

Jesus' Death

Core Activity

A Week That Shook the World



1. For this activity you will need the following items for every three or four students: a sheet of newsprint; markers; a Bible; a copy of the handout “A Week That Shook the World” (Document #: TX003183), cut apart; and a roll of tape. You will also need to think of two or three well-known events from the last five years that the students are likely to remember. A professional sports championship, a controversial political campaign, an international conflict or war, the death of a famous person, and a national tragedy are all good examples.

2. Ask the students, “Where were you when [a major news event] happened?” Give the students a moment to think about their answers. Then invite them to share what they remember about the event and how they felt at the time. Move on to one or two other events and repeat the process. Then offer the following comments in your own words:

- Human beings are likely to remember events that have a major effect on them. It is almost as if the human brain takes a photograph of the surroundings when it receives a shocking or exciting message.
- The followers of Jesus probably had the same experience at the time of Jesus’ death. Jesus’ Crucifixion was one in a series of events that they would never forget and experiences that they wanted to keep alive for the rest of us.

3. Divide the class into small groups of three or four students. Assign each group one of these four Scripture readings:

- Matt., chaps. 26–27
- Mark, chaps. 14–15
- Luke, chaps. 22–23
- John, chaps. 18–19

Give each group the materials you prepared in step 1, and issue these instructions in your own words:

- Someone in each group is to write the name of the Gospel the group was assigned at the top of the newsprint. You will have 10 minutes to arrange the slips describing the events of the last week of Jesus’ life in order and tape them to the newsprint. Note that the events listed on the slips do not occur in every assigned Gospel account. Affix events that do occur in your group’s account to one corner of the newsprint.

4. When time is up, post the sheets so that everyone can see the results. Using the sheets, discuss the key elements of the Gospel stories of Jesus' Passion and death, and similarities between the different accounts. When you are reasonably certain that the students understand the material, continue the presentation with the following comments, stated in your own words:

- The last days of Jesus' life were undoubtedly etched in the minds of his followers just as the recent historical events we talked about at the beginning of the activity are etched in yours. The arrest, trial, and Crucifixion of Jesus are the most extensively reported events in the Gospels.
- There are similarities between the lists of events taped on the newsprint sheets. The Passion accounts in the three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are quite similar. The Passion account in the fourth Gospel, John, on the other hand, has some unique features: it runs for six chapters, including the two chapters you were asked to read; it replaces the story of the Last Supper with one in which Jesus washed the feet of the disciples; and it includes a number of lengthy presentations by Jesus.
- Each group taped some events to the side because they did not appear in the group's assigned Gospel. The differences between the Gospel accounts can be explained by variations in the audiences to whom the Evangelists were writing and in the points that the writers wanted to emphasize.

5. Conclude with a reading of the Live It! article "One Solitary Life," on page 107 of *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth, Third Edition (CFH)*. You may wish to read the article yourself, or divide it by paragraph among several students. The reading should be done in a reverent and prayerful manner.

Core Activity Extension

Easter Triduum

As homework or class work, instruct the students to research the Church's celebration of the Easter Triduum. Ask them to compare Jesus' Passion, death, and Resurrection with the unique elements in the liturgies celebrated on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Have them report their findings to the class or write a brief paper on what they learn. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

Additional Activities

The Charges Against Jesus

1. Divide the students into small groups of three or four and give each group a Bible. Assign each group one of the accounts of Jesus' trial in the Gospels:

- Matt. 26:47—27:26
- Mark 14:53—15:15
- Luke 22:66—23:25
- John 18:12—19:16

Explain that the groups are to read their passages and make a list of the possible charges against Jesus, from the perspectives of both the religious and the civil authorities. In many cases the students will have to infer the charges from comments recorded in the Gospels. Allow about 5 minutes for the groups to complete the task.

2. Have the groups refer to pages 105–107 of the *CFH* for a list of the religious and civil offenses Jesus was accused of committing. Direct the young people to compare that list against the one their group came up with and to note any additions. If time allows, have them report the results to the class.

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

Scripture Study: The Death of Jesus

Instruct the students to choose one of the Passion narratives (listed in step 3 of the core activity) and to write a brief reflection paper or a journal entry answering the following questions:

- What feelings were evoked in you as you read or listened to the passage?
- Which person in the passage do you identify most closely with? Why?
- What in the passage inspires you?

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

Jesus' Passion in Film

Show the account of Jesus' Passion and death from the film *Jesus of Nazareth* (Family Home Entertainment, 1977, 371 minutes). Have the students reflect and write a journal entry on the following questions after seeing the film clip:

- Have you ever experienced a moment of faith or conversion that changed your understanding of Jesus? Explain.
- Describe a time of loneliness and abandonment in your life. What got you through it?
- Have you ever been unjustly accused and punished for an offense? If so, describe your memories of that occasion. Did anything good come out of the situation?

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

In Character

Invite the students, individually or in small groups, to choose one person who was present during the final events of Jesus' life and develop a first-person account of those events. Some possibilities are Peter; Mary Magdalene; Pilate; Mary, Jesus' mother; John, the beloved disciple; a Roman soldier; and a Jewish leader. Explain that each account should address the questions, What did that person see? hear? feel? say? think? Encourage the students to share their ideas as newspaper articles, magazine interviews, or live newscasts. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

Crucifixion in Art

Encourage the students to do some library or Internet research for paintings and sculptures depicting Jesus' Crucifixion, from the Middle Ages to the present. Tell them to try to find multicultural representations from different parts of the world. Ask the students to choose a work of art that is meaningful or striking to them and to write a brief reflection on what the artist was trying to capture in his or her depiction of the Crucifixion. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

(The material labeled *TC: Creed* is adapted from *Total Catechesis: Catechetical Sessions on the Creed*, by Maura Thompson Hagarty, Michael J. Hagarty, Marilyn Kielbasa, and Barbara Murray, in the Total Catechesis series [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2004]. Copyright © 2004 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)