

6th & 7th Grade Homestudy Lesson #7
THE PASSION

GOAL:

The goal of this lesson is for you to come to a greater understanding of the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ.

THE CREED

Begin the lesson by carefully praying the Nicene Creed:

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Lectio Divina

Read Luke 23:1-56

How is God speaking to you through the story of the Passion and Death of Jesus?

What did this story teach you about the love God has for you?

Read Luke 23:1-56 again

MAIN IDEAS

- From the beginning of Jesus' public life He was misunderstood, He was different, and a lot of people found His teachings to be difficult and offensive; because of this they sought to destroy Him. (CCC 574-586)
- God loves us so much that He was willing to die for us, He was willing to give the greatest sacrifice of His very life to save us — all of us. There is not a single person who has lived or ever will live for whom Christ did not suffer and die. (CCC 605)
- Jesus was obedient to the will of the Father to the point of being killed. His obedience saves us from our sins. His obedience makes up for all of humanity's disobedience. (CCC 612)

TEACHING:

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God's great plan to save all of humanity, to redeem all of humankind, was accomplished once and for all through the death of Jesus Christ. But how did this all come about? (CCC 571) From the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus was a man of contradiction. He was misunderstood by different groups of people who found His teachings and actions offensive for various reasons. Eventually they sought out to destroy Him because He undermined and challenged their authority and teachings about God.

The way that Jesus acted scandalized the Pharisees because He associated with sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes. The mercy and love that He showed the people who were outcast challenged various groups of religious officials. **When He went even further and forgave the sins of these people, they saw that as the worst offense possible. He was acting in the place of God to reveal to the world that He is God and who God is. But to the religious officials, this was seen as the great crime of blasphemy because they did not believe what He said. And the punishment for blasphemy was death.** (CCC 574-591)

The series of events leading up to the death of Jesus are very complex, and we cannot blame one group of people for Jesus' death. His violent death was not just the result of chance or unfortunate coincidence, but it was a part of the great and mysterious plan of God for the redemption of humanity. (CCC 590-601) **Sacred Scripture foretold of this great plan of salvation — that Jesus would one day come and set us free from the slavery of sin.** The punishment of sin is death, and Jesus takes on this punishment, once and for all, for all of us through His own death. What greater love could humanity ask for than to have God give of His very life to save us? **Through the death of Jesus, God manifests that His plan for us is one of benevolent love, for “Christ dies for all men without exception. ‘There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer’”** (CCC 605).

(CCC 601-605) **Christ's whole life shows His mission to save humankind from their sins. The night before He died, Jesus, at the Last Supper, gave His disciples His Body and Blood by transforming the bread and wine of the Passover meal. Not only did Jesus die for our sins, but He gives us His very self for the forgiveness of sins through the Eucharist. At every single Mass, the priest, by the authority passed on from Jesus to the apostles, makes present this great mystery of love that set us free from darkness and death. The Eucharist is a memorial of His death in which Jesus gives us His very Body and Blood to nourish and sustain us in our journey.**

(CCC 608-611) **While His death was always a part of God's plan, Jesus was still human and suffered greatly. He suffered greatly in His death, but through it all He remained obedient to God and His will and what He came to accomplish.** He trusted God and accepted His own death, knowing that it would free all humankind from slavery and restore all people to a relationship with God — “he knew us and loved us all when he offered his life” (CCC 612). Jesus was obedient to God and He took on all our sins in His death. His obedience makes up for our disobedience. His death frees us from death and opens the possibility of eternal salvation to us. **Christ is united to all humanity through His own humanity and calls each of us to take up our own crosses and follow Him.** (CCC 612-618)

QUESTIONS:

1. Imagine now what it must have been like to live in the time of Jesus and to see this holy man being accused of many different things. Would you have joined in and believed the leaders? Would you have stood up for Jesus? Or would you have just remained silent? Explain.
2. What does it mean when someone is willing to sacrifice his or her life for someone else?
3. What does Jesus sacrifice on the cross reveal about Jesus Christ?
4. What did Jesus' self-sacrifice do for us?
5. How is His sacrifice connected to the Eucharist?
6. How can you be more attentive to what is happening during Mass and more open to receive Christ in the Eucharist?

CLOSING PRAYER

Close the lesson by praying the following reflection on the Seven Last Words of Jesus.

The First Word

“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.”(Luke 23:34)

It makes sense that the first word of Jesus from the cross is a word of forgiveness. That’s the point of the cross, after all. Jesus is dying so that we might be forgiven for our sins, so that we might be reconciled to God for eternity.

But the forgiveness of God through Christ doesn’t come only to those who don’t know what they are doing when they sin. In the mercy of God, we receive his forgiveness even when we do what we know to be wrong. God chooses to wipe away our sins, not because we have some convenient excuse, and not because we have tried hard to make up for them, but because he is a God of amazing grace, with mercies that are new every morning.

As we read the words, “Father, forgive them,” may we understand that we too are forgiven through Christ. As John writes in his first letter, “But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness” (1 John 1:9). Because Christ died on the cross for us, we are cleansed from all wickedness, from every last sin. We are united with God the Father as his beloved children. We are free to approach his throne of grace with our needs and concerns. God “has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west” (Ps 103:13). What great news!

Reflection: Do you really believe God has forgiven your sins? Do you take time on a regular basis to confess your sins so that you might enjoy the freedom of forgiveness? Do you need to experience God’s forgiveness in a fresh way today?

Prayer: Dear Lord, though I believe at one level that you have forgiven me, this amazing truth needs to penetrate my heart in new ways. Help me to know with fresh conviction that I am fully and finally forgiven, not because of anything I have done, but because of what you have done for me. May I live today as a forgiven person, opening my heart to you, choosing not to sin because the power of sin has been broken by your salvation. All praise be to you, Lord Jesus, for your matchless forgiveness! Amen.

The Second Word

“I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”(Luke 23:43)

As Jesus hung on the cross, he was mocked by the leaders and the soldiers. One of the criminals being crucified with him added his own measure of scorn. But the other crucified criminal sensed that Jesus was being treated unjustly. After speaking up for Jesus, he cried out, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (v. 42). Jesus responded to this criminal, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise” (v. 43). The word paradise, from the Greek word paradeisos, which meant “garden,” was used in the Greek Old Testament as a

word for the Garden of Eden. In Judaism of the time of Jesus it was associated with heaven, and also with the future when God would restore all things to the perfection of the Garden.

Thus we have encountered one of the most astounding and encouraging verses in all of Scripture. Jesus promised that the criminal would be with him in paradise. Yet the text of Luke gives us no reason to believe this man had been a follower of Jesus, or even a believer in him in any well-developed sense. He might have felt sorry for his sins, but he did not obviously repent. Rather, the criminal's cry to be remembered seems more like a desperate, last-gasp effort. Though we should make every effort to have right theology, and though we should live our lives each day as disciples of Jesus, in the end, our relationship with him comes down to simple trust. "Jesus, remember me," we cry. And Jesus, embodying the mercy of God, says to us, "You will be with me in paradise."

Reflection: Have you staked your life on Jesus? Have you put your ultimate trust in him?

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, how I wonder at your grace and mercy! When we cry out to you, you hear us. When we ask you to remember us when you come into your kingdom, you offer the promise of paradise. Your mercy, dear Lord, exceeds anything we might imagine. It embraces us, encourages us, heals us. O Lord, though my situation is so different from the criminal who cried out to you, I am nevertheless quite like him. Today I live, trusting you and you alone. My life, both now and in the world to come, is in your hands. And so I pray: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom! Amen.

The Third Word

"Woman, behold your son." And to the disciple he loved: "Behold your Mother." (John 19:26)

As Jesus was dying, his mother was among those who had remained with him. Most of the male disciples had fled, with the exception of one whom the Fourth Gospel calls "the disciple he loved." We can't be exactly sure of the identity of this beloved disciple, though many interpreters believe he is John, who is also the one behind the writing of this Gospel. No matter who the beloved disciple was, it's clear that Jesus was forging a relationship between this disciple and his mother, one in which the disciple would take care of Mary financially and in other ways. Jesus wanted to make sure she would be in good hands after his death.

The presence of Mary at the cross adds both humanity and horror to the scene. We are reminded that Jesus was a real human being, a man who had once been a boy who had once been carried in the womb of his mother. Even as he was dying on the cross as the Savior of the world, Jesus was also a son, a role he didn't neglect in his last moments.

When we think of the crucifixion of Jesus from the perspective of his mother, our horror increases dramatically. The death of a child is one of the most painful of all parental experiences. To watch one's beloved child experience the extreme torture of crucifixion must have been unimaginably terrible. We're reminded of the prophecy of Simeon shortly after Jesus' birth, when he said to Mary: "And a sword will pierce your heart" (Luke 2:35). This scene helps us not to glorify or spiritualize the crucifixion of Jesus. He was a real man, true flesh and blood,

a son of a mother, dying with unbearable agony. His suffering was altogether real, and he took it on for you and for me.

Reflection: What does Mary's presence at the cross make you feel? Why do you think it was necessary for Jesus to suffer physical pain as he died?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, the presence of your mother at the cross saddens my heart. You are no longer only the Savior dying for the sins of the world. You are also a fully human man, a son with a mother.

O Lord, how can I begin to thank you for what you suffered? My words fall short. Nevertheless, I offer my sincere gratitude for your suffering. Thank you for bearing my sin on the cross. I give you my praise, my love, my heart . . . all that I am, because you have given me all that you are. All praise be to you, Lord Jesus, fully God and fully human, Savior of the world . . . my Savior! Amen.

The Fourth Word

"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"(Mark 15:34)

As Jesus was dying on the cross, he echoed the beginning of Psalm 22, which reads:

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Why are you so far away when I cry for help?

Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night you hear my voice, but I find no relief. (vv. 1-2)

In the words of the psalmist Jesus found a way to express the cry of his heart: Why had God abandoned him? Why did his Father turn his back on Jesus in his moment of greatest agony?

This side of heaven, we will never fully know what Jesus was experiencing in this moment. Was he asking this question because, in the mystery of his incarnational suffering, he didn't know why God had abandoned him? Or was his cry not so much a question as an expression of profound agony? Or was it both?

What we do know is that Jesus entered into the Hell of separation from God. The Father abandoned him because Jesus took upon himself the penalty for our sins. In that excruciating moment, he experienced something far more horrible than physical pain. The beloved Son of God knew what it was like to be rejected by the Father. As we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God".

Reflection: Have you taken time to consider that Jesus was abandoned by the Father so that you might not be? What does this "word" from the cross mean to you?

Prayer: O Lord Jesus, though I will never fully grasp the wonder and horror of your abandonment by the Father, every time I read this “word,” I am overwhelmed with gratitude. How can I ever thank you for what you suffered for me? What can I do but to offer myself to you in gratitude and praise? Thank you, dear Lord, for what you suffered. Thank you for taking my place. Thank you for being forsaken by the Father so that I might never be.

The Fifth Word

Jesus says: “I thirst.” (John 19:28)

No doubt Jesus experienced extreme thirst while being crucified. He would have lost a substantial quantity of bodily fluid, both blood and sweat, through what he had endured even prior to crucifixion. Thus his statement, “I am thirsty” was, on the most obvious level, a request for something to drink. In response the soldiers gave Jesus “sour wine” (v. 29), a cheap beverage common among lower class people in the time of Jesus. John notes that Jesus said “I am thirsty,” not only as a statement of physical reality, but also in order to fulfill the Scripture. Though there is no specific reference in the text of the Gospel, it’s likely that John was thinking of Psalm 69, which includes this passage:

Their insults have broken my heart, and I am in despair.

If only one person would show some pity; if only one would turn and comfort me.

But instead, they give me poison for food; they offer me sour wine for my thirst. (vv. 20-21)

As he suffered, Jesus embodied the pain of the people of Israel, that which had been captured in the Psalms. Jesus was suffering for the sin of Israel, even as he was taking upon himself the sin of the world.

As I reflect on Jesus’ statement, “I am thirsty,” I keep thinking of my own thirst. It’s nothing like that of Jesus. Rather, I am thirsty for him. My soul yearns for the living water that Jesus supplies (John 4:10; 7:38-39). I rejoice in the fact that he suffered physical thirst on the cross – and so much more – so that my thirst for the water of life might be quenched.

Reflection: How do you respond to Jesus’ statement “I am thirsty”? What does this statement suggest to you about Jesus? About yourself?

Prayer: O Lord, once again I thank you for what you suffered on the cross. Besides extraordinary pain, you also experienced extreme thirst. All of this was part and parcel of your taking on our humanity so that you might take away our sin.

Dear Lord, in your words “I am thirsty” I hear the cry of my own heart. I too am thirsty, Lord, not for physical drink. I don’t need sour wine. Rather, I need the new wine of your kingdom to flood my soul. I need to be refreshed by your living water. I yearn for your Spirit to fill me once again. I am thirsty, Lord, for you. Amen.

The Sixth Word

Jesus said: "It is finished!" (John 19:30)

I never saw a more difficult film to watch than Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. For most of that movie I wanted to avert my eyes. It was horrible to watch even a cinematic version of a crucifixion. And it was beyond comprehension to think that this actually happened to somebody, and not just anybody, but my Lord and Savior. I had studied the crucifixion before, and knew in my head what Jesus experienced. But seeing a visual presentation of his suffering was almost more than I could bear. When *The Passion of the Christ* was over, I felt palpable relief. Thank goodness it was finished.

When Jesus said "It is finished," surely he was expressing relief that his suffering was over. "It is finished" meant, in part, "This is finally done!" But the Greek verb translated as "It is finished" (*tetelestai*) means more than just this. Eugene Peterson captures the full sense of the verb in *The Message*: "It's done . . . complete." Jesus had accomplished his mission. He had announced and inaugurated the kingdom of God. He had revealed the love and grace of God. And he had embodied that love and grace by dying for the sin of the world, thus opening up the way for all to live under the reign of God.

Because Jesus finished his work of salvation, you and I don't need to add to it. In fact, we can't. He accomplished what we never could, taking our sin upon himself and giving us his life in return. Jesus finished that for which he had been sent, and we are the beneficiaries of his unique effort. Because of what he finished, you and I are never "finished." We have hope for this life and for the next. We know that nothing can separate us from God's love. One day what God has begun in us will also be finished, by his grace. Until that day, we live in the confidence of Jesus' cry of victory: "It is finished!"

Reflection: Do you live as if Jesus finished the work of salvation? To you have confidence that God will finish that which he has begun in you?

Prayer: How can I ever find words to express my gratitude to you, dear Lord Jesus? You did it. You finished that for which you had been sent, faithful in life, faithful in death. You accomplished that which no other person could do, taking the sin of the world upon your sinless shoulders . . . taking my sin so that I might receive your forgiveness and new life. All praise be to you, gracious Lord, for finishing the work of salvation. All praise be to you, dear Jesus, for saving me! Alleluia! Amen.

The Seventh Word

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!" (Luke 23:46)

Two of the last seven "words" of Jesus were quotations from the Psalms. Earlier Jesus had Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" to express his anguish. Later he borrowed from Psalm 31, which comes to us from Luke as "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands."

When we look carefully at the Psalm Jesus quoted, we see more than what at first meets our eyes. Psalm 31 begins with a cry for divine help:

O LORD, I have come to you for protection; don't let me be disgraced. Save me, for you do what is right. (v. 1)

But then it mixes asking for God's deliverance with a confession of God's strength and faithfulness: I entrust my spirit into your hand. Rescue me, LORD, for you are a faithful God. (v. 5)

By the end, Psalm 31 offers praise of God's salvation: Praise the LORD, for he has shown me the wonders of his unfailing love. He kept me safe when my city was under attack. (v. 21)

By quoting a portion of Psalm 31, therefore, Jesus not only entrusted his future to his Father, but also implied that he would be delivered and exonerated. No, God would not deliver him from death by crucifixion. But beyond this horrific death lay something marvelous. "I entrust my spirit into your hands" points back to the familiar suffering of David in Psalm 31, and forward to the resurrection.

Reflection: Have you put your life and, indeed, your life beyond this life, in God's hands? How do you experience God's salvation through Christ in your life today?

Prayer: Gracious Lord, even as you once entrusted your spirit into the hands of the Father, so I give my life to you. I trust you, and you alone to be my Savior. I submit to your sovereignty over my life, and seek to live for your glory alone. Here I am, Lord, available to you, both now and in the future. How good it is to know, dear Lord, that the cross was not the end for you. As you entrusted your spirit into the Father's hands, you did so in anticipation of what was to come. So we reflect upon your death, not in despair, but in hope. Amen.