

PASCHAL MYSTERY

The term *Paschal Mystery* is used throughout theology and in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council to name the heart of Christian redemption. It refers to the one saving mystery of Christ's passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. In this way, it gathers the whole of Christ's saving work into the mystery of Easter.

The Paschal Mystery is not an isolated event, but the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation, prepared throughout the history of Israel and revealed in the Scriptures. In Christ, this plan reaches its fullness. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus brings new life, gives birth to the Church, and opens the sacramental life through which we continue to participate in his saving work.

In a particular way, the Paschal Mystery is lived and celebrated in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Through Baptism we are plunged into Christ's death and resurrection, and through the Eucharist we continue to proclaim and participate in his Passover. For this reason, the whole Christian life is rightly understood as Paschal—shaped by participation in Christ's saving death and rising.

Every liturgy of the Church is a celebration of this mystery. Sunday itself becomes a "little Easter," and Easter stands as the great Sunday of the Church year. The Paschal Mystery is the meaning of Christian initiation, the foundation of reconciliation, the primary image of the Anointing of the Sick, and the driving purpose of Christian ministry. It shapes Christian marriage, gives meaning to Lent, and reaches its fullest expression in the Easter Triduum.

As *Sacrosanctum Concilium* teaches, Christ accomplished the work of salvation above all through the Paschal Mystery—his blessed passion, resurrection, and ascension—"by dying he destroyed our death, and by rising he restored our life" (SC 5). Yet this mystery is not limited to a single moment in history. It encompasses the whole history of salvation, which finds its meaning and fulfillment in Christ.

The very word *Paschal* comes from the Greek *pascha*, rooted in the Hebrew *pesach*, meaning Passover. In the Old Testament, the Passover commemorates Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt. God "passed over" the houses marked with the blood of the lamb and led his people from slavery into freedom, from death into life. This event became the foundational act of Israel's covenant relationship with God and is remembered not simply as history, but as a living memorial in which the people participate.

In Christian faith, this Passover is fulfilled in Christ, the true Paschal Lamb. As St. Paul proclaims, "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7). Through the cross of Christ, we pass from darkness to light, from sin to grace, and from death to new life. What was foreshadowed in Israel is now made fully present in Christ.

The word *mystery* in Scripture does not refer to something hidden or unknowable. Rather, it refers first to the hidden plan of God for salvation, which must be revealed. Second, it refers to Christ himself, in whom this plan is fully revealed and accomplished. And third, it refers to the life of the Church, where this saving work is made present through the liturgy and sacraments.

The Second Vatican Council reminds us that in the liturgy the Paschal Mystery is not only remembered but made truly present. Through Baptism, we are joined to Christ's death and

resurrection; and in the Eucharist, we proclaim his death until he comes again, while receiving the grace of his saving sacrifice made present among us.

This mystery also shapes the whole of Christian life and spirituality. It becomes most real in the human experience of suffering, loss, and the awareness of death. In Christ, death itself is transformed. It is no longer the end, but a passage. Christian life, therefore, is a continual movement through death into life, through darkness into light, and through struggle into communion with God. At the center of this is Christ's own self-giving love. He freely embraced the cross in obedience to the Father, and in doing so gave meaning to human death itself. Christian discipleship is the invitation to share in that same pattern of self-offering trust in God.

The Christian life, then, is fundamentally Paschal. It is a life lived in transition—moving from captivity to freedom, from sin to grace, from death to life. Christian sacrifice is not simply about giving things up, but about living a life shaped by Christ's self-gift.

And finally, the Church lives this mystery in time—between Christ's first coming and his return in glory. We live in remembrance and hope: remembering what Christ has done, and waiting in joyful expectation for what he will do. This is why the Church's central proclamation remains: **“Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”**