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Jesus Dies and Rises Again

Luke 22:1–24:53 · Bloom · Ages 13–19

Luke 22–24 is the center of the Christian faith: a meal, a betrayal, an execution, and an empty tomb. Every Gospel tells it, and the first Christians preached it before anything else.

The story: Judas, one of the Twelve, agrees to hand Jesus over for money; Luke says Satan had taken hold of him (22:3–6), yet Judas still chose. At Passover, Jesus eats a last meal with the Twelve. He gives them bread as his body, given for them, and the cup as the new covenant in his blood, and tells them to repeat this in his memory. He predicts Peter's denial and Judas' betrayal. In agony on the Mount of Olives, he submits his will to his Father's. Judas betrays him with a kiss. Peter, in the high priest's courtyard, denies him three times, meets his look, and weeps. The council condemns Jesus for claiming to be the Son of God and brings him to Pilate on a political charge. Pilate and Herod both find him innocent; Pilate gives in anyway, frees Barabbas, and sends Jesus to be crucified. Jesus forgives his executioners, promises paradise to a repentant criminal, and dies entrusting himself to his Father. A Roman centurion calls him innocent. On the third day, women find the tomb empty, and two angels announce that he is risen. The risen Jesus walks with two disciples to Emmaus, eats with the Eleven, opens the Scriptures, sends them to all nations, and ascends into heaven.

What the Church sees here: at the Last Supper Jesus gave the Eucharist as the memorial of his sacrifice and made the apostles priests of the New Covenant (CCC 610–611; 1337). It is not only a symbol: by the consecration the whole substance of the bread and wine is changed into his body and blood (transubstantiation), so that Christ is truly, really and substantially present (CCC 1374–1376), and the Mass makes present the one sacrifice of the Cross (CCC 1366–1367). Jesus went to his death freely, out of love (CCC 609), and he died for every human being without exception (CCC 605). The Resurrection is a real, historical event, witnessed first by the women and then by Peter and the apostles (CCC 639–641), and the risen Jesus is no ghost: he invites the disciples to touch him and eats in front of them (Lk 24:39–43), yet his body is glorified (CCC 645–646).

Honest questions:

Who killed Jesus? Roman soldiers carried out a sentence passed by a Roman governor at the urging of some religious leaders. The Church firmly teaches that the Jewish people, then or now, cannot be blamed as a whole (CCC 597). It also teaches something harder: all of us, by our sins, share responsibility, Christians most of all (CCC 598).

Did Jesus have to die? Not because God needed blood, but because love goes all the way. Jesus freely accepted his Passion to save us (CCC 609), and in Gethsemane his human will agreed to the Father's will (CCC 612).

Is the Resurrection just a nice story? The apostles did not expect it. They dismissed the women's report, and some still doubted when they saw him (CCC 643–644). Their fear turning into courage is hard to explain any other way. No one saw the moment itself (CCC 647), but the empty tomb and the meetings with the risen Jesus convinced people who had every reason not to believe.

Peter's story is good news for anyone who has failed badly. His tears led back to love (CCC 1429).

Church teaching note

Church teaching: the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood (CCC 610–611, 1337, 1339–1340); the Real Presence and transubstantiation (CCC 1374, 1376); the Mass as the one sacrifice made present (CCC 1366–1367); Jesus' free offering out of love (CCC 609, 612); Christ died for all (CCC 605); responsibility for his death, never the Jewish people as a whole (CCC 597–598); the Resurrection as a real event, the empty tomb and the first witnesses (CCC 639–641, 643–647); Peter's repentance (CCC 1429); Jesus true God and true man (CCC 464, 469).

Talk about it

1. Why does the Church teach that the Eucharist is not just a symbol? What did Jesus say about the bread and the cup?
2. Who is responsible for Jesus' death, according to the Church (CCC 597–598)?
3. What convinced the first disciples that Jesus had risen, even though they did not expect it?
4. Peter denied Jesus and Judas betrayed him. What made the difference in how their stories ended?

Key verse: Lk 22:19. Look it up in your Bible.