - d. Looks like a violation of the Law and the Temple to the authorities of his time

C. According to the divine plan

1. Christ's death was a necessary part of God's eternal plan (see Luke 24:26)
2. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1)
  - a. Christ does not "experience reprobation as if he ... had sinned"<sup>3</sup> (No. 603)
  - b. These words signal the resulting victory of God over sin

D. Jesus' Burial

1. Jesus suffers a real human death (see No. 627)
2. Jesus rests, fulfilling all the rich significance of the Jewish Sabbath, and rises on the following day

**GRPOUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. The *Catechism* describes the importance and meaning of Jesus' baptism: He is "numbered among sinners;" proclaimed "Lamb of God;"<sup>1</sup> anticipates his "bloody death;"<sup>2</sup> fulfills "all righteousness;"<sup>3</sup> and "submits himself entirely to his Father's will" (No. 536). In our own baptism, we "go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with him" (No. 537). What are the other symbols of baptism today, and what do they mean and accomplish for us?
2. During the forty days of Lent, "... the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert" (No. 540). What do you typically do to observe Lent? How does your observance of Lent reflect Jesus' time in the desert?
3. The *Catechism* indicates that the Transfiguration not only provides "... a foretaste of Christ's glorious coming ..." but also recalls that persecution will be part of entering the kingdom (No. 556). In this way, the Transfiguration served to prepare the apostles for the doubt and confusion that would accompany their witness of Jesus' passion and death. Can you describe a "spiritual high" that you experienced and the way in which it has served to strengthen you in the face of trials, persecutions, or sufferings?
4. Though Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it, he often found himself in conflict with the religious leaders over the law. Have you ever found yourself following the laws of God and the Church more out of obligation than out of love of God? Have you ever been accused of pharisaic hypocrisy for following the law but failing in charity?
5. Jesus was often confronted for his perceived transgression of the Sabbath laws, but responded with the lesson that "... the Sabbath rest is not violated by serving God and neighbor ..." (No. 582). How is the third commandment regarding observation of the Sabbath neglected today? In what ways do you "keep holy the Lord's Day"?
6. In the desert, Jesus provides us an example of how to deal with temptation. In what specific ways do you deal with temptation in your life?

**CLOSING PRAYER**

*Dear Father, you looked with infinite satisfaction upon the sacrifice of love made by your Son and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Teach us by the Holy Spirit that he breathed forth on us from the cross to unite our daily sufferings with his infinitely fruitful ones. May nothing we say, do, or think contribute in any way to his suffering or that of our brothers and sisters, and so grieve you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*



**HOMEWORK QUESTIONS**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

From the *Catechism* Nos. 535-570

- 1. What caused the heavens to be dosed?

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- 2. What is the "... seed and beginning ..." of the kingdom?

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- 3. What does the "... power of the keys ..." designate, and to whom were the keys entrusted?

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From the *Catechism* Nos. 571-594

- 4. In what three ways did Jesus seem to be acting against essential institutions of the chosen people?

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- 5. The perfect fulfillment of the Law could be the work of none but whom?

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6. How did Jesus identify himself with the Temple?

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7. What was it that most especially placed the religious authorities"... on the horns of a dilemma ..."?

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From the *Catechism* Nos. 595-630

8. T or F \_\_\_\_ Those who claim to believe in Christ and continue to sin are more blameworthy for his death than are the Jews of Jerusalem who condemned him.

9. In his passion, did Jesus experience reprobation as if he had sinned?

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10. What is the only ladder by which we may get to heaven?

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11. T or F \_\_\_\_ "Because of the union his body retained with the person of the Son;' Christ's death was not a real death.