

# The Paschal Mystery in Everyday Life



The liturgy of the Church, the celebration of the sacraments, and the seasons of Lent and Easter are particular times when we pay attention to what Jesus Christ has done for us through his passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. Yet these are not the only times when we experience the Paschal Mystery. It is a part of our everyday life; it is the undercurrent of all that we do and all that we are.

What does this mean? How do I *experience* the Paschal Mystery? How does it affect me on a day-to-day basis? How do I become aware of its presence in my life in a real way and not just something I know about? First, let's look at the Paschal Mystery in general terms, without any religious lingo. The Paschal Mystery is basically the process of dying and rising, death and new life. We see this all around us and in our own lives. For example, we experience the process of dying and rising each year as we go through the different seasons. Summer is a time of vibrancy and life, which then gives way to fall, when leaves on the trees die and fall away and many plants seem to die. Winter comes and with it the frost and chill that seem to halt all growth and life. But after winter, when it seemed as if everything had died away, spring arrives. New life surrounds us. Daffodils and crocuses begin to push through the once-frozen ground. The bare branches of trees begin to show signs of new leaves. Another example within nature is a process that many park rangers use—a controlled burn. Certain areas are purposefully set on fire in order to improve the habitat for plants and wildlife. It's hard to believe that from the charred tree trunks and withered, blackened brush can come a healthy ecosystem with stronger trees and plants. But that's exactly what happens. We are a part of nature too. Not only do we experience the seasons and see the process of dying and rising, we also have our own dyings and risings. Sometimes these are obvious—for example, a grandparent dies or a baby is born. But

other dyings and risings are less obvious. An experience of dying might be when you have an argument with a friend that leaves you feeling upset, or you see a homeless mother and child and don't know what to do to help. An experience of rising might be reconciling with someone you hurt or who hurt you, talking with your family about the homeless mother and child and discovering that an organization like the St. Vincent de Paul Society has the people and the resources to care for people who are homeless. These are some of the dyings and risings that we experience every day. Now when we look at the Paschal Mystery in the context of our religious beliefs and the life of Jesus Christ, we come to a deeper meaning of dying and rising. Jesus Christ's passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension are the ultimate event of dying and rising, of death and new life. We learn from Jesus that new life can come from death, that we can find meaning in tough times, that there really is light in the darkness. We learn that all life has this rhythm of dying and rising and that God is with us in good times and in bad. Christ's experience of suffering, death, and new life has forever changed us and given us a different way of living. Death no longer has the last word. Plus, when we encounter tough times, we have the comfort of knowing that God has "been there, done that" and the power of hope that new life will come from death. Becoming conscious of our own dyings and risings helps us have a greater sense of compassion for others and a greater willingness to reach out. Think about your own life. What is a dying or rising that you have experienced today, this week, this year? Reflect on that experience in light of the event of Jesus Christ's passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.