

**WEEK:**

Palm Sunday (April 5, 2020)

MASS READINGS:**FIRST READING:**

Isaiah 50:4-7

RESPONSORIAL PSALM:

Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20,

SECOND READING:

Philippians 2:6-11

GOSPEL:

Matthew 26:14-27:66 or
27:11-54

KEY WORDS:

Conviction, Sacrifice, Fulfillment, Execution, Abandon, Institution

KEY THEMES:

- The Kingdom rarely comes in the manner or form we are expecting.
- In Christianity, death precedes true life.
- Surrender is ongoing, it usually occurs in stages rather than all at once.
- Christ does what we cannot. He came to us to get us to Him; He was born to die.

THE ASCENT**Welcome and Introduction**

Welcome everyone to the discipleship group, and invite each person to introduce themselves. Next, have each person share one “high point” and one “low point” from their week.

A Witness (10 min)

In lieu of a game, utilize this time to really dive into and encounter the Gospel reading. Use the following to set up the context of the Gospel:

Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Picture yourself in a large crowd with the following scene before you: two men on trial — one, a peace-filled teacher, one, a convicted criminal. The judge yells out, “Who would you want me to release?” There is a lot of noise. Many are arguing about who is more deserving of release, but the outstanding cry is “release the criminal.” You know this criminal to be guilty and the teacher to be good and holy, but doubt starts to creep in. You realize this teacher says some pretty crazy things and people seem to be sure about His guilt. What do you do? The crowd around you is getting restless and a little violent. Someone notices your hesitation. Do you join the crowd, or do you remain silent?

Give everyone a few moments to make this decision in silence.

LECTIO**Opening Prayer**

Invite someone to open the group in prayer, either creating their own prayer or using the following:

Jesus, thank you for your sacrifice. We are imperfect, yet you continue to love us every day. Instill in us an authentic appreciation for the love you have shown us through your death on the cross. Help us love one another as you have loved us. May we, with the help of your grace, always choose love over hate. Amen.

Our Voice (10 min)

One by one, ask the other teens in the group the following questions to prepare for the topic of the session:

- What did you experience when you had to decide if you were going to yell out to release the criminal or not? What influenced this decision?
- Do people ever do or say something just because it is the “popular opinion”? Why? Is there a specific example of this you see in our culture?

Reflection: Palm Sunday (5 min)

Have each person watch the *Summit* reflection video for Palm Sunday, which can be found on the Life Teen YouTube channel under the Summit Teaching Videos playlist. This video provides a thematic overview to the session.

God’s Voice (5 min)

Read Matthew 27:11-54 aloud. Before reading, encourage everyone to actively listen to the passage. Invite another person to read the passage a second time. After the second read-through, invite everyone to open their Bibles and silently read the passage a third time. Allow time to pause and reflect between read-throughs.

If someone in the group is more comfortable using a Spanish translation of the Bible, encourage them to use it. Additionally, if people do not have access to a Bible, they can use the online Bible from the USCCB.

MEDITATIO

Reflecting on God’s Voice (10 min)

Offer the following questions for silent reflection and journaling:

- Have you ever been accused of something you did not do, or have you ever accused someone of something they did not do? What happened? How did it make you feel when you realized the truth?

- Although Jesus was innocent of the crime He was convicted of, He still chose to die for us — for you, specifically. What does that say about Jesus and His love for you?

ORATIO

Discussing God’s Voice (30 min)

Following the silent reflection, discuss the reading. The following questions are a great starting point for the discussion, but be open to where the Holy Spirit may guide it. Consider alternating who asks the question, giving each person a chance to ask a question and lead the discussion.

- What do you think was going through Jesus’ mind as He made the long, grueling walk to His death? How do you think He felt?
- What kind of mockery did Jesus encounter as He carried His cross to Calvary? Why did people mock Him?
- Have you seen or experienced this same kind of mockery in your life? How did you respond? Why do people resort to this behavior?
- Is there anything that makes you uncomfortable about this Gospel proclamation? Why?
- Is it difficult for people to accept this ultimate act of love as an act Jesus did specifically for them? Why or why not? What holds people (perhaps you) back from accepting this truth?

CONTEMPLATIO

Worthy of Love (10 min)

Read the following quote (attributed to St. Augustine of Hippo) aloud:

“If you were the only person on Earth, Christ would have still suffered and died for you.”

Then, invite everyone to spend a few minutes journaling about the fact that Jesus chose to die specifically for them, focusing on how this reality impacts their life. Encourage them to write down any ways they struggle to believe this fact.

Close the session by having each person write a prayer of thanksgiving, thanking Jesus for His sacrifice. If people are willing, have them share their prayer with the group.

Weekly Challenge

As a group, create a plan for how you will celebrate the Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday). Since churches may not be open, brainstorm creative ways for you to enter into Holy Week.