



of Our Catholic Faith
LEARNING TO LOVE

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LEADER

THE **5** W'S

WHO * WHAT * WHEN * WHY * WHERE

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of Our Catholic Faith **LEARNING TO LOVE**

Experts Write About Christian Love

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First edition

Contents

Introduction	vii	SESSION 6	
How to Use This Program	ix	The Eucharist Makes the Church	43a
SESSION 1		What Is the Eucharist?	44
The Mystery of the Church:		Do This in Remembrance of Me	46
Our Shared Journey Forward	1a	Sacrifice	47
What Is Mystery?	2	Thanksgiving	48
The Divine Mystery	3	Mission	49
Mystery of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery	4	SESSION 7	
Mystery of the Church Revealed in Dialogue		Grace Abounds	51a
With World Cultures	5	Introduction	52
SESSION 2		Catholicism and Literature	53
The Church: Ever Ancient, Ever New	9a	Catholicism and the Arts	55
Change	10	Catholicism and Music	57
Where Has the Church Changed?	11	SESSION 8	
How Have These Changes Happened?	14	Work, Economy, and Politics	61a
SESSION 3		Working for the Common Good	62
Conversion and Spiritual Maturity	17a	Work and Economic Justice Today	64
Conversion	18	The Church Engages With the World	66
God's Plan for Humanity	19	SESSION 9	
The Stages of Spiritual Growth	20	Discernment	71a
God's Continuous Presence—		The Meaning of Life	72
How It Changes Our Lives	22	God Who Is Love	74
SESSION 4		Elements of Discernment	76
Sacred Scripture: The Story of Salvation	25a	SESSION 10	
The Big News	26	Liturgy as a Form of Community Prayer	
Jesus Is the Master	27	and Manifestation of God's Love	79a
Mark's Gospel: Old, Not Outdated	28	Liturgical Prayer	80
Luke: A Universal Gospel	29	The Lord's Day: What We Celebrate	82
John: A Deep and Spiritual Gospel	30	Called to the Table	84
Acts of the Apostles	32	Manifesting God's Love in the World	85
SESSION 5			
The Holy Trinity: Mystery of Love	35a		
Who Is the Holy Trinity?	36		
Trinitarian Doctrine	38		
Trinitarian Love Manifested in Our Lives	40		

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Introduction

This final book in a series invites you to examine Catholic belief and practice through the lens of love.

The 5 *W*'s of Our Catholic Faith: Learning to Love completes Liguori Publications' 5 *W*'s adult faith formation series. The three books in this series build on each other to provide a program of faith formation that engages the participants progressively in an examination of the basic tenets of the teaching of Jesus and his Church through the lens of the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. These virtues, which are also divine gifts, allow us to share directly in God's very nature—thereby enabling us to live lives in greater conformity with God's will and thus attain the eternal life he promises to give us (see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1812–1813).

The series' first book, *The 5 W's of Our Catholic Faith and How We Live It*, focuses on the core content of the Catholic faith. It provides the participants with basic information and the opportunity to reflect on Church teaching, thus helping them find answers to many of their initial questions about the 5 *W*'s, the who, what, where, when, and why of our faith—and how to live it.

The second book, *The 5 W's of Our Catholic Faith: Living in Hope*, builds on the first. It revisits the teaching of the Church and how we live it, but from a different perspective: through the lens of hope, thus helping participants see how the grace of God has been at work in these areas in their own lives and in the Church throughout history. This second part of the series leads participants to a deeper and more personal embrace of their faith, better enabling them to connect what they believe with what they do, especially in the Eucharist, and furthering their ongoing intellectual and moral conversion.

This third book, *The 5 W's of Our Catholic Faith: Learning to Love*, invites participants to examine Catholic belief and practice through the lens of love, which Saint Paul identifies as the greatest of the theological virtues: “So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Since sacrificial love is God's very nature, it is also at the heart of his plan for our salvation. Faith is the foundation of our hope, and if genuine these lead to love that is real and “enfleshed”—just as God's love became enfleshed in the person of Jesus Christ. Love is the reason for Jesus' Incarnation and his embrace of the cross for our redemption—no mere abstraction, or else we would not be saved. Love is also the reason he founded the Church and continues to send us forth to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to people who still live in darkness and the shadow of death today—that same love “enfleshed” in us. Christian love is not just about warm feelings; it is a commitment that requires death to self.

Taken together, these three volumes have the goal of enabling the participants to draw on their faith and God's grace to do just that: to live lives of sacrificial love. For many people this begins with them taking a more active role in the work of the Lord in their parish and in the larger community. To do this effectively, they must be familiar not only with the teaching of Jesus and his Church, but also with the human and social environment into which Jesus sends them to undertake the badly needed New Evangelization.

God has blessed the Church with many resources to help us learn and reflect upon his will for our lives,

including sacred Scripture, the Liturgy of the Church, the witness of countless saints in every age, the insights of theologians and the authoritative teaching of the Church's magisterium. In recent times the teaching of the Second Vatican Council—and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which summarizes Church teaching in the light of the council—continue to serve as especially helpful guides for us as we bring the teaching of Jesus and his Church to bear on the issues we face today.

Among the key teachings of Vatican II that have proven especially helpful for people on their own faith journey and for the larger mission of the Church are:

(1) its desire to foster greater love for and knowledge of sacred Scripture, (2) its vision of a united and interdependent world, (3) its emphasis on the universal call to holiness that should characterize the spiritual quest of every human being, and (4) the proclamation of God's kingdom by all believers who work to foster peace and justice, forgiveness and healing in today's world and in individual lives. And, as the participants in this third and final part of this 5 W's series will learn, this can only be achieved through sacrificial love: lives built on faith and hope rooted in the very love of God himself.

+Bishop Anthony B. Taylor

Diocese of Little Rock

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How to Use This Program

Like its predecessors, this book's ten sessions can be broken down in a variety of ways.

- Present a session a month for ten months.
- The sessions can be set up during Advent and Lent, once a week for the four weeks of Advent and six weeks of Lent.
- Schedule a session every two weeks over a five-month span to allow for personal reading of the material before the session.
- Several sessions can be used for a weekend retreat: for example, three, four, or five sessions used for a full-day gathering; two to three sessions for a 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. meeting or for a full weekend retreat, two sessions on Friday evening, and four each on Saturday and Sunday. (Here you might consider eliminating the opening prayers, readings, and concluding prayers.)
- No matter how the sessions are covered, a condition for quality discussion requires people to read the material and answer the five questions before the session.
- With all of these settings, keep in mind the importance of allowing time for socializing. While some participants may come simply for the education, most will appreciate the opportunity to speak with others who are gathered there. Especially with longer meetings and certainly with a retreat, think about providing refreshments, maybe even a meal, if appropriate.

Notes to leaders

- Establish a calendar for how long *The 5 W's of Our Catholic Faith: Learning to Love* sessions will run and present the schedule when the program is announced.
- Allow for at least seventy-five minutes per session.
- Review all the material to be covered beforehand.
- Have the meeting space prepared ahead of time and ready for the opening prayer.
- Have name tags ready for the first couple of sessions.
- Establish written ground rules (for example, do not let one person dominate the discussion; invite everyone to share; this is not a time to debate or argue, etc.).
- Keep discussion on any one topic limited. Allot the same amount of time for any single discussion; this will ensure that the majority of the material is covered.
- The sessions are laid out in an easy-to-use format and are designed to run for an hour and a half to two hours.

Once the session has begun

- After the hospitality, welcome, and opening (including the opening prayer), ask participants to share their answers to the five questions for that session. From there, move into each section using the **LOVE in Action** questions in addition to questions that may have arisen after the first reading.
- The timing of each section is flexible, depending on your needs, and can stretch from ten to thirty minutes per section. If you choose to have more time for each section, you may want to use the catechism quotes and other supporting material to add to the reflection and discussion.
- When the content has been covered, move on to the Closing Rite. Give participants a chance to pray for individual needs, and be mindful of any current events or situations that can be incorporated into the concluding prayer. Bless those gathered, sending them forth with the light of Christ in their hearts and spiritual food for the journey.

A note about suggested movies

Catholics have a long history of using virtues to help orient their lives. However, non-Christians have lived exemplary lives as well as they discern how to live lives of justice and peace. We are encouraged to find where God's kingdom is breaking forth in the world and celebrate its coming. Movies are a way to take the message of the Gospel to wider audiences. To make for a deeper study of the practice of love, especially sacrificial love, we have included at least one movie suggestion at the end of each chapter, in the "suggested resources" portions of the participant guide. Some of the films are inspired by religious events; others show men, women, and children witnessing the virtue of love in their daily lives.

Notes to participants

- Participants should come to class having answered the five questions (who, what, where, when, and why) as best as they could before reading.
- Come having read the material before class, underlining, highlighting or circling terms or narrative you might have a question about.
- Come with an open mind and heart, ready to follow the instructions of the leader.
- Don't dominate or argue. Listen respectfully and know when the answer to a question is not to be found in this forum.

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SESSION 1

The Mystery of the Church: Our Shared Journey Forward

By Johan van Parys, PhD

Preparation

Have ready a Bible, a candle, matches, and a cross or Christian icon. Set these up on a small table in front of the room where the group will meet, or in the center if you are using a circle format.

Optional

Prepare some simple refreshments for the group to share either before or after the session.

Have music playing quietly in the background on a CD or iPod as participants arrive and settle in.

Opening *TEN MINUTES*

When everyone is seated, light the candle. Begin with the suggested opening song or use one of your choosing. Or you can go directly to the opening prayer found in the session and have everyone read it aloud together.

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Scripture Reading

Colossians 1:15–23

Ask a member of the group to read, or you can read it aloud to the group. Once the passage is read, direct group members to silently reflect for a minute or two on what they have just heard. This also serves as a centering and quieting exercise for participants.

Supporting catechism quotes for Session One:

“The Church is one because of her source: ‘the highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit’” (CCC 813); UR 2 #5.

“From the first community of Jerusalem until the parousia, it is the same Paschal mystery that the Churches of God, faithful to the apostolic faith, celebrate in every place. The mystery celebrated in the liturgy is one, but the forms of its celebration are diverse” (CCC 1200).

“The liturgical traditions or rites presently in use in the Church are the Latin (principally the Roman rite, but also the rites of certain local churches, such as the Ambrosian rite, or those of certain religious orders) and the Byzantine, Alexandrian or Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Maronite and Chaldean rites” (CCC 1203).

The Mystery of the Church

ALLOW FIFTEEN MINUTES FOR EACH SECTION.

Take a few minutes for the group to read through the section, then move to the **LOVE in Action** questions. Allow each person a minute or two to contribute, and give each group member the opportunity to speak.

Additional questions for reflection and discussion

- *As Catholics, we believe that our participation in the mystery of salvation is the greatest gift we will ever receive. How can we grow the awareness of our participation in the mystery of salvation? How does it change our outlook on the world?*
- *In our increasingly more complex, secularized, and individualistic world, speaking about the mystery of salvation is neither easy nor popular. How can we find ways to testify to our faith in a world that is increasingly indifferent at best and antagonistic at worst?*
- *If we allow ourselves to look beyond our own small world, we cannot help but notice that the Church is characterized more so by diversity than uniformity. Is this a gift to the Church? If so, how can we better embrace the rich diversity within our Church as an expression of the divine mystery?*

Closing Rite

FIVE MINUTES

Invite participants to take a few moments of silence, then ask the participants for spontaneous prayer. When finished, you can offer this brief blessing to the group:

The LORD bless you and keep you!

The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!

The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace! (Numbers 6: 24–26)

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Concluding Prayer: Ever-living God, Creator of all that is, in your goodness you have given us the gift of your Son as our paschal mystery. Through his death and resurrection, light has destroyed darkness and life has triumphed over death. Through our baptism you have adopted us as your sons and daughters and made us participants in his death and resurrection. Inspire us to more fully acknowledge your tremendous gift, let us live our lives more worthy of this gift, and send us out into the world to testify more vigorously to this gift. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, our Passover and our hope, who lives with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

SESSION

1

The Mystery of the Church: Our Shared Journey Forward

By Johan van Parys, PhD

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WHO created and sustains the Church?

WHAT mysteries of God do we encounter through faith in Jesus?

WHERE and how do we enter into divine life?

WHEN will we fully know and understand divine mysteries?

WHY do we need the sacraments?

Opening Song: "Bring Forth the Kingdom," by Marty Haugen, or a hymn of your choice

Opening Prayer: Ever-loving God, we thank you for the marvels of creation and for the mystery of salvation. Touch our hearts so we may embrace your unending love for us and enlighten our minds so we may better testify to your presence among us. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Reading: Colossians 1:15–23 (the preeminence of Christ)

Spend a moment in quiet reflection.

What Is Mystery?

The word “mystery” has enjoyed different meanings over the course of history. Even today, different people use the “mystery” in different ways. Etymologically speaking, “mystery” comes from the Greek *mysterion*, meaning “secret rite or doctrine.” *Mysterion*, in turn, is derived from the Greek word *myein*, meaning “to close or to shut.” The word “mystery” thus carries the notion of “sealed lips” and “closed eyes,” implying that those who have been initiated into the mystery keep quiet about it, while those who have not been initiated are blind to it.

In today’s popular culture, the word “mystery” refers to something unknown that needs to be solved. A perfect example of this usage is a murder mystery. In this kind of book or movie, the lead detective is expected to solve the mystery. What makes reading or watching a murder mystery so exciting is that it invites the reader or viewer to solve the mystery even before the detective is able to do so.

The religious (biblical, theological, and liturgical) use

of the term is similar to its popular usage, yet different. The similarity lies in the fact that in both instances the word “mystery” implies that something is hidden or is unknown. The difference is twofold: first in popular culture we are invited to figure it out ourselves, while in the religious use of the term the truth is revealed to

us not as the result of our successful breaking of the code but rather as a gift bestowed upon us. Second, in popular usage once the puzzle has been solved there is nothing more to be discovered, while in religious usage the mystery is never completely revealed.

In the Catholic Church, we use the religious understanding of the term “mystery” when we refer to God, God’s divine plan for us, the sacraments as well as the Church itself.

*“Mystery”
implies
something
is hidden.*

LOVE in Action

- *What do you think of most immediately when you hear the word “mystery?”*
- *Do the differences between our popular and religious understanding of mystery make sense to you? Explain.*

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The Divine Mystery

In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Bible, the word *mysterion* is used to translate a number of different Hebrew concepts. To give just three examples: in Sirach 27:16, *mysterion* is used to refer to a simple secret: “Whoever betrays a secret [*mysterion*] destroys a confidence, and will never find a congenial friend.” Second, *mysterion* is used in reference to a secret (military) plan such as in Judith 2:2: “He summoned all his attendants and officers, laid before them his secret plan [*mysterion*], and with his own lips recounted in full detail the wickedness of all the land.” Third, and most importantly, *mysterion* is used to refer to God’s secret plan. This can be found, for example, in the Book of Daniel, chapter 2 in the context of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. In this instance, *mysterion* is used to refer to the secret plan that God has for humankind. This secret plan or *mysterion* was revealed by the prophet Daniel as he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. It is important to note that even though Daniel interpreted the dream and thus revealed the divine mystery or plan, some aspects of it remained unknown and secret.

The usage of the word “mystery” by the Church is similar to the one we find in the biblical usage of *mysterion* in the Book of Daniel. The divine mystery or God’s plan for our salvation was at first unknown. Gradually it has been revealed to us, starting in the Old Testament, but most especially in its realization through the mystery of the Incarnation and the paschal mystery. The divine mystery continues to be revealed to us in

and through the Church. We know, however, that we will never comprehend the divine mystery totally until all is revealed when we see God face to face at the end of time.

In addition to the divine plan for salvation, God himself is a mystery. Better yet, God is mystery itself. This means that God is essentially unknown and cannot be “researched.” Our knowledge of God is dependent upon his self-revelation to us. Examples of this can be found throughout the Bible, for example, when God spoke to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3) or to Elijah in the gentle and quiet whisper (1 Kings 19:11–14). God’s supreme self-revelation happened in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. By extension, God is also revealed in the sacraments or through the Church. Each of these instances gives us a glimpse into who God is, without ever completely revealing the complete mystery of God. The best way to relate to God then is not through our mind,

but rather through our heart, since we can never comprehend God completely, but we can love God most deeply.

*The divine mystery
continues to be
revealed to us
in and through
the Church.*

LOVE in Action

- *How would you describe the divine mystery?*
- *Are there biblical images that come to mind when you think of the mystery of God or God revealing himself to one or more people?*
- *How do you relate to God? When you pray how do you address God?*

Mystery of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery

The mystery of the Incarnation and the paschal mystery are the two anchors of the divine mystery or God's plan of salvation for us all.

The mystery of the Incarnation essentially is the fact that God adopted our human nature in Jesus. The word "incarnation" is derived from the Latin *carnis*, meaning flesh. Another word for incarnation might be "enfleshment" or the taking on of the human form. Over the past 2,000 years, many aspects of this mystery have been revealed to us. Thus we know that the baby born to the Virgin Mary is indeed the Son of God who became human so he might open for us the way to salvation. Not all has been revealed, though, and some aspects of the Incarnation remain a mystery.

The paschal mystery, the second anchor of our faith, in essence is the mystery of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The word "paschal" is derived from the Greek *Pascha*, which in turn is a translation of the Hebrew *Pesah*, meaning Passover. In Judaism, Passover is the celebration of the transition of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. By the grace of God, the Israelites were freed from bondage and death so they might enjoy freedom and life.

Christians see this deliverance from slavery to freedom as a pre-figuration of the ultimate deliverance Jesus won for us through the paschal mystery of his suffering, death, and resurrection. The Christian Passover, or Easter, then celebrates the victory Jesus won over death through his willingness to die on the cross. His victorious death was the ultimate consequence of his radical love for God's people which flowed from his undying love for the Father. Through his death and resurrection Jesus broke the bondage of death and opened the gates to eternal life for all. This in essence is the divine mystery or the mystery of our salvation.

The way humans participate in this salvific sacrifice of Jesus is through the sacraments. Through the sacra-

ments of initiation, Christians are incorporated into the paschal mystery as they die with Christ in order to rise with him again.

The Sacraments— Entering Sacred Mysteries

As baptized Christians, the divine mystery of salvation is not only revealed to us, we also are incorporated in it and benefit from it through the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. Thus the sacraments become our gateway into the mystery of salvation and our entrance into the Church.

In the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible uses the Latin word *sacramentum* to translate *mysterion*. Thus *sacramentum* does not only refer to the sacraments or the sacred mysteries but far beyond that to the divine mystery itself.

The root of the word "sacrament" is *sacer*, meaning sacred. Thus through the sacraments, which are our sacred rites, we are incorporated into the sacred mysteries. The Latin fathers chose the word *sacramentum* as translation for *mysterion* based on its military usage. A *sacramentum* in the Roman Empire was a sacred bond between a soldier and his superior which was sealed through an oath and a branding. Similarly, through the sacraments of initiation we enter into a sacred bond with God through the words that are spoken and the sacred signs that are used.

LOVE in Action

- **Which is your favorite: Christmas or Easter? Why?**
 - **How do you celebrate Christmas? How do you celebrate Easter?**
 - **Can you think of an experience in your life that both has an oath and a sign, thus making some kind of sacramentum?**
 - **Do you recall your initiation into the Church? Or maybe you witnessed a baptism? What did you think or feel at the time?**
-

Mystery of the Church Revealed in Dialogue With World Cultures

The first chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) promulgated by Vatican II holds that the divine mystery of salvation is present in the Church because in it and through it Christ is present, thus assuring the efficacy of the sacraments. The Church thus is mystery because it shares in the divine mystery and because through it Christians participate in the divine mystery.

An invitation to share in the mystery of salvation through membership in the mystery of the Church has been issued by Catholic missionaries from the start. Successful missionaries have effectively used the idioms and language of the people to whom they have been sent. Saint Paul is a great example of such successful preaching. Not only did he use words and idioms that were familiar to the Greeks, he also used the local media as he proclaimed the Gospel from the *areopagus*, the speaker's corner in Athens during his time.

The success of the Church throughout the ages has been connected with the level of willingness we have had to learn about the people we were preaching to and our willingness to preach the Good News in their own language. The failed attempt at spreading the Gospel in China was greatly due to our unwillingness to adopt some of China's theological language and our refusal to embrace their sensitivity for their ancestors. On the other hand, we have had great success in central Africa because we were willing and able to present our liturgy in the vocabulary of the African people, including African instrumentation, music, and dance.

The mystery of the Church is best revealed when we understand the culture we are communicating with and when we are willing to use the vernacular of any place and time, without abandoning or diluting the

Gospel message itself. At the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Blessed Pope John XXIII said we need to "study afresh" and "reformulate in contemporary terms" the "immutable doctrine of our faith" if we want "our doctrine to be more widely known, more deeply understood and more penetrating in its effect." This was not only an invitation to the bishops fifty years ago, it is an invitation to all of us today.

The Mystery of Unity Within Diversity

The reformulation of the truths of the divine mystery in dialogue with our culture was spoken about by Blessed Pope John XXIII as one that necessarily implies an openness to a certain level of diversity, while preserving the shared essence of the faith.

Some people would have us believe that Jesus himself presented us with the Bible, the *Roman Missal*, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Granted, we do believe that the Scriptures are divinely inspired and that both our liturgy and our doctrine have evolved under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, we need to remember that our theology, our liturgy, and even our understanding evolved over time.

In the earliest centuries of the Church, different theologies, different liturgies, and different books of the Bible were used in different parts of the Christian world. Yet the different communities were united in the divine mystery and respected the diversity in which they worshiped and shared the Good News. Even today we have remnants of this great example of unity in diversity as some of the ancient liturgical rites (for example, the Milanese Rite, the Maronite Rite, etc.) have survived and are recognized by the Catholic Church as equal to the Roman Rite.

If we truly believe that the divine mystery of God is gradually revealed to us in time and space, then it follows that the Church—while remaining one, true, and Catholic—continues to evolve. It also follows that as we preach to an increasingly diverse and complex world, the celebration of the mystery of God will become ever

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POPE JOHN XXIII*

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SESSION 1
The Mystery of the Church

richer in diversity. All this, while Christ as the head of his mystical body, the Church holds us all together until at the end of time we will all be perfected in him.

LOVE in Action

- *How do you think the Church can best spread the Gospel in our world?*
 - *What do you think are the contributions of Vatican II to the Church and the world?*
 - *Are you familiar with some of the different ways in which the Catholic Church celebrates Mass?*
 - *Do you believe that we can be one Church but with many different liturgical expressions?*
-

Concluding Prayer: Ever-living God, Creator of all that is, in your goodness you have given us the gift of your Son as our paschal mystery. Through his death and resurrection, light has destroyed darkness and life has triumphed over death. Through our baptism you have adopted us as your sons and daughters and made us participants in his death and resurrection. Inspire us to more fully acknowledge your tremendous gift, let us live our lives more worthy of this gift, and send us out into the world to testify more vigorously to this gift. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, our Passover and our hope, who lives with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

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SESSION 1
The Mystery of the Church

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- Craghan, John F. *Precious Gifts: Biblical Reflections on the Eucharist* (Liguori Publications, 2011).
- Fragomeni, Richard. *The Eucharist: 50 Questions From the Pews* (Liguori Publications, 2008).
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CINEMA CONNECTION



The Mission (1986), starring Robert De Niro, Jeremy Irons, Ray McAnally. Spanish Jesuits attempt to keep a South American Indian tribe from falling under the rule of proslavery Portugal (set in the eighteenth century).

Steel Magnolias (1989), starring Sally Field, Shirley MacLaine, Dolly Parton, Olympia Dukakis, Daryl Hannah, Julia Roberts. Friendship is a gift that these six “steel magnolias” receive through their life struggles. Laughter and tears are found together in their remarkable stories of love and loss.

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