

## Discussion Questions

### Session 1

#### ***THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST (MATTHEW 1:1-17)***

1. Matthew is writing to Jewish Christians living in Palestine. Recall what you learned in Session One. In writing to this group, why do you think Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy of Jesus?

#### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MATTHEW'S AND LUKE'S GENEALOGIES

There are two genealogies of Jesus found in the New Testament. Matthew begins his genealogy with Abraham, most likely because of God's promise to Abraham—"Kings shall come forth from you" (Genesis 17:6). His genealogy also establishes Jesus as heir to the Davidic throne, which God promised would last forever (see 2 Samuel 7:16). Luke's genealogy begins with Jesus and goes all the way back to "Adam, the son of God," probably to emphasize the universal nature of Jesus' kingship. Many theories have been proposed to explain the discrepancies between these two genealogies. It is possible that one list reflects legal descent and the other reflects natural descent. (Note: As the foster son of Joseph, Jesus would have received the same legal rights as a natural child.)

2. What titles does Matthew give Jesus in Matthew 1:1, and what do these titles say about him?

3. Matthew includes four women in Jesus' genealogy: Tamar (Matthew 1:3), Rahab (Matthew 1:5), Ruth (Matthew 1:5), and "the wife of Uriah," who was Bathsheba (Matthew 1:6). Do you recognize these names?

a. Read about these women in the following verses and record what you learn.

- Genesis 38:
- Joshua 2:1-16 and 6:22-25:
- Ruth 1:1-22 and 4:13-17:
- 2 Samuel 11:

b. What is unusual about these women? Why do you think Matthew draws attention to them in Jesus' genealogy?

4. Think About It: This genealogy is divided into three distinct groups of fourteen names. The first group ends with David, the second with the deportation to Babylon, and the third with the

birth of Jesus Christ. Why do you think Matthew draws attention to the deportation but not to Judah's return to the land of Canaan? (For help with this question, review Session One.)

### ***THE BIRTH OF THE KING (MATTHEW 1:18-25)***

5. In Matthew 1:21 and 1:23, what names does Matthew say will be given to the new child, and what is the significance of these names? (For help with the first name, see CCC 430–431.)

6. Think About It: "Jesus" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name "Joshua" ("Yahweh saves").

a. Who was Joshua? (There is a good synopsis of his life in Sirach 46:1-8.)

b. How is Jesus a "new Joshua" in a spiritual sense?

7. Consider the names for the Messiah found in Matthew 1, including "Christ," "Son of David," "Son of Abraham," "Jesus," and "Emmanuel." Do any of these names seem particularly appropriate in your own experience of God's Son?

8. Some people interpret Matthew 1:25, which says that Joseph "knew [Mary] not until she had borne a son," as meaning that the Holy Couple had sexual relations after Jesus was born. Here, the word "until" has been translated from the Greek word *heos*, which is used elsewhere in the Bible to indicate a discrete period of time and which does not necessarily imply any change in the future. For example, we read in 2 Samuel 6:23 that "Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death." Just as in Matthew 1:25, the word "to" in this passage has been translated from the Greek word *heos*. Read CCC 499–501. What does the Magisterium teach about Mary's virginity?

## **Session 2**

### ***THE MAGI'S VISIT (MATTHEW 2:1-12)***

1. Jesus is born in Bethlehem of Judea. Find it on the map on page 4. In Hebrew, "Bethlehem" means "house of bread." Read the following Old Testament passages, and note what is important about this little town.
  - a. • 1 Samuel 16:1, 16:4-13:
  - b. • Micah 5:2-4:2.
2. In Matthew 2, four people (or groups of people) are shown reacting to news of the new King. Who are they, and what are their responses?

PEOPLE

RESPONSE

3. Think About It: Matthew does not include the visit of the (Jewish) shepherds that is recorded in Luke 2. What conclusion might the reader draw from this omission?
4. Read CCC 528. What does the Church see in the Magi?
5. Herod is troubled enough to seek the death of the reported new King of the Jews. His own kingship is not based on blood (Herod is an Edomite descended from Esau), but on political expediency: Rome has appointed him king of the Jews, a position he holds from 37 to 4 bc. Read Numbers 24:15-19. This passage records a prophecy of Balaam, with which Herod, as an Edomite, would have been familiar. Why is Herod so disturbed by the words of the chief priests and scribes in Matthew 2:6?
6. Read Isaiah 60:3-6. How is this proclamation fulfilled in Matthew 2?

### ***THE HOLY FAMILY ESCAPES TO EGYPT (MATTHEW 2:13-23)***

7. When Matthew says, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matthew 2:15), he is quoting Hosea 11:1. Hosea's reference is to God's delivery of his children from Egyptian slavery. Read CCC 530. What point is Matthew trying to make about Jesus?

#### **NOTE ON MATTHEW 2:16-18**

Rachel was the beloved wife of Jacob and the mother of his eleventh and twelfth sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh became the chief tribes in the North during the time of the Divided Kingdom. Ephraim attained such prominence that Israel (the Northern Kingdom) was often called Ephraim. Rachel died after giving birth to Benjamin. She was buried either in Bethlehem itself or

five miles north in the Benjamite town of Ramah. That geographic area became a focus of sorrow—not just Rachel’s sorrow, but the sorrow of Judah and Israel as Ramah became the place where many died and were taken into exile.

8. Read Matthew 2:19-23, and find Judea, Galilee, and Nazareth on the map on page 4.

a. Why does the Holy Family decide not to return to Bethlehem?

b. “He shall be called a Nazarene” appears to be paraphrased from the words of several prophets. Matthew may be drawing a comparison between the words “Nazareth” and nester (Hebrew for “branch”). Read the following verses, and record what the image of the branch represents.

- Isaiah 11:
- Jeremiah 23:5-6:

#### BACKGROUND: THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

Nearly one thousand years before, the Davidic kingdom of David and Solomon split in two as a result of sin, and it remained divided until first the North (in 722 bc) and then the South (in 587 bc) were carried into exile by Assyria and Babylon respectively. Although part of the South (Judah) returned to Palestine after seventy years of captivity, the Jewish people continued to mourn the loss of the ten Northern tribes of Israel.

c. How does this image of the “branch” relate to Jesus Christ, the Nazarene?

### **Session 3**

#### ***JOHN THE BAPTIST'S ANNOUNCEMENT (MATTHEW 3:1-12)***

1.
  - a. Who is John the Baptist, and what has been foretold about him? Read Luke 1:5-36.
  - b. Read Matthew 3:2-3. What is his message and purpose?
  - c. What details does Matthew give about where John the Baptist preaches, the clothes he wears, and the food he eats?
2. Who comes to hear John preach, and how do they respond?
3.
  - a. The Pharisees and Sadducees were religious leaders in Jesus' day. The Pharisees kept themselves separate from everything "unclean" and insisted the people observe strict adherence to the Law to be considered holy. The Sadducees were descendants of Zadok, high priest under David, who had become corrupt; they were pawns of the Romans. What do you think John the Baptist means by his warning in Matthew 3:8-12?
  - b. What do you think John means when he says "fruit that befits repentance"? Read CCC 678. What will be judged on the Last Day?
4. Read 2 Kings 1:8; Malachi 4:5-6; Sirach 48:4, 48:9-10. What Old Testament prophet does Matthew's description of John the Baptist bring to mind, and what do Malachi and Sirach say about that prophet? (Note: In the NAB, the Malachi reference will be in Malachi 3:23-24.)
5. Think About It: John baptizes people in the Jordan River. What is special about this river that lends meaning to this? Read Joshua 3; 2 Kings 5:1, 5:10-14; CCC 1222.
6. Compare and contrast the baptisms of Jesus and John the Baptist. (See Matthew 3:11-12; CCC 1265.)

#### ***JESUS IS BAPTIZED (MATTHEW 3:13-17)***

7. Why do you think Jesus, who is sinless, wants to be baptized by John, who baptizes "with water for repentance"? (For help with this question, see CCC 535–536, 1223–1224.)
8. What do the opened heavens, the descent of the dove, and the voice from heaven signify?

## Session 4

### ***THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS (MATTHEW 4:1-11)***

1. In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus is tempted by the devil. What is the purpose of the devil's questioning?
2. What weapons does the devil employ against Jesus?
3. How does Jesus fight back? What is the result?
4.
  - a. Who leads Jesus into the desert in Matthew 4:1, and why?
  - b. Does this seem odd to you? Why is it important for Jesus to be tempted? Read what the Church has to say about Jesus' temptations in CCC 538–540. (See also Hebrews 4:15-16.)
5. **Think About It:** If even the devil can quote Scripture, how can we know when it is correctly used and when it is not? How can we avoid being misled? (Try to answer this from what you have learned in this session. If you need additional help, see CCC 85–86, 109–119.)

### ***JESUS MINISTERS IN GALILEE (MATTHEW 4:12-22)***

6. The tribal areas of Zebulun and Naphtali were the first regions to be carried into exile by the Assyrians. During Jesus' day, there were some Jews (from Judah) living in Galilee, but the population was made up mostly of Gentiles and descendants of the Israelites (Northern tribes) who had returned from exile. Why do you think Jesus chooses to start his ministry there?
7. Matthew 4:15-17 connects the start of Jesus' ministry with a prophecy from Isaiah. Read the original prophecy in Isaiah 9:1-7. What does Matthew want his readers to understand?
8.
  - a. Notice that Jesus' message in Matthew 4:17 is identical to John the Baptist's message in Matthew 3:2. Why is this significant?
  - b. Why is this message so important for Israel to hear?
9. How does Jesus call his first disciples (see Matthew 4:19), and how do they respond?
10.
  - a. How does Jesus minister to the people in Galilee (see Matthew 4:23-25)?
  - b. How is he received?

## **Session 5**

### ***THE BEATITUDES (MATTHEW 5:1-11)***

When God first called Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants, he promised them land and an everlasting royal kingdom that would be the source of blessing to the entire world. It is significant, then, that Jesus' first major pronouncement, the Sermon on the Mount, begins with the "Beatitudes"—the blessings of the New Covenant.

1. Look up the definition of "blessed." What does it mean? What do you mean when you call someone "blessed"?
2. Who does Jesus proclaim in the Beatitudes will be the "blessed" of the kingdom?
3.
  - a. In Jesus' day, "beatitude" (blessedness) would ordinarily be determined by a person's good fortune. On what basis does Jesus determine blessedness?
  - b. What point is Jesus making about the kingdom of heaven and happiness (blessedness)?
4. The first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," lays the groundwork for the rest. Who are the "poor in spirit"? (For help with this question, see CCC 544.)

### ***SALT AND LIGHT (MATTHEW 5:13-16)***

5. Jesus calls his disciples "the salt of the earth" in Matthew 5:13. Discuss what it means to be "salt."
6.
  - a. Read Matthew 5:14-16. This is not the first time the children of Israel have been called the light of the world. Read Isaiah 42:6-7, 49:5-6. What is Israel's God-given mission, and how does Jesus expect his disciples to fulfill it?
  - b. How does the image of light enhance your understanding of what God calls his children to do?

### ***THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS (MATTHEW 5:17-48)***

7. Part of living out this new law involves being salt and light in the world. How do we put this into practice? Read Matthew 5:21-48, in which Jesus applies his New Covenant understanding to Old Covenant laws regarding murder, adultery, divorce, swearing falsely, retaliation, and enemies. How would you summarize his basic message?
8. Choose one of these laws, and explain how Jesus deepens your understanding of the purpose or intent of the original law.

9. Think About It: The Catechism tells us, “In Jesus, the same Word of God that had resounded on Mount Sinai to give the written Law to Moses, made itself heard anew on the Mount of the Beatitudes” (CCC 581). What similarities and differences do you see between God’s Word in the Ten Commandments(Exodus 20:1-17) and God’s Word in the Beatitudes? In what sense do the Beatitudes “fulfill” the Ten Commandments or reveal what the earlier Law only pointed to?

10.Think About It: What does Jesus’ discussion of anger in Matthew 5:21-26 say about the connection between our worship of God and our relationships with one another? (See also Matthew 6:15.)

11. Love of neighbor is one of the two greatest commandments of the Old Testament Law.

- a. How does Jesus expand on the definition of “neighbor” in Matthew 5:43-48?
- b. On what basis does Jesus say to love even our enemies?

## **Session 6**

### ***PERSONAL PIETY (MATTHEW 6:1-4)***

1. In this section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, he turns to matters of personal piety, or "acts of righteousness."
  - a. What three practices are discussed in Matthew 6:1-18?
  - b. What is the gist of Jesus' message in these verses?
  - c. What is revealed about the nature of true piety?
2. Matthew uses the title "Father" or "heavenly Father" for God twelve times in Matthew 6.
  - a. What fatherly traits of God are illustrated in this chapter?
  - b. What difference does it make to your personal piety, or acts of righteousness, when you relate to God as your Father instead of as a master or judge?

### ***PRAYER (MATTHEW 6:5-14)***

3. In Matthew 6:5-14, Jesus introduces prayer as a means of intimate communion with our heavenly Father. The Lord's Prayer gives us a framework so we will understand how to pray.
  - a. What is the primary focus of the Lord's Prayer (see Matthew 6:9 -10)?
  - b. St. Thomas Aquinas once said: "The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. ... In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired" (CCC 2763). Why do you think these initial requests precede the more personal ones of Matthew 6:11-13?(See CCC 2764.)
4. Read Matthew 6:11-13.
  - a. What earthly concerns does Jesus direct us to pray about?
  - b. Which one of the petitions speaks most to you? The Catechism discusses them in detail in Article 3 (see CCC 2803–2854). Read the pertinent section for the petition you choose, and record what you learn from it.

### ***FORGIVENESS (MATTHEW 6:15-18)***

5. What does Jesus say people must do for their sins to be forgiven?
6. Think About It: Why do you think Jesus makes such a point of the need for forgiveness in his instructions on prayer?

***GOD AND MAMMON (MATTHEW 6:19-24)***

7. What is Jesus saying in Matthew 6:19-24? (Note: The phrase “a sound eye” in Matthew 6:22-23 refers to an ancient Hebrew idiom for generosity.)

***ANXIETY VERSUS TRUST IN THE FATHER’S CARE (MATTHEW 6:25-34)***

8.     a. What reasons does Jesus give us in this passage not to worry about how we will be taken care of?
- b. When Jesus tells us not to worry about what we will eat or wear, is he telling us not to work to provide for ourselves? Read CCC 2830.
- c. What related point does the apostle Paul make in Philippians 4:6-7?

## **Session 7**

### ***JUDGING OTHERS (MATTHEW 7:1-6)***

1.
  - a. In Matthew 7:1, Jesus says, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” What kind of judgment is he talking about, and why does he speak against it? See also James 4:11-12.
  - b. How do Jesus’ instructions regarding judging others relate to his words in Matthew 6:14-15? (See also CCC 678.)
  - c. If we refrain from judging others, when will they be judged, and by whom? Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5.
  - d. Does Jesus mean we should never make any judgments? Read Matthew 7:6, 7:15-19. What kinds of judgments should Christians make?

### ***PRAYER (MATTHEW 7:7-12)***

2. What promises does Jesus make in Matthew 7:7-12 about prayer?
3. The “Golden Rule” in Matthew 7:12 is found in a negative form in rabbinic Judaism and other world religions: Do not do things to others you do not want them to do to you. How does Jesus change this? How does this change relate to true righteousness?

### ***ENTERING THE KINGDOM – “THE TWO WAYS” (MATTHEW 7:13-23)***

4. Jesus’ admonitions in the Sermon on the Mount may seem hard to fulfill. What does Jesus say about the way to the kingdom in Matthew 7:13-14?
5. **Think About It:** Is this a new message, or has Israel heard something like it before? Compare Jesus’ words here about the two gates with God’s message to Israel through Moses as the people prepared to enter Canaan (see Deuteronomy 30:15-20).
6. Read Matthew 7:21-23.
  - a. What are some examples of things people might mistakenly rely on to convince themselves they will enter God’s kingdom?
  - b. How can you be sure to follow the narrow way and enter the kingdom?

### ***HEARERS VERSUS DOERS (MATTHEW 7:24-29)***

7. Jesus compares those who hear and obey his words to a wise man who builds his house upon the rock. What is the “moral sense”—life instruction—of his teaching? (See CCC 117.)
8. How does the crowd respond to Jesus’ teaching?



## **Session 8**

### ***JESUS' MIRACLES (MATTHEW 8)***

1. In the New Testament, the miracles of Jesus are most often called *dynameis*, or “powers.” The focus is not on Jesus as a miracle worker, but on Jesus as the power of God made manifest on earth. How—and over what—does Jesus demonstrate his divine power in Matthew 8?

### ***JESUS CLEANSSES THE LEPER (MATTHEW 8:1-4)***

2. a. Under the old Law, anyone with leprosy was isolated from the community. Not only were they forbidden from interacting with people who were “clean,” they were denied access to the Temple for worship. They lived outside the camp, and if anyone came near, they had to call, “Unclean! Unclean!” so no one would touch them and become defiled themselves. Given this background, what is remarkable about the way Jesus cleanses the leper?

b. Think About It: The Church distinguishes between the literal and spiritual “senses” of Scripture, which, taken together, add richness to our understanding of God’s Word. The literal sense is the intended meaning of the text; the spiritual senses are based on the literal sense and represent the way in which the text points to or is a sign of a deeper reality. These spiritual senses can be “allegorical”—pointing to Christ; “moral”—pointing to the way we ought to act; or “anagogical”—pointing to our eternal destiny. Can you see a spiritual sense behind leprosy in general or something in the Church that Christ’s healing of the leper points to?

### ***THE CENTURION'S SERVANT (MATTHEW 8:5-13)***

All Gentiles were by definition “sinners” simply because they did not adhere to Jewish Law. When the centurion says he is not worthy to have Jesus come under his roof, this is not false humility but an acknowledgment that Jesus will become ceremonially defiled if he enters his house.

3. a. Jesus praises the Roman centurion for his faith. What qualities of faith do you see in the words and actions of the centurion?

b. What quality, which is lacking in some “sons of the kingdom,” does this Gentile have that makes him fit for heaven?

4. You may recognize the words of the centurion in the following words we say at Mass prior to receiving the Eucharist: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but

only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” What does the story of the centurion add to your understanding of these words?

### ***THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP (MATTHEW 8:18-22)***

5. In this passage, Matthew gives us a picture of two potential followers of Jesus. Based on Jesus’ replies to their questions, what are they unwilling to let go?

**6. Think About It:** Read Matthew 8:18-22 along with 1 Kings 19:19-21. Why do you think Jesus tells the disciple to “leave the dead to bury their own dead” even though Elijah permitted Elisha to take leave of his family?

### ***JESUS CALMS THE STORM (MATTHEW 8:23-27)***

7.       a. Jesus calls the disciples who are with him in the boat “men of little faith.” They have enough faith to go to him for help; what do they lack?  
          b. How might the disciples act differently with stronger faith?

### ***THE GADARENE DEMONIACS (MATTHEW 8:28-34)***

8.       What questions do the demon-possessed men address to Jesus? What do these questions reveal about their knowledge of Jesus?

### ***QUESTION WHAT IT REVEALS***

9.   **Think About It:** What do the leper, the centurion, and the demoniacs have in common? Is there a reason these are among the first people Jesus reaches out to in Matthew’s Gospel?

## **Session 9**

### ***JESUS HEALS A PARALYTIC (MATTHEW 9:1-8)***

Note: "His own city" in Matthew 9:1 refers to Capernaum in Galilee. Find it on the map on page 5. At the end of Matthew 7, we read that the crowds are astonished at the authority with which Jesus teaches. Now, the religious leaders are calling into question the authority with which he acts.

1. a. Why do the scribes, who are experts in Mosaic Law, believe Jesus is blaspheming? (For help with this question, see Isaiah 43:25; Mark 2:7; Leviticus 17:11.)
- b. What does Jesus demonstrate to the scribes, and how does he go about it?
- c. Whose faith is responsible for the healing of the paralytic and the forgiveness of his sins?
- d. Can we bring the sick before God in faith today and ask him to heal them? Read James 5:14-15.

2. Think About It: The Catechism tells us: "It is the experience of Israel that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, and that faithfulness to God according to his law restores life" (CCC 1502). It is easy to see how the Jewish leaders, focused on attaining holiness, righteousness, and life through strict adherence to the Law and avoidance of everything unclean, might look upon people who are sick as sinners and outcasts. How does Jesus begin to change this thinking?

### ***JESUS CALLS MATTHEW (MATTHEW 9:9-13)***

3. The Pharisees object when Jesus and his disciples eat with tax collectors and sinners. Explain what Jesus means when he makes the following three replies in Matthew 9:12-13.

- a. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."
- b. "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'" Jesus quotes from the prophet Hosea, who spoke to the Northern Kingdom about its arrogance, its worship of other gods, and its spiritual sickness. Hosea announced God's judgment, writing: "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6).

Note: This is a quote from Hosea 6:6. Optional: For a deeper understanding of Hosea's general message, read this verse in the context of several chapters, or read your Bible's introduction to Hosea if there is one.

- c. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."4. In Matthew

4, we read about how Jesus called his first four disciples. Why do you think Matthew highlighted his own calling in this chapter rather than in the beginning of his Gospel? Think about this in the context of the various accounts of Jesus' healings.

#### ***A QUESTION OF FASTING (MATTHEW 9:14-17)***

5. a. A second criticism comes from the disciples of John in Matthew 9:14. They ask, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" How does Jesus answer?

b. Jesus' words to his disciples in Matthew 9:16-17 about new wine and old wineskins can be applied equally to the Pharisees in Matthew 9:10-13. What is he teaching them?

#### ***MORE HEALINGS (MATTHEW 9:18-34)***

6. a. What does the woman with the hemorrhage need to do to be healed?

b. How do you account for the different reactions of the Pharisees and the crowd to Jesus healing the mute demoniac depicted in Matthew 9:32-34?

c. How would you react if you heard about such a miracle occurring today?

7. Think About It: Moses performed many miracles in his day; so did Elisha and others. Yet, the people marvel at Jesus' healings: "Never was anything like this seen in Israel," they say in Matthew 9:33. What sets Jesus' miracles apart from these other miracles?

#### ***THE HARVEST AND LABORERS (MATTHEW 9:35-38)***

8. a. After the Southern Kingdom of Judah went into exile, the prophet Ezekiel blasted the "shepherds of Israel" for failing to care for the sheep, God's people. "So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the wild beasts" (Ezekiel 34:5). Even though the people have returned physically from exile, how can you tell from this passage in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus sees them in the same situation in his day?

b. God continues: "I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out" (Ezekiel 34:11). "And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd" (Ezekiel 34:23). Who is this "servant David" who will be their shepherd?

9. How does Jesus respond to the needs of these "harassed and helpless," shepherd-less sheep?

## **Session 10**

### ***JESUS GIVES HIS DISCIPLES AUTHORITY (MATTHEW 10:1-4)***

Note: The word “apostle” comes from the Greek *apostello*—to send forth with a commission. It was used for personal representatives of the king, ambassadors who functioned with the king’s authority. This is the spirit in which we see Jesus commissioning his disciples and giving them authority and power to carry out his work on his behalf.

1. What do you think is the significance of Jesus’ selection of twelve apostles? (For help with this question, see Luke 22:28-30 and Revelation 21:10-14.)
2. a. Read the names of the twelve apostles. Whose is the first name on the list?
- b. Are any of the other apostles’ names familiar to you from the preceding chapters of Matthew’s Gospel? What kind of men are those described already? (See Matthew 4:18-22, 9:9.)
- c. **Think About It:** At the end of the list is “Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.” Surely, Jesus knows what kind of man Judas is and that he will betray him; yet, he chooses Judas to be an apostle. Do you sometimes see people in positions of authority in the Church who seem unworthy of those positions? What does Jesus’ choice of Judas as an apostle suggest our attitude toward these people and their offices should be?

### ***THE MISSION OF THE APOSTLES (MATTHEW 10:5-15)***

3. a. What charge does Jesus give his apostles, and how does he empower them?
- b. Who will be the initial recipients of their ministry? Is this significant? (Recall what you learned in Matthew 4:12-16.)
4. a. What additional instructions does Jesus give the Twelve?
- b. When Jews left “unclean” Gentile territory for their own land, it was customary for them to shake the dust from their feet. What is the significance of Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 10:13-15?

### ***THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP (MATTHEW 10:16-39)***

5. a. Read Matthew 10:16-24. Jesus asks his apostles to deliver fantastic news, news that everyone has been longing to hear. Not only that, he gives them the ability to transform people’s lives for the better, healing diseases, raising the dead, and casting out demons. In spite of all this, what kind of reception does he tell them to expect?
- b. How does Jesus tell them to respond?

c. What hope and comfort does Jesus give the apostles in these verses?

6. a. Following this assurance of persecution, Jesus says in Matthew 10:26, “So have no fear of them.” How can he say this?

b. Think About It: Read Genesis 3:15 to refresh your memory of the first announcement of the Good News in the Bible. In light of these words of God, why should we not be surprised by Jesus’ insistence on the inevitability of persecution—and his admonition not to be afraid?

7. a. Read Matthew 10:34-39. Are Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:34-36, where he says he has come not to bring peace but a sword, a contradiction of his words in John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Explain your answer.

b. What does the cross—a cruel instrument of execution that all Jesus’ followers would be familiar with—represent in Matthew 10:38?

***REWARDS (MATTHEW 10:40-42)***

8. In Matthew 10:14-15, Jesus pronounced judgment greater than that on Sodom and Gomorrah on those who refuse to receive the apostles. In Matthew 10:40-42, what does he say is in store for those who do receive them? (Note: Jesus refers to the apostles here as “little ones.”)

## **Session 11**

### ***JOHN THE BAPTIST (MATTHEW 11:1-19)***

John the Baptist had heard reports while in prison of Jesus' miracles. Were they what he had expected from the Messiah? The Bible does not tell us, but John sent this question to Jesus: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

1. a. Although Jesus' answer seems to merely reiterate what John already knows (that Jesus has been healing people and preaching the Good News), it actually says much more. How is Jesus elaborating on what John already knows? (Read Isaiah 35:4-6, 61:1-2.)
- b. Jesus tells the crowd that John the Baptist is more than a prophet—he is the Elijah who is to come. He is the greatest of all the prophets, sent to prepare the way for Jesus and the kingdom. Yet, great as John is, Jesus says that even the least in the kingdom is greater than John. What do you think he means by this?
- c. What does Jesus say about his generation in Matthew 11:16 -19?

### ***WOE ON UNREPENTANT CITIES (MATTHEW 11:20-24)***

2. Read Matthew 11:20-24; then use the map on page 5 to locate the cities mentioned. Why does Jesus compare the first three cities unfavorably to Tyre and Sidon and pronounce such a harsh judgment on them?

### ***JESUS' YOKE (MATTHEW 11:25-30)***

3. a. In contrast to the unrepentant cities that reject Jesus' teaching and miracles, who are those that know the Father and "come" to Jesus?
- b. What is the "yoke" Jesus refers to in Matthew 11:29? (See also Sirach 51:23-26; 1 John 5:3.)

### ***CHALLENGES TO JESUS' AUTHORITY (MATTHEW 12:1-21)***

Following the destruction of the first Temple in 587 bc and during the exile, the Sabbath gained importance as one way the displaced Jews maintained their identity while they lived among strangers. By Jesus' time, keeping the Sabbath was an essential part of Jewish life, and there was a great deal of debate over how it should be observed. Lists of rules were drawn up by the rabbis. Penalties were enforced for breaking the law. As a result, a day set apart for rest in God's image had turned into a day of obligation, stripped of its meaning and intended effect.

4. a. What two charges do the Pharisees bring against Jesus and his disciples in Matthew 12:1-14? (See also Exodus 20:10.)

b. What is Jesus' defense? (Note: If you want to read about the incident Jesus refers to in Matthew 12:3-4, it can be found in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Matthew 12:5 says that priests who do the work required to offer sacrifice on the Sabbath do so without guilt.)

c. Read CCC 2168–2172. What was the original purpose of the Sabbath that the Pharisees have lost in their zeal to enforce the Law?

### ***CHALLENGES TO THE SOURCE OF JESUS' POWER (MATTHEW 12:22-37)***

5. a. What serious charge do the Pharisees make against Jesus?

b. How does Jesus reveal the fallacy in their charge?

c. In Matthew 12:30-34, what grave risk does Jesus say the Pharisees are taking by making this charge? (Optional: Read CCC 1864, 679.)

### ***JESUS CONFRONTS HIS GENERATION (MATTHEW 12:38-45)***

6. a. Read Matthew 12:38-45. What does Jesus mean by “the sign of the prophet Jonah”? (For help with this question, see CCC 994.)

b. Jesus gives two examples of Gentiles—one nation (Nineveh) and one person (the queen of the South, or Sheba)—who will arise and condemn his generation. Why would they do this?

7. Both Jesus and the Pharisees expel evil spirits. What will happen, though, if that generation (“the man” of Jesus' illustration in Matthew 12:43-45) fails to fill the resulting vacuum with acceptance of the kingdom Jesus offers and with the power of the Spirit of God?

### ***JESUS' TRUE FAMILY (MATTHEW 12:46-50)***

8. Read Matthew 12:46-50. How does Jesus broaden the concept of family? (See also John 1:11-13; 1 John 3:10.)

## **Session 12**

### ***PARABLE OF THE SOWER (MATTHEW 13:1-23)***

1. This chapter is filled with Jesus' parables about the kingdom of heaven. The Greek word for "parable" is parabole—literally, a "placing beside." In the Gospels, it is a comparison from everyday life that is used to illustrate a spiritual truth. What reason does Jesus give in Matthew 13:10-16 for using parables?

2. What is given to the disciples but not to the crowd, and why? (See Matthew 13:11-17; CCC 546.)

3. a. Read the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:18-23. According to Jesus, what do each of the following things refer to?

- The seed that falls along the path:
- The seed that falls among rocks:
- The seed that falls among thorns:
- The seed that falls on good soil:

b. What is the main message of this parable?

c. Why is the Word of God not always effective in our lives? (Read also 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:2.)

### ***PARABLE OF THE WEEDS (MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43)***

4. Read the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30 and what Jesus says about it in Matthew 13:36-43.

a. What do the following represent?

- The sower of the good seed:
- The field:
- The sower of the bad seed:
- The good seed:
- The bad seed (weeds):
- The reapers:
- The time of the harvest:

b. What will happen to those who cause sin and to all who do evil? What will happen to the righteous?

c. Read CCC 827, 681–682. What ramifications does this parable have for the Church today? (You might ask yourself: Who is responsible for pulling the “weeds”?)

***FOUR MORE PARABLES (MATTHEW 13:31-35, 44-46)***

5. Jesus tells four more parables in Matthew 13:31-46.

a. What is the connection between the kingdom of heaven and the mustard seed and the way it grows?

b. How does Jesus use the concept of yeast to expand our understanding of the kingdom?

c. What is the lesson of the two parables in Matthew 13:44-46?

***PARABLE OF THE NET: A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR (MATTHEW 13:47-58)***

6. Read Matthew 13:47-52. What does the parable of the net tell us about the judgment to come?

7. a. Why are the people of Jesus’ hometown “astonished” at him (Matthew 13:54)?

b. How does their reaction differ from the “astonished” crowd in Matthew 7:28?

c. What is the consequence of their unbelief?

## **Session 13**

### ***THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (MATTHEW 14:1-12)***

1. When Jesus hears that John the Baptist has been beheaded, he does not demand justice or confront Herod but withdraws to a lonely place. Why do you think he does this?

### ***JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND (MATTHEW 14:13-21)***

2. a. Contrast the disciples' reaction to the needs of the crowd with Jesus' response to their needs.  
b. Jesus asks his disciples to do something that is humanly impossible. What do you think the disciples learn from this experience?  
c. Notice that Jesus does not feed the people himself; he has his disciples pass around the bread and fish in his name; and by his power, they distribute abundance from their meager store. Do you see a parallel to this in the Church today? (For help with this question, see CCC 1335.)

### ***JESUS WALKS ON WATER (MATTHEW 14:22-33)***

3. It is not the storm that first frightens the disciples but the sight of Jesus walking toward them. How does Jesus respond to their fear?
4. a. When Peter realizes it is Jesus, his immediate response is to ask Jesus to permit him to walk on the water. What causes Peter to doubt after his initial success?  
b. What significant confession do the disciples make after this event, and how does it contrast with their reaction the first time they saw Jesus' power over a storm? (For help with this question, see Matthew 8:23-27.)
5. What have you learned about faith from the two miracles Jesus performs in Matthew 14?

### ***CLEAN AND UNCLEAN (MATTHEW 15:1-20)***

6. a. In Matthew 15:1-9, the scribes and Pharisees once again attempt to catch Jesus and his disciples in an infraction of the Law. What do they accuse the disciples of doing?  
b. How does Jesus reply?  
c. How does Jesus explain his parable in Matthew 15:17-20?

### ***THE FAITH OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN (MATTHEW 15:21-28)***

Locate the predominantly Gentile district of Tyre and Sidon on the map on page 5.

7. a. How does the Canaanite woman obtain healing for her daughter despite Jesus' initial refusal to heal her?

b. How can this incident give us confidence as we approach the Father in prayer? (See CCC 2609–2610.)

***JESUS FEEDS THE FOUR THOUSAND (MATTHEW 15:29-39)***

8. a. Before feeding the four thousand, Jesus performs many other miracles in this primarily Gentile region (see Matthew 15:30-31). List them, and describe how the crowd reacts to them.

b. Why do you think Matthew includes this list of miracles in his Gospel?

9. a. Notice the verbs Matthew uses in 14:19 and 15:36. Read Matthew 26:26. What do the miracles recorded here anticipate? (See CCC 1335.)

b. **Think About It:** Matthew records not one but two feeding miracles. These miracles have the effect of brackets, focusing the reader's attention on what is between them: the offense the Jewish leaders take at the disciples. Contrast the roles Jesus assigns his disciples in these stories with the role the scribes and Pharisees play. How does this illuminate the difference between the Old and New Covenants?

## **Session 14**

### ***“AN EVIL AND ADULTEROUS GENERATION” (MATTHEW 16:1-12)***

1. The Pharisees and Sadducees come to test Jesus in Matthew 16:1. In what way does their question reflect Satan’s first temptation of Jesus in the desert in Matthew 4:3?
2. a. What “signs of the times” do you think Jesus is accusing the Pharisees and Sadducees of being unable to interpret?  
b. What kind of sign does Jesus offer them? Explain it. (Optional: Read the book of Jonah, which contains just four short chapters.)
3. In Matthew 16:5-12, Jesus warns the disciples to beware of the “leaven” (teaching) of the Pharisees and Sadducees. What do the uses and properties of leaven add to your understanding of his warning?

### ***PETER’S CONFESSION (MATTHEW 16:13-20)***

4. a. How does Peter’s understanding of who Jesus is compare with the way the religious leaders and other men see Jesus?  
b. Why is it important to know who Jesus is?  
c. Who does Jesus say is the source of Peter’s knowledge?
5. a. After Simon acknowledges Jesus to be “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus gives him a new name—Peter—meaning “Rock.” Can you remember anyone else who was given a new name by God, and why? (See Genesis 17, 32.)  
b. The word “rock” was not commonly used as a name in Old Testament times the way “Peter” is used today. It was used to describe God, however. (See Isaiah 26:4; 2 Samuel 22:32.) On one occasion, it was used to describe someone else. Who was it? Read Isaiah 51:1-2.  
c. Why is it significant that Jesus gives Simon the new name Peter? In the original Aramaic, both “Peter” and “rock” are the same word—kephas. In Greek, the word for “rock” is petra. Because this is a feminine noun, the masculine petros (“stone”) is used for Peter’s name in the translation.

6. a. What does Jesus promise Peter in Matthew 16:18, and what does this promise mean for the Church? (See CCC 552.)

b. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus gives Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” and tells him, “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Read Isaiah 22:15-25; Revelation 3:7. What insight do these passages give you into the meaning of the keys? Read CCC 553.

7. Matthew 16:21 marks a turning point in Matthew’s Gospel. God has revealed Jesus’ identity to Peter and made him the foundation stone of the Church. “From that time,” Jesus begins to tell his disciples what the establishment of this new kingdom will require.

a. Why are Jesus’ words so hard for Peter to take?

b. Why does Jesus reply with such force? (Do you see any parallel between Peter’s remark and the words of the Serpent in Genesis 3 or of Satan in Matthew 4 when he tempts Jesus in the desert?)

c. Think About It: How should we see Peter’s error in light of the special revelation he has just received and the fact that he will be the foundation of the Church? For that matter, how do we understand the mistakes of any of the later popes in light of their infallibility?

8. a. It is not only Jesus who will suffer. What does Jesus say will be required of anyone who follows him? (Read also Romans 8:15-18; John 12:24.)

b. How can we do this today?

## **Session 15**

### ***THE TRANSFIGURATION (MATTHEW 17:1-13)***

1. The Transfiguration takes place in the context of the events of Matthew 16, in which Peter declares Jesus to be the Christ, Son of the living God, and in which Jesus foretells his passion and speaks of the cost of discipleship.
  - a. Six days later, who does Jesus take up a mountain, and what is revealed to them there?
  - b. In what way will this experience prove significant for the apostles later on? (See 2 Peter 1:17-18; CCC 555.)
2. a. Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets. Why do you think these two “greats” appear on the mountain for this occasion? (A brief ode to Elijah can be found in the first part of Sirach 48.)
  - b. From Luke’s Gospel, we know that on this occasion, Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about his “exodus, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:30-31). What does calling it an “exodus” add to the disciples’ understanding of Jesus’ mission?
3. Peter wants to extend Moses’ and Elijah’s stay by building tents for them. What do we learn from the fact that they do not stay?
4. How does the Transfiguration relate to our own hopes for the future? (See 2 Corinthians 3:18.)

### ***THE HEALING OF A BOY WITH A DEMON (MATTHEW 17:14-23)***

5. a. Why are the disciples unable to drive the demon from the man’s son?
  - b. What does Jesus say they need?
  - c. What do you make of the disciples’ failure?
6. a. In Matthew 17:22-23, Jesus again says he will be betrayed, killed, and raised to life on the third day. The first time he said this in Matthew 16:21-22,

Peter was shocked, and the disciples misunderstood him. Do they understand him this time? How do you know?

b. Think About It: By the time Peter wrote his epistles, his view of Christ's suffering—and of suffering in general—had changed markedly. Read 1 Peter 1:6-8, 4:12-13, 5:10. Do you think witnessing the Transfiguration had an impact on his change of view? Explain your answer.

### ***THE TEMPLE TAX (MATTHEW 17:24-27)***

7. The half-shekel tax (literally, didrachma—"two-drachma tax") represented about two days' wages; it was an annual tax on adult males for the Temple upkeep and was a symbol of the people's redemption, or purchase, from Egypt.

a. Who does Jesus say is exempt from the tax, and why?

b. By implication, of whom is he speaking specifically?

8. If they are exempt, why does Jesus ask Peter to pay the tax for the two of them?

9. Do you think Jesus accomplishes more by submitting to the authorities in this way than he would by insisting on his rights?

## **Session 16**

### ***HUMILITY (MATTHEW 18:1-4)***

1. a. In Matthew 18:1, the disciples ask Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” How does Jesus answer their question?
- b. What do you think Jesus has in mind when he says to “turn and become like children”?
2. What must we do to enter the kingdom of heaven? (See John 1:12-13; CCC 526.)

### ***PURITY (MATTHEW 18:5-9)***

3. What warning does Jesus issue to those who would cause “one such child” to sin?
4. a. In Matthew 5, Jesus said to take drastic measures if necessary (figuratively, to cut off or pluck out the offending member) to combat personal temptation and avoid sin. In this illustration in Matthew 18, how does he extend this concern to the community as a whole?
- b. What is the goal of these drastic measures?
5. **Think About It:** When the Catechism discusses “Life in Christ,” it includes a section called “Respect for the souls of others: scandal.” Read it in CCC 2284–2287. What does this add to your understanding of Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:5-9?

### ***FAMILY (MATTHEW 18:10-14)***

6. What does the parable of the lost sheep tell you about God?

### ***JUSTICE ... (MATTHEW 18:15-20)***

7. a. As the earthly shepherds of God’s flock on earth, the disciples will need to know how to deal with lost sheep and problems in the sheepfold. What are Jesus’ instructions for dealing with sin in the Christian community?

b. In Matthew 18:17, Jesus says that if the offender refuses correction by the Church, “Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” What does this mean?

c. What is the ultimate goal of this process? (See Galatians 6:1-2.)

8. a. How does Jesus’ assurance that what the disciples bind or loose on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven relate to this? (See CCC 1443–1445.)

b. Who has this authority today, and how is it practiced? (See CCC 1461–1463.)

**... AND MERCY (MATTHEW 18:21-35)**

9. What does Jesus mean by saying that even seven times is not enough, but “seventy times seven”?

10.a. How does Jesus illustrate the foolishness of putting limits on forgiveness? (Note: One “talent” would represent more than fifteen years' wages for a laborer; one “denarius” could be earned in a day.)

b. What does this parable teach about justice in the kingdom of heaven? (Read CCC 2832–2843.)

c. Think About It: Forgiving others sounds good on paper, but it can be the hardest thing we have to do. How is it possible to carry this out in our lives?

## **Session 17**

### ***MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE (MATTHEW 19:1-12)***

1. The action shifts from Galilee in the north to “Judea beyond the Jordan.” Locate this area on the map on page 5. Do you remember what this region is associated with? (See Matthew 3:1-6.)
2. We have seen the Pharisees plotting to kill Jesus since Matthew 12. Forbidden under their own law from carrying out a death sentence, they will need to find him guilty of breaking Roman law or get him to provoke the secular authorities. In Matthew 19:3, they test Jesus by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” What do you think is behind this question? Can you think of any way in which it represents a potentially lethal trap for Jesus? (Hint: Remember the fate of John the Baptist.)
3. a. How does Jesus avoid the trap?  
b. What is the next objection of the Pharisees, and how does Jesus handle it?

### ***THE MEANING OF “EXCEPT FOR UNCHASTITY ...”***

The meaning of the phrase “except for unchastity” in Matthew 19:9 has been strenuously debated. Three interpretations exist in Catholic tradition: (1) Separation or divorce is permitted under serious conditions (such as adultery), but remarriage is not; (2) “unchastity” refers to invalid marriages that should never have taken place and which should be ended—for example, a marriage between close relatives; and (3) “except for unchastity” means something like, “regardless of the Old Testament grounds for divorce.” In any of these cases, while there might be some grounds for separation or divorce, there are no grounds for a divorced person to remarry. (See CCC 2380–2391.)

4. a. According to the following Bible and Catechism references, what does marriage represent? (Optional: Read CCC 1602–1617.)
  - Ephesians 5:31-32:
  - CCC 1604:

- CCC 1611:
- CCC 1613:
- CCC 1617:

b. In Matthew 19:5, Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:20-24. Read this passage. What was God's original plan for marriage?

c. Read Malachi 2:13-16. What do these verses say about God in regard to divorce? For a concise view of the conflict, see the essay "Jesus on Marriage and Divorce" on page 51 in the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible.

d. How does the reaction of the disciples in Matthew 19:10 support the Catholic teaching that the marriage bond is created by God and cannot be broken except by death?

5. Is the Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage impossible to bear? (See CCC 1615.)

***THE RICH YOUNG MAN (MATTHEW 19:16-30)***

6. Why do you think Jesus responds the way he does when the rich young man asks what good thing he can do to attain eternal life?

7. a. Jesus says the young man has to obey the commandments to "enter life." For a list of the Ten Commandments, read Exodus 20:1-17. Which of the commandments does Jesus omit in the list he gives the young man in Matthew 19:18-19 that pertain to the young man's situation?

b. Why do you think he omits those at first?

8. a. Why do you think the disciples are astonished at what Jesus says in Matthew 19:23-24?

b. Can you explain Jesus' reply in Matthew 19:26?

9. Think About It: In reviewing Matthew 19, what is the cost of commitment to the kingdom?

10. Peter is quick to note that he and the other disciples have left everything to follow Christ. What will be their reward?

## **Session 18**

### ***“THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST” (MATTHEW 20:1-16)***

1. This parable continues and further clarifies Jesus’ reply to the disciples’ question in Matthew 18—“ Who then can be saved ? ” Jesus replies: “Many that are first will be last, and the last first.” Keep in mind when reading Matthew 20:1-16 that this is a parable. It is not something that actually happened, nor is it proposed as a model for labor relations today. Jesus is telling this story to help his disciples understand who will be part of the kingdom of God.

a. What or who do the following represent?

- The vineyard (see Jeremiah 12:10 and Isaiah 5:1-7):
- Harvest time:
- The employer:
- The first group:
- The later groups:

b. How does this parable illustrate God’s justice and mercy?

c. What is the parable’s message to Israel?

### ***THE “CUP” OF CHRIST (MATTHEW 20:17-28)***

2. a. Twice already in Matthew’s Gospel, we have heard Jesus prophesy his passion. Review Matthew 16:21 and 17:22-23. What new information does Jesus give the disciples in Matthew 20:17-19?

b. What “cup” is Jesus talking about in Matthew 20:22? (See Matthew 26:39, 42.)

c. How is greatness achieved in God’s kingdom?

### ***THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM (MATTHEW 20:29–21:17)***

3. To better understand the significance of the way Jesus enters Jerusalem, read Zechariah 9:9-10; 1 Kings 1:32-46; 2 Kings 9:13. With these verses as the

background, what does Matthew 21:4-5 say is being fulfilled, and how do you know?

4. In Matthew 21:13, Jesus says to those who are changing money and selling pigeons in the Temple: “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you make it a den of robbers.” Jesus does not want the Temple profaned by being turned into a marketplace. Read that verse from its original context in Isaiah 56:6-12. What else does Jesus indict the Jewish leaders for when he quotes this verse? (It may help you to know that during the Passover in Jesus’ day, the Temple became a veritable marketplace as people came from all over Israel to worship. Many sacrificial animals were required, and pilgrims often needed to change currency. Merchants made a profit by taking advantage of this demand. There was not much room outside the Temple, so the outer court—the “court of the Gentiles”—was used to sell animals and exchange money. Normally, the outer court was the only place in the Temple Gentiles could enter to worship.)

#### ***JESUS CURSES THE FIG TREE (MATTHEW 21:18-22)***

5. a. How is what Jesus does to the fig tree in this passage prophetic? (For help with this question, read Jeremiah 8:5-9, 8:13; Hosea 9:10-17.)
- b. What is the message of this incident for us?

#### ***JESUS IS CHALLENGED BY THE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES (MATTHEW 21:23-45)***

6. a. What challenge does Jesus face from the chief priests and elders?
- b. How does Jesus handle their question?
7. Jesus tells the leaders two parables. Summarize the message behind the parable of the two sons in Matthew 21:28-32.
8. In the parable of the tenants in Matthew 21:33-41, the servants represent the Old Testament prophets, many of whom were killed. The son represents Christ, condemned by the religious leaders. The other tenants are the “outcast” Jews and the Gentiles.

- a. In Matthew 21:40, Jesus asks what the owner will do to the unfaithful tenants. How do the religious leaders respond?
- b. Do the Pharisees understand the meaning behind the parable? Who is the message of the parable directed to?
- c. How do the Pharisees react to this, and what keeps them from overt action against Jesus?9. What message is Jesus trying to send when he refers to Psalm 118:22-23 (in Matthew 21:42)?

## **Session 19**

### ***PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST (MATTHEW 22:1-14)***

1. a. To what does Jesus compare the kingdom of God in this parable?
- b. In what way does this parable tell the story of salvation history?
- c. What is the significance of the man without wedding clothes who is thrown outside? (See Revelation 19:7-9.)

### ***THREE CHALLENGES (MATTHEW 22:15-40)***

2. a. What trap is laid for Jesus in Matthew 22:16-17, and how does he escape it?
  - b. How do the Sadducees try to trick Jesus in Matthew 22:23-28? (For help with this, see Deuteronomy 25:5-10.)
  - c. How does Jesus answer them, and what does his answer reveal about their knowledge?
3. Jesus' reply to the ethical question posed in Matthew 22:36 pairs the familiar shema of Deuteronomy 6:4-8—"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might"—with a second law: Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). What point is Jesus making by joining these laws and saying they are the greatest commandments?

### ***JESUS SILENCES THE OPPOSITION (MATTHEW 22:41-46)***

4. a. What question does Jesus ask that finally silences the Pharisees, and why does it have this effect on them? (Think About It: If the Messiah is not David's son, whose son is he?)
  - b. Why do they not answer him or dare to ask him any more questions?
5. Think About It (optional): Why do the Pharisees not "get it"? Why do they fail to recognize Jesus for who he is? (For help with this question, read John 7:15-19.)

### ***JESUS DENOUNCES THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES (MATTHEW 23:1-12)***

6. a. “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat” is a metaphor for their teaching and ruling authority as successors of Moses. According to Jesus, what practical implications does this have for the people regarding their teaching?
- b. What do you think Jesus means when he instructs them not to call anyone “rabbi,” “father,” or “master”? How literally should we take this? (To see how literally the disciples took this instruction in the early Church, read one or more of the following: Luke 16:24; Romans 4:12; Acts 7:1-2; 1 Corinthians 4:14-16; Philemon 10.)

### ***THE “SEVEN WOES” (MATTHEW 23:13-32)***

In Deuteronomy 27 and 28, Moses pronounced the blessings and curses of the covenant: blessings on those who kept the Law, curses on those who did not. Leviticus 26:18-48 enumerates the consequences to Israel of breaking its covenant with God: a “sevenfold” chastisement for its sins. In the Beatitudes, Jesus explains who will attain the blessings. The “seven woes”—curses tantamount to the sevenfold chastisement—are also spelled out in Leviticus. Throughout Matthew’s Gospel there are hints of these “woes”; here, Jesus gives a full critique and pronounces judgment on the religious leaders who have been leading the people astray and who refuse to recognize him.

7. a. Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees “hypocrites” six times in these verses. Look up the definition of “hypocrisy.” What does it mean?
- b. What other words and images does Jesus use when talking about the scribes and Pharisees? What do these say about the leaders?
- c. How does Jesus illustrate the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees in the following verses?

- M a t t h e w 2 3:13 -14 :
- M a t t h e w 23:15:
- M a t t h e w 2 3:16 -2 2 :
- M a t t h e w 23:23-24:

- Matthew 23:25-28:

- Matthew 23:29-36:

***JESUS' FINAL CURSE AND LAMENTATION OVER JERUSALEM (MATTHEW 23:33-39)***

8. What judgment does Jesus say will fall on the leaders, and when will it come?  
9. What is Jesus' attitude in this rebuke of Jerusalem's false shepherds? Is there any hope? (See CCC 558.)

## **Session 20**

### ***SIGNS OF THE END OF THE AGE (MATTHEW 24:1-35)***

1. The Jews saw the Temple as a microcosm of the world and an image of the universe in miniature. God met his people there; his presence filled the Holy of Holies and from there spread out to the world. Read Matthew 24:1-2, and review 21:13, 23:38. If the Temple is God's house and the center of worship, why does Jesus condemn it?

2. The disciples respond to Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the Temple with the question: "When will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matthew 24:3.) Thus, the destruction of the Temple is the context for Jesus' reply, which equates it with his coming and the end of the age. Summarize the signs Jesus gives in Matthew 24:4-31.

3. a. Notice how Isaiah and Ezekiel use apocalyptic imagery in the following passages, and record the historic events they describe.

- Isaiah 13:1, 13:9-10, 13:13:
- Isaiah 14:4, 14:12:
- Ezekiel 32:1-2, 32:7-8

b. In light of this literary tradition, how should we interpret the apocalyptic imagery found in Matthew 24?

### ***BE WATCHFUL AND FAITHFUL (MATTHEW 24:36-51)***

The "coming" of the Son of Man is literally his Parousia. In ancient times, Parousia was a term used for a returning conqueror: He would leave the conquered city under an agreement that they would follow certain stipulations of the conquest. Some time later, he would pay them a surprise visit to determine whether or not they were behaving as loyal subjects to their new master.

Remember that God had made a covenant with Israel. Before establishing them in the Promised Land, he put before them blessings if they would obey, curses if they would not. He has sent his emissaries time and time again to warn them of the

consequences of continued disobedience. Now, the time of his Parousia is “coming.”

4. Whether we are looking at the immediate or future fulfillment of these events, people commonly respond to apocalyptic messages by trying to determine the exact date on which the events will occur.

a. Does Jesus mean for his followers to do this? How do you know?

b. How does Jesus advise people to occupy themselves while they wait for his return?

### ***TWO PARABLES (MATTHEW 25:1-30)***

5. The parable of the ten maidens reflects a Jewish custom in which the bridegroom brings his bride home at the head of a procession that ends with a weeklong celebratory banquet.

a. Why are some of the maidens in Jesus’ story admitted while others are not?

b. A wedding banquet often represents the wedding of Christ and the Church, when he will come to establish his kingdom in glory. What is the message of this parable?

6. a. This parable is about the kingdom of heaven. Who do the people in this story represent?

b. Why are the servants treated differently when the man returns?

c. What does this teach us about the kingdom of God?

### ***THE LAST JUDGMENT (MATTHEW 25:31-46)***

7. a. When the Son of Man comes and sits on his throne in glory and gathers the nations before him, on what basis will he separate the “sheep” from the “goats,” and what will be the destination of each group?

b. What do the people fail to understand in Matthew 25:37-39, 25:44?

8. What does this parable say about how we should live while we wait for Christ’s return?

## **Session 21**

### ***PLAN OR PLOT? (MATTHEW 26:1-5)***

1. When Jesus tells his disciples that the time is near for his crucifixion, he links it to an important event in Israel's history and ongoing tradition: the Passover. What is the Passover? (See Exodus 12 for help with this question.)
2. Jesus says he will be crucified at Passover. In spite of the Jewish leaders' determination not to crucify Jesus during the feast, that is exactly what they do. What does this suggest about Jesus' death?

### ***ANOINTING AND BETRAYAL (MATTHEW 26:6-16)***

3. Why do you think Matthew includes the story of the woman anointing Jesus with expensive ointment at the start of his Passion narrative?
4. Compare the price of the ointment "wasted" on Jesus with the price the priests place on his head. (For purposes of comparison, note that the owner of a slain slave was reimbursed thirty shekels of silver in Exodus 21:32.) What does this say about Judas and about the woman?

### ***THE TRUE PASSOVER LAMB (MATTHEW 26:17-29)***

5. a. When the time comes during the Passover meal for the disciples to eat the lamb, what does Jesus ask them to eat instead? What is he doing?  
b. Explain how you know Jesus is the Passover Lamb the other lambs only pointed to. (For help with this question, read Exodus 12; 1 Peter 1:18-19.)  
c. In Exodus 24, the blood of the covenant was splashed on the altar and on the people to seal Israel in a family relationship with God. What does Jesus mean when he says, "For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"? (See Matthew 26:28; CCC 610, 613– 614.)

### ***PRAYER IN THE GARDEN (MATTHEW 26:30-46)***

6. What does Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane teach us about how and why to pray when we are in difficult circumstances?

***BETRAYAL AND ARREST (MATTHEW 26:47-56)***

7. In the garden, Jesus is faced by an angry crowd of armed men. Who is in control of the situation, and how do you know?

8. a. The picture Matthew paints is one of Jesus walking deliberately toward the crucifixion. Because he is God's Son, it would be a small matter to get rid of his enemies and avoid capture. What does he do instead? Read also CCC 612.

b. What does this suggest about the role of the betrayal of Jesus in God's plan?

***TRIAL AND DENIAL (MATTHEW 26:57-75)***

The Sanhedrin was the Jewish high court. It was made up of chief priests, elders, and teachers of the Law. Counting the high priest, there were seventy-one members. Under Roman law, they were given a great deal of authority but could not impose the death penalty without Roman approval.

9. What charges are brought against Jesus, and how does he answer them?

## **Session 22**

### ***JUDAS HANGS HIMSELF (MATTHEW 27:1-10)***

1. a. Compare Judas' remorse in Matthew 27:4 over his sin of "betraying innocent blood" with Peter's bitter sadness in Matthew 26:75. How do they differ?
- b. Read CCC 1430–1431. Would you say Judas experiences true repentance? Why, or why not?
2. Think About It: Matthew says Jeremiah's prophecy is fulfilled in the purchase of the potter's field with the thirty pieces of silver. Similar images are found in both the books of Jeremiah and Zechariah. Optional: Read Jeremiah 18, 19, 32–33; Zechariah 11:12-13. What insights do these passages provide into the wider meaning of Judas' betrayal of Jesus, his death, and the purchase of the potter's field?

### ***JESUS BEFORE PILATE (MATTHEW 27:11-26)***

3. a. Why does Pilate decide to offer the crowd Barabbas in Jesus' place?
- b. Read John's account of this trial in John 19:1-22. What is behind Pilate's final decision? Does he believe in it?
4. Barabbas is a "notorious prisoner," guilty of insurrection and murder. He is possibly one of the Zealots, a group of Jews who seek to change Israel's fortunes by political rebellion and force. What does the crowd's choice to spare Barabbas over Jesus say about their understanding of God's way of accomplishing things? What are they really choosing?
5. In Matthew 27:25, the crowd cries, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Some people have interpreted that to mean that all Jews are cursed as a result. What does the Church have to say about this? Are the Jews as a people responsible for the crucifixion of Christ? Why, or why not? (See CCC 597–598.)

### ***THE DEATH OF THE KING (MATTHEW 27:27-56)***

6. Think About It: Jesus' passion should be seen in light of the curse that resulted from mankind's original sin, which Jesus has come to set right (see Genesis 3:14-

24). Now read 1 Corinthians 15:45, where Paul calls Jesus “the last Adam.” What elements of the curse do you see reflected in Jesus’ ordeal or redeemed by him?

7. Think About It: Jesus’ final words on the Cross are Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani? that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ( Matthew 27:46).To anyone familiar with the psalms, this should immediately bring to mind Psalm 22, which begins with the same line. Jesus could quote another psalm; there are many with similar sentiments. Why do you think he chooses this particular verse? Is he simply crying out in loss, or is there more in his cry?

8. a. Review Matthew 27:51-54. What do you think is the significance of these events? Read also Hebrews 10:19-22, 12:18, 12:21-24, 12:28.

b. Of what do these signs convince the centurion and those who are with him?

***THE BURIAL OF THE KING (MATTHEW 27:57-66)***

9. What precautions are taken in sealing Jesus’ tomb, and why?

## **Session 23**

### ***THE RESURRECTION (MATTHEW 28:1-15)***

1. a. Compare the reaction of the women to the news of Jesus' resurrection with the reaction of the guards.
- b. Why do you think these two groups react in different ways to their fear?
2. Read CCC 2174 –2176.
  - a. What is the significance of Jesus rising on the dawn of the first day of the week after the Sabbath?
  - b. What is the difference between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday?
3. a. The elders bribe the guards to lie and say the disciples have stolen Jesus' body. Is this lie convincing? Why, or why not?
- b. What are the religious leaders afraid of that prompts them to spread this story?
4. a. Read St. Paul's reflections on Jesus' resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:12-24. Why is it so important for Jesus to be raised from the dead?
- b. Read CCC 651–655. What does this add to your understanding of the significance of the Resurrection?

### ***THE "GREAT COMMISSION" (MATTHEW 28:16-20)***

5. Jesus instructs the women to send the disciples to Galilee where they will see him for themselves. It is there that he appears to the disciples to give them the instructions that are often called "the Great Commission" (Matthew 28:16-20). On the map on page 4, note the relationship of Galilee to Jerusalem. Why would Jesus call his disciples to this location to see him and hear these important instructions?
6. a. List the things Jesus tells the disciples to "go therefore" and do.
- b. Why does Jesus tell them to do this? Read also Daniel 7:14. Do you see a connection?

7. Think About It: The Catechism says: “Missionary endeavor requires patience. It begins with the proclamation of the Gospel to peoples and groups who do not yet believe in Christ, continues with the establishment of Christian communities that are ‘a sign of God’s presence in the world,’ and leads to the foundation of local churches” (CCC 854).<sup>1</sup> How can you help your Christian community be “a sign of God’s presence in the world”?

8. a. What comforting promise does Jesus leave with his disciples, and why do they need it?

b. What name of Jesus (a name that Matthew emphasizes in Matthew 1) are these words a reminder of?

c. What does this name mean to you today?

