

# HOLY THURSDAY



## FROM THE PSALMS

“Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance.”

—Psalm 78:25

“Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.”

—Psalm 106:47

## FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

—1 Corinthians 11:23–26

## FROM THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

“Christ’s death is both the *Paschal sacrifice* that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’, and the *sacrifice of the New Covenant*, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the ‘blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’.”

—CCC, 613

# HOLY THURSDAY AND THE NEW COVENANT

## INTRODUCTION

In addition to the new temple, the new exodus, and the new creation, God promises his people a new covenant. Why is a new covenant needed? Because the Israelites broke the covenant they swore with God at Mt. Sinai. Despite swearing to worship the Lord alone, they worshipped a false Egyptian god, the Golden Calf. How will this new covenant be different from the covenant with Moses? What does this reveal about the meaning of the Eucharist?

## OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, open my mind to your word and bless me with the gift of understanding so I might come to know and love you better. Amen.

## BACKGROUND

Today we read from two prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Through Jeremiah, God announces that he will forge a new covenant with his people. The prophet Ezekiel echoes Jeremiah's words and points to the same promise.

## SCRIPTURE

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:22–29

## COMMENTARY

Even though the Israelites had been unfaithful and owed a debt to the Lord for breaking the covenant at Mt. Sinai, God shows them mercy and promises a new covenant. All twelve tribes (the “house of Israel and the house of Judah”) will be blessed by this new covenant for it will be the means by which God gathers all his people together.

God promises to give his people a new heart so they can be freed from their attachment to sin. God will supply the grace for his people to be holy by giving them his Spirit: “And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezekiel 36:27). God will provide the supernatural help his people need to obey his law and live in a holy manner.

## FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

At the Last Supper, Jesus announces that his blood is the blood of the new covenant. God prepared his people through the prophets to look for a new covenant; Jesus' words announce that the new covenant is at hand.

Jesus goes on to say, “I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29–30). God had promised through the prophet Ezekiel that he would gather the scattered tribes. Jesus tells his disciples that all twelve tribes will be gathered *at the Lord's table*. The new kingdom of Israel is gathered together through the Eucharist. One of the Eucharistic Prayers (Prayer III) reflects this: “Listen graciously to the prayers of this family, whom you have summoned before you: in your compassion, O merciful Father, gather to yourself all your children scattered throughout the world.” Through the Eucharist, celebrated at every mass beginning with the Last Supper, Jesus makes his sacrifice of the Cross present to all people, in all nations, throughout all time. Before our eyes, in the form of breaking of bread and pouring of wine, Christ offers the perfect gift of himself who handed his body and blood over to be broken and poured out to establish this new covenant.

Jesus gives us his Body and Blood as our food and drink, filling us with his very life, causing us to be holy and walk in his ways.

## IN THE LITURGY

All the sacraments bring the promises of the new covenant into our lives. We are sprinkled with water, we are forgiven of sins, we are given God's Spirit and his abundant grain. We are given new hearts. Our once-hardened hearts become filled with Christ's presence (Ephesians 3:17) through the sacraments.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, I thank you for offering your people this new covenant. We do not deserve your mercy or kindness, but we rejoice in the abundance of your love. Amen.

## RESOLUTION

During your prayer after Holy Thursday Mass, thank the Lord for healing all that sin has broken. Think of one thing in your life that needs God's healing and ask him for help.

# GOOD FRIDAY



## FROM THE PSALMS

“O God, insolent men have risen up against me; a band of ruthless men seeks my life, and they do not set you before them.

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant.”

—Psalm 86:14–16

## FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

“And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.’”

—Luke 2:27–32

## FROM THE *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*

“After his Resurrection, Christ sent his apostles ‘so that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations.’ The apostles and their successors carry out this ‘ministry of reconciliation,’ not only by announcing to men God's forgiveness merited for us by Christ, and calling them to conversion and faith; but also by communicating to them the forgiveness of sins in Baptism, and reconciling them with God and with the Church through the power of the keys, received from Christ...

—CCC, 981

# GOOD FRIDAY<sup>6</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Our final reflection on Jesus' death is Psalm 22. Jesus prays the beginning line of this Psalm while he is on the Cross. Why might he have chosen this Psalm to pray? Let's take a closer look after we pray.

## OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, open my mind to your word and bless me with the gift of understanding so I might come to know and love you better. Amen.

## BACKGROUND

In Jesus' day, the Psalms were not numbered as they are today. The Psalms were known by their opening lines. As Jesus recites the first words of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," he is invoking the entire Psalm as his prayer. There are many similarities between what the Psalmist experiences and what Jesus experiences on the Cross.

## SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 22:14–18, 21–31

## COMMENTARY

Psalm 22 speaks about a person who suffers so greatly that he feels abandoned by God. It is a Psalm of both lament and trust. Though he faces great suffering, he is confident God will deliver him from his trials (verse 21).

In verse 27, this suffering man says, "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you." In the ancient world, each nation worshipped its *own* set of gods. The Egyptian gods differed from the gods of the Canaanites; the Greek gods differed from those of the Romans. This Psalm announces that *all nations* and *all families* will one day worship the Lord, the God of Israel. This is very unusual. This man's suffering and God's deliverance of him will cause all nations to abandon their false gods and worship the one true God.

The inclusion of "all nations" in the worship of God is an important idea in the Old Testament.

Many of our reflections have focused on the fate of Israel and Judah. What is God's plan for the Gentiles, the people of the earth that are not from the twelve tribes? Psalm 22 celebrates God's plan to incorporate all nations into his kingdom.

## FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

Jesus' death fulfills this prophetic Psalm in many ways, but we will focus on one aspect of this Psalm that is more subtle, but very important. Just after Jesus prays the first line of Psalm 22, he breathes his last breath and dies. A centurion (a Roman soldier) who is standing by sees Jesus breathe his last breath and professes, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39). This soldier is a Gentile—a man from *the nations*. At his profession of faith, the words of Psalm 22:27 are fulfilled. The Roman centurion is the first of many people from the nations who will declare that Jesus is the Son of God. As the Psalm foretold, all nations and families of the earth now worship the God of Israel. Your family as you study the scriptures is a fulfillment of this prophecy.

## IN THE LITURGY

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the Apostles are sent to teach and baptize people from *all nations* (Matthew 28:19). People from all over the world and through all generations—"people yet unborn" (Psalm 22:31)—hear this message and receive God's salvation. The priesthood of the Church carries on the mission of the Apostles to teach and administer the sacraments.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, Jesus Christ, thank you for offering your so that they whole world can know the love of God and receive your salvation. Amen.

## RESOLUTION

During your quiet prayer time, read all of Psalm 22.

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<sup>6</sup> This reflection is adapted from Brant Pitre's *The Case for Jesus*, page 167–168.

# THE RESURRECTION



## FROM THE PSALMS

“Therefore my heart is glad,  
and my whole being  
rejoices; my flesh also  
dwells secure. For you will  
not abandon my soul to  
Sheol, or let your holy one  
see corruption.”

—Psalm 16:9–10

## FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

“For I delivered to you as of  
first importance what I also  
received: that Christ died for  
our sins in accordance with  
the Scriptures, that he was  
buried, that he was raised on  
the third day in accordance  
with the Scriptures, and that  
he appeared to Cephas, then  
to the twelve. Then he  
appeared to more than five  
hundred brothers at one time,  
most of whom are still alive,  
though some have fallen  
asleep.”

—1 Corinthians 15:3–6

## FROM THE *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*

“‘If Christ has not been  
raised, then our preaching is  
in vain and your faith is in  
vain.’ The Resurrection  
above all constitutes the  
confirmation of all Christ's  
works and teachings. All  
truths, even those most  
inaccessible to human reason,  
find their justification if  
Christ by his Resurrection  
has given the definitive proof  
of his divine authority, which  
he had promised.”

—CCC, 651

# THE RESURRECTION AND THE SIGN OF JONAH<sup>7</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus teaches that the prophet Jonah prepares the Israelites to understand his resurrection. What can we learn about Jesus' resurrection from Jonah's story? How does Jonah prepare us to understand Jesus' mission to include *all nations* in God's saving plan? Let's pray and then turn to the scriptures.

## OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, open my mind to your word and bless me with the gift of understanding so I might come to know and love you better. Amen.

## BACKGROUND

God sends the prophet Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh. Jonah disobeys the Lord's command and attempts to hide from God on a ship. God causes a storm to arise which threatens his life and the life of his shipmates. Jonah tells the ship's crew to throw him into the sea in order to calm the storm. Our passage explains what happens to Jonah once he enters the water.

## SCRIPTURE

Read Jonah 1:11–2:10

## COMMENTARY

The Ninevites—the people of the capital city of Assyria—were Israel's enemies. God asks Jonah to call the Ninevites to repentance or God will destroy their city. But Jonah just wants God to destroy them! Rather than give the Ninevites the chance to repent, Jonah runs away and suffers the consequences of disobeying God's will.

Jonah's story is a resurrection story. He does not live in the belly of the fish for three days. Rather, he *dies* and God brings him back to life after three days. Jonah 2:2 tells us that Jonah was in the belly of *Sheol*. This is the Old Testament name for the place where the souls of the dead go. Jonah goes to the land “whose bars closed... forever” on him, yet God brings him up “from the pit” (2:6). “The pit” is also a reference to the abode of the dead.

After the Lord restores his life, Jonah reluctantly travels to Nineveh and preaches to them. Surprisingly, they repent of their sins and avoid God's punishment. Their willingness to listen to

God's word contrasts with the people of Israel who do *not* listen to the prophets God sends to them. Jonah preaches to the Assyrians and they repent. God sends many prophets to Israel, but Israel ignores their warnings and continues in their sin.

## FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

When Jesus' opponents approach the Lord and ask for a sign, Jesus replies that they will only receive the “sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matthew 12:39–41). Jesus, like Jonah, will rise from the dead. If they will not be convinced by *this sign*, nothing will convince them that the Father has sent him into the world. Jesus reminds the Israelites that the people of Nineveh—even Nineveh!—listened to Jonah and repented. Jesus' opponents are in the presence of Christ himself, yet they do not repent. The Resurrection is the hinge: if Jesus does not *actually* rise from the dead, then our faith is in vain. But because Jesus did rise from the dead (even appearing to hundreds of witnesses!), we should turn from our sins and do everything that Jesus tells us. We can trust all of Jesus' promises because he said he would rise from the dead... *and he did*.

## IN THE LITURGY

In baptism we are buried with Christ and raised with Christ (Romans 6:4, 11). We still have our earthly bodies, but we also already enjoy the fruits of the resurrection. We have a mission to bear witness to Christ so that all people—the people from Judah, the lost sheep of Israel, and the people of all nations—can participate in this new life.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, Jesus Christ, thank you for offering your life so that the whole world can know the love of God and receive your salvation. Amen.

## RESOLUTION

Talk with your family about what Bible story stands out the most to you from your Lenten study. Make a commitment to continue reading the Bible together. Try to read a book of the Bible, perhaps the book of Acts, this Easter seas

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<sup>7</sup> This reflection is adapted from Brant Pitre's *The Case for Jesus*, page 188–190.