Contents

Introduction 7

Section 1: God's Plan for Salvation: The Big Picture

The Goodness of Creation 10

1. The Primeval History 11
2. Creation Reflects the Glory of God 14
3. Human Beings: The Summit of Creation 17
4. The Garden of Eden: The Perfect Life 21

The Fall from Grace 25

5. Adam and Eve's Disobedience 26
6. Original Sin: A Consequence of the Fall 29
7. Satan and the Fallen Angels 31

The Path to Restoration 36

8. God's Promise to Adam and Eve 37
9. The Old Testament Covenants: Part One 41
10. The Old Testament Covenants: Part Two 45
11. Covenant Keeping: Successes and Failures 48
12. The Growing Messianic Hope 53

Section 2: Jesus Christ's Mission Is Revealed

The Word Became Flesh 57

13. God Prepares the Way: The Roles of Mary and Joseph. . 58
14. The Gospels and Christological Prophecies 62
15. Why the Word Became Flesh 64
16. The Titles Say It All 68

The Redemptive Nature of Christ's Earthly Life 72

17. The Luminous Mysteries 73
18. The Poverty of Christ 78
19. The Obedience of Christ 82
20. Christ's Moral Preaching 85
21. Christ's Healings 89

Section 3: God's Plan for Salvation Is Fulfilled

The Suffering and Death of Jesus 95

22. The Events of the Passion 96
23. Who Killed Jesus? 101
24. The Meaning of the Cross 105

The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus 111

25. The Events of the Resurrection 112
26. What Is the Resurrection? 116
27. The Significance of Christ's Resurrection 121
28. The Ascension 124
29. The Significance of Christ's Ascension 127

Redeemed by Christ: Our Eternal Destiny 131

30. Saved from 132
31. Saved for 134
32. Our Judgment by God. 139
33. Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory 143

Section 4: The Paschal Mystery and Your Life

Living as a Disciple 150

34. Our Call to Holiness. 151
35. Participating in Christ's Priestly Ministry. 155
36. Participating in Christ's Prophetic Ministry 159
37. Participating in Christ's Kingly Ministry. 164

Suffering and the Paschal Mystery 169

38. Making Sense of Suffering 170
39. Is Accepting Suffering a Sign of Weakness? 174
40. Finding Strength in Times of Suffering 177

Section 5: Prayer and the Paschal Mystery

The Fundamentals of Prayer 183

41. Why We Pray 184
42. The Forms of Prayer 187
43. The Expressions of Prayer. 192
44. Overcoming Obstacles to Prayer 196
45. Ignatian Gospel Meditation 201

Praying the Triduum 206

46. Introduction to the Triduum 207
47. Holy Thursday 210
48. Good Friday 215
49. The Easter Vigil 219

Glossary 225
Index 234
Acknowledgments 246

Part 2

The Redemptive Nature of Christ's Earthly Life

The Father's saving plan is revealed through his Son, Jesus Christ, and fully understood with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All of Jesus' life teaches us about God's saving plan: his poverty, his humility, his prayer, whom he lived with, whom he called to be his disciples, his teaching and preaching, his healings, his exorcisms . . . everything.

Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension most clearly reveal his and his Father's glory (see John 13:31). These events, which we identify with the Paschal Mystery, the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation, are the focus of the next section. In this part we focus on how the mystery of redemption is already at work in the words and actions of Jesus that precede his Passion.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- "The Luminous Mysteries" (page 73)
- "The Poverty of Christ" (page 78)
- "The Obedience of Christ" (page 82)
- "Christ's Moral Preaching" (page 85)
- "Christ's Healings" (page 89)

17 The Luminous Mysteries

In 2002 Pope John Paul II issued the apostolic letter "*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*" ("The Rosary of the Virgin Mary"). In the letter he recommends a change in the way the Rosary is prayed. In addition to the three traditional sets of mysteries that are meditated on when praying the Rosary—the joyful mysteries, the sorrowful mysteries, and the glorious mysteries—the Pope recommends another set of mysteries, which he calls the luminous mysteries or the mysteries of light. These five mysteries are significant moments in Jesus' public ministry where he is most clearly identified as the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God. In these events he is "the light of the world" (John 9:5) shining for all to see!

The Luminous Mysteries

The five luminous mysteries of the Rosary highlight events in Jesus' public ministry where he is most clearly revealed as the light of the world.

Mystery	Scripture Passage	Description
The Baptism in the Jordan	Matthew 3:13–17, Mark 1:9–11, Luke 3:21–22, John 1:31–34	The voice of the Father declares Jesus the beloved Son.
The Wedding at Cana	John 2:1–12	Christ changes water into wine, his first public miracle.
The Proclamation of the Kingdom	Mark 2:15 is a good summary.	Jesus calls to conversion (see Mark 1:15) and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him.
The Transfiguration	Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36	The glory of the Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ.
The Institution of the Eucharist	Matthew 26:26–30, Mark 14:22–26, Luke 22:14–23, 1 Corinthians 11:23–25	Jesus offers his Body and Blood as food under the signs of bread and wine.

In his letter Pope John Paul says, "Each of these mysteries is *a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus*" (21). Think of the Kingdom of God as that "place" (it really is not a place in the geographic sense) where the fullness of God's grace is present and human beings are restored to full communion with God and with one another. The full realization of the **Kingdom of God** is the end result of God's saving plan. What the Pope is saying is that Jesus does not just talk about God's saving plan, he makes it real. When Jesus speaks and acts, the Kingdom of God is present to those who listen to him and believe in him. So let us consider what the five mysteries of light reveal about the Kingdom of God and the Paschal Mystery.

The Baptism in the Jordan

The account of Jesus' Baptism is told in all four Gospels, which in itself is a sign of its importance. Jesus is baptized by his cousin John. John prepares the way for Jesus, and his ministry is seen as a fulfillment of a prophecy by Isaiah (see Mark 1:2–3). John does this by urging people to reform their lives and turn away from sin. As a sign of their cleansing and renewal, he baptized people in the waters of the Jordan River.

The Baptism of Jesus is the first Glorious Mystery. Since Jesus is without sin, why did he choose to be baptized?

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Even though Jesus was free from all sin, he came to John to be baptized at the beginning of his public ministry. In doing this he showed his willingness to completely identify with the human condition. By identifying himself with human sin, Jesus Christ became the perfect offering to save us from our sin. Saint Paul put it this way: "For our sake he [the Father] made him [the Son] to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus' Baptism is an example of his perfect obedience to his heavenly Father (see "The Obedience of Christ" article). His Baptism also reveals the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The three Divine Persons of the

Trinity work together in the plan of salvation. The Holy Spirit descends upon the Son in the form of a dove and the Father pronounces, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). As Jesus' public ministry begins, the first Luminous Mystery shows that Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity and he has come to save us from our sins.

The Wedding at Cana

The second Luminous Mystery is recorded in the Gospel of John only. It is a few days after Jesus' Baptism, and Jesus is attending a wedding feast with his new disciples. When the wedding party runs out of wine (which would have been an embarrassing situation for the hosts), Jesus' mother asks him to help. You probably know Jesus' response; he turns the water in six large ceremonial jars into excellent wine. The Gospel of John tells us that "Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him" (2:11).

John's Gospel contains only seven miracles. Each of these is a sign that reveals Jesus as the Son of God. This first sign shows his power over creation. His mother already believed in him, because she asked him to do something miraculous. But now his disciples begin to believe too. The second Luminous Mystery recalls the time in which Christ began his public ministry.

The Proclamation of the Kingdom

The third Luminous Mystery is not just one event or one teaching. Through many miracles and many teachings, Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of God is at hand. His very first words in the Gospel of Mark are these: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (1:15). The prophets had prophesied about the coming of the Kingdom of God (see Isaiah 2:2–4, Micah 4:1–4) when original justice and holiness would be restored and people would live in peace with God and one another. They prophesied that a messiah would usher in this kingdom by bringing good news to the poor and freedom to captives (see Isaiah 61:1–2).



Kingdom of God
The culmination or goal of God's plan of salvation, the Kingdom of God is announced by the Gospel and present in Jesus Christ. The Kingdom is the reign or rule of God over the hearts of people and, as a consequence of that, the development of a new social order based on unconditional love. The fullness of God's Kingdom will not be realized until the end of time. Also called the Reign of God or the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus fulfilled these ancient prophecies. His words were good news for the poor and challenging news for the wealthy (see "The Poverty of Christ" article). He lived a life of unconditional love and forgiveness, even forgiving his torturers and killers. He called everyone to forsake hate, revenge, violence, and greed. He helped the blind to see and the lame to walk. He brought freedom to those held captive by demons, disease, sin, and even death. Wherever he went, the Kingdom of God was present for those who put their faith in him. The third Luminous Mystery reveals that the Kingdom of God is present in Jesus Christ, and his life brings salvation to our world.

The Transfiguration

The fourth Luminous Mystery is captured in all three of the synoptic Gospels. The event happens soon after Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (see Matthew 16:16). Jesus responds to this act of faith by predicting his Passion, death, and Resurrection (see verse 21). It would seem that Jesus wanted to be clear that as Messiah he would not be a warrior leader but a suffering servant. This was hard for the disciples to hear (see verse 22).

It was just a few days later that Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the top of a mountain by themselves. There Jesus was transfigured and the three disciples saw him in his glory; Christ's face and clothes shone like the sun and both Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ (see Matthew 17:1–3). To top things off, the Father's voice came from the clouds saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (verse 5).

To faithful Jews, Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented the message of all the prophets. Their appearance with Jesus was a sign that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets. The Transfiguration reassured Peter, James, and John that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. It strengthened their faith before the ordeal of Jesus' Passion and death. The fourth Luminous Mystery reveals that Jesus was the one they had been waiting for, but they would not fully understand the plan of salvation until the principal events of the Paschal Mystery—Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension—had come to their conclusion.

Passover
The night the Lord passed over the houses of the Israelites marked by the blood of the lamb, and spared the firstborn sons from death. It also is the feast that celebrates the deliverance of the Chosen People from bondage in Egypt and the Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Eucharist, the
Also called the Mass or Lord's Supper, and based on a word for "thanksgiving," it is the central Christian liturgical celebration, established by Jesus at the Last Supper. In the Eucharist the sacrificial death and Resurrection of Jesus are both remembered and renewed. The term sometimes refers specifically to the consecrated bread and wine that have become the Body and Blood of Christ.

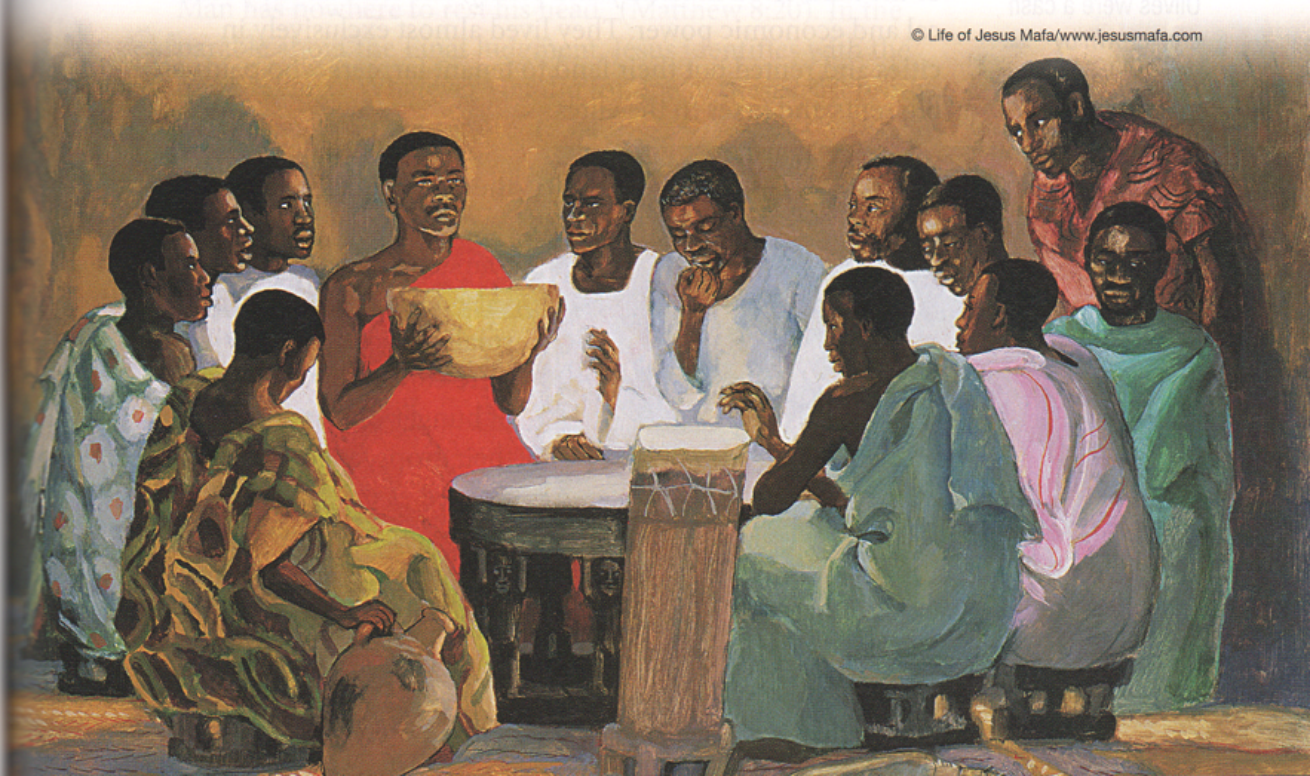
institute
To introduce, establish, or inaugurate.

The Institution of the Eucharist

The fifth Luminous Mystery is testified to in the synoptic Gospels and in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians and is strongly implied in the Gospel of John. These all testify that soon before his death, at a **Passover** meal, Jesus turned ordinary bread and wine into his sacred Body and Blood and shared these with the Twelve Apostles. Then he commanded them to "do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). This was the first celebration of the **Eucharist,** which today we also call the Mass. By **instituting** the Eucharist, Jesus gave the Church a great gift—the gift of himself—present to us in his Body and Blood.

This Luminous Mystery, the institution of the Eucharist, reveals that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, whose life is given that we might be freed from sin and death. Just as the original Paschal Lamb was offered to free the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt, so through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension, Jesus' life is offered up for us. This is the core of the Paschal Mystery, which we enter into every time we participate in the Eucharist. This is why "the Eucharist is the heart and summit of the Church's life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all on the cross to his Father; by this sacrifice he pours out the graces of salvation on his Body which is the Church" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1407). ✝

Notice how the color of Jesus' tunic stands out in this image of the Last Supper. What symbolic meaning might his red garment have?


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18 The Poverty of Christ

redeem, Redeemer, redemption
From the Latin *redemptio*, meaning "a buying back"; to redeem something is to pay the price for its freedom. In the Old Testament, it refers to Yahweh's deliverance of Israel and, in the New Testament, to Christ's deliverance of all Christians from the forces of sin. Christ our Redeemer paid the price to free us from the slavery of sin and bring about our redemption.

In the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Judas rhetorically asks Jesus why he chose to reveal himself the way he did. Why be born and live in an unimportant place? Why be born in a poor and unimportant family? Wouldn't Jesus' message be more easily accepted if he were born into an important family? Wouldn't it be more easily heard if he went to Rome and preached and lived in the center of the world's politics and economics?

These are important questions because everything in Jesus' life does indeed teach us about God's plan for our **redemption.** Let us start with Jesus' humble beginnings. There is a reason he was born into poverty and lived in relative poverty—it has something to teach us and will lead us more deeply into the Paschal Mystery.

Elites and Non-Elites

In the United States, we are used to a socioeconomic system where there is a minority of wealthy people, a minority of poor people, and a majority of middle-class people. In Jesus' time there were basically two economic classes: the elites (the wealthy) and the non-elites (the poor). The elites were a very small minority of the population, but they owned most of the land, lived in luxury and plenty, and held all the political and economic power. They lived almost exclusively in cities and rented out their land to tenant farmers who paid big rents and taxes to the elites.



Olives were a cash crop grown by wealthy landowners in Jesus' time.

© Saint Mary's Press/Brian Singer-Towns

The non-elites were the vast majority of the people. They were lucky to make just enough to survive. If they owned a small plot of land, they were constantly in danger of hunger or starvation if their crops failed. Many worked as day laborers for the wealthy landowners who grew **cash crops,** not **subsistence crops.** Some

non-elites were "self-employed," but they had to pay high fees (to fish, for example) or rents (to use someone's fishing boat, for example). They all had to pay high taxes to support both the elite Jewish leaders and the elite of the Roman Empire. Many non-elites sold themselves into slavery to work for the elites because they were at least usually assured of food and a place to sleep.

This was Jesus' world. The Gospel of Luke emphasizes Jesus' poverty. First, it shows Mary and Joseph under the power of the elites of the Roman Empire. At the order of the Emperor, Caesar Augustus, they have to make the difficult trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem even though it is late in Mary's pregnancy (see 2:1–5). The only reason for this trip is for a census, to determine the amount of taxes the Romans would collect. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem emphasizes Mary and Joseph's low status: "She wrapped him [Jesus] in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (verse 7).

You might think that in his life Jesus would show us how to get ahead by working hard to become an elite. Instead he does just the opposite; he embraces the poverty he is born into. He resists Satan's temptation to become an elite and replies to Satan, "One does not live by bread alone" (Luke 4:4). When a scribe wishes to follow him, Jesus warns the scribe about the poverty involved in following Jesus: "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head" (Matthew 8:20). In the parable about the Final Judgment, Jesus identifies with the poor, saying, "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (25:40).



cash crops
Crops that are grown to make the most wealth for the landowner but typically do not provide the basic food needed for the majority of people. In ancient Israel examples of these crops would be grapes, olives, and wheat.

subsistence crops
Crops that provide the basic food to feed the most people. In ancient Israel examples of these crops would be barley, beans, and figs.

Catholic Wisdom

Mother Teresa on Wealth

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta worked with the poorest of the poor in India for over fifty years. She once said:

> I think it must be harder to be happy if you are wealthy because you may find it difficult to see God: you'll have too many other things to think about. However, if God has given you this gift of wealth, then use it for his purpose—help others, help the poor, create jobs, give work to others. Don't waste your wealth.

Material Poverty and Poverty of Heart

poverty of heart
The recognition of our deep need for God and the commitment to put God above everything else in life, particularly above the accumulation of material wealth.

Jesus embraced material poverty for one simple reason; he was teaching that we do not achieve salvation through material wealth. This was a popular belief at the time. Many Jews believed that material wealth was a sign that you were blessed by God and living a righteous life. Jesus taught just the opposite: "Blessed are you who are poor, / for the kingdom of God is yours. . . . But woe to you who are rich, / for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6:20,24).

Not only did Jesus teach that God had not abandoned the poor, but he also taught that the elites, the wealthy, have a special obligation to help the poor. There are several Gospel stories about this:

- the parable of the rich young man (see Matthew 19:16–24)
- the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (see Luke 16:19–31)
- the parable of the Final Judgment (see Matthew 25:31–46)
- the parable of whom to invite to eat with you (see Luke 14:12–14)
- the parable of the wedding banquet (see Luke 14:15–24)

Jesus' life and teaching revealed that **poverty of heart** (sometimes called spiritual poverty) is necessary for us to be

Consider the two homes in this image. Do people seem happier in the large, wealthier home or in the smaller home?



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truly in communion with God. Those people with poverty of heart recognize their need for God. This is why Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). Without God we are truly empty and alone; no amount of material wealth can fill that void. In fact, material wealth often gets in the way of our recognizing our need for God. For this reason Jesus warns us that material wealth can be dangerous to our salvation: "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23). He calls us to be unattached to material wealth. Material wealth is not bad in and of itself, but it is very easy to let it take the place of God in our lives.

Money can be a very touchy subject. Our culture places a great deal of importance on having it. We often measure our worth by how much we have. We get stressed when we don't think we have enough—which for many people is most of the time. We sometimes compromise our values and even our physical and emotional well-being in order to get more. The poverty of Jesus challenges us to put our trust in God, not in money. When we do this, we are one step closer to the Kingdom of God. ✝

Gospel Teaching on Poverty of Heart

There are many places in the four Gospels in which Jesus teaches about the importance of poverty of heart.

Gospel Passage	Summary
Matthew 6:19–21,24	"store up treasures in heaven" and "no one can serve two masters"
Matthew 13:44–46	treasure buried in the field, the pearl of great price
Mark 12:41–44	widow's mite
Luke 12:15–21	parable of the rich fool
Luke 12:22–32	do not worry about what to eat or what to wear
Luke 12:33–34	"where your treasure is, there also will your heart be"

19 The Obedience of Christ

Obedience is a topic that can irritate many people. We sometimes rebel or complain when we are told what to do by people in positions of authority. Part of our resistance to the idea of obedience is probably rooted in our historical struggle against unjust situations. For example, the United States was born when our ancestors rejected the English monarchy and disobeyed unfair laws. So why then is obedience such an important value to our faith?

The answer lies in whom you are obedient to. We owe our obedience to God, our Creator, who calls us back to full, loving communion with him. To redeem Adam's disobedience and to be an example for us, the Son of God lived a life of perfect obedience to his Father.

Redeeming Adam's Disobedience

Our first parents disobeyed God, and through their disobedience brought sin and death into the world. To rescue us from this situation, the Son of God assumed a human nature, becoming our perfect mediator. Through Christ's perfect obedience to his Father's will, he restores human nature to its original holiness. Says Saint Paul, "For just as through the disobedience of one person the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of one the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). This is why we call Jesus the New Adam.

Jesus' greatest act of obedience for the first Christians was his willingness to assume a human nature. They even had a hymn about this that Paul quotes in Philippians 2:5–8:

> Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,
>
> Who, though he was in the form of God,
> did not regard equality with God
> something to be grasped.
> Rather, he emptied himself,
> taking the form of a slave,
> coming in human likeness;
> and found human in appearance,
> he humbled himself,
> becoming obedient to death,
> even death on a cross.



This painting portrays Jesus' suffering in the garden at Gethsemane. What are the angels showing Jesus that causes him such agony? When does obedience require you to make a personal sacrifice?

© Brooklyn Museum/Corbis

Jesus' Example of Obedience

Paul introduces the Philippians' hymn with these directions: "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus." Jesus' obedience to his Father's will is the model for us of how to live a life of obedience to God. First, Jesus was obedient in his human relationships, respecting the order his Father created. We read how as a child he respected his earthly parents: "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them" (Luke 2:51). Tradition teaches us that in the hidden years of Jesus' life, which are not recorded in the Gospels, he remained obedient to Mary and Joseph.

Second, Jesus was obedient to his heavenly Father. In the garden at Gethsemane, we see his obedience even when it would lead to torture and death. Knowing that his Passion and death are coming, Jesus prays that he might escape this ordeal. But he concludes his prayer with a commitment to obediently follow his Father's will: "If it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!" (Matthew 26:42). We should never assume that obedience always came easily to Jesus and that he never struggled with it.

We are called to follow Jesus' example to be obedient to his Father's will, not because God wants to control us as a puppeteer controls puppets but because God is a perfectly loving parent who wants what is best for us. When we are obedient to him, we grow in holiness, which is to say we grow to be in closer communion with him. The First Letter of Peter gives excellent advice:

> Like obedient children, do not act in compliance with the desires of your former ignorance but, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written, "Be holy because I [am] holy." (1:14–16) ✝

Christ Our Teacher

Saint Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–211) traveled from Greece, to Italy, to Palestine, and finally to Egypt to find Christian teachers to instruct him in the faith. Here is an excerpt on his thought about Christ as our Teacher:

> The Word by whom all things were made, has appeared as our Teacher; and he, who bestowed life upon us in the beginning, when, as our Creator, he formed us, now that he has appeared as our Teacher, has taught us to live well so that, afterwards, as God, he might furnish us abundantly with eternal life.
>
> (Exhortation to the Greeks)



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20 Christ's Moral Preaching

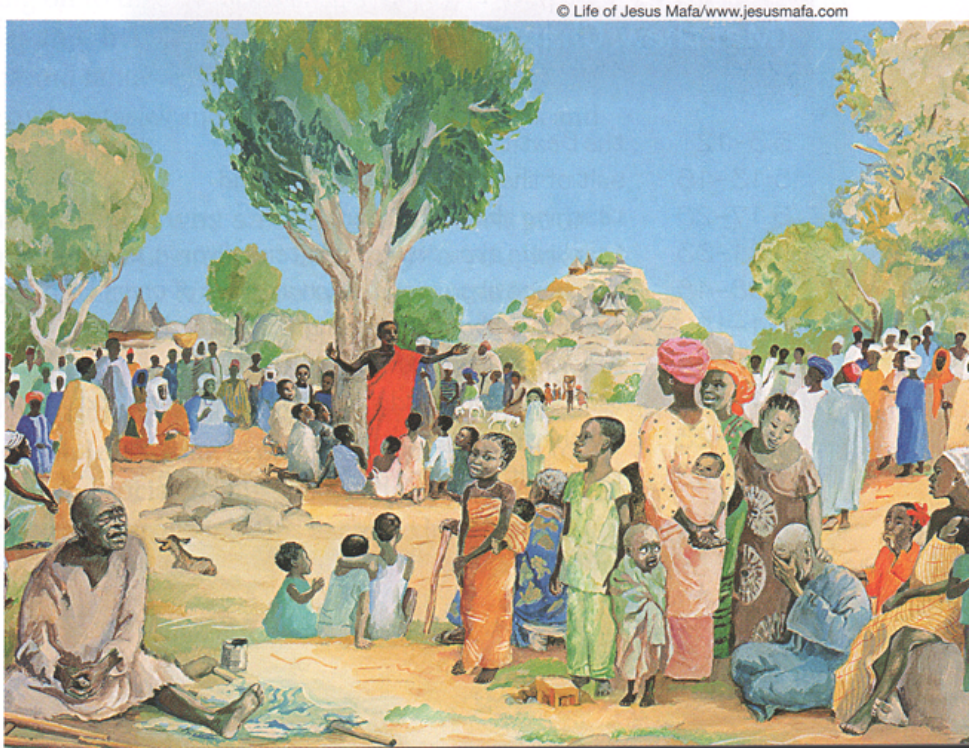
Christ's moral teaching is perhaps the section of the Gospels that Christians struggle with most. For in his moral teaching, he goes beyond the letter of the Old Law to challenge us to live the deeper moral truths the Old Law is intended to teach us, thus revealing its ultimate meaning. In his life and teaching, he perfectly fulfills the Old Law and ushers in the New Law. Even more, through the Paschal Mystery, he redeems us from all our sins against the Law. Living the New Law is a return to original holiness and justice. It can only be lived with the sanctifying grace given by the Holy Spirit through Baptism.

The New Law is part of the Paschal Mystery; through the New Law, Christ redeems us by purifying our **conscience.** When we live according to the New Law, our moral choices are not based on only what is good or bad for us, or based on **legalistic** morality, but are based on what truly brings us into full communion with God and with one another. Jesus sums up the New Law in two great commandments: "The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:29–31). In this article we take a closer look at Jesus' expression of the New Law in the Sermon on the Mount.

conscience
The "interior voice" of a person, a God-given sense of the law of God. Moral conscience leads people to understand themselves as responsible for their actions, and prompts them to do good and avoid evil. To make good judgments, one needs to have a well-formed conscience.

legalistic
To focus strictly on what the law requires without considering the truth the law is intended to promote. Jesus taught that all law must be an expression of love for God and love for our neighbor.

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Jesus teaches his followers how to live as true children of God. What part of Jesus' moral teaching is most challenging for you?

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew, chapters 5–7. Some have called the Sermon on the Mount a kind of "mini-Gospel" because it is a summary of the key teachings of Jesus. We are going to focus on three of the "You have heard it said" statements in chapter five of the sermon. These statements are good examples of how Jesus purifies our conscience by teaching us the true meaning of God's Law. If you haven't read the Sermon on the Mount recently, it would be good to do so before reading the rest of this article.

"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matthew 5:21–22).

The Old Law commands us not to kill. This may seem obvious, but recall the story of Cain and Abel. The first sin after the Fall was murder. What the Old Law is meant to teach us is that thoughts and attitudes—anger, hatred, lack of forgiveness, revenge—that lead to violence are wrong in themselves. They have no place in the Kingdom of God. They will not lead to love and communion with other people and with God.

Outline of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, Chapters 5–7)

5:3–12	the Beatitudes
5:13–16	salt of the earth, light of the world
5:17–20	teaching about the Law
5:21–33	teachings about anger, adultery, divorce, and oaths
5:38–48	teachings about retaliation and love of enemies
6:1–18	teachings about almsgiving, prayer, and fasting
6:19–34	teachings about poverty of heart
7:1–12	teachings about judging others, relying on God, the Golden Rule
7:13–23	teachings on discipleship
7:24–29	the result of acting on Jesus' teachings

Does this mean that every time you have an angry thought you are sinning? No, those thoughts are part of life, especially as we are on the journey to perfect holiness. What is sinful is to hang on to feelings of anger and hurt; letting them grow inside us until they become thoughts of revenge. At that point we are only one step away from actually hurting the other person. The New Law calls us to let go of our anger and replace it with forgiveness and compassion, even for those who hurt us.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27–28).

The Old Law commands us not to have sex outside of Marriage. Again Jesus says this is just a minimum requirement. The Old Law is meant to teach us that the thoughts and attitudes that lead to sexual promiscuity are wrong in themselves. Christ's New Law commands us to live lives of **chastity** and not to think or act in ways that might lead us to sexual sin.

This is a difficult commandment to live out in our culture. Sexuality and sexual suggestion are often used as marketing techniques, and we are constantly bombarded with sexual messages. This makes it difficult to go through a day without having a sexual thought! Again this doesn't mean that having a brief sexual thought is sinful. What is sinful is to hang on to those thoughts, letting them grow into sexual fantasies and then convincing yourself that acting on those thoughts and fantasies is okay. The New Law asks us to let go of sexual fantasies and avoid sexual temptations and live chaste lives.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (5:43–44).

Jesus quotes Leviticus 19:18, which says that you should love your neighbor as yourself (it does not say anything about hating enemies). In Jesus' time people were fiercely loyal to their own family and social groups, distrusting everyone who was outside those groups. By his example Jesus shows



chastity
The virtue by which people are able to successfully and healthfully integrate their sexuality into their total person; recognized as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Also one of the vows of religious life.

them a different way of living. He gathers people together who aren't blood relatives or even from the same social groups. He brings together fisherman, tax collectors, and zealots; these people usually distrust one another, but Jesus teaches them how to love one another.

This doesn't seem to be much different today. People often fear and distrust people who come from somewhere else. Sometimes cultural differences lead to hatred and attacks on people and their way of life. Jesus tells us these attitudes are wrong and sinful. His New Law asks us to love everyone, even



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Why is caring for the earth an important moral issue?

Live It!

Loving Beyond Boundaries

Jesus gathered people from many different walks of life who probably, in most circumstances, hated one another. Similarly, in many schools today, certain social groups dislike and avoid one another because of their race, religion, economic status, or even something as trivial as involvement in particular extracurricular activities. Jesus saw beyond the external ways people define one another. He saw the common humanity of the fisherman and the tax collector, the Jew and the Gentile, the prostitute and the Pharisee, the zealot and the Roman soldier. And he loved them all.

Christ also asks us to look beyond the things that divide us. Though it is easy to love people we like, God requires more from us. Christians are called to love and respect athletes, band members, cheerleaders, slackers, straight-A students, and artists—everyone—whether we like them or not.

those who aren't like us and those who attack us. Through prayer, and with the help of God, we will find ways to overcome misunderstanding, distrust, and even hatred.

Jesus' moral teaching shows us what our relationship with God and others must be to participate in the Kingdom of God. Through Baptism we receive the grace that is necessary to live according to the New Law. Through the other Sacraments, we receive additional graces that strengthen us as we journey to perfection in our lives as true children of God, members of the Body of Christ, and citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. ✝

21 Christ's Healings

Being sick is no fun. Illness makes our daily routine even more challenging, if not impossible. It often isolates us from other people. People with lifelong disabilities must face these things every day. And serious illness and disease force us to face death itself, which can be frightening for many people. But remember, this is not the way God intended us to be; this is the result of Original Sin.

In his public ministry, Jesus performs many miraculous healings. He cures the blind, the deaf, and the lame. He brings health and wholeness to lepers so they can rejoin the community. He casts out evil spirits from those who are possessed. Jesus has great compassion for those who are suffering and outcast. But he doesn't try to heal everyone, even though there is great need. Have you ever wondered why Jesus did not make healing his full-time ministry? The answer is that Jesus' mission was bigger than just being a miracle worker.

Jesus' healings are a sign that the Father's plan of salvation is being fulfilled. Every healing is a sign that Christ is restoring the wholeness of body, mind, and spirit he intended people to have. The healings are also signs that Jesus is the Messiah who is making the Kingdom of God present to all those who believe in him. Jesus himself points to this. When asked, "Are you the one to come, or should we look for another?" he replies, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and



exorcism
The act of freeing someone from demonic possession. Exorcisms are also part of the Church's worship and prayer life, calling on the name of Christ to protect us from the power of Satan.

the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (Matthew 11:3–5). Finally, Jesus' healings are a promise that in the Kingdom of Heaven we will all be made whole, physically and spiritually, and there will be no more suffering or sickness or disease for all God's holy ones.

Sickness and Health in Biblical Cultures

The culture Jesus lived in did not make the distinction that we do between the natural world and the spiritual world. Illness and disability were most often associated with impurity and sin. When someone is sick today, we look for a natural cause. When someone was ill at the time of Jesus, people looked for a supernatural or spiritual cause. In the Book of Job, Job's friends were convinced that his sufferings were sent by God as punishment for sins. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:2). Jesus denies that suffering is a direct punishment for sin (see 9:3, Luke 13:1–5). But he does

Pray It!

Comfort for the Sick

Being sick is awful. We stay at home to keep others from getting sick. We are cut off from our friends. We fall behind in our schoolwork. We then get worried and upset about everything we have to do after we get better. It can be depressing! It is obvious that our physical health has an impact on our mental and spiritual health. When the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is celebrated, the priest offers the following prayer after the person has been anointed with oil:

> Father in heaven,
> through this holy anointing
> grant (name) comfort in his / her suffering.
> When he / she is afraid, give him / her courage,
> when afflicted, give him / her patience,
> when dejected, afford him / her hope,
> and when alone, assure him / her of the support of your holy people.
> We ask this through Christ our Lord.
> Amen.

Next time you are ill, offer a similar prayer to God, asking for comfort, courage, patience, hope, and support.



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seem to acknowledge that there is a relationship between sin and illness. Before he heals the paralytic, he asks the scribes, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk?'" (Matthew 9:5).

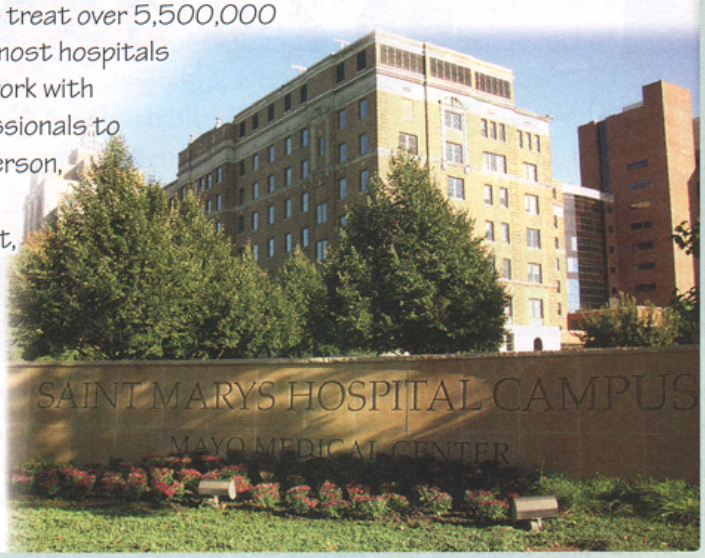
It was also believed that illness and disease were the direct result of demonic possession. Some of the Gospel accounts make this connection. Luke tells about a woman who was crippled by a spirit for eighteen years (see 13:11). In Matthew a boy is having seizures and Jesus casts a demon from him, curing him (see 17:14–18). For these reasons we probably should not see Jesus' physical healings and his **exorcisms** as two different things. They were all miracles in which Jesus restored people to both physical and spiritual wholeness at the same time. ✝

Imagine the joy that comes from being healed of a serious mental or physical illness. Why is such healing a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God?

The Church Continues Christ's Healing Ministry

In our culture today, we see a greater connection between our spiritual health and our physical health. People are more prone to physical illness when they are feeling stressed, depressed, and yes, when they are engaged in sinful activities, such as sexual promiscuity and illegal drug use. And studies show that people of faith and prayer, people who are part of a loving family and community, often recover more quickly than those who are not.

The Church supports the work of doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals to continue the healing ministry of Christ. In fact, many of the hospitals around the world were founded by Catholic religious orders. In the United States, there are over six hundred Catholic hospitals with over 500,000 staff who treat over 5,500,000 patients a year. At most hospitals Catholic **chaplains** work with other medical professionals to care for the whole person, both body and soul. And, most important, the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick makes Christ's healing grace available through the power of the Holy Spirit.



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chaplains
Specially prepared priests to whom the spiritual care of a special group of people, such as hospital patients, military personnel, or migrants, is entrusted.

Review

1. What are the luminous mysteries?
2. What was the Transfiguration a sign of?
3. Describe the elites and the non-elites at the time of Jesus.
4. How are material poverty and poverty of the heart related to each other?
5. How are Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience related?
6. How does the New Law of Christ purify our conscience?
7. What was the commandment "You shall not commit adultery" meant to teach us? What deeper insight does the New Law give us in relation to this commandment?
8. What are Christ's healings a sign of?
9. What did people in biblical times see as the causes of illness and disease?