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Lenten Lesson from *Connect! Bringing Faith to Life* Parish

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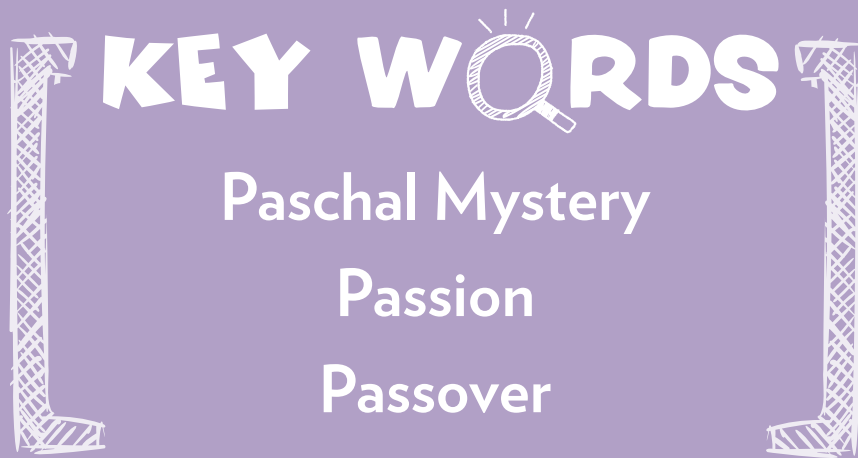
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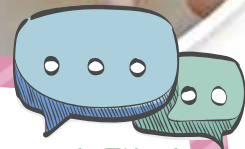
Chapter 11

The Death of Jesus



People often give of their time and talents to make others happy. They could be doing something just for themselves, but instead they work hard to bring joy to others. Perhaps you've shared a talent or helped a young child learn how to do something or volunteered at your parish food pantry. Or maybe you went with your parents to visit a sick relative, even though it meant missing time with your friends.

God is the origin of such selfless acts. As the First Letter of John tells us: "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (4:10). In previous chapters, we learned that Jesus freely came into this world to save us from our sins, heal us, and make us friends of God and one another. But it is in Christ's **Passion**



CONNECT with GOD

Jesus, thank you for your generous love in sacrificing yourself for me and all people. Help me forget about myself and give my life for others. Show me how I can take up your cross by serving people in little ways. Remind me to offer everything I do in union with you in joy and hope. Teach me to bear pains well and to comfort others who are in pain. Amen.

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Passion → Jesus' suffering and death.

that his saving work for us is completed. The Passion is the extreme sufferings of Jesus' last hours—the whipping, the crown of thorns, the carrying of the cross, and his agony while nailed on the cross—and his death. Through his suffering and death, Jesus freed us from death, which came with sin. Through Christ we can live with God forever after death.

Throughout his whole public life, Jesus was aware of this future final act of love for us. Several times he foretold that he would undergo suffering and death in Jerusalem but also that he would rise again after three days (see, for example, Matthew 16:21). He freely gave himself up for each of us. His whole life was given to doing the will of the Father, to bring about our salvation.



LIVING the GOSPEL

Do Everything for the Glory of God

All baptized Christians can unite their efforts to be holy with Christ's sacrifice on the cross. We all can offer sacrifices to God through Christ. But what exactly can we offer?

A good, basic rule of thumb comes from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians: "Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God" (10:31). You can offer family time, classes, fun things, and chores. You can offer your efforts to be friendly, patient, and kind. You can offer all your joys and pains. You can offer your attempts to bring others to Christ and to be Christ to them.

Trying to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can offer everything, big or small, that happens in our daily lives. At Mass we can unite our offerings with Jesus' sacrifice. Through them we can praise and thank God. We can ask for help and show our sorrow for our sins.

Jesus' Passion

At Mass throughout the year, but most especially during Holy Week and the Easter season, we hear the account of Christ's final sacrifice. We can meditate and pray about Christ's Passion and death at any time to recall how much God loves us. This prayer and reflection encourage us to love Christ and to avoid sin. It also teaches us to bear our own sufferings with patience and to have compassion for others who suffer.

In chapters 22 and 23 of the Gospel of Luke, we read about the events leading to Jesus' Crucifixion. Even while experiencing great suffering, Jesus forgave his torturers, saying: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

The Stations of the Cross

Christians have always made pilgrimages to Jerusalem to pray at holy sites along the path Jesus walked to his Crucifixion. But not everyone could make the trip. As early as the fifth century, some churches began to set up local images of these holy places so those unable to travel could still participate in this devotion. Today, nearly all churches have depictions of the Stations of the Cross. You too can participate in this ancient devotion.



WHAT DO
YOU
THINK?

Taking up Christ's cross means growing in habits of love. It means accepting the suffering in our lives without becoming bitter. It means giving up some of our comforts and leisure time to help others. What are some ways young people can take up the cross? What people in your family, parish, and community seem to be taking up Christ's cross?

good to KNOW

It is interesting to try to imagine the stories of people who appear only briefly in the Bible. Remember Simon of Cyrene, who was forced to help Jesus carry the cross (see Mark 15:21)? Simon must have been upset. He was just walking by. This criminal, Jesus, was none of his business. Ever wonder how this meeting with Jesus affected Simon and his family? Our tradition tells us that Simon's sons, Alexander and Rufus, were faithful Christians later.

The next time you are at a church, pause at each of the Stations, imagine the scene, and pray about it.

1. Jesus is condemned to death.
2. Jesus takes up his cross.
3. Jesus falls the first time.
4. Jesus meets his mother.
5. Simon helps Jesus carry the cross.
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.
7. Jesus falls the second time.
8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem.
9. Jesus falls the third time.
10. Jesus is stripped of his garments.
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross.
12. Jesus dies on the cross.
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross.
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb.

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Images of Jesus' Suffering and Death

The New Testament compares Christ in his suffering and death to several images that Jewish readers would recognize. For instance, John the Baptist calls Jesus “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The name recalls the time when God had to force the stubborn Egyptian pharaoh to free the Jewish people from slavery. The angel of death took the oldest male child and animal in each home. But the angel passed over the Jewish homes that had the blood of a lamb sprinkled on the door (see Exodus 12:1–14). The Jews remember this event during the **Passover** festival each year.

Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples at the Last Supper, which we recall on Holy Thursday. He himself became the Passover



Passover ➡ The Jewish feast that commemorates the release of the Jewish people from captivity in Egypt.



Lamb who sacrificed himself so his people might escape their slavery to sin and death. In Luke's Gospel we read:

Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you." (22:19–20)

The Last Supper was the first Eucharist. The bread that was broken became Jesus' Body broken for us, and the wine poured out became Jesus' Blood shed for us.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is seen as both shepherd and sacrificed lamb. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, who cares for his sheep and is willing to die to save them when wolves attack (see 10:11–13). Jesus gave up his life for us.

Because *paschal* is another word that means

"Passover," Jesus is sometimes called the Paschal Lamb. The mystery of how his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension save us from sin and death is called the **Paschal Mystery**.

The Gospel of Matthew quotes from chapter 53 of the Book of Isaiah, which describes the Messiah as the Suffering Servant (see Matthew 8:17). In one verse from Isaiah, we read, "My servant, the just one, shall



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Paschal Mystery ➡ The entire process of God's plan of salvation by which Christ saves us from sin and death through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. We enter the Paschal Mystery by participating in the liturgy and being faithful followers of Christ.

PRAYING TOGETHER

The Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts. The bread and wine, which will become Christ's Body and Blood, are presented for the sacrifice. We are also invited to add our own offerings.

Usually, a few people attending the Mass bring the bread and wine to the altar. They might also bring money or other goods that have been collected. The priest blesses God, through whose goodness we have the bread and wine. God has also willed that human hands have helped make them. We respond by praying that God accept our sacrifice "for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church."

justify the many, their iniquity he shall bear" (53:11). Many of Isaiah's details of the Messiah's suffering actually happen to Christ.

Sometimes we wonder why innocent people suffer. Why does God allow children to die from hunger or disease? Why do terrible wars that take the lives of innocent people happen? We cannot understand the mysterious ways God is at work in the world, but we know that sometimes good results come from suffering. We also know that God leaves us free to love, and that sometimes people can misuse freedom to hurt others. Even from this evil God can bring about good. Still, innocent suffering is hard to accept.

Jesus shows us through his totally undeserved suffering that God understands and feels our pain. He teaches us that our pain can be offered to God as a pleasing sacrifice and prayer. We can unite our sufferings and all our efforts to do good with the sufferings and good deeds of Christ. In a way we cannot fully understand, they will help Christ's saving and healing action in the world.

CHECK *this* OUT

Jesus' Death and the Old Testament

The Old Testament foretells many details of Christ's Passion. For example, Isaiah, chapter 53, says that Jesus will be looked down on, rejected, wounded, beaten, arrested, and sentenced (see verse 12).

In Matthew and Mark's Gospels, Jesus began praying Psalm 22 while on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (verse 2). Other parts of that psalm fit Christ's death. "But I am a worm, not a man, scorned by men, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; / they curl their lips and jeer; / they shake their heads at me" (verses 7-8).

Amazingly, Psalm 22 also refers to Christ's weakness, stretched bones, thirst, and torn hands and feet. People even gamble for his clothes in the psalm. All these things happen at the Crucifixion.

Jesus Frees Us from Death

Jesus was without sin. Unlike other human beings, he did not have to experience human suffering and death. He accepted these things to save us from spiritual death.

Still, Jesus did not want to suffer or die. In the garden at Gethsemane, he prayed that he might avoid suffering and death. But he wanted to do the Father's will (see Matthew 26:39). Jesus teaches us to overcome our fear of sacrificing ourselves for God and others. He masters his fear of death so that we will no longer fear it as our final state.

Jesus Christ has tasted death so that we can live forever with God after our earthly lives have ended. He can accomplish this because he is the Son of God made man, who died and was buried. Of course, as the Second Divine Person of the Trinity, Christ is eternal and cannot cease to exist. But for a human being, death means the body is so damaged that it can no longer support earthly life. The soul and body separate. Earthly life ends. Jesus freely accepted death in this sense for our sake.

From Good Friday until Easter Sunday, Jesus' body was in the tomb. It did not decay, because his physical body was still united to the Divine Person of Christ.

The Apostles' Creed tells us that after death, and before his Resurrection, Jesus "descended into hell." *Hell* here means the place where the souls of all the people who had died before Christ's coming, good and bad, had gone after death. None of them could go to Heaven until Christ reconciled them with God. Now Jesus opened Heaven's gate for the just who had gone before him. Christ led their way to Heaven when he was raised from the dead on Easter Sunday.

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A painting of Jesus descending into the place where all souls went before the first Easter Sunday.

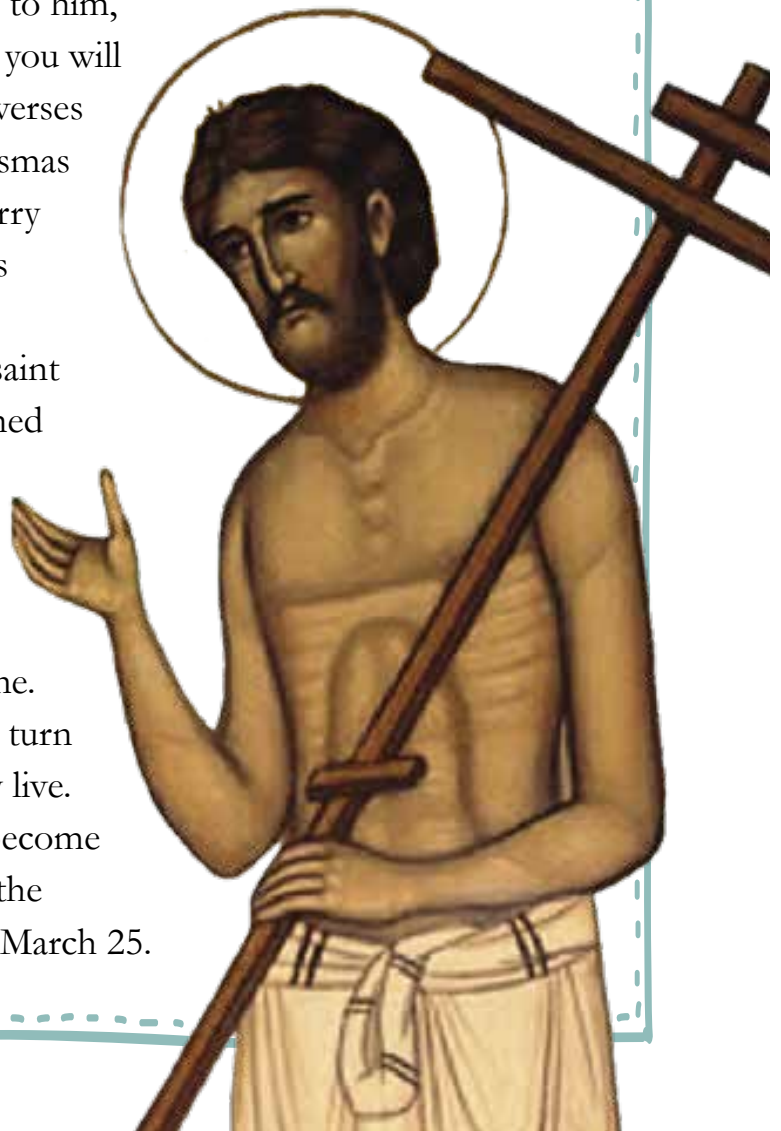


PEOPLE of FAITH

Saint **DISMAS**

Do you know the story of Saint Dismas (first century), the Good Thief? You can read it in Luke 23:32–43. One of the two criminals crucified with Christ insults him. The other, known to us as Dismas, defends Jesus as an innocent man. “Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied to him, ‘Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise’” (verses 42–43). Jesus sees that Dismas has a good heart and is sorry for his sins. Jesus promises him a place in Heaven.

Dismas is the patron saint of criminals and condemned prisoners. We might see him as the saint of so-called hopeless cases. His story reminds us not to give up on anyone. Even very bad people can turn to God’s mercy while they live. Many great sinners have become great saints. We celebrate the Feast of Saint Dismas on March 25.





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Catechist Guide pages



Chapter 11

The Death of Jesus

Chapter Summary

This chapter identifies Jesus as the “Lamb of God” and “Suffering Servant.” Jesus overcomes sin and death through the Paschal Mystery so that all might be raised to new life and spend eternity with God.

Background for the Catechist

When you think of Jesus’ suffering and death, are you able to connect that to your own life? Are there people for whom you would give your life? Would you consider sacrificing your life for people you don’t know or don’t like or for people who haven’t even been born yet?

In our historical time and geographical place, it is not likely that we will ever be asked to sacrifice our very lives for the good of others, unless we decide to serve in the military. And yet we are asked to sacrifice in small and not-so-small ways every day for the good of others. Parents often place the well-being of their children over their own needs. Social workers and health professionals help others seek healing and wholeness. Firefighters and police officers run into dangerous situations to help others. Teachers work long hours, investing their energy and financial resources to encourage and educate the next generation.

Thinking about the sacrifice of Jesus can be quite overwhelming. Many evangelists are fond of asking people to imagine the suffering of Jesus; to visualize the blood flowing and the nails literally piercing through his flesh. Far more important, however, is the purpose and the result of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus “died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves” (2 Corinthians 5:15). For the participants, how Jesus suffered and died must be considered in light of its meaning for their lives. The death of Jesus cannot be presented as some horror show from long ago but must somehow raise questions such as these: What does God ask of me? How am I called to service and sacrifice? How am I to be Christ for others? The death of Christ continues to have power and meaning today, as it shows us how to be part of Christ’s mission of saving and healing.

Catechist’s Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me fully grasp the immensity of your great love for humanity. Help me see how you love and forgive even those who mocked, ridiculed, tortured, and killed you. Help me love and forgive others for all the times that they “know not what they do.” Give me the patience and understanding to love and serve, that all might come to know you. Amen.

Teaching Tip

The images considered in this chapter, Jesus as Paschal Lamb and Suffering Servant, are layered throughout the celebration of the Eucharist. Draw connections between the chapter material and the Eucharist, but keep in mind that any participants who do not attend Mass regularly may need more detailed explanations than those who are frequent Mass-goers.

Getting Ready

Connect! Bringing Faith to Life, pages 106–116

Core Understanding

Jesus' suffering and death show his great love for us and are a model for how we are to love others.

Materials Needed

- ☐ Bibles, one for each participant
- ☐ index cards, one for each participant

Key Words

- Paschal Mystery
- Passion
- Passover

Catechism Pillar

- The Creed

Catechism Connection

- Paragraphs 595–637
(Jesus Died Crucified)

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Make** the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God." (*Pause.*)
2. **Pray** the following:
 - Lord Jesus, thank you for your great sacrifice so that we might live. Help us live lives of service and sacrifice that honor you. Help us love as you love. Amen.
3. **Invite** the participants to offer any special intentions for which they would like to pray.
4. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

Engage Activity (10 minutes)

1. **Engage** the participants' experience by asking the following questions:
 - Have you ever heard reports of near-death experiences? (*Explain that these are events when a person appears biologically deceased but is resuscitated and afterward reports a profound experience.*)
 - What are some common aspects that are usually part of either near-death experiences or the way death is shown on TV and in the movies? (*peacefulness, warmth, the presence of light, a sense of being detached from one's body*)
 - Why do you think people are so intrigued with what happens after we die?

2. **Share** the following thoughts, in these or similar words:
 - Death is one of the great mysteries we simply cannot understand. Thanks to Jesus' death on the cross, however, death is no longer the last word.
 - Today, we're going to look at what Jesus' death means for us.
3. **Read** 1 John 4:10 aloud using a Bible or the *Connect!* book (see second paragraph on page 107). Remind the participants that we learned in previous chapters that Jesus freely came into this world to save us from sin, to heal us, and to make us friends of God and one another.
4. **Introduce** the term *Passion*. Explain that it refers to Jesus' suffering—the whipping, the crown of thorns, the carrying of the cross, the being nailed to a cross—and his death. Emphasize that Jesus sacrificed out of love. He gave himself up for each of us. He makes it possible for us to live forever with God after our earthly lives have ended.

Core Content (15 minutes)

1. **Engage** the young people in a review of pages 109–115 in the *Connect!* book by dividing the material into sections, such as the following:
 - "Jesus' Passion" and "The Stations of the Cross," pages 109–110
 - "Images of Jesus' Suffering and Death," pages 111–113
 - "Jesus Frees Us from Death," pages 114–115
2. **Assign** each young person one of the sections of material. They can read silently to themselves or gather in small groups with others who share the same assigned material. If opting for small-group reading, ask one person from each group to read the material aloud.
3. **Invite** volunteers to report key ideas from each section of the material to the large group. Be prepared to expand on the reports as necessary to ensure key concepts are covered.

Teaching Tip

If collaborative reading and reporting is not the best choice for your group, consider using one of the following options or another of your choosing:

- **At-home reading option:** Invite the young people to read the chapter prior to the session.
- **In-session individual reading option:** Ask the participants to read the chapter during the session, or read it aloud to them.
- **Presentation option:** Give a short presentation that incorporates the key points listed on the handout "Chapter 11 Summary" on page 105 of this guide.

Core Learning Activity (20 minutes)

Images of Jesus

Objective: To explore the meaning of Jesus as Lamb of God and Suffering Servant.

1. **Arrange** the participants into small groups of three or four. Announce that half the groups will explore the image of Jesus as Lamb of God and half will explore the image of Jesus as Suffering Servant.
2. **Distribute** the Bibles. Ask the “Lamb” groups to read Exodus 12:1–14, and ask the “Servant” groups to read John 10:1–18.
3. **Invite** volunteers from the Lamb groups to share summaries of their passage with the large group. Review the information in the first three paragraphs following the heading “Images of Jesus’ Suffering and Death” on pages 111–112 in the *Connect!* book, which describe the connection between the Passover Lamb and Jesus.
4. **Encourage** volunteers from the Servant groups to share summaries of their passage with the large group. Emphasize that the passage compares Jesus to a shepherd willing to suffer and even die so that his sheep might live.
5. **Explain** that Jesus models a way of living in order to bring good to others. His sacrifice of giving up his life is not one we are asked to make. But we are called to be followers of Jesus and to strive to love and serve others.
6. **Challenge** the participants to work with the members of their small groups to identify a person who exemplifies Christlike living—someone who made a personal sacrifice to serve others.
7. **Invite** a volunteer from each small group to share with the large group a brief story about the person they identified.

Session Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

1. **Invite** volunteers to share key things they learned during the session. Ensure that the following points are made:
 - Jesus’ suffering and death show his great love for us.
 - Jesus is a model for how we are to love others.
2. **Distribute** the index cards. Instruct the participants to write the following questions on their cards:
 - What does God ask of me? How am I called to serve others?
3. **Direct** the young people to take the cards home and refer to them a few times during the week. Ask them to answer the questions for themselves or to share their cards with friends or family members and discuss their answers with them.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Invite** a volunteer to find and read aloud “Connect with God” on page 107 in the *Connect!* book, while the rest of the group closes their eyes and meditates on the words.
2. **Close** by making the Sign of the Cross.

Optional Activities

What Can I Give? (15 minutes)

Materials Needed

- ☐ Bibles, one for each participant
- ☐ a large paper cutout of a cross
- ☐ sticky notes, two for each participant
- ☐ reflective music (optional)

Objective: To help the participants consider ways they might sacrifice for others in service.

1. **Introduce** the activity by sharing the following, in these or similar words:
 - It is likely that none of us will be asked to suffer and sacrifice for others in the way that Jesus sacrificed for us. But that doesn't mean that we aren't called to sacrifice and serve.
 - What are some ways that others sacrifice for you or serve you? *(If prompting is needed, ask the participants who cared for them the last time they were sick.)*
2. **Facilitate** a brief discussion identifying ways that others sacrifice their time and energy for the young people, helping them see sacrifice and service all around them. Invite the participants to silently consider how they sacrifice for others and serve others.
3. **Instruct** the young people to find "Praying Together" on page 113 in their books. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud.
4. **Distribute** the Bibles, and instruct the participants to find Mark 12:41–44. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud.
5. **Display** the large paper cross. Distribute two sticky notes to each participant, and offer the following instructions:
 - Imagine you are like the widow in the passage from the Gospel of Mark. You are not rich. You are not powerful, and yet you want to make an offering to God or to someone else.
 - You have two sticky notes. On one, briefly write about one way you already sacrifice your time to help others. On the other, write another offering you could make for God or others in service. What ways could you sacrifice for someone else? Please do not include your name.
 - When you are done, post your sticky notes on the cross.
6. **Play** reflective music if desired to facilitate an appropriate atmosphere. When all have posted their sticky notes, invite everyone to look at the cross. Conclude by asking for reactions to the cross.

The Passion in Vignettes (20 minutes)

Materials Needed

- ☐ Bibles, one for each participant

Objective: To help the participants learn about the events that led to Jesus' Crucifixion.

1. **Introduce** the activity in these or similar words:
 - Chapters 22 and 23 of Luke's Gospel record the events of Jesus' Crucifixion.
 - Your task is to work in small groups to read about and teach the events leading to Jesus' Crucifixion without speaking. Please teach the steps of the Passion that I'll assign in a moment, using only body language. You will have 10 minutes for planning.
2. **Distribute** the Bibles, and arrange the participants into four groups. Assign each group two consecutive passages from the following list. (Alternatively, you could create eight groups and assign each group one passage, depending on the number of participants.) As you assign passages, read the scene descriptions aloud so that everyone becomes familiar with the larger story.
 - **Luke 22:1–6:** Some Jewish leaders decided that Jesus must die. They made an arrangement with Judas to betray Jesus in exchange for money.
 - **Luke 22:47:** Judas approached Jesus and went up to him and kissed him.
 - **Luke 22:54–60:** After Jesus was arrested, Peter and the other disciples deserted him, and Peter denied that he knew Jesus.
 - **Luke 22:63–65:** The Jewish council's guards mocked and beat Jesus.
 - **Luke 23:13–25:** Pilate, the Roman governor, found Jesus guilty of no crime, but the crowds kept calling for Jesus' Crucifixion. Pilate wanted to free Jesus, but instead he handed Jesus over to be crucified.
 - **Luke 23:26–27:** Jesus carried his cross through the streets.
 - **Luke 23:33–37:** The Roman soldiers stripped Jesus' clothes, raised him up on the cross, and crucified him. They cast ballots for his garments and mocked him.
 - **Luke 23:44–46:** Jesus breathed his last and died upon the cross.
3. **Allow** about 10 minutes for the groups to find and read their assigned passages in their Bibles and to rehearse their presentations.
4. **Instruct** the groups to present in order. Explain that they have 10 minutes for all the presentations, so one group needs to be ready to take over from the previous group right away.
5. **Conclude** by emphasizing that although the participants might have experienced this activity as fun or difficult, this story has been the most important story the world has ever known. It is through this story of suffering and death that we come to appreciate the immensity of God's great love for us.

Take Up Your Cross (20 minutes)

Materials Needed

- ☐ the song/video “Take Up Your Cross” (4:36), by Jaime Cortez, available on YouTube (*optional*)
- ☐ Bibles, one for each participant
- ☐ a sheet of newsprint
- ☐ a marker

Objective: To enable the participants to consider how they might take up the cross and to identify models and mentors.

1. **Write** “Take Up Your Cross” where all can see. If feasible, play the song “Take Up Your Cross,” by Jaime Cortez.
2. **Distribute** the Bibles, and instruct the participants to find Matthew 16:24–26. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Facilitate a brief discussion of the following questions:
 - What do you think Jesus meant? What does this Scripture passage mean?
 - What do you think it means for us today?
3. **Direct** the young people to find “What Do You Think?” on page 109 in their books. Select a volunteer to read it aloud.
4. **Arrange** the participants into pairs, and instruct them to answer the questions in “What Do You Think?”
5. **Create** two columns on a sheet of newsprint: “How We Take Up the Cross” and “Others Who Take Up the Cross.” Ask the pairs to come forward, and have one participant write a few words in one column and the other participant write a few words in the second column.
6. **Conclude** by reviewing the list with the group.

Chapter 11 Summary

The Death of Jesus

1. In Christ's Passion, his suffering and death on the cross, his saving work is completed. The Passion is Christ's final act of love for us.
2. In his suffering and death, Jesus gave himself freely for each of us.
3. During Holy Week and the Easter season, we hear about Jesus' final sacrifice and about the victory of his Resurrection.
4. The events of Jesus' Passion are recorded in all four Gospels. They are all recalled in the Stations of the Cross, which can be found in nearly all churches.
5. Jesus' Passion and death teach us about how much God loves us. We learn both patience and compassion.
6. The New Testament compares Christ in his suffering and death to several images that Jewish readers would recognize: the Passover Lamb, the Good Shepherd, and the Suffering Servant.
7. The mystery of how Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension save us from sin and death is called the Paschal Mystery.
8. Suffering itself is a mystery. The suffering of Jesus reminds us that God, who loves us, brings good out of every evil.
9. If we unite our sufferings with the sufferings of Jesus, we can help Christ's saving action in the world.
10. Jesus accepted human death for our sake, so that we might know that death is not a final ending but a new beginning through his Resurrection.

