

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

Outline by Jim Gontis

Please see paragraph #'s 571 – 667 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church for more on the Paschal Mystery.

Prayer before a Crucifix

Behold, O Kind and most sweet Jesus, before Thy face I humbly kneel, and with the most fervent desire of soul, I pray and beseech Thee to impress upon my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope and charity, true contrition for my sins and a firm purpose of amendment. With deep affection and grief of soul, I ponder within myself, mentally contemplating Thy five wounds, having before my eyes the words which David the Prophet spoke concerning Thee: "They have pierced my hands and my feet, they have numbered all my bones."

I. Jesus and Israel

A. Jesus and the Law

1. Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, cf. Mt. 5: 17-19.
2. In Christ Jesus the law finds its ultimate meaning.
3. In Jesus, the same Word of God, that had resounded on Mount Sinai to give the written Law to Moses, made itself heard anew on the Mount of the Beatitudes. Jesus did not abolish the Law but fulfilled it by giving its ultimate interpretation in a divine way.

B. Jesus and the Temple

1. Passover and feasts of pilgrimage
2. His "jealous" love of the Temple, e.g. exemplified by His driving out of moneychangers from outer courts
3. Announcement of its destruction as a manifestation of His own execution and the dawning of a new age in salvation history when His Body would be the definitive Temple.

C. Jesus and Israel's faith in the one God and Savior

1. His forgiveness of sins a stumbling block for many
2. His identification with the Father – Belief presupposes conversion
3. Members of Sanhedrin act out of ignorance and hardness of heart

II. Jesus' Passion and Death – “ Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.” - 1 Cor. 15:3

A. The Trial of Jesus

1. Divisions among Jewish authorities regarding Jesus, even within the Sanhedrin, e.g. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea
2. Pharisees threatened to excommunicate His followers
3. Majority of Sanhedrin declare Him guilty as blasphemer, but having lost the power to put Him to death, turn Him over to the Romans
4. All sinners, not just the Jews, are the authors and ministers of the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured, cf. CCC 598.

B. Christ's Redemptive Death in God's plan of salvation

1. Jesus was handed over according to the definite plan of God.
2. Christ died in fulfillment of the Scriptures, He is the suffering servant prophesied in the Old Testament by Isaiah, cf. Is. 53
3. He was in complete solidarity with us, so much so that as St. Paul wrote, *He became sin for our sake.*
4. Christ died for every single human being, cf. CCC 605.

C. Christ offered Himself to the Father for our sins

1. The desire to embrace his Father's plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus' whole life, CCC 607.
2. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. No more need for animal sacrifices, He is the Paschal Lamb. “Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world...”

D. The Last Supper

1. Christ institutes the memorial of His sacrifice
2. The Last Supper is the first Mass
3. Two sacraments initiated by Christ at the Last Supper
 - a. The Most Holy Eucharist
 - b. Holy Orders – Apostles are the first priests and bishops of the Catholic Church

E. The Agony at Gethsemani

1. Christ expressed the horror that death represented for His human nature.
2. Like ours, His human nature is destined for life, but he has no sin,

which is the result of our human nature...but His human nature, though real, is not fallen.

- F. Christ's death is the real and definitive sacrifice. He dies once for all.
 - 1. Completes & surpasses all other sacrifices
 - 2. In reparation for our disobedience
- G. Jesus substitutes His obedience for our disobedience. He makes atonement for us. This atonement brings about at-one-ment.
- H. Jesus consummates His sacrifice on the Cross
 - 1. Council of Trent teaches that "his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited justification for us."
- I. Our participation in Christ's sacrifice
 - 1. Christ is the "one mediator between God and men" – 1 Tim. 2:5
 - 2. However, in some way he has made it possible for all men to be partners in His redemptive work.
 - 3. This is supremely achieved in the case of His mother, Our Lady of Sorrows.
 - 4. "Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven." – St. Rose of Lima

III. Jesus' Burial – "To the benefit of every man, Jesus Christ tasted death." - Heb. 2:9

- A. Christ experienced death, the separation of His body and soul.
- B. This and His descent into hell is the mystery of Holy Saturday
- C. His stay in the tomb is the link between His passible state before Easter and His glorious and risen state from Easter on.
- D. He is the meeting point for death and life by arresting the decomposition of nature produced by death and thus becoming the source of reunion of the separated parts – body and soul.
- E. His death was a real death, but His divine power and the perfection of His sacred humanity preserved His body from corruption.
- F. Baptism efficaciously signifies the descent into the tomb of the Christian who dies to sin with Christ in order to rise to new life with Him.

IV. Christ's Descent into Hell – Jesus "descended into the lower parts of the earth. He who descended is he who also ascended far above all

the heavens.” - Ephesians 4: 9-10

- A. The Bible calls the abode of the dead that Christ went down to “hell,” Sheol in Hebrew, or Hades in Greek.
- B. Those there were deprived of the vision of God until Christ’s death and resurrection, though they were not all in the same condition
- C. Jesus did not descend to deliver the damned, but to free the just who’d gone before Him.
- D. The Gospel was preached even to the dead.
- E. Spread of Christ’s redemptive work to all men and women of all times and places.
- F. Liturgy of the Hours – Office of Readings for Holy Saturday on Christ’s Descent into hell.

V. **The Resurrection – “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”** – Lk 24: 5-6

- A. The Resurrection is the crowning truth of our Faith.
- B. The empty tomb and appearances of the risen Christ
 - 1. Empty tomb was essential sign of the resurrection
 - 2. Christ had not simply returned to earthly life as had been the case with Lazarus and others Christ raised from the dead, but Christ was raised to His glorified state.
 - 3. Mary Magdalene and other holy women were the first messengers of the Resurrection.
 - 4. Peter – He who “confirms the brethren.”
 - 5. Other witnesses – St. Paul tells us He appeared to more than 500 at once, cf. 1 Cor. 15: 4-8
 - 6. Shock provoked by the Passion was so great that some of His disciples did not believe Him at first and Jesus upbraids them for this, e.g. disciples on the Road to Emmaus and the Apostle St. Thomas
 - 7. Belief in the Resurrection ultimately was and is born under the action of divine grace.
- C. The condition of Christ’s risen humanity and the Resurrection as a transcendent event
 - 1. Christ shows his true humanity through contact with them and by sharing meals with them
 - 2. However, though a real body, his risen body possesses new,

glorified properties.

- a. Not limited by space and time
 - b. Appears as He wishes and in whatever appearance He wishes, e.g. as a gardener
3. No one can say how the Resurrection came about physically
- a. Imperceptible to the senses – no one saw the actual Resurrection
 - b. Resurrection is a true historical event verified by the empty tomb, the burial cloths, and the disciples encounters with the risen Christ
 - c. Still, it remains at the very heart of the mystery of Faith.
4. All truths of the Faith find their justification in the Resurrection.
- a. “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” – 1 Cor. 15:14
 - b. The truth of Jesus’ divinity is confirmed by His Resurrection.
 - c. CCC says in paragraph 654 that “...by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life.”
 - d. CCC 655 - *Christ’s Resurrection – and the risen Christ himself – is the principle and source of our future resurrection.* “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” – 1 Cor. 15: 20-22

VI. **The Ascension – “So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.” – Mk. 16:19**

- A. During the 40 days after His Resurrection, Christ’s glory remains veiled under the appearance of ordinary humanity.
- B. In the Ascension, we see the entry of humanity into divine glory manifested and shown by His ascending into heaven on a cloud, cf. CCC 660.
- C. In heaven, Christ intercedes constantly as the Great, Eternal High Priest on our behalf, cf. Hebrews 9:24
- D. As “high priest of the good things to come” he is the center and the principal actor of the liturgy that honors the Father in heaven, CCC 662, Heb. 9:11, Rev. 4: 6-11
- E. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to

myself.” - Jn. 12:32

VII. Questions

Some Recommended Lenten Movies:

*** *Jesus of Nazareth***

*** *The Passion of the Christ***

*** *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe***