

Session 9: The New Rachel

The Mother of Sorrows

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Tracing Matthew's weeping mother from Bethlehem back to Rachel's roadside grave, the group discovers the biblical pattern of the sorrowful mother, hears Simeon's sword named over Mary, and follows her to her station at the Cross.

Catholic Touchstone. Simeon's prophecy of the sword (Luke 2:34–35); Mary's union with her Son's sacrifice at the Cross (CCC 964).

What You Need to Know

This session carries grief, and the leader carries the room. Some present will have buried children, marriages, parents, or versions of their own lives; Rachel's weeping will not stay on the page for them. Follow the study's standing pastoral rule tonight more than any other night: allow silence, never force resolution, and point gently toward real support and the sacraments. It is enough, sometimes, to say: 'The Church has a Mother of Sorrows because God does not ask us to pretend.'

The typology, for the leader's preparation. Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, dies on the road giving birth to her second son. With her last breath she names him *Ben-oni*, 'son of my sorrow'; his father renames him *Benjamin*, 'son of the right hand' (Genesis 35:16–20). She is buried near Bethlehem, and her tomb becomes Israel's landmark of maternal grief. Centuries later Jeremiah hears her still: 'A voice is heard in Ramah... Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted, because they are not' (Jeremiah 31:15), a mother's lament over the exiles. Ramah was the staging point for the deportation (Jeremiah 40:1), and the tradition heard Rachel weeping there as her children were led away. (Leader note: Scripture itself preserves two tomb traditions, near Bethlehem in Genesis 35:19 and in Benjamin near Ramah in 1 Samuel 10:2, which is part of why her voice haunts both landscapes.) Matthew reaches for exactly this verse when Herod slaughters Bethlehem's boys (Matthew 2:16–18). Brant Pitre draws the study's conclusion: in Matthew's infancy narrative, the sorrowing mother of Bethlehem's Messiah steps into Rachel's place; Mary is the New Rachel, the mother whose motherhood is wounded from the start.

The Ben-oni/Benjamin wordplay is the hidden gem the group will uncover tonight: the same child is 'son of my sorrow' to his dying mother and 'son of the right hand' to his father. The Messiah is both at once: the man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3) whom the Father seats at his right hand (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:33–34). Mary's vocation lives in that hyphen: mother of the sorrow, mother of the enthroned.

And Jeremiah does not leave Rachel weeping. The very next verses answer her: 'Keep your voice from weeping... there is hope for your future, says the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country' (Jeremiah 31:16–17), and the same chapter announces the new covenant (31:31). Matthew quotes the tears knowing his readers can see the consolation on the same page. Christian sorrow is real sorrow inside a promised reversal; the Mother of Sorrows is not a monument to despair but its refutation. One doctrinal honesty note for the leader: if the term 'co-redemptrix' arises, represent the Church's actual position: the Church teaches Mary's real, singular, wholly subordinate cooperation in her Son's work (Lumen Gentium 56–58, 60–62), while that particular title remains undefined and its formal use is currently discouraged precisely to protect the uniqueness of the one Redeemer. Say what the Church says, at the confidence the Church says it.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Rachel's road (Genesis 35:16–20): the beloved wife, the hard labor 'when they were still some distance from Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem),' the dying naming, the pillar on her grave 'to this day.' Israel's memory attached her tomb to the Bethlehem road; the geography is why her voice haunts that landscape in Jeremiah and Matthew.

Simeon in the temple (Luke 2:25–35): the old man's oracle over the child ('set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, a sign that is spoken against') pivots, mid-sentence, to the mother: 'and a sword will pierce through your own soul also.' From the fortieth day of her Son's life, Mary's motherhood is prophesied as a shared wound. The tradition counts her seven sorrows beginning here.

The station at the Cross (John 19:25): 'standing by the cross of Jesus' is where this session ends, deliberately mid-scene. She stands (the Latin tradition's *stabat*): not collapsed, not shielded, not fled with the scattered disciples (Matthew 26:31, 56). What is said to her there belongs to the next session; tonight the group simply takes its place beside her and stays.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

In a sermon the Church reads in her liturgy for Our Lady of Sorrows, St. Bernard teaches, in substance, that Simeon's sword truly passed through Mary's soul at the Cross: the lance that opened her Son's side, finding him beyond pain, reached her instead; she is more than martyr, for her compassion suffered in the soul what the martyrs suffered in the body.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon within the Octave of the Assumption (*Sermo infra octavam Assumptionis*), read in the Office of Readings for Our Lady of Sorrows, September 15 (summary)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

"She stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, associating herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of the Victim who was born of her." The Church's own solemn description of Calvary's second station of grief.

Lumen Gentium 58

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE STABAT MATER

The thirteenth-century hymn the Church still sings on this mystery begins: at the Cross her station keeping, stood the mournful Mother weeping, close to Jesus to the last. Its petitions ask not to admire her grief but to share it: make me feel as thou hast felt; make my soul to glow and melt with the love of Christ my Lord.

Stabat Mater (liturgical hymn, 13th century)

Catechism Connection

CCC 964 teaches that Mary's union with her Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the hour of his virginal conception to his death, and quotes *Lumen Gentium* 58 on her standing at the Cross, enduring with her Son and uniting herself with his sacrifice.

CCC 618 teaches that the Cross is Christ's unique sacrifice, and that he nonetheless calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him; it names Mary as associated 'before all others' and more intimately

than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering. CCC 970 stands guard over tonight's whole topic: Mary's maternal role 'in no way obscures or diminishes' the unique mediation of Christ, but shows its power; her influence flows entirely from the superabundance of his merits. Cite all three as written; the Ben-oni/Benjamin application to Christ is the study's typological extension and should be labeled so.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Thread C ('mother of all living') is one session from resolution. Tonight ends at John 19:25 with Mary standing at the Cross, and the leader must end it there: read verse 25, hold the silence, and close in prayer WITHOUT reading verses 26–27. If someone reads ahead aloud, receive it gently: 'Those words get our whole next session.' The cliffhanger is the plant.

Thread A: the Cana resolution may echo tonight (the hour has come; the Woman is at her station). One sentence of callback is right; the Revelation payoff stays sealed, two sessions out.

Pastoral thread, tonight only: identify beforehand one or two concrete supports you can name if grief surfaces (the parish's grief ministry, a priest available for conversation, the sacrament of reconciliation, Mass intentions for the dead). Do not improvise these in the moment.

Session Goals

1. Group has discovered the Rachel typology themselves, running Matthew 2 back through Jeremiah 31 to Genesis 35.
2. Group can explain the Ben-oni/Benjamin wordplay and its Christological shape.
3. Group can state, with the Church's own hedges, what Mary's cooperation in the Passion is and is not.
4. Session ends at John 19:25, silence kept, next session's text untouched.

Timed Plan (75–90 minutes)

Segment	Minutes
Welcome and opening prayer	5
Win questions	10
Build: live discovery, the weeping voice (Matthew 2 to Jeremiah 31 to Genesis 35)	25
Build: Ben-oni / Benjamin; the consolation verses	10
Build: Simeon's sword (Luke 2:25–35); Voices	15
Build: steelman and answer	15
The station (John 19:25), silence, Send, Live It, memory verse, closing	10

If short on time: Cut the Dig Deeper on the seven sorrows (hand it to the Take-Home) and compress the Win to one question. Do not cut the closing silence at John 19:25; it is the session's real teaching.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Leader prays: Father, you did not spare your own Son, and you did not hide his mother from the cost. Tonight, as we walk the road past Rachel's grave, be near to everyone in this room who carries a grief we cannot see. Let your word tell the truth about sorrow, and let your promise answer it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Opening Questions

1. Why do we build memorials at the places where sorrow happened? What are they for?
2. Is there a difference between being comforted and being consoled? Try to name it.

Build: Into the Text

1. Read Matthew 2:16–18, Herod's massacre. Matthew says this fulfilled 'what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah.' Discovery step one: find the verse he quotes, near the middle of Jeremiah 31, and read it with its surrounding verses.

Read aloud: Matthew 2:16–18

LIVE DISCOVERY: THE WEeping VOICE, TRACED TO ITS GRAVE

Step one lands at Jeremiah 31:15: Rachel weeping for her children, refusing comfort, 'because they are not.' Ask: who is Rachel, and why is she weeping at Ramah centuries after her death? Take guesses, then give step two:

'Rachel's death is recorded near the end of Genesis 35. Find it, and pay attention to two things: where she is buried, and what she names her son.'

The group reads Genesis 35:16–20: the hard labor on the road to Ephrath, 'that is, Bethlehem'; the dying naming, Ben-oni, son of my sorrow; the father's renaming, Benjamin, son of the right hand; the pillar on the Bethlehem road.

Let them assemble it: Israel's great mother is buried on Bethlehem's road; Jeremiah hears her weeping as the exiles pass her grave; Matthew hears her weeping again when Bethlehem's sons are slaughtered around the newborn Messiah. The sorrowing mother belongs to Bethlehem's story, and in Matthew's scene, one particular mother is fleeing Bethlehem with the Child the swords were meant for.

2. Sit with the wordplay: one child, two names. Ben-oni, 'son of my sorrow,' from the dying mother; Benjamin, 'son of the right hand,' from the father. Where have you met a Son who carries both names at once?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jesus is Isaiah's 'man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief' (Isaiah 53:3) and the Son enthroned 'at my right hand' (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:33–34); Ben-oni to his mother at the Cross, Benjamin to his Father in the Ascension. The two names are not stages he outgrows; the Lamb reigns as slain (a note the study will cash out in its final sessions).

Mark the claim's grade honestly: this wordplay-to-Christ application is typological meditation, ours with the tradition, built on real texts; Scripture does not state it. It earns its place by the now-familiar controls: the echo is on the page, and it serves the literal sense of both stories.

Then the consolation: read Jeremiah 31:16–17, the verses Matthew's readers would know sit beside the tears: 'there is hope for your future... your children shall come back.' And note what else lives in that

chapter: the promise of the new covenant (31:31). Rachel's weeping and God's answer share a page. That is the whole shape of tonight.

3. Now Luke. Read Luke 2:25–35, Simeon in the temple. The oracle is about the child until, mid-breath, it turns to the mother. What exactly does Simeon prophesy over Mary, and when in her life does he say it?

Read aloud: Luke 2:25–35

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

'A sword will pierce through your own soul also': her Son will be a sign spoken against, and the contradiction he meets will run her through as well. It is said on the fortieth day of his infancy, at a moment of ritual joy, with the child in her arms.

Notice the 'also': the sword is his first; hers is participation, not substitution. From the beginning, her motherhood is conscripted into the shape of his mission. The tradition's devotion of the Seven Sorrows strings its beads from the Gospel story: Simeon's word, the flight into Egypt, and the three days' loss are explicit in Scripture; the meeting on the road to Calvary, the taking down, and the burial are the tradition's contemplative extension of her attested station at the Cross (John 19:25).

Pastoral sentence to say aloud: God, who could have hidden the cost from her, told her the truth instead, forty days in. He does not recruit under false pretenses, and he does not despise the grief he foretells.

STEELMAN: PRESENT AT FULL STRENGTH

Present with full force: 'Show me Mary's tears in the Bible. You cannot: not one verse records her weeping, fainting, or lamenting. John says only that she stood near the cross, one item in a list of bystanders. The entire Mother of Sorrows apparatus, the seven swords, the Pietà, the Stabat Mater, the tear-streaked statues, is medieval emotional artwork projected back onto a silent text. And it is worse than harmless: Catholic talk of Mary's suffering keeps sliding toward co-redemptrix language, as if her pain contributed to redemption. Scripture is a wall against that: by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Hebrews 10:14); there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). The Cross needs no supplement, least of all a mother's tears.'

Ask the group: separate the two charges. One is about evidence, one is about doctrine. Which is which, and which is more serious?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The evidence charge first, honestly: correct, no Gospel verse records Mary weeping, and this study will not invent one. But the objection saws off the branch it sits on, because the biblical basis it demands is explicit prophecy, which outranks recorded tears: Simeon's sword is God's own word that her soul will be pierced (Luke 2:35), and Matthew's Rachel quotation drapes the Messiah's infancy in the Bible's archetypal maternal grief. As for 'she merely stood': in that scene, standing is the loudest word available. The shepherd was struck, the sheep scattered (Matthew 26:31), and she stood at the instrument of execution in public association with the condemned. The tradition's *Stabat* is not embroidery on the text; it is the text.

On the art and devotion: guilty as charged, and gladly. The Pietà and the Stabat Mater are meditation, and the Church has never claimed otherwise; meditation on a prophesied sorrow is piety, not forgery. The devotion's function is worth defending too: a Church with a Mother of Sorrows is a Church where the grieving are not anomalies. Christianity that airbrushes Calvary's mother tends to airbrush its

mourners.

Now the doctrine, which is the serious charge, and here the Church's actual teaching is the answer, not the problem. One mediator, one sufficient sacrifice: the Church teaches this in the same paragraphs that treat Mary (CCC 970: her role 'in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power,' flowing wholly 'from the superabundance of the merits of Christ'). Her cooperation is real and unrepeatable, consenting, offering, enduring with him (Lumen Gentium 58), and totally derivative: a creature's participation in a work that is complete without her and generous enough to include her. If participation in Christ's sufferings insulted their sufficiency, St. Paul could not write 'in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body' (Colossians 1:24) about himself. Mary is that biblical principle at its maximum, not an exception to it.

And the disputed title itself: say plainly what is true. 'Co-redemptrix' is not defined doctrine; the Church's recent guidance has discouraged its formal use precisely to keep the Redeemer's uniqueness unmistakable; and no Catholic is required to use it. The doctrine of the study stands entirely on what the Church does teach, and needs nothing more.

4. Last movement. Read John 19:25, only verse 25, and stop. Who is at the cross, and what is Mary doing? Then keep thirty seconds of real silence before the Send questions.

Read aloud: John 19:25 (stop at verse 25)

Leader note: Read it, name the station ('near the cross... his mother'), keep the silence honestly, and do not proceed to verses 26 and 27 under any circumstances; those words are the whole next session. If the room is heavy, let the closing prayer carry it, and mention the supports you prepared. Grief that surfaced tonight should leave with somewhere to go.

Send: Taking It Out

1. Rachel's weeping was answered on the same page: 'there is hope for your future.' What grief in your life are you still holding at verse 15, and what would it mean to let God read you verses 16 and 17?

2. Who around you is a Rachel right now, refusing to be comforted? What does tonight suggest about how to stand with them without rushing them?

Live It This Week

- Pray one decade of the Rosary this week on a Sorrowful Mystery, unhurried, for someone who is grieving, and tell them you did (or offer it silently if telling would burden them).
- Read Jeremiah 31:15–17 and 31:31–34 together once this week, tears and covenant on one page.
- If you carry an unmourned grief, take one concrete step toward mourning it well: a Mass intention, a visit to a grave, a conversation with a priest or counselor. Write the step down tonight.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

Luke 2:35 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader prays: Father, your Son was named in sorrow and enthroned at your right hand, and his mother stood where sorrow and glory met. Console every Rachel among us; give hope a future in us; and when our own hour comes to stand at someone's cross, keep us standing. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Close together, slowly: Holy Mary, Mother of Sorrows, pray for us who stand where you stood. Amen.

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order:

- Matthew 2:16–18 (the massacre; Rachel's voice)
- Jeremiah 31:15 (Rachel weeping; live discovery step one)
- Genesis 35:16–20 (Rachel's death and grave; Ben-oni/Benjamin; live discovery step two)
- Isaiah 53:3 (man of sorrows)
- Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:33–34 (son of the right hand)
- Jeremiah 31:16–17, 31 (the consolation; the new covenant)
- Luke 2:25–35 (Simeon; the sword)
- Matthew 26:31 (the shepherd struck, the sheep scattered)
- Hebrews 10:14; 1 Timothy 2:5 (steelman: sufficiency and one mediator)
- Colossians 1:24 (participation in Christ's afflictions)
- John 19:25 (the station; STOP at verse 25)
- Luke 2:35 (memory verse)