



JESUS CHRIST
*His sacrifice on the cross for the
redemption of the world*
Texts from the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

CHRIST OFFERED HIMSELF TO HIS FATHER FOR OUR SINS

The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus is at the centre of the Gospel

The Paschal mystery of Christ's cross and Resurrection stands at the centre of the Good News that the apostles, and the Church following them, are to proclaim to the world. God's saving plan was accomplished "once for all" (Heb 9:26) by the redemptive death of his Son Jesus Christ. (571)

The Church remains faithful to the interpretation of "all the Scriptures" that Jesus gave both before and after his Passover: "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Lk 24:26-27,44-45) Jesus' sufferings took their historical, concrete form from the fact that he was "rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes," who handed "him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified." (Mk 8:31; Mt 20:19) (572)

Faith can therefore try to examine the circumstances of Jesus' death, faithfully handed on by the Gospels and illuminated by other historical sources, the better to understand the meaning of the Redemption. (573)

Christ's whole life is an offering to the Father

The Son of God, who came down "from heaven, not to do [his] own will, but the will of him who sent [him]", (Jn 6:38) said on coming into the world, "Lo, I have come to do your will, O God." "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Heb 10:5-10) From the first moment of his Incarnation the Son embraces the Father's plan of divine salvation in his redemptive mission: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work." (Jn 4:34)

The sacrifice of Jesus "for the sins of the whole world" expresses his loving communion with the Father. (1 Jn 2:2) "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life," said the Lord, "[for] I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father." (Jn 10:17; 14:31) (606)

The desire to embrace his Father's plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus' whole life, for his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation. And so he asked, "And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour." (Jn 12:27) And again, "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?" (Jn 18:11) From the cross, just before "It is finished," he said, "I thirst." (Jn 19:30; 19:28) (607)

"The Lamb who takes away the sin of the world"

After agreeing to baptise him along with the sinners, John the Baptist looked at Jesus and pointed him out as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (Jn 1:29) By doing so, he reveals that Jesus is at the same time the suffering Servant who silently allows himself to be led to the slaughter and who bears the sin of the multitudes, and also the Paschal Lamb, the symbol of Israel's redemption at the first Passover. Christ's whole life expresses his mission: "to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45) (608)

Jesus freely embraced the Father's redeeming love

By embracing in his human heart the Father's love for men, Jesus "loved them to the end," for "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (Jn 13:1; 15:13) In suffering and death his humanity became the free and perfect instrument of his divine love which desires the salvation of men. Indeed, out of love for his Father and for men, whom the Father wants to save, Jesus freely accepted his Passion and death: "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." (Jn 10:18). Hence the sovereign freedom of God's Son as he went out to his death. (609)

At the Last Supper Jesus anticipated the free offering of his life

Jesus gave the supreme expression of his free offering of himself at the meal shared with the twelve Apostles "on the night he was betrayed." (Roman Missal) On the eve of his Passion, while still free, Jesus transformed this Last Supper with the apostles into the memorial of his voluntary offering to the Father for the salvation of men: "This is my body which is *given* for you." "This is my blood of the covenant, which is *poured out* for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Lk 22:19) (610)

The Eucharist that Christ institutes at that moment will be the memorial of his sacrifice. Jesus includes the apostles in his own offering and bids them perpetuate it. By doing so, the Lord institutes his apostles as priests of the New Covenant: "For their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth." (1 Cor 11:25) (611)

The agony at Gethsemani

The cup of the New Covenant, which Jesus anticipated when he offered himself at the Last Supper, is afterwards accepted by him from his Father's hands in the garden at Gethsemani, making himself "obedient unto death." (Phil 2:8) Jesus prays:

"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me..." (Mt 26:39) Thus he expresses the horror that death represented for his human nature.

Like ours, his human nature is destined for eternal life; but unlike ours, it is perfectly exempt from sin, the cause of death. Above all, his human nature has been assumed by the divine person of the "Author of life," the "Living One." By accepting in his human will that the Father's will be done, he accepts his death as redemptive, for "he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." (1 Pt 2:24) (612)

Christ's death is the unique and definitive sacrifice

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," (Jn 1:29) 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." (Mt 26:28) (613)

This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices. First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience. (614)

Jesus substitutes his obedience for our disobedience

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous (Rom 5:19)" By his obedience unto death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant, who "makes himself *an offering for sin*", when "he bore the sin of many", and who "shall make many to be accounted righteous", for "he shall bear their iniquities (Is 53:10-12)." Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father. (615)

Jesus consummates his sacrifice on the Cross

It is love "to the end" (Jn 13:1) that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life. Now "the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died (2 Cor 5:14)." No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons, and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice *for all*. (616)

The Council of Trent emphasises the unique character of Christ's sacrifice as "the source of eternal salvation" and teaches that "his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited justification for us". And the Church venerates his cross as it sings: "Hail, O Cross, our only hope". (Roman Liturgy) (617)

Our participation in Christ's sacrifice

The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the "one mediator between God and men (1 Tim 2:5)." But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, "the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" is offered to all men (Vatican II). He calls his disciples to "take up [their] cross and follow [him]", for "Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps". (Mt 16:24; 1 Pt 2:21)

In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries. This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering.

"Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven." (St Rose of Lima) (618)

IN BRIEF

- **Jesus freely offered himself for our salvation. Beforehand, during the Last Supper, he both symbolised this offering and made it really present: "This is my body which is given for you" (Lk 22:19). (621)**
- **The redemption won by Christ consists in this, that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28), that is, he "loved [his own] to the end" (Jn 13:1), so that they might be "ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [their] fathers (1 Pt 1:18)". (622)**
- **By his loving obedience to the Father, "unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8), Jesus fulfils the atoning mission (cf. Is 53:10) of the suffering Servant, who will "make many righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities" (Is 53:11; cf. Rom 5:19). (623)**

