

## SESSION 3 / JESUS, THE BRIDGE OF MERCY

*But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).*

**Theme** In willing obedience to his Father's will, Christ lovingly took on human flesh to unjustly suffer for our sins. Scourged for our iniquities, he sacrificed his life to rescue us and offer us the opportunity to be with him now and forever.

### **Welcome: We Pray and Share Together** (15 mins)

O God,  
send forth your Holy Spirit  
into our hearts that we might perceive,  
into our minds that we might remember,  
into our souls that we might meditate.  
Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,  
tenderness and mercy.  
Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses  
from beginning to end.  
May your grace help us to see with your eyes  
and to act with your love and light in our hearts.  
May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high  
for the sake and glory of your kingdom.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying the Apostles' Creed (page 48)

### **Read and Reflect on the Scriptures** Romans 6:1-6 (5 mins)

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

### **Meditate on the Word** Romans 6:1-6 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

### Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

In recent years, business leaders have been fiercely debating whether they will continue to permit their employees to work from home. Precipitated by Covid, remote working contracts have enabled employees to work from pretty much anywhere, but some business executives are now calling their employees back to the office for at least some portion of each week. While enjoying lower travel costs and less time in transit, employees have grown accustomed to virtual meetings to facilitate discussions amongst work colleagues and line managers. Yet, business leaders contend in-person gatherings are not only better for business but also beneficial for employees. After, all, you can't turn your camera and sound off when meeting in person.

Similarly, in a fashion, God accompanied his people from afar while 'hiding his face' throughout the Old Testament (Deut 31:17). For generations, God quietly spoke to his people through the prophets. While they called God's people to turn back to him, to live in obedience to his mosaic covenant, the Ten Commandments, they often chose to go their own way, to worship pagan gods. Respecting their free choice and his own aversion to sin, God had to distance himself so they might suffer the pain of his absence even to the point of humiliation and death. Like Moses who died outside of the Promised Land because of idolatry amongst his people, the later prophets, notably Jeremiah and Ezekiel, physically suffered not only for their own sins but also for those of their people. Having been exiled from their homeland and their Temple destroyed, the Israelites realised they needed God's help to live according to the Commandments and began to hunger for his love, to recognise their sinful ways and ask forgiveness so that they might renew their covenantal relationship and grow closer to God, our loving Father.

It was not long thereafter that 'God sent forth his Son' (Gal 4:4). Christ broke into our world to take on human flesh, to do what we could not do on our own: to make an offering of his own life to rescue us from our sins. Through the Holy Family, he came to us in a body like ours and in doing so he gave a special dignity both to our bodies and to our families. In total openness to the will of the Father, our Blessed Mother brought forth the gift of Christ's life, body and soul knitted together in human form to image the heart of our heavenly Father. Then, at the moment of his own baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Universe, who was sinless, lovingly assumed the sins of all and set about on his mission: to brutally suffer, die and rise to new life so that the pathway to eternal life would be restored for you and for me.

Having taken on our human flesh, the fruit of Christ's saving work is bestowed on each of us at our Baptism. Water was poured over our heads not as a simply symbolic gesture. It was poured over our heads to unite us to Christ and to transform us. Through the workings of the Holy Spirit, you and I became adopted children of God, our relationship with God, lost by our first parents Adam and Eve, was restored. Like the covenants made with our ancestors, Adam, Noah, Abraham and David, Christ calls us to live in a covenant with him. He invites us each and every day to live our Baptism, to share in his saving work by continually dying to sin, turning away from our own sinful, self-centred ways to rise again and again in newness of life in Christ. He gave his life for this. He dearly wants that likeness to grow in each of us so that we may be with him now and for eternity.

### Responding to what has been heard

At the Easter Masses, we renew our Baptismal Promises as Jesus calls us to a conversion of heart (cf. Mark 1:15). Reflect this week on the following question: **Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father?** Will you be able to state your 'yes' to this truth this Easter?

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make the words of the Apostles' Creed resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

## Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 63. Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: O God, you are my God; at dawn I seek you;  
for you my soul is thirsting.

B: For you my flesh is pining,  
like a dry, weary land without water.

A: I have come before you in the sanctuary,  
to behold your strength and your glory.

B: Your loving mercy is better than life;  
my lips will speak your praise.

A: I will bless you all my life;  
in your name I will lift up my hands.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

## From the Rite of Baptism: White Garment

The white garment symbolises that the newly baptised has 'put on Christ' and has risen to new life in him. It is a sign of our vocation, our new identity as Christians. Through Baptism, we are transformed and elevated. We are made holy and called to grow in holiness.

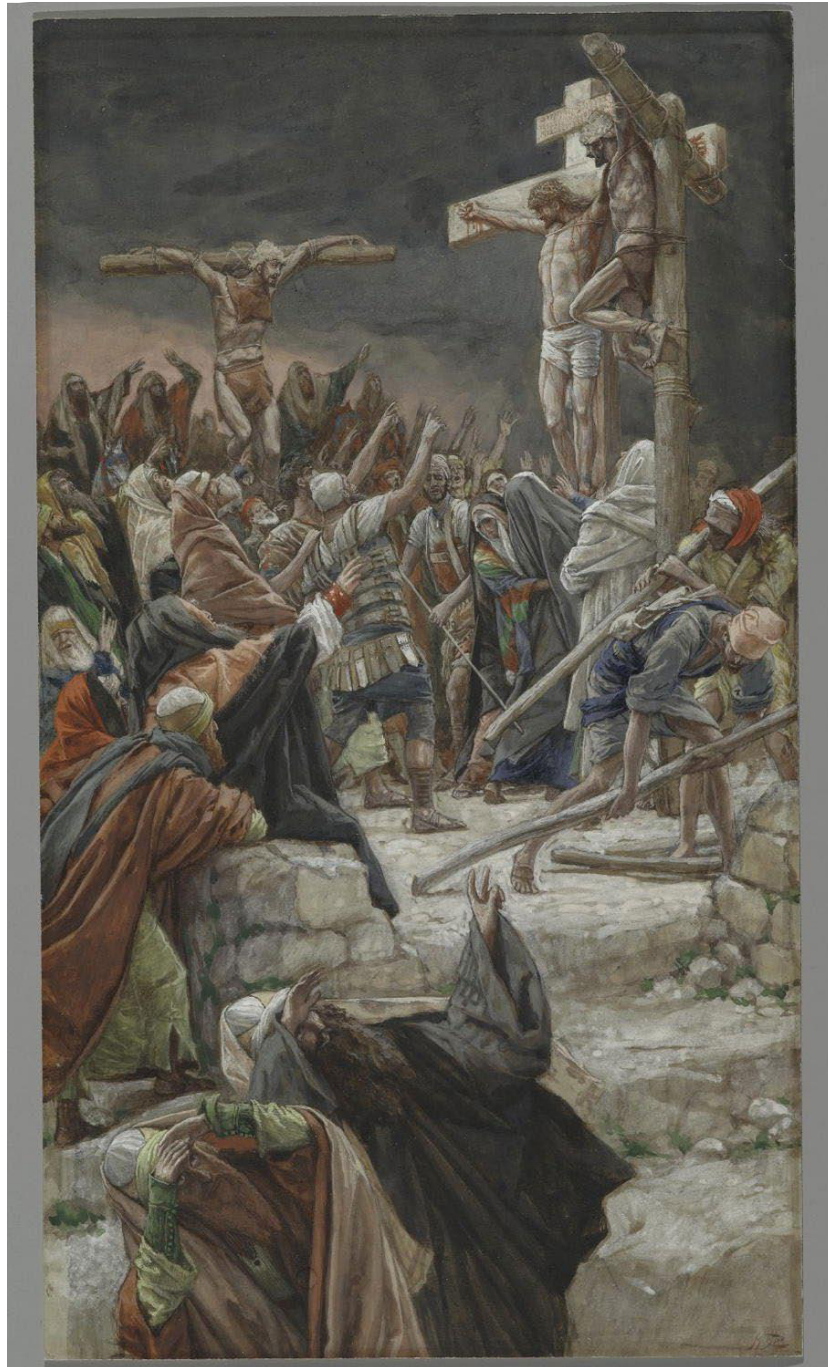
With the help of God's graces, we are empowered to do what we cannot do on our own: to live in Christ, that is, to strive to be Christ-like each day, sharing in his virtues so that we may be with him for all eternity.

**[Catechism references relating to this session 1243-1244]**

## About Visio Divina

Genuine masterpieces of sacred and religious art offer privileged means by which we purify our vision and our heart so as to 'see God,' now and in the life to come.

The Beauty of Faith: Using Christian Art to Spread the Good News, Jem Sullivan, p.78



### **Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina**

Describe what you can see, what is happening?

What does this picture say about the love poured out, by Jesus, for us?

In Baptism, you enter into this relationship of love. How do you respond?

How might you deepen your knowledge and love of God in the coming days?

The Pardon of the Good Thief / Le pardon du bon Larron (1886–1894) by James Tissot