A GUIDE TO THE PASSION

100 QUESTIONS ABOUT The Passion of The Christ
**A Guide to the Passion**

**Leader’s Manual**

**Preparation**

Prior to the study group’s first meeting, all participants should see *The Passion of The Christ*. They will also need the following materials:

1) A copy of *A Guide to the Passion*

2) The Bible (We recommend using the Revised Standard Version—Catholic Edition or the New American Bible)

At least one copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (second edition) will be helpful to have on hand during your group study to answer any questions that might arise.

**Length of study group program**

We recommend that your study group program last 4 to 6 weeks. The length can be varied based on the number of questions you choose to discuss each week and the time constraints of your group or parish.

**Promoting Your Small Group Study**

You can download a “Five Step” plan for organizing and promoting your Small Group Study program by visiting the www.evangelization.com website. Our website features free, downloadable full-color and black-and-white posters (11” x 17”), flyers (8.5” x 11”), and announcements that can be placed in bulletins and read from the pulpit. The best promotion, however, is the personal invitation you extend to people.

**Choosing the questions for discussion**

All of the 100 questions contained in *A Guide to the Passion* are certainly thought-provoking and suitable for study, but we have provided a list that is best for group discussion. If you choose a six-week program, simply reduce the number of questions studied each week.

**How to conduct a study session**

It is recommended that each member of the study group read in advance the study group questions for *A Guide to the Passion* that will be discussed at a particular session. You should print or photocopy as many copies of this study guide as needed so your group conversations are more fruitful.
1. Discussion sessions should typically last about 60 to 90 minutes. Your time could be allocated in the following way:

**60-Minute Session**
- Greetings and Opening Prayer -- 5 minutes
- Discussion of Questions -- 45 minutes
- Closing Meditation and Petitions -- 10 minutes
(See recommended meditations at the end of each section of Questions)

**90-Minute Session**
- Greetings and Opening Prayer -- 10 minutes
- Discussion of Questions -- 60 minutes
- Closing Meditation and Petitions -- 20 minutes
(See recommended meditations at the end of each section of Questions)

2. It is important for each session to start and end on time so that people can rely on this consistency. In particular, it often hurts attendance if the ending time changes from week to week. In short, be consistent and keep to your schedule.

3. The group leader should be familiar with both the *A Guide to the Passion* book and the film. While formal theological training is not necessary, the group study will be more fruitful if the leader is well-versed in the Bible and the teachings of the Catholic Church. This will help your discussions bear more fruit and remain faithful to Church teaching.

4. Individual group members can look up the Bible references and consult the Catechism on their own in between study sessions. During the small group discussion, group leaders are encouraged to refer to the *Catechism* if they or any of the small group members have questions that the group leader can’t answer.

**Suggested list of questions for study (with answers)**

NOTE: The following numbered questions (in bold) are taken directly from *A Guide to the Passion*. Answers to these questions can be found in the book; refer to the question number in parentheses. Study group questions are provided that logically follow each question from the book.

Answers to study group questions are included below. These are provided to aid the leader in guiding the discussion and to help him or her elicit thoughts from group members. The answers provided are called “reflections”—they are not to be seen as definitive by any means. In many cases, the questions provided call for a purely subjective response.

**Week I**

1. Christians refer to Jesus’ “agony in the Garden.” What does this phrase mean and what is its significance? (Question #3 in *A Guide to the Passion*)

   a) What were your thoughts as you witnessed this scene in the film?

   *Responses will vary. Possible answers from the group may include: “I found this scene particularly moving; it filled me with sadness for Jesus’ suffering”; I imagined myself in Jesus’ place”; etc.*
Additional ideas to prompt discussion: Ask the group to contemplate what might have been in Jesus’ mind. Being both God and man, He would have been afraid on a human level but also, as God, been committed to fulfilling the will of the Father. Do be careful to point out, however, that this does not suggest that Jesus’ humanity and divinity were ever at odds. Jesus’ human will, though distinct from his divine will, is always united to the divine, and submissive to the will of the Father. Have the group reflect on the emotional or spiritual pain Jesus may have experienced as He contemplated His mission: saving the world from its sins. Discuss what it might mean to “bear the sins of the world.”

b) What implications does this scene have for your life?

Reflection: The agony of Jesus in the Garden points the way for us to understand the redemptive value of the suffering we experience in our own lives. In doing His Father’s will, Jesus “drinks the cup” – undergoes His Passion – for our salvation. With God’s grace, we too must seek to do His will always, even if this causes us pain and suffering.

Additional ideas to prompt discussion: Ask the group members if this affects their understanding of sin—“Does this inspire you to remove the sin from your own life?”

2. Before we go any further, is there any hard evidence that Jesus really existed and that the events portrayed in the movie actually took place? (Question #5)

Group study questions:

a) Why do you think the person of Jesus continues to challenge, even threaten, so many people in our world? Why would many prefer that He was simply a myth?

Jesus challenges us to radically confront our own sinfulness and seek His forgiveness. The name and person of Jesus often equates to “moral living” in the ears of a person who does not seriously practice a faith. Thus, He is often rejected before even being heard. Jesus calls us to conversion—to turn our lives over to God and live according to His will, not our own. Jesus asks us to make a definitive choice: God’s ways or the world’s ways; faith in Him or faith in ourselves. This is an affront to our modern culture, one that celebrates tolerance and rugged individualism to the exclusion of “truth.” In such a society, the message of the Gospel can be seen as profoundly counter-cultural, even downright threatening. Many people would prefer if Jesus were just a myth or legend; as a real Person, He and His message are a challenge.

3. So, in the Garden, Jesus knew He was going to die? (Question #7)

Group study question:

a) How would knowing the moment of your own death affect your life?

Responses will vary. Possible answers: “If I found out I had only a few (days/months/years) left, I would strive to live a holier life;” or “If I knew my death was many years away, I might waste my life in worldly pursuits;” etc.

Additional ideas to prompt discussion: Ask the group members what they would do if they knew they were going to die. What would they change about their life? What is most important to them? Is their own salvation more important than any earthly concern? Ask them if they think about “their eternity” often.
4. In the Garden of Gethsemane, shortly before the soldiers come to capture Him, we hear Jesus say the words, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.” What does this mean? (Question #10)

Group study question:

a) The Incarnation is one of the deepest mysteries of our Faith. What light do Jesus’ words in the Garden shed on His relationship with the Father?

Two profound realities are powerfully highlighted by Jesus’ words in the Garden: His true humanity is affirmed in His natural human aversion to pain, suffering, and death; and His will was fully united to that of His Father – “Not My will but Yours be done.” In this wondrous scene, the God-Man shows us how we are to live our lives: we are always to seek God’s will and not our own.

Note: It is generally not recommended to discuss complex doctrinal issues in small group settings because the group leader would not want the acceptance or rejection of revealed Christian doctrines put up for a “democratic vote.” This can be the result if the group is not deeply formed in the faith. The group can be swayed by a well-spoken person, even if the person holds views that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic faith. On the other hand, if the group leader is very knowledgeable in theology, your group can discuss doctrinal questions such as the following:

1. What does the Church teach about the Trinity?

2. Do Jesus’ words here confuse your understanding of His relationship with His Father? Do they say to you, “I don’t know what is in the mind of the Father because He is somehow greater than I (Jesus)?” Do they somehow diminish Jesus’ divinity?

3. What do the words “hypostatic union” mean?

4. Jesus has two natures: what is the difference between a “person” and a “nature”?

5. There was a fifth figure in the Garden, whom I later realized represented the devil. Why was the devil present in the Garden? (Question #13)

Group study questions:

a) How does the devil tempt us in our lives? What is his purpose in leading us astray?

The devil tempts us by appearing as an “angel of light.” This is why he is referred to as Lucifer—“light bearer.” He proposes an action that appears to be good, but that is actually evil. He wants us to believe that God is a stern taskmaster who wants to oppress us with arbitrary laws; he wants us to see sin as liberating. What is his goal in all of this? He wants to separate us from the love of God in this life and for all eternity. Remember: the devil rebelled against God out of pride, condemning himself to being eternally separated from the Divine Presence. He hates God and wants to get as many of us to hate Him as well—or, at least, to disobey Him and reject the saving grace of Jesus.

Additional ideas to prompt discussion: Ask the group to discuss in what ways the devil tempts the world. Try to avoid having group members discuss their personal temptations—this material is better suited for the confessional or personal spiritual direction. Others in the group may feel uncomfortable with this or be compelled to share similar personal information.
6. But why did Jesus have to die? Couldn’t God have simply declared humanity’s relationship with Him restored? Why did He choose such an extreme and bloody means of reconciling the world to Himself? (Questions #16 & #17)

Group study questions:

a) How does Jesus’ death fit with your own notion of justice?

Responses will vary. Possible answers: Jesus’ death was clearly unjust. He was innocent, and did no harm to those who condemned Him to death. In fact, He showed His love for them by working miracles and preaching the love of God. The ultimate injustice Jesus faced—His crucifixion—was the direct consequence of our unjust acts, of your sins and mine.

Additional ideas to prompt discussion: This question is, in many ways, a profound mystery we finite humans can only understand on the most basic level. If you do not feel equipped to speak about aspects of God’s love and justice, you may wish to move on to the next question. In regard to the concept of “mystery,” tell your group that a mystery is something that we can understand partially, but not fully.

7. Things are starting to connect now for me. Didn’t the timing of Christ’s passion have something to do with the Jewish Passover? (Question #18)

Group study questions:

a) In condemning anti-Semitism, Pope Pius XII noted that all Christians are “spiritually Jewish.” How are the Jewish Passover and the Passion of Jesus related to this statement by that pope?

As is discussed in question 18 of the book, Jesus’ Passion is the fulfillment of the Jewish Passover. By shedding His blood on the cross, Jesus became the paschal Lamb, reconciling humanity definitively with God. Thus, in a very profound sense, all Christians are spiritually linked with their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Additional ideas to prompt discussion: Ask the group members if they are familiar with this teaching and what their thoughts are concerning it; ask them if this gives greater meaning to their Eucharistic celebration at Mass.

8. Is the devil character in the film meant to represent an actual spiritual being or is it merely symbolic of the “evil” of the world? (Question #22)

Group study questions:

a) Why do you think so many people do not believe in the devil?

Responses will vary. Reflection: Many people are caught up in today’s media culture, which by its very nature distracts us from spiritual realities; in such an environment, belief in angels and demons seems like a relic from a more superstitious, pre-scientific age. Or perhaps people simply don’t want to believe in such an unpleasant reality as the devil – such a belief might force them to confront their own sinfulness and challenge them to strive for holiness.
Additional ideas to prompt discussion: Ask the group members if they subtly reject the idea of the devil for the reasons described above. Note: As mentioned previously, try to avoid having the group discussion slip into a discussion about whether or not the devil exists. If you are not able to adequately respond to these opinions, either have citations from the Catechism of the Catholic Church ready to share or simply defer the discussion to a later time when the issue can be more thoroughly addressed. The Catholic faith has nothing to fear in discussing these issues—if the situation is appropriate and the teacher/leader is prepared.

b) What are the ramifications of this lack of belief in the devil?

If we believe (or pretend) that the devil does not exist, we give him free reign in our lives; we are not on guard against his temptations. Remember: the devil is a fallen angel—in fact, he was the most glorious of the angels prior to his rebellion against God and his fall from grace. Like all angels, his intellect is far superior to ours; he is a master at making sin and evil look attractive, even glamorous. We will certainly lose every head-to-head battle with the devil if we rely on our own strength. But Jesus has already conquered the devil, sin, and death through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. With His grace, we have the power to resist every temptation the devil throws our way. First, though, we need to believe the devil exists!

9. I realized later that the person who kisses Jesus in the Garden was Judas, one of the apostles. Why did He betray Jesus? (Question #28)

Group study questions:

a) What does Judas' betrayal of Jesus teach us about human nature?

Judas' betrayal of Jesus shows the weakness of the human heart in the most profound and poignant way possible. It also shows us how essential it is to seek God's forgiveness regardless of how serious our offense—we must never despair as did Judas. Consider this: as one of the twelve apostles, Judas was one of the closest people to Jesus. He heard His preaching, he witnessed His miracles, he saw how people reacted to Him. Judas clearly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and maybe even believed in His divinity. The problem was—Judas expected a different kind of Messiah than Jesus turned out to be. Like most of the Jewish people, he expected the Messiah would overthrow Roman rule. When Jesus didn't fulfill his expectations, he turned against Him.

Additional ideas to prompt discussion: Ask the group members how they might have responded to Jesus. Would they have been faithful to Him until the end? Ask the group members about why we must always have “hope” in our hearts.

10. A fight scene in the Garden between the temple guards and Jesus' disciples follows Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Peter cuts the ear of one of the guards with his sword, and Jesus heals him. The guard is entranced by the way Jesus heals him. Did this actually happen? (Question #30)

Group study question:

a) What are the implications of Jesus' words “He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword”?

Violence begets violence. We see this on the streets of our cities in the form of drive-by shootings and drug wars; we see this in countries that oppress their people, leading them to armed resistance. It is always advisable to seek peaceful means in resolving disputes—resistance by force should be the last resort. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and He calls us to be people of peace: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of
“God” (Matthew 5:9). To be people of peace, we must strive to eliminate all anger, hatred, and bitterness in our hearts. Of course, when our homes, families, and nations are threatened with violence, force may be used as a defensive measure because we do have a moral obligation to protect ourselves and others against unjust attacks. Strictly speaking, a radical pacifism is not in accord with Christianity. That being said, force should be the last resort.

Additional ideas to prompt discussion: In your own lives, how have you responded when someone has been verbally or physically aggressive? How might you be a better “peacemaker” in your families, at work, among your friends?

**Recommended Closing Meditation:**

Pray the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary found in Appendix A of *A Guide to the Passion*. For full meditations of each sorrowful mystery, go to www.evangelization.com and click on the Devotional Prayers link.

**Week 2**

1. **Who is the group of Jewish leaders that pay Judas to betray Jesus?** (Question #32)

   Group study questions:
   
   a) What are some dangers of being in a position of authority, even if the authority was established by God?

   Reflection: With much authority comes great responsibility. As Jesus taught, “Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required” (Luke 12:48). Those who rule over others must continually purify their motives and intentions; they must strive to sacrifice their own will for the good of others, always applying the demands of justice. They must never place their own good ahead of the good of those who are under their authority.

   Additional ideas to prompt discussion: How well do today’s political and religious leaders demonstrate an uncompromising commitment to justice? To truth? What are some instances when you have seen those in authority take a stand for what is right, regardless of their own good?

   b) How can religious leaders guard against these dangers?

   Reflection: Only through a life devoted to prayer and sacrificial love can religious leaders be free of pride, vanity, and timidity in their service of the Gospel. Indeed, all Christians must continually check their motives and seek to purify them in light of Jesus’ teachings.

2. **What was the motivation of the Sanhedrin to do away with Jesus?** (Question #33)

   Group study question:

   a) What moral implications do the Sanhedrin’s actions regarding Jesus have for our own lives?

   Answers will vary. Reflection: It is easy to act out of fear and pride; being receptive to what is true and good requires courage. We must not be simplistic in our condemnation of the priests, scribes, and Pharisees—they saw themselves as righteous according to the Law. But their fear of the Romans and their pride in their position caused them to turn against Jesus.
Additional thoughts for discussion: Why is it so difficult to stand up for what is right? Why are we often fearful and timid in our Christian witness? Point out that God's grace is sufficient and will give us the courage we need to hold our ground when our Catholic faith is challenged. We need to prepare ourselves to accept His grace by fostering a life of prayer, frequenting the sacraments, and deepening our knowledge of the teachings of the Church.

3. The director uses “flashbacks” to connect the Passion to other aspects of Jesus life. The first flashback shows Jesus as a carpenter, living at home with His mother. What was his purpose in creating this scene? (Question #35)

Group study question:

a) When you saw this moving scene, how did it change your understanding of Jesus? Of the relationship He had with His mother?

Answers will vary. Additional ideas to prompt discussion: Consider why Jesus was born in a manger and raised in a tiny, unimportant, middle-of-nowhere village. We must remember that Jesus, as God, chose to be born and raised in such surroundings to show us what is truly important in life. He, the creator of the universe, lived and worked as a builder of tables, as a carpenter. Why do you think He chose such a simple, humble life?

4. When Jesus is brought before Caiaphas and the council of elders, the final charge against Him is “blasphemy.” What is blasphemy? (Question #39)

Group study questions:

a) Jesus Himself told us that we would have to account for every word we speak. Why do you think profanity and vulgarity are so commonplace in our society?

Reflection: We live in a permissive, coarse, media-obsessed culture. Those who produce our TV shows, movies, and CDs are, for the most part, secular in their worldview. They see no problem with “pushing the envelope” by filling their shows with profanity, sex, and violence. This barrage of vulgarity desensitizes us to the reality of sin, particularly as it relates to speech.

The New Testament is filled with admonitions to watch our words: “If any one thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man’s religion is vain” (James 1:26); “He that would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile” (1 Peter 3:10); and, most profoundly, the warning of Jesus Himself – “I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).

b) What personal resolutions can you make regarding this aspect of your life?

Possibilities: I will only watch TV shows that contain little or no profanity, sex, and violence; When I hear God’s name being taken in vain, I will show my offense; I will think before I speak; If I hear an off-color joke, I won’t laugh; I will regularly ask Jesus for the strength to say only things that edify others, things that are positive and will strengthen their faith; etc.

5. One of the men testifying against Jesus argues that Jesus claimed He was “the bread of life,” and repeatedly spoke about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Where is this in the Bible? (Question #41)
Group study questions:

a) Why do you think this was regarded as a “hard saying” by some of Jesus' disciples.

Reflection: Given that the Law forbade the Jewish people from eating anything contaminated with blood (and certainly human flesh), it is understandable that many of Jesus’ disciples would have been scandalized by His words—Eat His flesh? Drink His blood? What is He talking about? They lacked the ability to understand such a teaching. At this point, many of His followers probably were not yet convinced of Jesus’ divinity or, if they were, they began to have doubts.

When we think about the awesome mystery of the Eucharist—that we are actually consuming the real Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus—we can see why it was (and is) a “hard saying.”

Additional ideas to prompt discussion: What are some of Jesus’ other “hard sayings”? Have the group members discuss such issues as loving your neighbor as yourself, loving your enemies, the prohibition of divorce, looking lustfully at someone as adultery of the heart, etc. Focus on the fact that Christianity is liberating—with the help of grace, we can follow these hard sayings and be truly free to serve God and be the people we are meant to be.

b) Why do you think Christ would institute the Eucharist?

Answers will vary. Encourage the group members to offer their own reflections. Possibilities: Jesus gave us the Eucharist so that we might have communion with Him; to have His life living within us; to join us with His sacrifice of the cross; to make us present with Him at the Last Supper; etc.

Additional ideas to prompt discussion: The Eucharist is truly the most profound gift Jesus could have given us. How can we show greater reverence for the Real Presence?

6. There is a scene in which Mary enters a place and finds Jesus chained to the ceiling below the stone pavement. What is the deeper significance of this scene?  
(Question #47)

Group study question:

a) What do you think the deeper significance of this scene was?

Answers will vary. Reflection: the connection between Mary and Her Son endures; she is present throughout His time of agony. This moving scene shows Jesus’ connection to His mother in a most profound way. As Catholics, we honor Mary and pray for her intercession precisely because she is Jesus’ mother—it is her blood that ran in Jesus’ veins. She is intricately linked with the saving events of her Son’s passion.

7. Why did Pilate send Jesus to King Herod? Why didn’t he judge Him himself?  
(Question #53)

Group study question:

a) Why must politicians and other leaders be committed to doing what is right sooner than what is expedient?

As was mentioned earlier, those entrusted with political or religious authority bear a heavy burden. Their actions and decisions affect the many thousands or millions under their authority—they must be diligent in seeking what is true and just.
Additional ideas for discussion: What are some issues today that challenge political leaders to go against the prevailing culture? Consider such issues as abortion, euthanasia, contraceptives in public schools, gay “marriage”, and the treatment of the poor, among others.

8. Should Christians condemn Pilate for his actions? He seemed to do the best he could. (Question #54)

Group study question:
a) What does Jesus mean when He says to Pilate “You would have no power over me unless it were given you from above”?

> Ultimately, all authority in heaven and on earth comes from God—His providence guides all things. This is not to deny human freedom, either that of human political leaders or in the people to elect them. It merely says that no one takes power without God’s permission. There is a certain amount of mystery regarding the interplay of God’s will and human free choice, but both realities must be affirmed. Pilate has authority over Jesus, then, only because it was ordained by God from all eternity.

9. The movie includes a scene in which Pilate asks his wife about Truth and why he can’t hear it. Why? (Question #55)

Group study question:
a) What are some of the reasons why we can’t “hear” the truth?

> The truth can often get lost amidst the normal clamor of daily life. In addition, we live in a media culture that promotes the view that fame, fortune, physical beauty, popularity, and the avoidance of any pain or inconvenience will bring us happiness. In such an environment, hearing the truth of the Gospel can be overwhelmed by competing messages.

Additional ideas for discussion: How do we know for certain what the truth is, especially religious truth? Guide the group members to consider the unique claims of the Catholic Church as the authoritative teacher of the apostolic faith. If you feel comfortable, you may wish to discuss the relationship between the Bible, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium.

10. After Pilate proclaims that neither he nor Herod found fault with Jesus, we are introduced to the criminal Barabbas. Why does Pilate offer to release a prisoner at that point? (Question #57)

Group study question:
a) What are some examples in our culture where we choose evil over an obvious good?

> Answers will vary. Possibilities: abortion as opposed to the life of the child; contraception as opposed to openness to life; co-habitation as opposed to marriage; etc.

**Recommended Closing Meditation:**

Pray the Stations of the Cross found in Appendix B of *A Guide to the Passion*. For meditations on each of the fourteen Stations, go to [www.evangelization.com](http://www.evangelization.com) and click on the Devotional Prayers link.
Week 3

1. The most powerful (and, frankly, the most difficult) part of the movie to watch is the whipping of Jesus. Why did the director make this scene so violent? (Question #58)

Group study questions:

a) What emotions did this scene stir up within you?

*Personal reactions will vary.*

b) Catholicism teaches that our sins were the reason for Christ’s Passion. After seeing the scourging of Jesus, do you have a greater sense of the need to guard against sin?

*Reflection: While the imagery of Jesus being scourged engenders great anguish in the hearts of all Christians—indeed, in the hearts of all but the most cynical—this anguish becomes ever more pronounced when we realize why Jesus was scourged—for your sins and mine. The innocent Son of God let Himself be mocked, beaten, whipped, spit upon, reviled, and crucified solely to save us from our sins. Each time we sin, it is as if we scourge Christ anew.*

*Additional ideas to prompt discussion: In generations past, priests frequently made mention of “spiritual warfare”—the reality that this life is a battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. How can we “win” this battle on a daily basis? What are some of the “weapons” God gives us to wage this battle? Mention the sacraments, especially Eucharist and Reconciliation.*

2. What is the significance of the flashback in which Jesus washes His disciples’ feet? (Question #60)

Group study question:

a) What does being a servant of others mean to you?

*Reflection: “…the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Jesus shows us how to be a servant to others by humbly washing the feet of His apostles. Indeed, His entire life was one of loving service—a service unto death. As the vicar of Christ, the pope is given the title Servus Servorum Dei (“Servant of the Servants of God”); he lives his life completely at the service of the Church. Each of us has particular gifts we must use in serving others, and we must discover where God is calling us to serve. As St. Paul teaches: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Encourage group members to share some of the ways they can be servants of others.*

3. Why is a contrast established between Pilate’s “washing his hands” and Jesus’ purifying His hands at the Last Supper? (Question #65)

Group study question:

a) What do you think the contrast is between Pilate’s washing of his own hands and Jesus’ washing of His own hands?
Pilate, in washing his hands before the crowd, is declaring his innocence regarding the fate of Jesus. He is seeking to evade his ultimate responsibility for Jesus’ crucifixion. Jesus, though, purifies His hands in obedience to the Law, as a way of honoring His Father.

4. As Jesus carries His cross, the director cross-cuts between the devil and Mary walking along with Him through the crowd. At one point, their eyes each meet in an amazingly powerful silent exchange. What exactly is going on here? (Question #68)

Group study question:

a) Why do Catholics believe that Mary is the devil’s nemesis?

Many people mistakenly believe that the devil is the “evil opposite” of God—that is, that the devil and God are locked in a furious battle for dominance over the world. This is a theological error. God is infinite Being; the devil is His finite creature. God, then, has no opposite. The devil, therefore, cannot in any way “fight” God or challenge His omnipotent rule over creation. That would be like an ant trying to wage war against the U.S. Army, only the difference would be infinitely greater. The devil’s real enemy is those who have been created in God’s image—us. He tempted Adam and Eve to rebel against God and he continues to tempt us to do the same.

Mary, as the Mother of God, is the “new Eve.” She brought forth from her womb the means of restoring what Eve lost through the first sin—the God-Man, Jesus. As such, Mary is the devil’s chief enemy. This is why it is so important for Christians to seek Mary’s powerful intercession in times of temptation and trial.

5. During Jesus’ carrying of the cross, a woman breaks through the crowd to help Jesus and wipes His face. Who is this woman? (Question #72)

Group study questions:

a) Can you recall a time when you boldly stood up for what was good and true?

Personal responses will vary.

b) Why do people hesitate to take courageous steps during times of trial?

Ideas for discussion: We don’t always stand up for goodness and truth because fear, pride, self-interest, apathy, etc., may overwhelm our desire to do what is right at those times. Courage requires grace and the commitment to do the right thing regardless of the cost.

6. How far was Jesus’ walk to Calvary? (Question #71)

Group study questions:

a) In what ways can you “take up your cross” on a daily basis and walk with Jesus to Calvary?

Personal responses will vary. Have the group members consider all the various difficulties, sufferings, and trials they endure in their daily lives. Get them to see in these a reflection of the Cross of Jesus. All suffering, when linked to the passion of Christ, becomes a means of holiness and salvation.
7. I heard an historian say that Jesus only carried the crossbeam—the horizontal part of the cross—as He walked to Calvary. Why does the movie show Him carrying the whole cross? (Question #78)

Group study questions:

a) What were your thoughts as you witnessed Jesus carrying the cross to Calvary?

   Personal responses will vary.

b) Describe an instance where you turned to God during a time in your life when you were carrying a cross?

   Personal responses will vary.

**Recommended Closing Meditation:**

Pray the Seven Last Words of Jesus found in Appendix C of *A Guide to the Passion*.

**Week 4**

1. Why does the movie show a flashback to the Last Supper during the Crucifixion? (Question #83)

Group study question:

a) What is the relationship between the Mass and Jesus’ death at Calvary?

   Reflection: *In Catholic theology, the Mass is seen as the “re-presentation” of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. As Pope Paul VI states in his 1965 encyclical letter Mysterium Fidei, “The mystery of the Eucharist makes present again in a unique manner the sacrifice of the Cross, which was once offered on Calvary, continuously calls it to mind, and supplies its saving power for the forgiveness of those sins we commit daily” (no. 7). At the Last Supper—where Jesus celebrated the Passover with His apostles—He instituted the Eucharist, a new liturgy that fulfills the Passover of the Old Covenant. In His passion, Jesus became the new Paschal Lamb and shed His blood for our redemption. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).*

2. Please explain the strange scene in which the cross on which Jesus has just been nailed is flipped over but remains suspended above the ground. (Question #84)

Group study question:

a) We get this image from private revelation. What role do devotions based on private revelations play in your own faith life?

   Responses will vary. Possible devotions: Miraculous Medal; Sacred Heart; scapular; Lourdes water; Fatima prayers; etc.

3. What is the meaning of Jesus’ words “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani” from the cross? (Question #87)

Group study question:
a) How do we see Jesus’ humanity reflected in these words?

_In these words of intense anguish, we see Jesus' profound suffering on the cross reach its zenith. The weight of human sin has crushed the Divine Son of Man; the Suffering Servant has nearly reached His end. Since God, as an infinite Being, is incapable of suffering, He needed to take on a human nature in order to suffer in our place. Here, Jesus expresses the abandonment men feel apart from God._

4. Explain why the film flashes back to Jesus’ offering the wine at the Last Supper as His blood drips down to the foot of the cross. (Question #89)

Group study questions:

a) Have you ever made the connection that the sacrifice of the altar and the sacrifice of Calvary are one and the same?

_Responses will vary. Seek to foster an extended discussion of this central belief of the Catholic faith._

b) What is your reaction to this Catholic teaching?

_Personal responses will vary._

5. If He was indeed God, why doesn’t Jesus perform another miracle by coming down off the cross?

Surely that would have made believers out of His enemies! (Question #91)

Group study questions:

a) What is it about miracles that attracts us so much?

_People are naturally drawn to the unusual, the sensational, the exciting. Any apparent manifestation of the supernatural is usually greeted with uncritical enthusiasm. Apparently, it is in our nature to love spectacle. In the case of a genuine miracle, this tendency is fulfilled to a deeper purpose—to elicit faith._

b) Why do you think the Bible indicates that some people will still not believe even if the miraculous is shown to them? (For example, in Luke 16:19-31, we have to story of the rich man and the poor beggar. When the rich man dies, he goes to Hades and asks Abraham to send him back as a warning to his brothers—he says that they will believe if they see one raised from the dead. Note Abraham’s response.)

_The human power of rationalization knows no limit. Things that do not fit neatly into our worldview can be dismissed—rationalized—out of hand. One needs to be open to seeing the miraculous in order to observe it when it really occurs. In the New Testament, we are told that many Pharisees witnesses Jesus’ miracles, but attributed them to the power of “Beelzebub”— the devil._

6. What is the significance of Jesus’ last words to His mother and the apostle John? (Question #92)

Group study questions:

a) How is Mary our mother?

_On the cross, Jesus hands over care of Mary to the apostle John with the words “Behold, your Son.” To John, He says, “Behold, your Mother.” While Mary was Jesus’ Mother physically, she is our Mother spiritually—like our earthly mothers, we should turn to her warm embrace whenever we need spiritual_
aid or comfort. It is fitting, therefore, that Mary is also considered Mother of the Church. Mary becomes the new Eve because her son Jesus is the first-born of a new generation of mankind born of the Holy Spirit in Baptism. Through the merits of her son Jesus, our Savior and our brother, we become adopted sons and daughters of God.

Mary is also mother to us in order of grace. From the moment of her consent to be the Mother of our Redeemer, she cooperated in a unique way in her son’s work of restoring supernatural life to souls. Even after her assumption into heaven, Mary’s powerful intercession continues in helping bring us the gifts of eternal salvation, won for us by Jesus.

b) What role should she play in our faith lives?

*We should always see Mary as our Mother, always ready to help us when we need her. She should be the first person we turn to in times of trouble because we trust in her powerful intercession with her Son. Through her example, Mary offers us the purest realization of faith. Mary’s exercise of faith allows her to accept the words spoken to her by the angel Gabriel that she would become the mother of the Anointed One of God. And through it all, including the death of her son on the cross, Mary’s faith never wavered. She never ceased to believe in the fulfillment of God’s word. Like Mary, we too can believe in what God has promised us through His Son, Jesus*

7. The heart-wrenching scene near the end of the film of Mary at the foot of the cross staring straight at us while holding her dead Son is very moving. What does it mean? (Question #98)

Group study question:

a) What was your reaction to this scene?

*Personal responses will vary.*

8. The movie closes with the Resurrection. Do Christians really believe that Jesus rose from the dead? (Question #99)

Group study questions:

a) Catholicism teaches that Christ actually rose from the dead. What does this mean to your faith and life?

*Reflection: The resurrection of Jesus is the sign of our hope. We who have died with Christ in baptism can now hope to live with Him eternally. Whenever we pray the Nicene Creed, we affirm our belief in the resurrection of the body. If we die in His grace, we will live with Him forever, body and soul. This wonderful “hope of heaven” should fill us with profound joy.*

b) How has this film affected your walk with Jesus? In what ways has it inspired you?

*Answers will vary. Encourage the group members to share any resolutions they have made since seeing the film. In what ways will they strive for a life of greater holiness?*

**Recommended Closing Meditation:**

Pray the Litany of the Passion found at [www.evangelization.com](http://www.evangelization.com). Click on the Devotional Prayers link.