

Session 1: The God Who Weeps

WHAT WE FOUND

- Jesus loved the family at Bethany, and he still delayed; the Gospel holds God's purpose and our pain in the same passage without shame. Martha made her great confession, Yes, Lord, I believe, while her brother was still in the tomb.
- Jesus wept (John 11:35), knowing exactly how the story would end. Grief and tears are not in themselves a failure of faith.
- At the tomb Jesus was not only sad but roused, almost angry. John does not name what at; an ancient and widely held reading takes it to be death itself, which Scripture calls the last enemy (1 Cor 15:26). It was certainly not aimed at the grieving.
- Isaiah 25:8 makes two promises: he will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces. Lazarus previewed the first, in miniature; the second is still open.
- Psalm 56:8: God has kept count of our tossings, and the psalmist asks him to put his tears in his bottle. Nothing you have cried is lost on him.

THREE VOICES WORTH KEEPING

St. Augustine (Tractates on John 49, in summary): Christ wept to teach us what to do with our own weeping; on the groaning he dwells on Christ freely stirring his own human emotion, so that his true humanity would be beyond doubt.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (Sermons on the Song of Songs 26, in summary): he broke off his sermon series to grieve his brother Gerard openly before his monks, and defended those tears as compatible with faith.

St. Thomas Aquinas (ST I-II q. 38, in summary): sorrow is eased by pleasure, tears, the compassion of friends, contemplation of truth, and sleep and baths; a hurt kept shut up inside hurts more.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray Psalm 56 once this week, slowly. At verse 8, name to God one grief whose tears he has kept.
2. Contact one grieving person: no advice, no fixing, presence only. I was thinking of you is a complete sentence.
3. If a tear comes this week, do not apologize for it. Say two words instead: Jesus wept.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Jesus wept."

John 11:35

Before next session: Read Psalm 13 slowly, once.

Catechism references for this session: CCC 478, 994, 1009

THE SEALED SHEET

MY GUESS · SEALED UNTIL WE OPEN THEM TOGETHER

Where is God when we suffer? Write your honest answer below: tonight's answer, not the churchy one. Then fold this page in half, seal it with tape, write your name on the outside, and bring it back next week. No one will read it, including you, until we open them together later in the study.

Session 2: Permission to Lament

WHAT WE FOUND

- By most counts, laments are the largest single category of psalms. God's own prayer book is full of inspired complaint.
- Lament has an anatomy: address, complaint, petition, and usually a turn to trust. Psalm 13 turns; nothing changed but the direction of the gaze.
- Psalm 22:1-11 braids complaint and creed together and refuses to drop either one.
- Psalm 88 never turns; its last word is darkness, and it is still holy Scripture, assigned to Friday Night Prayer in the Church's ordinary weekly cycle. Verse 1 hides its miracle: the man in the dark is still crying out *before you*. Lament keeps the address line.
- The wilderness grumbling God condemned (Exodus 16) ran the other way: pressed against Moses and Aaron, and so against the LORD, rewriting their history and moving away from him. The address line is the clearest sign of the difference, though not the whole of it.
- Even the Bible's book-length funeral hides hope at its exact center: the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases (Lamentations 3:21-24).

THREE VOICES WORTH KEEPING

St. Athanasius (Letter to Marcellinus, in summary): the Psalms mirror the soul; whoever prays them finds his own heart there, and prays the words as his own. The laments were written for your dark days too.

St. John of the Cross (The Dark Night, in summary): not every darkness in prayer is God's absence; some darkness is God's nearness, purifying faith of its dependence on feelings.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux (Story of a Soul, in summary): through her final trial of faith, when heaven felt closed, she kept making acts of faith she could not feel. She persevered to the end, and the Church canonized her.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray your written lament line once each morning. Just the line. Keep the address.
2. On Friday night, pray Night Prayer (Compline), or simply Psalm 88, with the whole Church.
3. When someone shares something hard, do not supply the turn for them: no at least. Let their verse 18 stand.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit."

Psalm 34:18

Before next session: Read Job 1-2. And if your sealed sheet from Week 1 is still at home, bring it next week.

Catechism references for this session: CCC 2585-2589, 2629-2631, 1174-1178

Session 3: The Question of Job

WHAT WE FOUND

- The book certifies Job's character twice before the catastrophe (1:1, 1:8), God's own testimony included, then certifies his response after it (1:22). The tidy explanation, he must deserve it, is ruled out on page one.
- Job mourned fully and worshiped fully in the same breath: the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.
- The friends' finest hour was seven days of silence (2:13). Their theology failed the moment they began explaining. (Chapters 32 to 37 belong to a fourth speaker, Elihu, not to the three.)
- God's own verdict (42:7-8): the friends have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. God vindicates Job over the friends, and not every sentence Job shouted: the whirlwind had already rebuked him for words without knowledge (38:2), and Job retracted (42:3, 6). God receives honest speech and purifies what is wrong in it; he will not accept tidy defenses built on false premises. And the wounded man became the intercessor for his comforters.
- Jesus twice severed the link between suffering and blame: John 9:1-3 and Luke 13:1-5.
- God never answered the question Job asked, and Job still said: now my eye sees you (42:5). Consequences remain real; the forbidden move is inferring someone's guilt from the fact or severity of their suffering.

THREE VOICES WORTH KEEPING

St. Gregory the Great (*Moralia in Job*, in summary): he wrote the Church's most influential Job commentary while ill himself, and said his own scourging helped him understand scourged Job from the inside.

St. John Chrysostom (his biographers' account, in summary): he protested his unjust exile to the end, and ancient tradition preserves his last words on the road as: Glory to God for all things. Protest and doxology can live in the same saint.

St. Teresa of Ávila (*The Book of Her Life*, in summary): she wrote her own life partly so that others in long illness and dryness would not conclude God had abandoned them: closeness to God does not exempt anyone from trials, and the soul should keep speaking to him plainly through them.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Practice one shiva skill: in one hard conversation, nothing prescriptive. Presence, not explanation.
2. Memorize Job 19:25 exactly, and pray it once at night before sleep.
3. If your sealed sheet from Week 1 is still at home, bring it next week.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth."

Job 19:25

Before next session: Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Bring your sealed sheet from Week 1 if you still have it.

Catechism references for this session: CCC 164, 272-274, 309-314

Session 4: Man of Sorrows

WHAT WE FOUND

- Isaiah saw him centuries early: a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, whose credentials are sufferings known from the inside.
- The great exchange of Isaiah 53: our griefs, sorrows, and sins move onto him; the wounds stay his, and what crosses back to us is what they win, our wholeness and our healing. And the crowd's verdict, smitten by God, was the friends' theology from Job, overturned by the surrounding claim that the griefs he bore were ours.
- In Acts 8 the apostolic Church left us its own answer key: beginning with this scripture, Philip told him the good news of Jesus.
- From the Cross, Jesus prayed the opening line of Psalm 22: the lament we prayed together in Session 2, complaint braided with creed, still addressed: My God, my God. The Lord himself died praying lament.
- The psalm he reached for ends in vindication, and says of the afflicted one: he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him (Ps 22:24). The Trinity was not broken; he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, so as to say that cry in our name (CCC 603).
- The sealed sheets opened, and each of us answered the question again at the foot of the Cross.

THREE VOICES WORTH KEEPING

St. Leo the Great (Passion sermons, in summary): the one hanging there is true man, truly suffering everything ours, and true God, truly saving: he assumed our weakness without laying down his power.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) (The Science of the Cross, in summary): the Cross is not admired from a distance but entered; she wrote it as the Reich closed in, and died at Auschwitz having offered her life with her people.

St. Ignatius of Antioch (Letter to the Romans 4): in a common English rendering: I am the wheat of God, and I am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray all of Psalm 22 once this week: both halves, without skipping either.
2. Put a crucifix where your day will collide with it; when suffering shows up, say Psalm 22:24: he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.
3. Choose one small suffering of this week, a minor one, and bring it with you next session. You will find out why.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed."

Isaiah 53:5

Before next session: Read Colossians 1:24 slowly, twice. It will sound wrong. Come ready to say why.

Catechism references for this session: CCC 599-600, 603, 618

Session 5: Filling Up What Is Lacking

WHAT WE FOUND

- Colossians 1:24 is deliberately scandalous, and inspired: Paul completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his Body. It must be exegeted, not explained away.
- What it cannot mean, from Scripture itself: it is finished (John 19:30); one offering has perfected for all time (Heb 10:14). Nothing is lacking in the Cross's redemptive value (CCC 614).
- The distinction that resolves it: redemption accomplished (complete) and applied (working through Christ's Body across time, with our participation willed by Christ himself: with him, share, with him: Rom 8:17; 1 Pet 4:13; 2 Cor 1:5; Phil 3:10).
- Paul begged three times for the thorn's removal and was refused; what came instead was grace sufficient and power made perfect in weakness. Not removal: presence with purpose.
- Offer it up, rehabilitated: an intention and a union, never a silencer. You still take the medicine and call the doctor. You offer your own suffering, and may gently invite a willing person to unite theirs; you never impose it or use it to wave away what someone needs.
- The exchange rate is published: the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed (Rom 8:18).

THREE VOICES WORTH KEEPING

St. John Paul II (Salvifici Doloris, in summary): Christ did not abolish or fully explain suffering; he transformed it, so that every sufferer united to him shares in his redemptive suffering and finds in it a vocation.

St. Rose of Lima (preserved by her biographer, quoted in CCC 618): apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.

St. Francis of Assisi (the perfect joy account, Franciscan tradition): the gifts of God are not ours to boast in; perfect joy is bearing rejection patiently for love of Christ, glorying only in the Cross.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray a morning offering each day: Lord Jesus, I offer you this day, all I do, all I enjoy, and all I suffer, joined to your Cross, for those you put on my heart.
2. Once this week, in the actual moment of an ache or a fear, offer it by name for a specific person. Then take whatever care is right for you.
3. Read Romans 8:18 each night before sleep, and let it be the last arithmetic of the day.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Romans 8:18

Before next session: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Catechism references for this session: CCC 618, 1505, 1508, 1847

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN · TAKE-HOME SHEET

Session 6: Not As Those Who Have No Hope

WHAT WE FOUND

- Paul never says do not grieve. He says: not as others do who have no hope. Grief is licensed; despair is evicted; hope changes grief's horizon, not its existence.
- Christians called death sleep so confidently that cemetery means dormitory. Every Catholic cemetery is a sleeping place with an alarm set.
- The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor 15:26): the enemy behind the strange force of Jesus's groaning in Bethany on our first night, now formally scheduled for destruction.
- Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor 15:54) takes up Isaiah 25:8, the verse we found in Session 1, which reads: He will swallow up death for ever. Different words, one promise, announced as cashed.
- The tears God has kept (Ps 56:8) meet their end in Revelation 21:4: he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Every tear this study permitted has been prayed toward that verse.
- The communion of saints: those who die in Christ are not severed from his Body. We entrust all our dead to God's mercy and pray for them (2 Macc 12:43-45; CCC 958), have Masses offered, keep their names and anniversaries: remembrance is traffic, not an archive.
- Job answered at last: the Redeemer who lives is the Man of Sorrows, risen; he has stood on the earth once, and will stand on it at the last. And the title verse at last: blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt 5:4). Not cheerful; blessed. Not explained; comforted, and by God himself.

THREE VOICES WORTH KEEPING

St. Ambrose (On the Death of His Brother Satyrus II, in summary): nature gives us tears and faith does not confiscate them; the resurrection changes what they mean, so that we grieve as those who expect to receive our dead back.

St. Augustine (Confessions IX): Monica asked only this: remember me at the altar of the Lord, wherever you are. He held his tears back, then wept freely before God, prayed for her, and asked his readers to pray too. We still do.

The Roman Liturgy (Preface I for the Dead (older ICEL wording); the preface is quoted at CCC 1012): Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Have a Mass offered for one of your dead this month: call the parish office; it is simpler than most people think. Go if you can.
2. Pray Revelation 21:1-5 once each night this week, and let verse 4 be the last thing your grief hears before sleep.
3. Write a short note of pure presence to someone grieving: no fixing, no explaining. I was thinking of you, and I am praying for [name] by name. Send it.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope."

1 Thessalonians 4:13

Before next session: This study ends; the communion does not. Keep your bookend sheet in your Bible at Psalm 22, and keep praying for your dead by name.

Catechism references for this session: CCC 958, 1012, 1030-1032