Gospel

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Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.’ But he replied, ‘Scripture says:

Man does not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. ‘If you are the Son of God’ he said ‘throw yourself down; for scripture says:

He will put you in his angels’ charge,
and they will support you on their hands
in case you hurt your foot against a stone.’

Jesus said to him, ‘Scripture also says:

You must not put the Lord your God to the test.’

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. ‘I will give you all these’ he said, ‘if you fall at my feet and worship me.’

Then Jesus replied, ‘Be off, Satan! For scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your God,
and serve him alone.’

Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him.

(Matthew 4:1–11)

Did you know?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Lent is a forty-day period of special preparation for Easter. During this time, the whole church puts extra effort into three aspects: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
- There is evidence of Lenten preparation for Easter very early in the church's history, but its practices became more regularised after the Council of Nicaea (325).
- In years gone by, Catholics did not eat meat on any Friday, and later, on Fridays in Lent. Today there are two days of the year when Catholics are expected to forgo meat—Ash Wednesday and Good Friday—but all the Fridays of Lent are still days when we should ‘fast’.
- The beginning of Lent marks a special time in the preparation of catechumens for baptism. The long period of formation and growth is ended and catechumens have their names entered in church records in a special celebration known as the Rite of Enrolment of Names or the Rite of Election. The next few weeks of intense preparation are known as the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. Catechumens are now known as ‘the elect’.

Exploring the Word

This text follows immediately from the baptism of Jesus. The final words of that text come from the voice from heaven: ‘This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.’ It is interesting that Satan uses the words ‘If you are the Son of God…’ to introduce two of his temptations. In this way, Satan is disputing the claim from heaven and trying to force Jesus to prove his sonship. In response to the first temptation, Jesus affirms his trust in God. Satan seizes on this as the basis for his second temptation, but again Jesus rejects any attempt to force God’s hand. The final temptation reveals the true nature of the contest: it is a struggle between God and Satan, but Jesus shows his choice is made and rejects Satan.

- Do you reject Satan and all his works? This will be a question asked at baptism. In what ways are we called to reject self-interest, power and physical comfort as followers of Jesus?
- What are some of the choices between ‘good and evil’ that we face in our own everyday existence?
- There is much evil in our world today. Draw parallels with this text. Discuss ways in which Christians are called to respond to particular modern phenomena like consumerism or individualism. In what way is this a personal testing for us?

Making Connections

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What are the temptations you experience?
- How is the balance in your life? How much energy do you expend in looking after your physical and material domain as opposed to your mental and spiritual domain?
- Have there been periods or events in your life that tested you? What did you learn of your own strengths and weaknesses from this? Share your reflections.
- Make a commitment to your own special regime of prayer, fasting and almsgiving during this Lenten period. Find out about and give support to Project Compassion.
- Use this verse from this week’s psalm as your prayer:

A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, nor deprive me of your holy spirit.
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 Lent–Easter–Pentecost cycle should be seen as a unified whole. Among the earliest of the feasts that were celebrated by the early church were Easter and Pentecost. The preparatory season of Lent was added later as a final period of intense preparation for those catechumens seeking baptism. It was also the final period of penance for those who had sinned before they were received back to the Eucharist.

• Reflect on the ceremonies of Ash Wednesday and especially the Rite of Election. What do they mean?
• Explain the significance of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment in the rite.
• What is the meaning of ‘penance’? Discuss appropriate expressions of ‘penance’ during Lent, including the possibility of ‘taking on’ rather than ‘giving up’.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

In this text, Matthew continues his depiction of Jesus as the new Moses. The forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness recall the forty years during which Israel wandered the desert and the forty days that Moses spent on the mountain.

LIVING THE WORD

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

• What special Lenten preparations or programs are being held in your parish? Are there ways that the elect can become involved?
• Try to evoke the wilderness with a bowl of sand and a simple twig cross as the focus for prayer. Pray for each other as you journey through this final phase towards baptism. A suitable song could be ‘My soul is thirsting’ (GA 37). Conclude with the prayer of exorcism in RCIA at §94F.
2nd Sunday of Lent

Gospel

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. ‘Lord,’ he said ‘it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.’ When they heard this the disciples fell on their faces overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them. ‘Stand up,’ he said ‘do not be afraid.’ And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but only Jesus.

As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, ‘Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.’

(Matthew 17:1–9)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of Interest and Catholic lore

• This event is known as 'the transfiguration'.
• Moses was a great figure who represented the law for Israel. Elijah represented the prophets. Readings from the law and the prophets made up the Scriptures of Israel. Here Matthew shows Jesus in conversation with them; thus Jesus is in harmony with everything revealed in Judaism.
• The voice from heaven here echoes the words that were used at the baptism of Jesus.
• Traditionally, this scene of the transfiguration is associated with Mount Tabor, which rises out of the Plain of Esdraelon.

Exploring the Word

• In the later part of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus warns his disciples that he must journey to Jerusalem to suffer and die and to rise again. He begins his journey towards his fate, but that journey is interrupted by this wondrous moment where he is revealed as the glorious Messiah, the beloved Son of God. In the language of this text, there are echoes of the Jewish expectation of the Messiah coming in glory at the end of time. Through the appearance of Moses and Elijah in this scene, Matthew links Jesus intimately with Jewish expectation. The law, represented by Moses, established a covenant with the chosen people, and it was the role of the prophets, represented by Elijah, to constantly remind the people of their covenant obligations. Both the law and the prophets looked forward to God's final intervention in human history, and here, Jesus is presented as that intervention. The disciples want to capture this moment and freeze it in time by building shrines, but Jesus is adamant that the journey must continue to its final outcome, which will confirm God's action in human history. It is not until Christ has been raised that the truth of this vision will be known.
• How do you look forward to your baptism or reception? Will it be a single moment of glory and joy?
• How will you continue the journey after that moment has been experienced?

Making Connections

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

• How do you expect to be transformed through baptism?
• ‘It is wonderful for us to be here.’ What does this phrase mean to you at the moment?
• What glimpses of the glory of God do you see in your daily life?
• Have you ever had an experience that caused you to see another person in an entirely different light? Or an experience of seeing attributes in someone that had never been revealed to you before? Share your reflections.
• ‘It is wonderful for us to be here.’ This week make a special effort to recognise the gifts of each day. Be aware of and rejoice in those small moments of joy or wonder or ‘revelation’ that often slip by unnoticed. Reflect on these for a time each evening as you review your day.
• Use today's response to the psalm as your prayer this week: Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
**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

This text affirms the very early Christian belief that Jesus was both God and man. This dual nature is one of the foundational beliefs of the church: ‘He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. During the first centuries, the Church had to defend and clarify this truth of faith against heresies that falsified it’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* §464).

- The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a brief explanation of some of the false ideas of the nature of Jesus (§§465–469). Use these as a basis for discussion of how we have come to understand the nature of Christ and his saving ministry.
- Examine the text in the Creed that affirms our faith in the dual nature of Jesus as God and man.

**SYMBOLS AND IMAGES**

In the Old Testament, mountaintops were important as places of encounter with God. Both Moses and Elijah experienced the power and presence of God on mountaintops, just as Jesus does in this gospel. Where do you experience the most profound sense of God’s presence in your life? Where is your sacred place?

**LIVING THE WORD**

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

- Are there plans in your parish or local ecumenical community to commemorate the journey of Jesus to his cross through a pilgrimage in the streets or a local park? Are there ways the elect can be involved? Perhaps the elect could be encouraged to join a Way of the Cross at a central location. Find out dates and venues.
- Use an icon image showing the divinity of Jesus as the focus for prayer. Pray the Creed together. Pray for each other as you near the end of your journey. A suitable song could be ‘Glorious in majesty’ (*GA* 370). Conclude with the prayer of exorcism in *RCIA* at §93G.
GOSPEL

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Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’ His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?’—Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied:

’If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.’

‘You have no bucket, sir,’ she answered ‘and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?’ Jesus replied:

‘Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.’

‘Sir,’ said the woman ‘give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water. I see you are a prophet, sir. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.’

Jesus said:

‘Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know: for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour will come—in fact it is here already—when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.’

The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah—that is, Christ—is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything.’ ‘I who am speaking to you,’ said Jesus ‘I am he.’

(John 4:5–16, 19–26, 39–42)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

• There was an ancient enmity between the Jews and Samaritans that sprang from the split of Israel and Judah into two kingdoms after the death of Solomon. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom while Jerusalem remained the capital in the south. The Samaritans built a ‘break-away’ Temple on Mount Gerizim.

• In speaking to a woman who is unknown to him, and a Samaritan woman at that, Jesus is contravening the acceptable social mores of his time. This causes shock in the disciples but indicates that the kingdom of God is open to all who recognise Jesus.

• The first scrutiny for those preparing for baptism or reception takes place today. A scrutiny is a rite in which people are encouraged to uncover ‘all that is weak, defective and sinful in their hearts’ so that God may heal it, and to recognise ‘all that is upright, strong and good’.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This gospel should be read in conjunction with the first reading from Exodus, in which the people of Israel, liberated from slavery in Egypt, are left thirsting in the desert. God provides them with water to sustain their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. In the gospel, the thirst of the Samaritan woman is a much more profound thirst, and her openness to the living water offered by Jesus and her gradual journey to faith are at the heart of this text. She moves from a superficial understanding that Jesus may be offering her a permanent supply of water to a deeper appreciation of him as one who intimately understands the yearning of the human heart and offers her a way forward. Not only does the woman come to faith but she is also instrumental in leading others to belief, using the classic words of invitation to discipleship in John’s Gospel: ‘Come and see a man … I wonder if he is the Christ?’

• Do you sometimes have a superficial understanding of what Jesus offers? How can you continue to deepen your appreciation of Jesus?

• What ‘thirst’ characterises your life at the moment?
MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'How will you get this living water?' Reflect on your journey so far.
- 'If you only knew what God is offering...' What is it that you are being offered by God? What would you ask of Jesus?
- What sense do you have of the spring welling up inside you?
- Recall your own first invitation to faith. What was it that led you to seek the living water? Share your reflections and offer thanks to those who have assisted your journey.
- Who do you know who is thirsty for company, acceptance or affirmation? Respond to their needs this week.
- Use today’s gospel acclamation for your prayer this week:
  Lord, you are truly the Saviour of the world; give me living water that I may never thirst 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

This image of living water cannot help but draw attention to baptism, which is now only weeks away. It is the foundational sacrament of the church and draws us into the life of faith.

- Look at the prayer of blessing over the water from the rite (RCIA §215) and trace the images of water, so central in the Scriptures, that are identified in this prayer.
- Water is fast becoming one of the most precious commodities on our planet. Discuss the ways we use and appreciate water in our own time, including its symbolic value in so many aspects of our lives.
- Use this opportunity to check on how the elect are preparing and how they are feeling about their own approaching baptism.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

This text is really about the woman's journey towards faith in Jesus. She begins with surprise that he would even speak to her and gradually deepens in her conviction that he is the Messiah; finally she leads others in her village to faith in Jesus as well. Does this echo something of your own journey?

LIVING THE WORD

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

- What special preparations are being made in your community for the ceremonies of the Easter Vigil? Do the elect know and understand all that will happen on that night. It may be possible to invite a former catechumen in to speak of their experience of the Easter Vigil.
- Use a bowl of water as a focus for prayer. Affirm each one of the group in their final preparations. Choose the prayers for today from the petitions for the elect and the exorcisms of the first scrutiny (RCIA §§140, 141). A suitable song could be ‘Come to the water’ (GA 403).

NOTES
GOSPEL

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As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. He spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, ‘Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam’ (a name that means ‘sent’). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, ‘Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some said, ‘Yes, it is the same one.’ Others said, ‘No, he only looks like him.’ The man himself said, ‘I am the man.’

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man’s eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, ‘He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.’ Then some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the sabbath.’ Others said, ‘How could a sinner produce signs like this?’ And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, ‘What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?’ ‘He is a prophet’ replied the man.

‘Are you trying to teach us,’ they replied ‘and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!’ And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ‘Sir,’ the man replied ‘tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.’ Jesus said, ‘You are looking at him; he is speaking to you.’ The man said, ‘Lord, I believe’, and worshipped him.

(John 9:1, 6–9, 13–17, 34–38)

EXPLORING THE WORD

There are two main points of today’s gospel: the blind man’s journey towards faith and belief, and the contrast between the attitudes of the blind man and his interrogators. Like the Samaritan woman at the well in last week’s gospel, the blind man gradually moves from lack of faith to faith. First the blind man refers to the one who effected his cure as ‘the man called Jesus’, then he proclaims him a prophet and a man from God, and finally he declares, ‘Lord, I believe’ and worships him. This openness to the revelation of God acting in Jesus is contrasted with the ‘blindness’ of the Pharisees, who, though physically able to see, do not recognise Jesus. The blind man tellingly declares, ‘Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes and you don’t know where he comes from!’ John’s use of the term ‘the Jews’ indicates that this group is from the religious leadership, the very people who are trained in the Law and ways of God. They, of all people, should know what is from God!

- Are there still things that block your total belief?
- What are the signs of God’s presence in your life?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- In what ways have your eyes been opened? What do you see now that you did not see before?
- What have been moments of enlightenment for you?
- Describe an experience you have had of ‘having your eyes opened’—of seeing or coming to understand something that you never realised before. What impact did this new awareness have on you? Share your reflections.
- Bring light and life to others this week. Is there some way you can assist in ‘healing’ another?
- Use the gospel acclamation this week: I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will have the light of life.

EXPLORING THE WORD

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of Interest and Catholic lore

- In Jesus’ time, blindness and other illnesses were seen as punishment for sin.
- The Sabbath was a day for God, and no work could be done. The action of ‘making a paste’ was considered work, so the Pharisees accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath laws.
- The Pool of Siloam was famous from ancient times as it was a pool inside the city walls of Jerusalem that was linked by a tunnel, built by King Hezekiah, to the Gihon Spring outside the city. This meant that during times of siege, the city always had a water supply.
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 first reading, in which Samuel anoints David as the chosen one of God, and the gospel, where Jesus anoints the eyes of the blind man with spittle, indicate the importance of anointing within both the Jewish and Christian traditions. Oil is generally used for this purpose in the church. Part of the baptism ceremony at the Easter Vigil will be an anointing with oil, and chrism will be used to seal the elect with the Holy Spirit during the confirmation ceremony.

• Explain the significance of these symbols and the symbolic actions that accompany them.
• Make links with the other symbols used in the sacraments of initiation: water, the lighted candle, the white garment, the laying on of hands, the bread and wine of life.
• What will it mean to the elect to undergo this initiation into the church?

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

This text again traces the journey towards faith of the man who was born blind and contrasts his openness to the revelation of Jesus as the light of the world to the ‘blindness’ of the Pharisees, who do not see or recognise the truth of who Jesus is.

LIVING THE WORD

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

• What preparations are being made in your community for the celebration of the resurrection? Can the elect play a part in these as preparation for their full entry into the community?
• Use a small dish of mud, the Scriptures and a lighted candle as a focus for prayer. Pray for each other, especially that you will always see the truth of God’s life and love. Use the intercessions from the second scrutiny from the rite (RCIA §154). A suitable song could be ‘Come to set us free’ (GA 277). Conclude with the prayer of blessing in RCIA at §97B.
5th Sunday of Lent

Year A

GOSPEL

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Mary and Martha sent this message to Jesus, ‘Lord, the man you love is ill.’ On receiving the message, Jesus said, ‘This sickness will end not in death but in God’s glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.’

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judaea.’

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house.

Martha said to Jesus, ‘If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.’ ‘Your brother’ said Jesus to her ‘will rise again.’ Martha said, ‘I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said:

‘I am the resurrection and the life.
If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.
Do you believe this?’

‘Yes, Lord,’ she said ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.’

Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, ‘Where have you put him?’ They said, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept; and the Jews said, ‘See how much he loved him!’ But there were some who remarked, ‘He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not have prevented this man’s death?’ Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, ‘Take the stone away.’ Martha said to him, ‘Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.’ Jesus replied, ‘Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

‘Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.
I knew indeed that you always hear me, but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me.’

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, here! Come out!’ The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, let him go free.’

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.

(John 11:3–7, 17, 20–27, 33–45)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

• Mary, Martha and Lazarus, named as special friends of Jesus, lived in Bethany, a small town on the outskirts of Jerusalem, just over the Mount of Olives.

• Popular Jewish belief was that the soul hovered near the body for three days after death. The ‘fourth day’ indicates that Lazarus is well and truly passed away, thus making his resuscitation even more amazing.

• The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead at the end of time, but the Sadducees did not.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The pure human emotion of Jesus in this text attests to the love he had for Lazarus, but this human affection is nothing compared with the future promise to which the actions of Jesus towards Lazarus will lead. For those without faith, the tomb is simply a place of human corruption and decay. Death has ultimate power over people. But for people of faith, the tomb holds no fear. It is ironic that in raising Lazarus to life, Jesus is ensuring his own death at the hands of ‘the Jews’ (see verses 49–53). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the power of sin and death is broken, and instead, resurrection and life are offered to all who would attest with Martha that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It is Jesus who is the resurrection and the life! There is a fundamental difference between the death and resurrection of Lazarus and that of Jesus. Lazarus will return to death, symbolised by the fact that he still wears the clothes of death when he comes forth from the tomb. Jesus’ death, however, will lead to a glory that lasts forever, symbolised by the fact that his death clothes are neatly folded and placed to one side when he emerges from the tomb (see John 20:6–7). The resurrection of Jesus brings eternal life.

• What aspects of your true self have been ‘buried’? How can Jesus help to bring these forth?

• What ‘new life’ will be yours after baptism or reception?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

• ‘I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who has come into this world.’ Are you able to make this total affirmation of faith?

• ‘Even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.’ What do you ask at this moment?

• ‘Unbind him!’ In what ways are you still bound? What must you do to shed your bindings?
• What have been the ‘deadening’ experiences of your life—those things that closed you off from other people? What have been the things, people or occasions that have made you ‘alive’? Share your stories.

• Be ‘life-giving’ to others this week. Acknowledge and affirm them in particular ways.

• Use Martha’s creed this week:

  *Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of 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

Faith in the resurrection of the body is one of the articles of faith in the Creed, and yet it is a belief that is difficult to understand. From earliest times in the church, this belief raised questions among those coming to faith. In the face of the mystery of death, all explanations are ultimately inadequate. Our best response is to put our faith in the words of Jesus: ‘You who believe in me, even if you die, you will live forever.’

• Examine the section of the catechism that deals with the resurrection of the body and the meaning of Christian death (CCC §§988–1019). Clear up any lingering questions or doubts that the elect may have of this future hope of faith.

**SYMBOLS AND IMAGES**

When Jesus calls forth Lazarus from death and the darkness of the tomb to new life, we hear echoes of the Christian belief in the power of baptism. The same symbolism appears in the baptismal ceremony. When baptism is performed by full emersion, this symbolism is even more powerful.

**LIVING THE WORD**

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

• How does your community remember and celebrate those who have died in faith? Look at the symbols and dedications in your church of people who may be commemorated by family and loved ones.

• Use a lighted candle and the open Scriptures as a focus for prayer. Give thanks for those people in your life who have been ‘life-giving.’ Pray for each other as you near the end of your journey of preparation. A suitable song could be ‘We who once were dead’ (GA 188). Conclude with a selection of the prayers of intercession from the third scrutiny at RCIA §161.
Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate, the governor, and the governor put to him this question, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ Jesus replied, ‘It is you who say it.’ But when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders he refused to answer at all. Pilate then said to him, ‘Do you not hear how many charges they have brought against you?’ But to the governor’s complete amazement, he offered no reply to any of the charges.

At festival time it was the governor’s practice to release a prisoner for the people, anyone they chose. Now there was at that time a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. So when the crowd gathered, Pilate said to them, ‘Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ For Pilate knew it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

Now as he was seated in the chair of judgement, his wife sent him a message, ‘Have nothing to do with that man; I have been upset all day by a dream I had about him.’

The chief priests and the elders, however, had persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. So when the governor spoke and asked them, ‘Which of the two do you want me to release for you?’ they said, ‘Barabbas’.

‘But in that case,’ Pilate said to them, ‘what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?’ They all said, ‘Let him be crucified!’ ‘Why?’ Pilate asked, ‘What harm has he done?’ But they shouted all the louder, ‘Let him be crucified!’ Then Pilate saw that he was making no impression, that in fact a riot was imminent. So he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood. It is your concern.’ And the people, to a man, shouted back, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’ Then he released Barabbas for them. He ordered Jesus to be first scourged and then handed over to be crucified.

The governor’s soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium and collected the whole cohort round him. Then they stripped him and made him wear a scarlet cloak, and having twisted some thorns into a crown they put this on his head and placed a reed in his right hand. To make fun of him they knelt to him saying, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ And they spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head with it. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the cloak and dressed him in his own clothes and led him away to crucify him.

On their way out, they came across a man from Cyrene, Simon by name, and enlisted him to carry his cross. When they had reached a place called Golgotha, that is, the place of the skull, they gave him wine to drink mixed with gall, which he tasted but refused to drink. When they had finished crucifying him, they shared out his clothing by casting lots, and then sat down and stayed there keeping guard over him.

Above his head was placed the charge against him; it read: ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’ At the same time two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said, ‘So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself! If you are God’s son, come down from the cross!’ The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way. ‘He saved others,’ they said ‘he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He puts his trust in God; now let God rescue him if he wants him. For he did say, “I am the son of God.”’ Even the robbers who were crucified with him taunted him in the same way.

From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Elî, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ That is, ‘My God, my God, why have you deserted me?’ When some of those who stood there heard this, they said, ‘The Man is calling on Elijah,’ and one of them quickly ran to get a sponge which he dipped in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it him to drink. ‘Wait!’ said the rest of them and see if Elijah will come to save him.’ But Jesus, again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up his spirit.

At that, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked; the rocks were split; the tombs opened and the bodies of many holy men rose from the dead, and these, after his resurrection, came out of the tombs, entered the Holy City and appeared to a number of people. Meanwhile the centurion, together with the others guarding Jesus, had seen the earthquake and all that was taking place, and they were terrified and said, ‘In truth this was a son of God.’

(Matthew 27:11–54)
EXPLORING THE WORD

This long reading from the passion of Jesus is presented by Matthew as a series of alternating scenes in which the disciples fail while Jesus commits himself both to them and to the Father. The betrayal by Judas, the disciples fleeing at his arrest and Peter’s denial all highlight sinful humanity and imperfect faith. But it is this very state that Jesus has come to redeem. The moment of his death is when this redemption is achieved. At that moment, the veil in the temple, which hangs in front of the holy of holies, where God dwells, is torn asunder. God is no longer separated from humankind. God’s indwelling has burst the confines of the temple and permeates the entire world. Heaven and earth are no longer separate from each other. In the salvific death of the God-man, heaven and earth are united again. Ironically, it is the Gentile centurion who proclaims the divinity of Jesus: ‘In truth this was a son of God.’

• In what ways do you feel the indwelling of God in your life?
• In what ways do you feel liberated and redeemed by Christ?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

• How will knowing of the cross of Christ help you to carry your own crosses in the future?
• What emotions stir in you as you read or listen to the passion of the Lord?
• Reflect for a short time on the moments of success and triumph as well as the moments of failure and despair in your life. Share your thoughts in pairs.
• Like Simon of Cyrene in today’s gospel, help someone carry their cross this week.
• Use today’s gospel acclamation as your prayer this week:

  Christ became obedient for us even to death, dying on the cross. Therefore God raised him on high and gave him a name above all other names.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

There are two central images in this week’s liturgy: the palms signify the glory and triumph of Jesus, as well as reminding us of his entry into Jerusalem before his death; the cross represents Christ’s love for the world and the sacrifice he made so that salvation would be available to all people.

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 celebrate the events of the passion? Are there roles that 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 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.

NOTES
Easter Sunday

Gospel

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After the sabbath, and towards dawn on the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary went to visit the sepulchre. And all at once there was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face was like lightning, his robe white as snow. The guards were so shaken, so frightened of him, that they were like dead men. But the angel spoke; and he said to the women, ‘There is no need for you to be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said he would. Come and see the place where he lay; it is there you will see him.’ Now I have told you.’ Filled with awe and great joy the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell the disciples.

And there, coming to meet them, was Jesus. ‘Greetings’ he said. And the women came up to him and, falling down before him, clasped his feet. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers that they must leave for Galilee; they will see me there.’

(Matthew 28:1–10)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

• The Easter Triduum (which means ‘three days’), lasting from Holy Thursday 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.’
• Good Friday and Easter Saturday are the only days of the year on which Mass is not celebrated.

Exploring the Word

You could perhaps allow time to read over some of the many Scripture texts used over these three days. 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 are the fundamental pattern of life for the Christian. Give some examples, from your own life or the lives of the saints, of dying and rising.
• In what ways did the liturgy of these days draw you into the mystery?

Making Connections

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

• ‘There is no need for you to be afraid.’ How have your fears been laid to rest with the events of this night?
• Reflect together on the ceremonies of the Vigil. Share responses and recollections. What did it mean to you?
• Light a candle each time you pray during this Easter season as a sign of keeping the light of Christ consciously before you.
• Use this memorial acclamation as your prayer 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.
• Identify opportunities available to the newly baptised to fully enter into the life of the community.
• What opportunities for the deepening of faith and exploration of the Word are offered in your parish?
• What ministries of service are available for the newly baptised to participate in?
• Explore the role of the sponsors in this period of mystagogy.
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.

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’ in the weeks to come?
- Use a candle and yellow flowers (the colour traditionally associated with the Easter event) as a focus. Offer prayers of thanks for the gift of faith. Sing an Easter song. Conclude with the following prayer:

  You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people; praise God who called you out of darkness and into his marvellous light.

NOTES
EXPLORING THE WORD

2nd Sunday of Easter Year A

GOSPEL

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, locked in their upper room and huddled in upon themselves, is transformed by the gift of peace that Jesus brings and his giving of the Spirit to strengthen them on their way. The doubt of Thomas is transformed by his encounter with the risen Lord. With this transformation, however, comes responsibility. Just as Jesus was sent by the Father, now, too, the disciples are sent into the world to act as Jesus did.

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

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 and touches Jesus. Jesus must fulfill the expectations that Thomas has!

- Are there times when we expect God to act as we wish rather than being open to the presence of the risen Christ in unexpected ways?
- What does the peace of Christ mean to believers today?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- ‘The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord.’ What have been your feelings since the events of last week?
- ‘Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.’ This is addressed to you! How will you nourish that belief in the future?
- How do you understand ‘life in his name’?
- What does the peace of Christ evoke for you now?
- Share experiences of doubt you have had in your life: times when you doubted the love of another or doubted your own abilities. What drove doubt away? How was doubt driven out for you by the events of the Easter Vigil? Share your reflections.
- Look for ways in which a simple gesture of touch can convey friendship, compassion or support this week.
- Repeat St Thomas’ acclamation of faith 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 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 simply because they are baptised. The sacrament of reconciliation is there to assist the faithful to acknowledge human sinfulness and seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

- Review the rites of reconciliation with special attention to the prayers used.
- The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers ample material for the exploration of this sacrament.
- 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 goes beyond verifying physical presence. It can provide healing and comfort; it can be an act of support or compassion.

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 the sacrament of reconciliation celebrated in your community? Perhaps the newly baptised may need to become familiar with the form of reconciliation. One possibility may be to arrange a special celebration for the newly baptised, their sponsors and other key members of the community for their first reception of this sacrament.
- Use the Easter symbol of the pascal candle and the symbols of initiation, oil and water, as a focus for prayer. Pray for each other and pray for the peace of Christ. You could use adaptations of the prayers used in initiation. Conclude with an Easter song.
Two of the disciples of Jesus were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but something prevented them from recognising him. He said to them, ‘What matters are you discussing as you walk along?’ They stopped short, their faces downcast.

Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, ‘You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.’ ‘What things?’ he asked. ‘All about Jesus of Nazareth’ they answered ‘who proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.’

Then he said to them, ‘You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?’ Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them. ‘It is nearly evening’ they said ‘and the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?’

They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, ‘Yes, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.

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

When we read of the meal at Emmaus, we cannot fail to see the parallels with the actions of the Last Supper, in which Jesus instituted the Eucharist. The fourfold actions of taking the bread, blessing it, breaking it and giving it are present, and it is in these actions that the disciples recognise Jesus.

- Look at the structure of the Liturgy of the Eucharist and see where each of these actions is present: the preparation of gifts, the Eucharistic prayer, the fraction rite and the giving of communion.
- Discuss the importance of the communal nature of Catholic faith.
- Speak of ways that faith can be nourished by receiving the Eucharist.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

The journey of the disciples to Emmaus recalls our own journey from doubt to faith. Informed by the Scriptures and nourished by the Eucharist, the disciples know that Jesus walks with them.

LIVING THE WORD

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

- What opportunities for ongoing formation in the lifelong journey of faith are available in your community? Can the newly baptised be encouraged to participate in these after the period of mystagogy concludes?
- Continue to use Easter symbols as a focus. Pray for all those who are setting out on their journey to faith. Pray for each other. Sing an Easter song. Conclude with the prayer of blessing in RCIA at §97C.

NOTES
GOSPEL

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Jesus said:

‘I tell you most solemnly, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but gets in some other way is a thief and a brigand. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out his flock, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They never follow a stranger but run away from him: they do not recognise the voice of strangers.’

Jesus told them this parable but they failed to understand what he meant by telling it to them.

So Jesus spoke to them again:

‘I tell you most solemnly, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All others who have come are thieves and brigands; but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: he will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.’

(John 10:1–10)

EXPLORING THE WORD

In the Gospel of John, we do not find parables in the traditional sense. They are not a literary device that John employs, but this text is as close an approximation to a parable as we have. The contrast he draws between the shepherd who enters the fold by the gate and the thieves and brigands who seek to enter another way is really about leadership. There are good leaders and bad leaders. The good leader of God’s people must come to them through Jesus, who is the gate. The thieves and brigands will only lead the people to fear and confusion, where they will be scattered. Perhaps John is addressing a situation in his community where those who are seeking leadership are not following the voice of Jesus but seeking their own aggrandisement or following their own agenda. Such people will ultimately lead the flock to destruction, but Jesus gives life in abundance to all who know his voice and follow him as shepherd.

• What false voices can be heard in our world today?
• What message do they proclaim that is different from the message of Jesus?
• What are the things that make it difficult to resist the false voices in our world?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

• What does it mean to you to have ‘life to the full’?
• Where is the voice of Christ calling you to go?
• Share together some reflections on people you have known who have been a guide and a protector to you. Try to describe the positive attributes they had and how they used these gifts in caring for others.
• When you pray this week, pray before an image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Be a protector of someone in need of help this week.
• Psalm 22 (23) is one of the best loved and most well-known psalms. Try to learn it by heart and recite it often this week: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose. Near restful waters he leads me, to revive my drooping spirit.

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

• In ancient times, shepherds and their sheep wandered in search of pasture, often travelling many miles. At night, the shepherd would build an enclosure to keep his sheep together and safe from predators. Often he would form a human gate by sleeping at the entry to the enclosure.
• The words pastor and pastoral come from the Latin word for ‘shepherd’.
• This is one of seven sayings of Jesus in John’s Gospel known as the ‘I am’ sayings. In John, this wording is an indication of the divinity of Jesus because it echoes the sacred name of God revealed to Moses: ‘I am who am’ (Exodus 3:14).
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.

John’s Gospel provides various images of Jesus in the form of the ‘I am’ sayings. There are seven of these:

- ‘I am the bread of life’ (6:48)
- ‘I am the light of the world’ (8:12, 9:5)
- ‘I am the sheep gate and the good shepherd’ (10:9, 11)
- ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ (11:25)
- ‘I am the way, the truth and the life’ (14:6)
- ‘I am the true vine’ (15:1)
- ‘Before Abraham was born, I am’ (8:58).

All these sayings—especially the last one listed—should be read and understood within the context of the Hebrew name for God. When Moses encountered God in the burning bush, he asks by what name God is known. God replies, ‘I AM WHO AM. Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM has sent me to you.”’

John is making a very profound point about the identity of Jesus in these sayings.

- Read each saying in its context in the gospel and discuss what it means for Jesus to be the bread of life, the true vine, the way, the truth and the life, etc. In what ways does this add to your understanding of Christ?

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is a very well-known one. It denotes his individual and pastoral care for all the flock. John takes this a step further. Entry into the flock of God’s people can only come through the gateway that is belief in Christ.

LIVING THE WORD

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

- What pictorial images of Jesus are there in your church or parish buildings? Which of these do you find most helpful? What images do the newly baptised have in their homes?

- Continue to use Easter symbols in your prayer. Add an image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Pray for all those who are like lost sheep. Pray for each other. Sing one of the settings of Psalm 22(23) (GA 23, 24, 25, 506). Conclude with an adaptation of the blessing in RCIA at §97D.
5th Sunday of Easter

Gospel

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Jesus said to his disciples:

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too. You know the way to the place where I am going.’

Thomas said, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’ Jesus said:

‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him.’

Philip said, ‘Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied.’ ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip,’ said Jesus to him ‘and you still do not know me? To have seen me is to have seen the Father, so how can you say, “Let us see the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason. I tell you most solemnly, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father.’

(John 14:1–12)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

This text comes from a long section of John’s Gospel known as the ‘farewell discourse’, during which Jesus gives final instruction to the disciples at the Last Supper. Perhaps this echoes something of your own experience of the period of mystagogy.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Today’s gospel draws our attention to the time when Jesus will depart from the disciples (the Ascension is two weeks away). When Jesus is gone, the disciples must continue the task that he has begun. One can imagine their fear and uncertainty in being left with such a monumental challenge. Philip’s question, ‘Lord, how can we know the way?,’ shows their fear clearly enough. But help is available. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He is both the map and the destination. Disciples are called to adopt Jesus’ lifestyle, his approach to God, to others, to all creation. In living as Jesus did, living the life of faith, the disciples will know the truth and will have life. This life of faith and living the way of Jesus, God’s way in the world, will enable the disciples not only to continue the work of Jesus but to perform even greater works.

- In what ways does living this life of faith get tested each day?
- What great works are you now called on to perform?
- What are some ways to continue to deepen your knowledge and love of Jesus?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Now that you have come to the Father through Jesus Christ, what sense do you have of the Father living in you?
- What are the things that cause your heart to be troubled?
- What are the things that cause you to be satisfied?
- ‘I am going to prepare a place for you.’ Share reflections on those places that are special to you for some reason. Is there a particular place where you find it easiest to experience the presence of God in your life?
- Allow your own home and its various rooms to remind you of your Father’s house this week. Be hospitable and open the doors of your home to someone in need of company.
- Use today’s psalm response as your prayer this week:

  Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
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

Living the way of Jesus is living the way of choosing life. An exploration of what ‘Life in Christ’ means takes up an entire section in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The catechism states that ‘Catechesis has to reveal in all clarity the joy and the demands of the way of Christ’ (CCC §1697). As the newly baptised may be drawing to the end of their formal period of catechesis, while other catechumens may be continuing, it could be useful to explore the type of catechesis needed for continual ‘newness of life’: a catechesis of the Holy Spirit, of grace, of the beatitudes, of sin and forgiveness, of human and Christian virtues, of charity and of church.

- Using the catechism (CCC §1697), explore what all these are and how they may be useful in ongoing formation and growth in the life of faith.
- What does it mean to claim that ‘the first and last point of reference of catechesis will always be Jesus Christ himself’ (CCC §1698). Explore this with relation to today’s gospel.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

The Father’s house, of which Jesus speaks here, refers to that spiritual state of being in which we will live knowing God, as we are already known so intimately by him. It is Jesus who grants access to this ‘house’ or state of being. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life for those who believe. In what ways do you feel ‘at home’ in the Father’s house?

LIVING THE WORD

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

- The rooms of the Father’s house are reflected in the various works of the church. How many ‘rooms’ are there in your parish community? Is everyone welcomed and encouraged to participate? Invite the newly baptised to get involved.
- Continue to use the Easter colours and symbols as a focus for prayer. Pray for each other. You could perhaps use an adaptation of the prayers of intercession for one of the scrutiny liturgies. Sing an Easter song. Conclude by reciting the Creed together.
The Summit Online

6th Sunday of Easter Year A

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to his disciples:

‘If you love me you will keep my commandments.
I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you. In a short time the world will no longer see me; but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you will understand that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you. Anybody who receives my commandments and keeps them will be one who loves me; and anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him.’

(John 14:15–21)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

• The word advocate means ‘called to the side of’ and thus is often used to describe a mediator or assistant in a lawsuit.

• Some translations of the Bible use the word paraclete instead of advocate; others use the word counselor or comforter.

• In John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit continues the work of Jesus himself (14:17, 26), recalling things the earthly Jesus taught or revealing things he was unable to convey. In John's view, this spiritual knowledge or insight, unavailable until after Jesus’ death and resurrection, makes Christian faith and understanding fully possible.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text again alerts the disciples to that time when Jesus will no longer be with them. His departure will be a severe challenge to their faith, and Jesus gives voice to the challenge: ‘If you love me you will keep my commandments.’ This challenging call to follow the commandments of Jesus is accompanied by a gift—the gift of someone else, the advocate, who will be by their side during that interim period between the two comings. Jesus does promise to return, and in the meantime, his presence, and that of the Father, lives on in the love that is to be the way of life of the Christian. The Holy Spirit is not a thing apart from God and Jesus but the bond of love between them, and the believer is drawn into this love and becomes a part of it through living the way of Christ. Through the Spirit, Jesus remains forever present to the church, and all Christians are brought into the very life of God.

Contemplate the ways you experience the life and love of the Spirit of God in the world:

• in nature and human relationships
• in society
• in personal prayer
• in the church and its liturgy.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

• When have you felt abandoned or left behind?
• What, for you, are the key commandments of Jesus?
• Who have been those people who have helped you through difficult times?
• Recall an experience of being supported by someone in a time of critical need. Share your memories of what form that support took and the impact it had on you.
• Be ‘life-giving’ to someone this week. Be an advocate, a counselor or comforter to someone in need.
• Pray to the Holy Spirit this week:

  Come Holy Spirit, renew me with your gifts. Heal my brokenness, pour down your wisdom. Instill your peace within me, inspire my every need. Amen.
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 knowledge of faith is possible only in the Holy Spirit: to be in touch with Christ, we must first have been touched by the Holy Spirit … By virtue of our Baptism, the first sacrament of the faith, the Holy Spirit in the Church communicates to us, intimately and personally, the life that originates in the Father and is offered to us in the Son.

(CCC §683)

The Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, is central to our understanding of God and to our faith in Christ. It is clear from many of the formulations of faith in the New Testament that the very first Christians had a keen sense of Jesus living on with them through his gift of the Spirit.

• The Catechism of the Catholic Church has a very good section on the titles and symbols of the Holy Spirit (CCC §§691–701). Explore these and take particular note of any relationships to the sacraments that have recently been received by the newly baptised.

• Discuss ways in which the Holy Spirit is seen to live on in the church and its action in the world.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

One of the often repeated themes in John’s Gospel is that of life. Life in abundance (John 10:10) is available to all who believe in Jesus and live his way. How do you understand that abundance of life that is now yours through baptism?

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 serve the world and cooperate with the movement of the Spirit to the conversion of the world? Encourage the newly baptised to take an active role in a ministry that serves the movement of the Spirit.

• Use a selection of symbols of the Holy Spirit as a focus for prayer (for example, water, oil, fire, the colour red, a dove). Pray for each other that the Spirit of Christ will remain with you as you near completion of the period of mystagogy. A suitable song could be ‘Spirit-Friend’ (GA 184) or ‘The Spirit of God’ (GA 185). Conclude with the prayer of the laying on of hands used in celebration of confirmation at RCIA §228.
The Ascension of the Lord  

GOSPEL

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The eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

(Matthew 28:16–20)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of Interest and Catholic lore

- The Ascension of Jesus is described only in the Book of Acts (1:2–11), although there is a shorter version in Luke’s Gospel. There are also allusions to the event elsewhere in the New Testament (such as John 6:62, or Ephesians 4:8–10).

- In Matthew’s Gospel, many of the important moments of Jesus’ life are located on mountaintops: his temptation, his transfiguration, the great teaching of the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ and now this final instruction to his disciples. In this way, Matthew draws parallels with Moses, the great leader and lawgiver who encountered God on the mountaintop.

- Matthew shows Jesus as fulfilling and extending the teaching of Moses. Whereas the law had been for the people of Israel, Jesus sends his disciples to all nations; whereas the Jewish people had faith in the name of God, yhwh, Jesus sends his disciples to baptise in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The feast of the Ascension celebrates the physical separation of Jesus from the human story, but this text promises his continual presence ‘to the end of time’. After three years of living, working and praying with the disciples, Jesus commissions them to continue his work in the world. This is a difficult challenge for some of the disciples who, although prepared to go to the appointed place, still hesitate! Despite their misgivings and fragile faith, he sends them out to all nations. Jesus has been given the authority that was once the exclusive domain of the God of Israel; Jesus has become the presence of the living God, and his presence will continue with his disciples through the Holy Spirit.

- Despite this affirmation from Jesus of his continued presence, the disciples at this point had no idea what would happen next. Talk for a time of how they may have felt. What did happen next?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- ‘Know that I am with you always.’ In what ways do you sense the presence of Jesus in yourself, in the church and in the world?

- ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.’ How do you see your role in this great work of the church? How can you bring the life of Christ to others?

- As you near the completion of your time with the RCIA, recall what it was that first drew you to wanting to become a disciple of Jesus. Share your reflections on how you now feel about your decision. Reflect on your way forward in the life of faith.

- Give witness to your faith this week by living the way of Christ: do not judge others, act with humility, respond to the needs of others, pray often.

- ‘Know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.’ Memorise this verse to help you in times of doubt or distress.

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 celebration of the Ascension as a particular feast day developed in the vicinity of Antioch around AD 380. The first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles notes that Jesus appeared among his disciples for forty days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3). It then goes on to describe Jesus being taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9). The juxtaposition of these two verses...
probably gave rise to this feast being celebrated forty days after Easter. Forty days after Easter falls on a Thursday, and in the past this feast was known as ‘Ascension Thursday’ and was a holy day of obligation. In more recent times, the celebration has been moved to the Sunday before Pentecost.

- You could talk about holy days of obligation and what they mean in the tradition of the church. There may be other obligations of the faith that the newly baptised have not yet encountered. Make sure they are equipped to move beyond the RCIA and into full participation in the church.

- This text from Matthew is often taken as the foundational text of mission organisations who work in cross-cultural contexts, such as St Columbans Mission Society or Catholic Mission. You could speak about the work of such groups and why the missionary activity of the church is still so important.

- Emphasise that all the baptised are called to participate in the missionary work of the church, in whatever sphere we work.

**SYMBOLS AND IMAGES**

The word *apostle* comes from the Greek word meaning ‘one who is sent out’. Jesus sends his apostles out to continue to preach the Good News to the entire world. This recalls for us the ‘sending out’ that occurs at the end of our Mass: ‘Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.’ We, too, are sent to bring the truth of the Gospel into our daily actions and decisions and thus give witness to the faith we profess.

**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 support and engage in the missionary work of the church? Are there ways the newly baptised can become involved in this work?

- The Book of the Gospels is a suitable focus for prayer. Use or adapt one of the prefaces for the Ascension. You could use the psalm of praise from today’s liturgy. Pray for each other. A suitable song could be ‘Lord, you give the Great Commission’ (GA 313) or ‘Take Christ to the world’ (GA 369). Conclude with the blessing in RCIA at §971.
GOSPEL

In the evening of 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.’

(John 20:19–23)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

• Pentecost was originally a Jewish harvest festival that was celebrated fifty days after the Passover. It was one of the great ‘pilgrimage’ festivals, which meant that people came to celebrate this feast at the temple. It was for this festival that so many pilgrims were present in Jerusalem on the day when the Spirit was manifested in the lives of the disciples.

• The Christian feast of Pentecost is fifty days after Easter and is the culmination of the Lent–Easter–Pentecost cycle.

• The church teaches that the Holy Spirit brings both gifts and fruits to the faithful (see Sharing the Tradition).

EXPLORING THE WORD

Despite the promise of Jesus that he would not leave his disciples ‘orphaned’ (see sixth Sunday of Easter), they huddle in fear in the upper room after his death. He comes among them, not offering recriminations at their lack of faith, but offering peace—a peace won through the cross and resurrection. Just as Jesus is transformed by this experience, so too the disciples’ fear turns to joy. In the giving of his Spirit, Jesus literally breathes life back into the disciples. They are to go out and continue his work of forgiveness, judgment and witness in the world.

• What kind of experiences animate you and ‘bring you to life’, giving you energy to keep on with the task?

• What gifts can be discerned among members of the group?

• How are these gifts used by each one?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

• Recall a time when you felt filled with joy.

• Relive your feelings when you first received the Holy Spirit at baptism.

• How do you feel about being ‘sent’ into the world?

• Recall someone you no longer see but who had a significant influence on shaping who you are, whose memory is alive for you and whose influence remains strong. Share your recollections of these people. Does this phenomenon give insight into the experience of the disciples at Pentecost?

• Try to recognise and affirm the gifts of others this week and use your own gifts to make life a little easier for someone else.

• Use today’s gospel acclamation as your prayer this week: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in us 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

Coming to faith is not so much acquiring a new set of beliefs about God as it is discovering God’s existence within the realities of our daily lives. The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit help us to be more attuned to the actions of God in our lives and in our world. At baptism, the Spirit comes upon the newly initiated Christian, and at confirmation, the Spirit of God is renewed and confirmed in the faithful.

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are: wisdom, understanding, counsel (right judgment), fortitude (courage), knowledge, piety (reverence) and fear (awe) of the Lord (CCC §1831).
The church lists twelve fruits of the Spirit: charity (love), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity (CCC §1832).

- Explore these gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. How do you see them 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, and red vestments are worn by the priest on Pentecost Sunday. 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. All have their origins in Scripture. 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*

- In what ways are the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit apparent in your community? In what ways does your community use and share those gifts and fruits?

- For some, this may be the last time they meet as an RCIA group. You could consider a special Eucharist and a meal together. It may be appropriate to present each person with a gift: a book of prayers or daily reflections, a Bible or some other suitable aide to ongoing formation.

- Use the symbols of the Holy Spirit as a focus for prayer: the colour red, small flames, a representation of a dove. Pray for the world and for the church. Pray that the Spirit will live in each of you present. A suitable song could be ‘Gifts of the Spirit’ (GA 183). Conclude with the prayer at the laying on of hands from the rite of confirmation (RCIA §228).