

Passion (Palm) Sunday

Year B

GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Company Inc.

They lead Jesus out to crucify him ... They brought him to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it. Then they crucified him, and shared out his clothing, casting lots to decide what each should get. It was the third hour when they crucified him. The inscription giving the charge against him read: 'The King of the Jews.' And they crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said, 'Aha! So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself: come down from the cross!' The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves in the same way. 'He saved others,' they said, 'he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, for us to see it and believe.' Even those who were crucified with him taunted him.

When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachtani?' which means 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?' When some of those who stood by heard this, they said, 'Listen, he is calling on Elijah.' Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink saying, 'Wait and see if Elijah will come to take him down.' But Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

(Mark 15:1–39, abridged)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Golgotha is a Semitic word that means 'skull'. The name Calvary comes from the Latin translation of 'skull'. It is likely that the name comes from the habitual use of the site for executions.
- Passion or Palm Sunday is the beginning of what is known as Holy Week, a period of intense preparation for the ceremonies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil.
- The Passion of Christ refers to his arrest, trial and death.
- Jesus is in Jerusalem at this time to celebrate the Festival of Passover.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Depending on how your parish celebrates the procession of palms and reading of the Passion, there are many readings that could form the basis of reflection. Mark's story of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Mark 11) for this his last Passover is in sharp contrast to the Passion narrative. Only days before his arrest and trial, Jesus had been hailed by the crowds, who spread their cloaks on the road, waved greenery in homage and shouted Hosanna. It is this same crowd of pilgrims to the festival who turn on him and shout 'Crucify him' to Pilate and taunt him on the cross. Even the disciples are a disappointment. They are unable to stay awake and pray in the garden as he contemplates his fate. At his arrest, one young man even leaves behind his cloak rather than be taken with Jesus. Peter denies he even knew him. Jesus dies totally alone and abandoned, his human frailty to the fore. Only some faithful women watch from a distance to see the final outcome. But the faithful come to know that through this death comes the rising and the glorification.

- What does the passion of Jesus tell us about where God is in the suffering of the world and in our own personal suffering?
- What is Mark expressing in this image of Jesus as abandoned even by those who have followed him?
- If, as scholars suggest, Mark is writing for a community of believers in Rome who are undergoing persecution and even death, how may this image of Jesus' suffering resonate with them? What comfort may they take from this image of Christ?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What moments of utter abandonment have you experienced?
- Have you ever been jeered at by others? How did you feel?
- Spend time reflecting on the events of the Passion of Jesus. What does it mean for you that Jesus died for all humanity?
- Share stories of occasions of desolation in your life.
- Share reflections on how you respond to the abandonment that Jesus experienced. Can you make connections?
- Make this prayer often this week:

Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free.

## NOTES

One of the great devotions associated with this period of the Church year is the Stations of the Cross (sometimes called the Way of the Cross). There are traditionally fourteen stations associated with events of the arrest, trial and death of Jesus. To travel and meditate on these events is a centuries-old practice, with some evidence of similar devotion going back as far as the fifth century. It is a practice that was promoted by the Franciscans who were given custody of the Holy Places in the Holy Land in the 1300s.

- You could view a video of pilgrims following the traditional Way of the Cross in Jerusalem.
- You could examine the Stations of the Cross in your church or use a contemporary Stations of the Cross that draws parallels between current issues and the Passion of Christ.

## SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

The palms used today symbolise Christ's triumph, while the cross is the symbol of the death through which his triumph is achieved. Traditionally, Catholics take the palms and place them in a position of prominence in their homes as a reminder of the passion Christ endured for us. The palm is often attached to a cross, uniting these two symbols. Do you have a cross or crucifix in your home?

## LIVING THE WORD

- In what ways does your community celebrate the events of the Passion? Are there roles which the elect could take in the ceremonies of Holy Week?
- Use a cross and some palms as a focus for prayer. Allow some quiet time for meditation on the events of the Passion, perhaps singing or quietly listening to 'Jesus remember me' (GA 308). Pray for each other, especially those who are approaching baptism. Conclude with the prayer of exorcism in *RCIA* at §94F.

## Easter Sunday

Year B

### GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Company Inc.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the Mother of James, and Salome, brought spices with which to go and anoint him. And very early in the morning on the first day of the week they went to the tomb, just as the sun was rising.

They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' But when they looked they could see that the stone—which was very big—had already been rolled back. On entering the tomb they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right-hand side, and they were struck with amazement. But he said to them, 'There is no need for alarm. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he has risen, he is not here. See, here is the place where they laid him. But you must go and tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going before you to Galilee; it is there you will see him, just as he told you."'

(Mark 16:1–7)

### DID YOU KNOW?

*Points of interest and Catholic lore*

- The Easter Triduum (which means 'three days'), lasting from Holy Thursday evening to Easter Sunday evening, is the climax of the Church's year.
- Holy Thursday is sometimes known as Maundy Thursday, a corruption of the Latin word for 'commandment', *mandatum*. This is to commemorate the 'new commandment' that Jesus gave his followers at the Last Supper: love one another as I have loved you.
- The stories of the Passion, death and resurrection of Jesus were the earliest stories told and later recorded by the early church. The commemoration of the events of the Triduum is the earliest of Church celebrations, when the first Christians gathered to break bread together.
- Good Friday and Easter Saturday are the only days of the year on which Mass is not celebrated.
- The women come to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus early on Sunday morning because it is the first chance they have to do so. The Jewish Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. During this time no 'work' can be done, so the women must wait until dawn on the first day of the week.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

You could perhaps allow time to read over some of the many Scripture texts used over these three days of the Triduum. You could point out the unity of the three days and how the readings fit together. It is essentially one liturgy with various moments. It is not simply a re-enactment of the past but a way of drawing people into the present reality of the mystery of God.

- The death and resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental pattern of life for the Christian. Give some examples of dying and rising from your life or the lives of the saints.
- In what ways was the baptism of the neophytes a dying and rising to new life in Christ?
- In what ways did the liturgy of these days draw you into the mystery?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

*Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer*

- What memories of these three days do you want to remain with you always?
- Do you feel a sense of 'amazement' at what has happened to you?
- Reflect together on the ceremonies of the Vigil. Share responses and recollections. What was the highlight for you? What did it mean to you? How did you celebrate with friends and family? How will your life now change?
- Light a candle each time you pray during this Easter season as a sign of keeping the light of Christ consciously before you.
- Repeat this proclamation of the mystery of faith often this week:

*We proclaim your death O Lord, and profess your resurrection until you come again.*

### SHARING THE TRADITION

*A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ*

The neophytes now enter the period of mystagogy or post-baptismal catechesis. 'This is a time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it a part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing the works of charity' (RCIA, §234).

- Explore the meaning of this, and talk about how it may be carried out with the community.

### SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

The cross and the paschal candle are the central symbols of these three days. Death is conquered in new life. The darkness of the tomb is conquered by the light of Christ. Much of this symbolism is present in the baptism ceremony of the Easter Vigil. Explore it together.

### LIVING THE WORD

*Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment*

- How will the community 'rejoice in the resurrection'? How can the members of your broader community be drawn more deeply into this period of mystagogy? In what ways will the community celebrate the baptism of the elect? What roles are now open to the newly baptised? How does your community encourage them to be become participating members of your local parish?
- Use a candle and yellow flowers as a focus. Offer prayers of thanks for the gift of faith. Sing an Easter song. Choose one of the responses to a canticle or responsorial psalm from the Easter Vigil liturgy to conclude your prayer—for example:

*Let us sing to the Lord; he has covered himself in glory.*

or

*I will praise you Lord for you have rescued me.*

or

*Lord you have the words of everlasting life.*

- Be sure to celebrate with the newly baptised! Make a gift to them to mark this great occasion, perhaps a Bible, missal or a crucifix if they do not already have one.

### NOTES

2nd Sunday of Easter

Year B

GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Company Inc.

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, ‘Peace be with you’, and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, ‘Peace be with you.

‘As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.’

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

‘Receive the Holy Spirit.  
For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven;  
for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.’

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, ‘We have seen the Lord’, he answered, ‘Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.’ Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. ‘Peace be with you’ he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.’ Thomas replied, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him:

‘You believe because you can see me.  
Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.’

There were many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

(John 20:19–31)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The period from Easter to Pentecost is known as ‘the Great Fifty Days’ and is an integral part of the Lent–Easter–Pentecost cycle.
- There is an ancient tradition that St Thomas preached the Gospel as far east as India.
- In Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus, the name of Thomas means ‘twin’.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This gospel is one of transformation. The fear of the disciples is transformed by the gift of peace, and the doubt of Thomas is transformed by his encounter with the risen Jesus. With this transformation, however, comes responsibility. The disciples are not to simply bask in the joy of Christ risen but are sent to continue the mission of Jesus in the world: ‘As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.’

- You could discuss the concluding rite of the liturgy and how we are sent out to continue Christ’s mission in our own world.

When Thomas is told by his companions that they have seen Jesus, he places his own conditions on faith. He will not believe unless he sees. Jesus must fulfil the expectation that Thomas has. The following week, he is forced to confront this and is brought to realise the pointlessness of imposing conditions on God. Only then can he see that God’s ways are often surprising. Only after accepting this truth does Thomas come to understand what faith really is.

- Are there times when we expect God to behave as we want rather than being open to the presence of the risen Christ in unexpected ways?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What have been some of the doubts and uncertainties you experienced on your faith journey? Have these been fully resolved?
- Do you see yourself as now being ‘sent’? What does this mean for you?
- How do you experience the peace of Christ?
- Have you ever been ‘locked in’ because of fear or being trapped in a certain way of thinking or responding? What was it that liberated you? Share your experiences.
- Have you ever had ‘blind faith’ in something or someone? What does this mean?
- Look for ways in which a simple touch can convey friendship, compassion or healing this week.
- Repeat Thomas’ great acclamation of faith often this week: *My Lord and my God.*



SHARING THE TRADITION

*A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God’s word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ*

‘Those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven. Those whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.’ Jesus’ disciples are to continue the work of reconciling all people to God. His power to forgive sins is conferred on the Church. Through baptism, God’s forgiveness becomes available to us, but human beings do not lose their tendency to sin just because they are baptised. The sacrament of reconciliation is there to assist the faithful to acknowledge human sinfulness and seek the forgiveness and reconciliation of God.

- Review the Rites of Reconciliation.
- Encourage the newly baptised to participate in the sacrament of reconciliation. You could invite your parish priest to explain the rituals and provide an opportunity for the sacrament to be celebrated for the group.
- Discuss the value of privately reflecting on our human failings and weaknesses. Through being more aware of our sinfulness we open ourselves to God’s mercy and love.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

It is when Thomas is given the opportunity to touch Jesus that he professes his faith. Touch can provide healing and comfort; it can be an act of compassion or support. This gospel passage is directed to the many believers who never knew the human Jesus and yet had faith in him as the Christ.

LIVING THE WORD

*Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment*

How and when is reconciliation celebrated within your community? The newly baptised may need to become familiar with the form of reconciliation. Invite them to participate in this sacrament or organise a special celebration of reconciliation for the newly baptised. Invite the community to participate.

Continue the Easter focus in prayer. Pray for the newly baptised that they may always echo Thomas’ acclamation of faith. Recite together the Creed as their profession of newly accepted faith. Conclude with an Easter song.

NOTES

3rd Sunday of Easter

Year B

GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and  
Doubleday & Company Inc.

The disciples told their story of what had happened on the road and how they recognised Jesus at the breaking of bread. They were still talking all about this when Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you!’

In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, ‘Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts rising in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet; yes, it is I indeed. Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.’

And as he said this he showed them his hands and feet. Their joy was so great that they could not believe it, and they stood dumbfounded; so he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes.

Then he told them, ‘This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms, has to be fulfilled.’ He then opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and he said to them, ‘So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.’

(Luke 24:35–48)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The disciples referred to in this gospel are the two who had been fleeing from Jerusalem towards Emmaus when they encountered Jesus on the road. They returned to be witnesses of their encounter with the risen Christ.
- Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles. His gospel is the story of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem to the cross and resurrection. Acts is the story of the gospel spreading from Jerusalem to ‘all the nations’. A unifying theme in Luke is that of ‘journey’.

EXPLORING THE WORD

In the Gospel of Luke, all the events of Easter run into one another, and the whole of Chapter 24 should be read as a continuous narrative. Beginning with the discovery of the empty tomb, the resurrection narrative follows the disciples as they move away from what had happened in Jerusalem towards Emmaus, but they encounter the risen Christ in the breaking of the bread. In witnessing to this, Christ is present among them again until he finally returns to the Father.

Jesus goes to great lengths to reassure them that he is the same Jesus who was with them during his ministry. Something in his nature has changed, but he is still ‘flesh and bone’. There is continuity with the Jesus they knew but now also something ‘other-worldly’ that they cannot quite comprehend. Jesus is the same but somehow transformed.

Jesus’ journey is about to be completed with his return to the Father, but their journey is only just beginning. Now the disciples must journey from Jerusalem to all the nations, witnessing to what they have seen and heard, preaching the good news of repentance and the forgiveness of sin.

- Now that you are newly baptised, can you identify with the notion of just setting out on a journey of witnessing to the Good News?
- Where do you think your journey will lead you?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- ‘He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.’ Reflect on your journey towards Jesus through the Scriptures.
- How do you plan to continue that journey of deepening faith through the Scriptures?
- ‘Their joy was so great they could not believe it.’ How are you feeling now about what has happened to you in these last weeks?
- Exchange memories of times of great joy or revelation in your life. Have you ever experienced a wave of relief and delight after a period of tension or sorrow?
- ‘You are witnesses to all this.’ How will you witness to Christ in your life this week?
- Today’s psalm response could be repeated this week.

Lord, let your face shine on us.

### SHARING THE TRADITION

*A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ*

The neophytes are now into the period of post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogia—a time for more deeply pondering the experience of the sacraments of initiation, especially the Eucharist. The newly baptised or received have now had a long period of ‘opening their minds to understand the Scriptures’. It may be appropriate over the next few weeks to give consideration to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. There are three main movements: the preparation of the gifts; the eucharistic prayer; and the communion rite.

*Preparation of the gifts:* This is the bringing to the altar of the bread and wine to be used at the Eucharist. These gifts symbolise our dependence on God's bounty for the food we need to live. They represent God's gratuitous giving of all that sustains us. With the gifts of bread and wine, we bring ourselves to the altar. We place our lives, our cares and joys, our struggles and triumphs in God's care to be transformed in the sharing of Christ's body and blood.

- What aspect of your life would you like to place on the altar at this point?
- You could pass around an empty paten or chalice and invite people to silently place this aspect of their lives into it and offer that to God.
- What ‘gifts’ do you bring to the call to witness to the Gospel? How can you use those talents in the service of the Good News?
- What gifts do you see in others in the group?

### SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is often depicted as sharing meals with his disciples and others. In this text, Jesus opens the minds of the disciples to the truth of the Word. These two elements—Word and Eucharist—continue to nourish the faith of believers. These two elements—Word and Eucharist—are the central rites of the Sunday liturgy.

### LIVING THE WORD

*Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment*

- Invite the neophytes to join in the procession of gifts to the altar at your community Mass.
- This material is a prayerful reflection. You could include a song such as ‘In remembrance of you’ (GA 355). Conclude with the blessing at the laying on of hands from the Confirmation Rite of the Easter Vigil in RCIA at §228 to remind them that they carry the Spirit of God.

### NOTES



4th Sunday of Easter

Year A

GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and  
Doubleday & Company Inc.

Jesus said, 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; this is because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep.

And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, and one shepherd.

The Father loves me because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again; and this is the command I have been given by my Father.'

(John 10:11-18)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Latin word for shepherd is the root of the word pastor, which is often used to describe the priest who leads the community.
- From this Latin root, we also derive other terms such as pastoral associate, pastoral council and pastoral care, all of which imply a duty of love and care towards others.
- Bishops carry a staff known as a crosier, which is the shepherd's crook and a symbol of the care of the bishop for his people.
- John's Gospel will be read for some weeks during this period. John is the latest of the written gospels, probably being composed at the very end of the first century.

EXPLORING THE WORD

King David had been a shepherd as a boy, so the image of the Shepherd Messiah underlies this text. But the intimacy of Jesus' relationship with his flock goes beyond even this. This gospel is a statement of the seriousness of Jesus' commitment to the Father's will and his self-giving love for humankind. Jesus' life is freely given for his flock. It is sometimes thought that Jesus died to satisfy the will of the Father imposed on the Son. This is not so. Jesus' gift was a free gift because he responded at all times to that which was most profound in him: the Father's love, which he wished to make known to the world. It is generous, self-giving love for others.

- In what ways are Christians today called to offer this same self-giving love for others?
- Who are those in our world who are most in need of this generous love?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Who have been the shepherds in your life who have guided and protected you?
- What or who are the 'wolves' that threaten and cause fear?
- Share memories of times when you were given special responsibility to care for something or for someone.
- Who are the people who rely on your care? Extend that care in special ways this week.
- Use the opening lines of Psalm 23 this week:

*The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.  
Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose.  
By quiet waters he leads me to revive my soul.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

*A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God’s word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ*

Continuing the reflection on the Liturgy of the Eucharist, provide copies of the Eucharistic Prayer II.

The eucharistic prayer, the heart of the Eucharist, is the great prayer of praise and thanks addressed to God. It recalls Jesus’ Passover from death to life and, in remembering, unleashes the power of that event in our present lives. The Spirit is invoked to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord. It is a trinitarian prayer.

*Read through the opening dialogue.*

- Why is it right to give God thanks?

The preface proposes reasons for giving thanks.

*Read through a couple of prefaces.*

- How do we understand ourselves as part of a holy people? In what way are we holy?

*Read through the invocation of the Spirit.*

- Ponder the mystery of the bread and wine becoming Christ present and among us.

*Read the institution narrative, which recalls Jesus’ last supper.*

- What effect ought eating and drinking the Body and Blood have on the Church and all its individual members?

*Read the memorial acclamations together.*

- Why do we cry for Christ to come? This moment encompasses the past, the present and the future. Explore what that means and its implications for how Christians live in the world.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

In Australia, we have visions of vast sheep farms where the flock is contained by fences, but this is not the way shepherds worked in Jesus’ time. Then, shepherds wandered the countryside with their sheep in search of pasture and guided them away from dangers like steep ravines or bramble thickets. A shepherd who owns the sheep looks after them well because they are his livelihood.

LIVING THE WORD

*Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment*

- In what ways does your community become the Body of Christ present in the world?
- The material here is a prayerful reflection. You may simply conclude by saying ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ and singing an Easter hymn.

NOTES

5th Sunday of Easter

Year B

GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and  
Doubleday & Company Inc.

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are pruned already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Make your home in me as I make mine in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me, and I in them, bear fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples.’  
(John 15:1–8)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The vineyard was one of the ancient images of the people of Israel, God’s chosen people, and God is the vinedresser.
- In John’s Gospel, the term ‘I am’ has a special significance. When Moses encountered God on Mount Sinai, God revealed himself as ‘I am who am.’ Jesus reveals himself as Son of God in the use of this term and tells something of his mission: I am the Living Water; I am the Good Shepherd; I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; I am the Light of the World; I am the Bread of Life.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Jesus continues to speak to the disciples through imagery that they understood from their everyday experience and with symbols that come from their Jewish tradition. The vine is a staple part of Israel’s agricultural life. It carries the idea of the life that flows into the branches from the thick stalk of the vine. Jesus becomes that giver of life and prosperity, but behind his life-giving presence is the Father. Like the vinedresser, the Father must cut away anything that impedes that life or comes from a source that is not nourished from the ‘true vine’. Jesus exists to make the Father known, and so it must be with disciples of Jesus. We must ‘remain with’ Jesus and thus make the Father known.

- Discuss the ways in which you cultivate and keep healthy your connection to Jesus. Who or what helps you do this?
- How may you continue with this after the period of mystagogy?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- ‘Cut off from me you can do nothing.’ How are you connected to Christ?
- In what ways are you connected to all the other ‘branches’ who are the followers of Christ?
- What has been pruned from you?
- What fruit do you bear?
- ‘You are pruned already by means of the word I have spoken to you.’ Words can be powerful weapons both for healing and hurting. Share experiences of times when words have harmed or healed.
- Offer hospitality this week, not in the sense of offering food or drink but in making someone feel ‘at home’, secure and accepted.
- Today’s gospel acclamation makes a suitable prayer for the week:  
*Live in me and let me live in you, says the Lord.  
My branches bear much fruit.*

### SHARING THE TRADITION

*A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ*

We continue the examination of the eucharistic prayer of the liturgy.

*Read the memorial prayer.* This calls to mind Jesus' death and resurrection and links us with those events in our present time.

- In what ways are we called to stand in God's presence? How can we do this outside the liturgy?

*Read the invocation of the Spirit.*

- In what ways are you aware of the Spirit present in the Church and the world?

*Read the intercessions.* At every Eucharist, we stand before God as his people and intercede for the Church and its pastors, for the world, for those who have died and for ourselves. We entrust our needs and the needs of all creation to God's saving power. These prayers are made in union with Mary and with all the saints. These prayers of intercession recognise that our good is bound up with the good of all. We are called to stand in solidarity with all members of the human family and with earth and all living creatures.

- Talk about ways in which suffering, poverty and the degradation of our planet diminish us all. How can we commit ourselves to the service of the world?

### SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

'Make your home in me.' Jesus invites his disciples to place complete trust in him and not be distracted by the cares of the world. Being 'at home' is a powerful image appealing to the desire of all people for acceptance, love and security. Even if our lives are troubled, in Jesus we can always be secure and at peace.

### LIVING THE WORD

*Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment*

- How is your community a sign of unity between those who are members and the broader community of the Church? Are there people in your local area with whom you can build better unity? In what ways does your community stand in solidarity with other humans and with the earth?
- Again, this session has been a prayerful reflection. Conclude simply with the Lord's Prayer and an Easter song.

### NOTES

6th Sunday of Easter

Year B

GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and  
Doubleday & Company Inc.

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.  
Remain in my love.  
If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just  
as I have kept my Father’s will and remain in his love.  
I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your  
joy be complete.  
This is my commandment:  
Love one another as I have loved you.  
No one has greater love than this,  
to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.  
You are my friends, if you do as I command you.  
I shall not call you servants any more,  
because a servant does not know his master’s business;  
I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything  
I have learnt from my Father.  
You did not choose me, no, I choose you;  
and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that  
will last;  
and then the Father will give you anything you ask in my name.  
What I command you is to love one another.’

(John 15:9–17)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

In John’s Gospel, there is no account of the last meal that Jesus  
shared with his disciples. Instead there is the account of Jesus  
washing the feet of his disciples, an act of absolute service to  
others, and a long discourse of instruction on how they must  
conduct themselves in the future. This is known as the ‘Farewell  
Discourse’ and part of it is read this Sunday and next week.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The heart of today’s gospel lies in Jesus repeating himself:  
‘Love one another’. The model for this love is the love that Jesus  
showed towards all those who follow him. Jesus has changed  
the way in which God relates to human beings. We are no  
longer servants of God but are drawn into deep intimacy  
and friendship through the Son. This new relationship is not  
dependent on our choice or will. God has chosen us, and we  
are now commissioned to bear fruit, fruit that will last. The  
Christian command to love is not a vague feeling of good will;  
it is a love that suffers all, and may demand great sacrifice.  
The command to love as Jesus loved may be the most difficult  
test of our Christianity. This is how the presence of Jesus is  
experienced even in his absence.

- You could discuss some examples of people who have laid  
down their lives for others, such as St Maximilian Kolbe or  
Archbishop Oscar Romero.
- How are we called ‘to lay down our life for our friends’ in  
our daily existence?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- When have you experienced complete joy? What or who  
brought that sensation on for you?
- Have you ever found that love is a costly and demanding  
emotion?
- What does it mean to love one another as Christ loved us?
- With your entry into the Church, you too have been  
commissioned to go out and bear fruit. How are you feeling  
about this now? Are there any difficulties or struggles?  
Discuss your experiences so far.
- Relate in special ways of openness with friends this week.
- Today’s entrance antiphon makes a lovely reflection for the  
week:

*Proclaim a joyful sound and let it be heard; proclaim to the  
ends of the earth: the Lord has freed his people, alleluia.*



SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God’s word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

We continue with our exploration of the eucharistic prayer.

*Read the doxology.* This wonderful prayer concludes the eucharistic prayer and is its climax. It is a final burst of thanks and praise to God. Through, with and in Jesus, in unity with the Spirit given to the world, we recognise that glory and honour belong to the Father forever. The Great Amen with which it concludes means ‘so be it’. In saying this, we acknowledge the greatness of God, made manifest through the Son and with us through the ongoing presence of the Spirit.

- What are the things to which you are saying ‘Amen’—‘so be it’? How are we called to live this out every day?

*Read through the Communion Rite:*

- How can you be a sign of peace in your world?
- In what ways do you acknowledge your failings and seek God’s healing?
- How are you called to be ‘the Body of Christ’ to others?

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

Jesus wants to emphasise the closeness and intimacy between himself and the disciples. He speaks of this relationship in a radical way when he names them friends. Friendship implies equality, an openness and sharing of life and experience, a mutual concern and interest. We are usually more comfortable in imagining our relationship with God as with a superior rather than a friend. How does this image of friendship and intimacy challenge you?

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- In what ways does your community act out the command of Jesus to love one another? What ministries of service are in place? Are there needs that are not being met? Can the neophytes help fill this need?
- You could invite the group to raise a symbol—a cross, a Bible, a candle—and recite together the doxology with special emphasis on the Great Amen. Pray for each other as you journey into this new phase of being a full member of the Church. Pray that all will bear fruit. Conclude with an Easter song.

NOTES

The Ascension of the Lord

Year B

GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and  
Doubleday & Company Inc.

Jesus showed himself to the Eleven and said to them:

‘Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.’

And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven: there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.

(Mark 16:15–20)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- These final verses of Mark’s Gospel were a later addition to the original ending of the women at the empty tomb. They show that from the earliest of times, the disciples realised that although Jesus was no longer physically present, ‘the Lord was working with them.’
- The word *apostle* comes from the Greek for ‘one who is sent out’.
- Mark uses the dramatic figures of speech about serpents and poisons to illustrate that those who believe in the Good News and preach it can overcome all that threatens or destroys life.
- All the baptised share in this missionary task of the Church: to go out to proclaim the Good News ‘to all creation’. Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have all called on Christians to be bringers of good news to creation. We must be stewards of the earth and all its resources to ensure that future generations inherit an environment that God gifted to all humanity.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The central point of this gospel is the instruction that Jesus gives to the disciples to continue his work and mission: to take the Good News of the Gospel to the whole world and to all creation. He warns that this task may not be easy and that some will reject the message the disciples bring, but for those who do accept it the rewards will be great. They will overcome all that impedes or threatens life and will be given great gifts. In the preaching of the Gospel, Jesus is still present and working with them.

The disciples unquestioningly carry out the instructions they are given. The preaching and the sacramental life of the Christian Church is the continuation of the presence of Jesus in the world.

- What hope is offered to us by Jesus taking up his place at the right hand of God?
- What signs of hope accompany the work of the Church in the world today?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What ‘good news’ does our world need today?
- How do you experience Jesus’ presence, even though he is absent?
- This gospel tells of the closing of one era and the opening up of another. What experiences have you had of closing off one chapter of your life and the opening of another. Share your stories. In what ways was your baptism or acceptance into the Church the beginning of a new way?
- Make a special effort this week to be good news for others or for the earth. Plant a tree, refuse plastic bags at the supermarket, recycle, conserve water and reduce waste.
- Use this simple prayer often this week:

*God draw us to you and lift our spirits on high.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

*A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God’s word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ*

The Ascension is not the celebration of a physical journey into the skies or the clouds, even though religious art often portrays this event in that way. The celebration of the Ascension of the Lord developed in the early Church to mark the fact that there was a period when Jesus of Nazareth was physically present and a subsequent period when he was no longer present in the same way. Heaven is often portrayed as a ‘place’ in the skies, but this can diminish the Christian understanding of heaven.

Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness ... This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description (CCC, §§1024, 1027).

Heaven is fully participating in the life of God. It is our ultimate destiny. St Augustine said, ‘Our lives are restless until they find rest in God.’

- Discuss the images that people have of heaven. Explore the differences between understanding heaven as a place or a state.
- This may lead to questions of ‘hell’ as a place or a state. Hell is the rejection of the life that God offers and for which we were created.
- You could use other sections from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to assist the discussion.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

In this gospel, Jesus sends out the disciples to continue his work of bringing the Good News. This calls to mind the ‘sending out’ that occurs at the end of every Mass. Not all of us can go ‘to the whole world’, but all are called to bring the Good News in even simple ways in our daily lives. This bringing of the Good News is not just to people, but to ‘all creation.’

LIVING THE WORD

*Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment*

- Discuss with the neophytes how they are progressing through this new part of their journey. Are there ways in which the community can support them further?
- The book of the Good News is a suitable focus for prayer. Use or adapt one of the prefaces for the Ascension. You could conclude with ‘Take Christ to the world’ (GA 369).

NOTES

GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and  
Doubleday & Company Inc.

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘When the Advocate comes,  
whom I shall send to you from the Father,  
the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father,  
he will be my witness.  
And you too will be witnesses,  
because you have been with me from the outset.

‘I still have many things to say to you  
but they would be too much for you now.  
But when the Spirit of truth comes  
he will lead you to the complete truth,  
since he will not be speaking as from himself  
but will say only what he has learnt;  
and he will tell you of the things to come.  
He will glorify me,  
since all he tells you  
will be taken from what is mine.  
Everything the Father has is mine;  
that is why I said:  
*All he tells you  
will be taken from what is mine.*

(John 15:26–27; 16:12–15)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The reason why the disciples were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost was that they were celebrating the Jewish Harvest Festival, which occurs fifty days after the Passover. This festival also celebrated the covenant made by God with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai.
- The Christian feast of Pentecost is fifty days after Easter Sunday and marks the culmination and closure of the Lent–Easter–Pentecost cycle.
- The word for ‘spirit’ in Hebrew is the feminine *ruah*, meaning literally ‘breath’, ‘wind’ or ‘air.’

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text again comes from the farewell discourse of Jesus to the disciples in John’s Gospel. In it he promises to send the Advocate to them. An advocate is one who stands by in times of trial or difficulty, defending, guiding and instructing. In many ways, the Spirit is the ongoing presence of Jesus with his disciples in all ages, and these texts give an eloquent instruction on the reason for God’s gift of the Spirit. The Spirit will witness to the truth, which comes from the Father through the Son. The Spirit will guide the Church’s future understandings as they gradually unfold. The Spirit will be the link between the Father, the now absent Son and the ongoing unfolding of the complete truth. The Spirit will inspire the followers of Jesus to continue his mission and will provide assistance and guidance in achieving this. No single set of human beings could completely know the implications of the Christ event. It is the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, sent by Jesus from the Father, who will accompany the Church through the whole of history, guiding it towards the complete truth.

- What evidence has there been in your own life of the Spirit guiding you towards an ever-unfolding understanding of the complete truth of Jesus Christ?
- How do you experience the presence of the Spirit in your life at the moment?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Are there people you still have ‘many things to say to’? Is it important that such things are said?
- In what ways have you been led to the complete truth?
- How do you experience the Spirit present in your life?
- The first reading tells of the experience of the disciples receiving the Spirit. They were astounded by what had happened to them, and it produced a change in them as people. Share stories of times you have been ‘blown away’ by something. Did the experience produce lasting change? How have you kept this feeling alive?
- The Spirit is bestowed at baptism and ‘confirmed’ for us. Galatians 5:22 lists the fruits of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Try to live these fruits this week.
- Today’s gospel acclamation makes a wonderful prayer for this week:  
  
*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful;  
And kindle in them the fire of your love.*

## SHARING THE TRADITION

*A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ*

At baptism, the Spirit comes upon the newly initiated Christian, and in the sacrament of confirmation, the Spirit of God is renewed and confirmed in the faithful. The bestowal of the Spirit brings certain gifts, and these gifts bear particular fruits.

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord (CCC, §1831).

- Discuss what each of these means.

The Church lists twelve fruits of the Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity (CCC, §1832).

- Discuss what each of these means.
- Discuss the ways in which we understand the role of the Spirit in giving guidance to the Church. In what ways do we see the Spirit at work in the Church today?
- How do you see the gifts and fruits of the Spirit made manifest in yourself and others? In what ways do we need to cultivate these gifts and fruits?

## SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

Red is the colour that is often associated with the Spirit. Red vestments are worn at Pentecost, and red is often associated with confirmation. Red symbolises the intense love or 'fire' of the Holy Spirit. Other symbols of the Spirit are tongues of flame, wind and a white dove. Each of these conveys something of the mystery of the Spirit of God, which is beyond human understanding.

## LIVING THE WORD

*Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment*

- Where do you see the Spirit alive and active in your community?
- Use the colour red and some symbols of the Spirit, like small flames, as a focus for prayer. Pray for the world and the Church. Pray for each other that the Spirit may live in you. Conclude with 'Gifts of the Spirit' (GA 183).

## NOTES