

# **My Catholic Faith! Study Group**

## **Session 4 - God Suffers Death**

### **Pre-meeting Prep**

Participants should be asked to read Chapter Four of the *My Catholic Faith!* book prior to this meeting.

### **5 minutes - Gather**

Snacks and informal social time as people gather. Try to be punctual and gather everyone together no longer than 5 minutes after the scheduled starting time.

### **5 minutes - Opening prayer and Scripture**

Everyone sits quietly as the leader begins with the Sign of the Cross and then invites a period of silence in the following way:

***Let us quiet ourselves as we begin this study of our glorious Catholic faith together. "Lord, as we sit here for a minute in silence, help each one of us to bring our own questions, concerns, fears, and joys to You. Help us, in this moment of silence, to be attentive to Your gentle voice speaking to us, directing us, and calling us to a deeper faith."***

Take about a minute in silence with eyes closed so that each person can speak to our Lord about their own particular cares and concerns.

Leader reads the following invitation: ***Let us ponder the Word of God. Let us reflect upon our own faith journey with the following questions: Do I believe? How deep is my faith? Am I open to letting God speak to me? Am I open to the Word of God and willing to let God's truth sink in more deeply? Am I willing to let this new faith change my life?***

The leader of the session prayerfully reads the following Scriptures, one at a time, pausing for about 30 seconds between each verse:

John 2:13-20: Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money-changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." His disciples recalled the words of scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me." At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?"

Matthew 23:15-17: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves. "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If one swears by the temple, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gold of the temple, one is obligated.' Blind fools, which is greater, the gold, or the temple that made the gold sacred?"

Mark 15:12-47: Pilate again said to them in reply, "Then what (do you want) me to do with (the man you call) the king of the Jews?" They shouted again, "Crucify him." Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" They only shouted the louder, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified. The soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort. They clothed him in purple and, weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him. They began to salute him with, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting upon him. They knelt before him in homage. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him out to crucify him. They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. They brought him to the place of Golgotha (which is translated Place of the Skull). They gave him wine drugged with myrrh, but he did not take it. Then they crucified him and divided his garments by casting lots for them to see what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." With him they crucified two revolutionaries, one on his right and one on his left. Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself by coming down from the cross." Likewise the chief priests, with the scribes, mocked him among themselves and said, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also kept abusing him. At noon darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Some of the bystanders who heard it said, "Look, he is calling Elijah." One of them ran, soaked a sponge with wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to take him down." Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" There were also women looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses, and Salome. These women had followed him when he was in Galilee and ministered to him. There were also many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. When it was already evening, since it was the day of preparation, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a distinguished member of the council, who was himself awaiting the

kingdom of God, came and courageously went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was amazed that he was already dead. He summoned the centurion and asked him if Jesus had already died. And when he learned of it from the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. Having bought a linen cloth, he took him down, wrapped him in the linen cloth and laid him in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus watched where he was laid.

Leader then says: ***Let us take a moment in silence to reflect upon these words.*** (a minute of silence)

The Leader invites everyone to either look at a Crucifix and kneel or to close their eyes and imagine kneeling before one and then prays the following prayer:

***Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus  
while before Your face I humbly kneel and,  
with burning soul,  
pray and beseech You  
to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments  
of faith, hope, and charity;  
true contrition for my sins,  
and a firm purpose of amendment.***

***While I contemplate,  
with great love and tender pity,  
Your five most precious wounds,  
pondering over them within me  
and calling to mind the words which David,  
Your prophet, said to You, my Jesus:***

***"They have pierced My hands and My feet,  
they have numbered all My bones."***

***Amen.***

The prayer time concludes with everyone professing the Apostles Creed:

***I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the***

***living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.***

#### **45-50 minutes - Discussion questions**

Each person should be invited to share something or ask a question, if he/she chooses, regarding the questions/discussion starters below. Go through one question at a time, and give each person an opportunity to say something if he/she chooses. Avoid having one or two persons dominate the discussion. Go around the circle and do not be afraid to share! Your insights might assist someone else in their understanding of the topics. Your question might very well be the same question someone else has. Some of the questions below will invite a personal sharing; other questions will invite you to share with others what you read in Chapter Four. The goal is to share personally and to also make sure that the faith of our Church is clearly expressed and understood by all.

1. Love, if it is true love, sometimes hurts. Jesus loved perfectly, but at times, His words stung to the heart. The religious leaders at the time, especially, were offended by Jesus' words of truth and by His actions of love. At one point Jesus said to them, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites..." And then He went on to call them "blind guides" and "blind fools." Share your thoughts on what you think the religious leaders of the time were thinking about Jesus. Why were they so upset with Him? And why would Jesus speak to them in such a way?
2. Have you ever had an experience in which you were offended by someone who spoke the truth to you? Is there a time when your pride got the best of you and you reacted in a defensive way? Feel free to share any experience like this that might be appropriate to share, especially if you later came to a reconciliation.
3. Who was responsible for Jesus' death? Certainly the religious leaders of the time were the primary instigators of the crucifixion. But the responsibility goes beyond that. Let's start by reflecting on how we might consider Jesus to be the one responsible for His own death by embracing it freely in accord with the Father's will. Share your thoughts and understanding on how Jesus took full responsibility for laying down His life freely.
4. It's also important to understand that we are all responsible for Jesus' death as a result of our sins. It was the sin of disobedience committed by Adam and Eve that led to the fall, but each one of us sins daily. Share with others your thoughts on being personally responsible for the death of Jesus. Have you thought about this? What does this thought do in your heart?
5. Jesus' death was ultimately an act of perfect obedience to the will of the Father. Share your thoughts on what must have gone through Jesus' mind as He said yes to this brutal crucifixion out of obedience to the Father.
6. The key to salvation in Christ is to be fully united with Him in His death. By doing so, we cling to Him and share in His triumph over death when He rises. Share any experience you have of clinging to Jesus in His suffering and death.

7. When Jesus died, He was buried and lay three days in the tomb. Discuss this experience and the significance of His time in the tomb. What was happening that Holy Saturday?

### **20 minutes - Final Reflections and sharing**

Go around and give each person an opportunity to share any other final thoughts. What stood out to each of you the most? Do you have any lingering questions or confusion that others can help clarify?

### **5 minutes - Closing prayer**

Leader begins with the Sign of the Cross and invites a minute of silence with all eyes closed.

Each person should reflect upon what was discussed tonight (today), especially what stood out to him/her the most.

Leader then prays the following prayer:

***God our Father, we thank You for the gift of Jesus, Your Son. Thank you for sending Him to take on our fallen human nature. Jesus, my Lord, thank You for uniting Yourself with me in my fallenness and for becoming for me the way back to the Father. Help me to fully profess my faith in You every day.***

***Lord, help us to always understand the glorious gift of Your Cross. Help us to see that Cross as the gift of Your perfect love that untangles our sinfulness.***

***Jesus, I know that Your Cross is also an invitation to me to embrace my cross. Help me to do so freely and wholeheartedly in imitation of Your Cross. Jesus, I trust in You.***

Leader then invites everyone present to offer their own prayer in the following way (Note: This can be done out loud, but it might be preferable if it's done in silence at the discretion of the leader):

***Let us now each bring our own personal concerns before our Lord, trusting that He hears us and knows all we need. Let us entrust these prayers to Him with full confidence that He desires to take control.*** (Take a minute of silence for each person to speak to God about their own personal needs for the night or day).

Leader then invites everyone to close with the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.