

Supplemental Information for  
*Why Catholic? Journey through the Catechism*  
*The Profession of Faith: What We Believe*  
To group leaders of  
Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois

By Deacon Al Laabs  
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### Session 8: "The Paschal Mystery"

As a forward to this chapter, I thought I'd share with you a few ideas around the concept of mystery. You'll find at the end of this commentary, a page from a web site by Gerald Hall, SM., who is the Head of the theology department at Australian Catholic University of Brisbane. The page I've copied is just a little reflection on what kind of mystery we are dealing with when we speak of the subject matter of this chapter; or for that matter, the idea of mystery in so many other aspects of our faith (the Trinity, the Incarnation, etc.).

When we use the word mystery in a faith context, we are not talking about a problem that is to be solved like a "Murder She Wrote" episode or some other puzzle whose solution may be evident to others but not ourselves. Rather we are in the realm at the bottom of page 45 of our text when speaking of the Incarnation that "...we are called to surrender our lives to a mystery we cannot fully understand in our lifetime." Note that that is a pretty good definition of what faith means in our lives.

I have often used the analogy of faith as a lens or a looking glass through which we see the world much differently than we would if we were not persons of faith. Faith, after all, allows us to believe in the unseen and the useable and still make sense of the world of reality that streams through our senses. Please feel free to copy Hall's single page reflection on mystery and share with your group. [Gerald Hall's home page](#) is also a great resource since he actually posts his course material on line. What you will find, for example, in his first course on Jesus Christ, are the handouts you would have received if you sat through a three or four credit course in Christology. Whatever use you may make of this idea of mystery, let me encourage you to make certain not only you but members of your group are comfortable with "living the mystery of faith in Christ Jesus" which is our calling and into which we have been baptized. Note that the underlined section above is a hot link to Hall's home page.

### **Suggested Environment**

Note again that there is a recommendation for the USCCA to be a part of each table arrangement. By the time you review this we will have celebrated Ash Wednesday, so it is appropriate to have a violet/purple color displayed as part of your environment. Since I am a firm believer in the power of imagery, let me encourage you to look for some images of the Paschal Lamb, and perhaps print one as part of your environment. Google's image search will produce a number of them of which the following are a few examples:



### **Lifting Our Hearts**

Note that the prayer suggested here is very recognizable as the *Exsultet* which is sung during the Easter vigil after the Easter Candle is brought into church. Usually the lights are left off until the song is completed since the song highlights our movement from the darkness of the tomb to the light of Christ's resurrection. Those words in the second verse: "Christ has conquered! Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes forever!" in a very special way can capture the mystery, the wonder and the glory of the Paschal event.

### **Sharing Our Good News**

Since I had mentioned last session the idea of encouraging group members to read and pray using scripture, I suggest following up on that idea to see how many have done so. I am on a personal mission this Lent to encourage as many as possible to "pray the scripture." We Catholics are so often deficient in our knowledge of scripture (I confess I am too) and I think that the traditional Lenten practices of "prayer, alms, fasting" in terms of the first one would be well served by reading the very words of Christ in the Gospels. We so often hear that prayer should be "conversation with God" but wonder where to begin? Well, we can read God's very words in the Gospels and reflect on them and even talk with God as what we think his words mean for us.

### **Reflection One "Revelation"**

The introductory story of the burned forest may call to mind some of our experiences in the past and certainly to come as we see "controlled burns" by IDOT of sections along the road ways where prairie grass has been planted. Fire is important to release the seeds for new life from certain types of native plants and we have all marveled at how quickly the once blackened areas spring to new life in green—a great metaphor, from ashes to life, from death to life.

Those words "Simply put, the Paschal Mystery is the source of our faith" need to be underlined and understood. It is difficult for us at a distance to recapture what must have been the awe and wonder of Christ's appearance after his brutal death. Remember Thomas? "Put your fingers into my hands and my side." We live in the post resurrection faith era so to speak and we so often say "Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again" during Mass that

the full wonder and **Mystery** of what we acknowledge by those few words rarely takes our breath away as it might have for those early believers. But what a difference the resurrection made as it turned frightened disciples into apostles and missionaries.

So too are those words “We live this Paschal Mystery in our daily lives and in the celebration of every Eucharist...” worthy of being underlined in the second paragraph on page 59. You might just test to get a comfort level that group members see the intimate connection between the idea of Paschal Mystery and the Eucharist. The following is taken from an encyclical letter by Pope John Paul II in 2003:

1. The **Church** draws her life from the **Eucharist**. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of **faith**, but recapitulates *the heart of the **mystery** of the **Church***. In a variety of ways she joyfully experiences the constant fulfillment of the promise: “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20), but in the **Holy Eucharist**, through the changing of **bread** and **wine** into the body and blood of the **Lord**, she rejoices in this **presence** with unique intensity. Ever since **Pentecost**, when the **Church**, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her **heavenly homeland**, the **Divine Sacrament** has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident **hope**.

The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the **Eucharistic sacrifice** is “the source and summit of the Christian life”.<sup>1</sup> “For the **most holy Eucharist** contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our Passover and living bread. Through his own flesh, now made living and life-giving by the **Holy Spirit**, he offers life to men”.<sup>2</sup> Consequently the gaze of the Church is constantly turned to her Lord, present in the Sacrament of the Altar, in which she discovers the full manifestation of his boundless love.

Use this as a link to the [full version of the encyclical, “Ecclesia de Eucharistia.”](#) It is our privilege at every Mass to be linked, trans-temporally, if I may use those words, to the very sacrifice of Christ himself through the Eucharist. So each Mass is not just a representation but is our actual entry into the very Paschal Mystery we celebrate. There was only one Easter in truth but we are privileged to enter into it every time our priest who stands in for Christ offers the “Sacrifice of the Mass.”

A final comment on this section regarding the imagery of the Lamb of God and the Paschal Lamb: You may want to invite someone to tell the story of the Exodus event from the Passover perspective and how the blood of the lamb saved God’s chosen people. Who are God’s chosen people today—we Christians are in a special way the new Israel and we are saved by the blood of the lamb and hence the imagery above of the Paschal Lamb.

### **Scripture: Pondering the Word**

“The Son of Man must undergo great suffering.”

### **Mark: 8: 27-38**

27 <sup>6</sup> Now Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along  
the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"  
28 They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the  
prophets."  
29 And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply,  
"You are the Messiah."  
30 Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.  
31 He began to teach them that the Son of Man <sup>7</sup> must suffer greatly and be rejected  
by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three  
days.  
32 He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.  
33 At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said,  
"Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings  
do."  
34 He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said <sup>8</sup> to them, "Whoever wishes  
to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.  
35 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my  
sake and that of the gospel <sup>9</sup> will save it.  
36 What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?  
37 What could one give in exchange for his life?  
38 Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this faithless and sinful  
generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when he comes in his Father's  
glory with the holy angels."

This scripture is taken from the USCCB web site and the footnotes in the small colored letters can be accessed back to their site. Let me just highlight here the importance of the blue box on p. 60 which has a quote from the USCCA, p. 93. Those words in the box "...we pass over into divine life already here on earth and more completely in heaven" may help understanding the sense of losing our life for the sake of the Gospel only to gain or save our life.

### **Sharing Questions**

I think this question is excellent and would urge you to be patient with your group as they sort out what may be difficult experiences to share. I can give you one from my own experience. My sister lost her husband to suicide almost a year ago and as tragic as that event was it has drawn her other sister and our surviving brother with myself into a closeness that is really difficult for me to put into words. In fact, I am glad I am typing these words to you rather than having to tell them to you. The images of life from death have so many possibilities to name. Like the seeds coming to life after a forest fire, I am reminded of how surprised volcanologists were to discover the spring after the eruption of Mount St. Helens that seedlings

were popping through the surface already of the volcano's debris. Images that touch our personal lives, the loss of loved ones, personal illness, always strike a deeper note.

### **Reflection Two: "God's Divine Plan"**

When we hear the words "divine plan," we sometimes wonder if God could have worked it out differently. In other words, a question that has been asked by theologians over the centuries is "Why did Jesus have to die?" There is a partial answer in the gospel text above in the sense that Christ's entering into death voluntarily is the key to transforming human death into life eternal. Why was this necessary? Again, we live in this world where by entering into and living the mystery, we become transformed by God's saving action for us. If we are to share his life and his death through our own suffering, we enter into the promise of where I am going I will take you with me, to paraphrase St. John.

The cross then as the bottom paragraph emphasizes become not merely a symbol but a means of transforming love for us. You might recall how when we spoke of the sacraments last year we talked about them as both symbols and means. As an example, water in baptism is a symbol of cleansing and new life and at the same time is the very means of our entering that new life in Christ when poured over our heads with the appropriate words. Another example is our understanding of Church as sacrament—both a symbol of Christ's presence in the world and the actuality of his presence as the sacramental mean available to all men in all places.

You may want to focus a question on the paragraph at the top of page 61. It is one thing for us to be willing to accept our own suffering, in other words, to enter into our Lord's transforming cross and resurrection on our own, but should we be doing so for others? It is crucial to see a connection between "building God's kingdom on earth" and the listing of "poor, sick, elderly, weak, etc." as part of our responsibility not only to pick up our cross but to help our brothers and sisters carry theirs. The entire body of Catholic social teachings hangs on our understanding that we have an obligation to be Christ to others too.

Let me suggest that you take a look together as a group at the blue box on the bottom of page 61. In fact, I would suggest that you use the last seven lines which are in quotes there as part of your ending prayer. The part that begins "Let us stretch ourselves..." is really an invitation for us in prayer form to live the Pascal Mystery.

I would encourage your reading of both CCC 645 and CCC 655 and some discussion about the resurrection. I've already touched on the transformative effect of Christ's resurrection and I would, at the risk of a lot of questions, suggest that we take seriously the scriptural case for resurrection meaning that of a glorified body. Our resurrection will parallel in some way with Christ's and I take seriously St. Paul's discussion in Romans 8: 18-25 where he speaks of the earth being renewed "and set free from the bondage of decay." So perhaps we will have glorified bodies in a new heaven and new earth—can be very thought provoking.

Celebrating the Paschal Mystery at every Mass should be the exclamation point on our hope as Christians. I am always prompted to smile when our priest says the following prayer just before he invites us to share the sign of peace: "Deliver us Lord from every evil, and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ." Secure in the promise of our

Lord, we can share with joy a true peace with our fellow believer. And we can return to the world of challenges we live in “without anxiety” because our Lord walks with us.

### **Sharing Our Faith**

Some good questions for contemplation, especially the first one with a paraphrase that might go like this: What are some of the small deaths we’ve experienced, the small things we’ve “died to” that now seem to set us free? That third question in particular may pull us to look beyond our immediate circle or comfort zone to the needs of many others in our community. Certainly the tragedy in Haiti has awakened an empathy and awareness of our connectedness as human beings in a way that few other events have recently. The final question of what can I do to bring hope, etc., to others may lead naturally to the section following below....

### **Living the Good News**

Since I admitted above that I am encouraging as many as possible to “pray the scriptures during Lent,” I am going to repeat the part immediately below from my previous material on session 7. So:

“Given that we all can use a deeper understanding of what the kingdom means and a deeper appreciation for Jesus as our model, I would really suggest encouraging everyone to consider making a commitment to “read and pray the Scripture each day.” Praying the scriptures is one of the oldest traditions we have as Catholics. Praying the scriptures is also known as [Lectio Divina and here is a good link](#) you can share with folks to help them learn about Lectio.”

Since we also have opportunities to pray the stations during this Lent, (as well as other times) may I suggest we turn those events into a reflective journey...when have we fallen, more than three times, during our pilgrimage here. When have we wiped the face of Christ in the person of those who are ill, the weak, the poor, etc?

### **Lifting our Hearts**

As I alluded to above, I would encourage using the last seven lines on page 61 in the blue box together with this prayer, keeping this prayer on p. 63 as the ending. In addition, my usual suggestion below:

You will find me encouraging each group to open up the closing to spontaneous prayer also for all the variety of intentions that we always do carry in our hearts so suggest going around the room/group to ask each person present to pray for a specific intention. Be a good example and start using our CTK format: EG; for an increase and deepening of our awareness of the Paschal Mystery in each and every Mass, let us pray to the Lord. Or, for the grace and

the courage to reach out to others in need, let us pray to the Lord. Group response: Lord, hear our prayer.

Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to [allaabs1770@gmail.com](mailto:allaabs1770@gmail.com)

Note: You may find using this web link a wonderful article that was posted on February 19, 2010 on the Archdiocese of Washington by [Msgr. Charles Pope on the subject of reverencing mystery](#). The page following this one is taken from Fr. Halls' material on his web site as I mentioned above and would encourage you're copying it and sharing it with your group.....

## Question of Mystery

- To speak of the *mystery* of Jesus Christ is to acknowledge, first of all, that human life itself is mystery. Human beings are not just minds and bodies; they are also spirit. God is the supreme Mystery and, as St. Paul remarks, it is only 'in God that we move and live and have our being'. Mystery, then, invades every dimension of our lives including our knowledge of ourselves and our world. Mystery is at the heart of our relationships with others. If we ever get to the point where we say of someone that 'there is no mystery there', we can be sure that we are failing to appreciate the depth, the beauty, the pain, the reality of who that person is. We are effectively saying that 'God is not there'. This is why the more we come to know and appreciate another person, the more we become aware of the depth of mystery and the reality of God in that person.
- The mystery of the person of Jesus is even more profound on account of the kinds of human faith-responses that he inspired in the disciples of his own day and in Christian believers throughout the centuries. Of course, people touched by the Jesus-story--then as now--respond in different ways and at different levels. However, it remains true that the story of Jesus continues to capture the imagination of people, to inspire new vision and hope. These people feel that Jesus somehow enables them to be more authentically human and to live their lives with greater openness to the divine mystery.
- How is it, then, that this first century Jew from Palestine came to exert such influence on human beings and world history? Evidently, there is no simple answer to this question. In fact, the best answers are not expressed in words, but in the lives and deeds, the witness and testimony, of Jesus' followers. In other words, it is only by risking our own lives and entering into the mystery of the Jesus-story that we can begin to understand something of the profound meaning of his life, death and resurrection for us and our world.

Gerald Hall sm