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## THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

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*"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."  
Matthew 28:19 (NABRE)*

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## The Paschal Mystery

The Paschal Mystery is central to the Christian faith, encompassing the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. This mystery highlights God's redemptive plan for humanity, revealed through the saving actions of Christ, culminating in His victory over sin and death.

Rooted in the Old Testament's Passover (Exodus 12), the term "Paschal" connects to the Hebrew word "Pesach," meaning "Passover," which recalls God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. In a similar but greater way, Christ, the true Paschal Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7), offers Himself as the sacrifice for humanity's salvation, liberating all people from the slavery of sin and death.

### Four Key Elements of the Paschal Mystery:

**Passion:** The suffering of Jesus, which began with his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and reached its climax in his crucifixion. This period fulfills the Old Testament prophecies of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53) and reveals the profound love of God for humanity, a love so great that He was willing to endure such suffering to bring about the redemption of the world (John 3:16).

**Death:** Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross is the atoning sacrifice for sin. In Catholic theology, his death reconciles humanity to God, paying the price for sin and restoring the relationship between Creator and creature. This act is foreshadowed in the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, where the blood saves the Israelites from death (Exodus 12:13).

**Resurrection:** Christ's resurrection from the dead on the third day is the definitive victory over death. The resurrection is not only a historical event but also a foretaste of the eternal life promised to all believers. It shows that death does not have the final word, and in Christ, believers can hope for their own resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-22).

**Ascension:** Christ's ascension into heaven marks his exaltation to the right hand of the Father, where he intercedes for humanity and prepares a place for believers (John 14:2-3). It also signifies the beginning of the Church's mission to spread the Gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, who was sent at Pentecost.

### Theological Significance:

The Paschal Mystery is not merely an event of the past but is made present in the liturgy, particularly in the Eucharist, where Catholics participate in Christ's sacrifice. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that through the sacraments, especially Baptism and Eucharist, believers are drawn into the Paschal Mystery, dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ (CCC 1067).

Thus, the Paschal Mystery is the core of Christian hope, revealing God's love and the path to eternal life, inviting all to follow Christ in His death and resurrection.

### The New Covenant

The New Covenant, instituted by Christ's death, is the fulfillment of God's promises in the Old Testament to restore His relationship with humanity. It was prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34) as a covenant not written on stone tablets but on the hearts of people. Salvation and forgiveness of sins are offered through the shedding of Christ's blood (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15).

His sacrifice is once for all, making the need for repeated animal sacrifices unnecessary (Hebrews 10:10).

This covenant brings a new relationship with God where faith in Jesus Christ, rather than adherence to the Mosaic Law, becomes the path to righteousness (Rom. 3:21-22). The New Covenant offers:

- **Forgiveness of sins:** Jesus' sacrifice brings full and final atonement (Heb. 9:26-28).
- **The indwelling of the Holy Spirit:** Believers are transformed from within, receiving the Holy Spirit to guide and sanctify them (John 14:26; Ezekiel 36:26-27).
- **Eternal life:** Through Christ's death and resurrection, believers are promised eternal life with God (John 3:16).

The New Covenant offers a deeper, more intimate relationship with God, based on grace and faith in Christ's redeeming work.

### **Other Christian Traditions**

While other Christian traditions also hold the Paschal Mystery as central, the Catholic perspective emphasizes the **sacramental reality** through which believers are incorporated into Christ's death and resurrection, particularly through **Baptism** and the **Eucharist** (Romans 6:3-5). The **ongoing nature** of Christ's intercession for humanity, his presence in the Eucharist, and the Church's mission empowered by the Holy Spirit are distinctly Catholic themes present in the explanation.

Sources:

- CCC. 1067-1068; 613-614, 1225
- The Navarre Bible: New Testament Expanded Edition (2008): Commentary on Luke 22.
- The Paulist Biblical Commentary: Commentary on Hebrews 9-10.