



New Creation

SESSION 6

“

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.”*

Psalm 51:12 [NRSV]

“

*If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!”*

2 Corinthians 5:17 [NRSV]

“

*God likes me covered with my creaturehood
and with my limits spread across His face.
He likes to see me lifting to His eyes
even the wretchedness that dropped His grace.
I make no guess what greatness took me in.
I only know, and relish it as good,
that I am gathered more to God's embrace
the more I greet Him through my creaturehood.”*

Sr. Jessica Powers

Focus for this Session

- We are made new in Christ
- Preparing for Easter as a new beginning
- Living as an Easter people

GATHER

Opening Prayer

Leader Let us spend a moment of quiet
in order to become more aware of God's presence ...
... God's presence in each of us
and in the community.

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Suggested Song **Morning Has Broken**

Reader "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!"

2 Corinthians 5:17 [NRSV]

Leader Lord God of all beginnings,
the creation was a wonderful work;
our redemption is still more wonderful.

All **We give you thanks and praise you!**

Leader Lord God of all beginnings,
you brought all out of the darkness of nothingness;
now, in Christ, you make us children of light.

All **We give you thanks and praise you!**

Leader Lord God of all beginnings,
you spoke and it was;
now, in Christ, we have the Word of life.

All **We give you thanks and praise you!**

Living Our Faith

*Share briefly your experience of putting into effect the
action you chose after the last session.*

BREAKING OPEN OUR STORY

Reflection

I can pinpoint to the second the moment I became
a father.

Some nine hours or so earlier I had driven my
wife to the maternity wing of the local hospital

because there were signs that, though the baby was not due for another seven weeks, nature was on a different calendar.

Everything about the experience was new, much of it blurred in my memory because of a mixture of anxiety and anticipation. I remember the doctor's concern that, though my wife was clearly in labor, the baby did not seem to be shifting into position for birth. An X-ray was organized (these were the days before ultra-sound scans were routine) that confirmed that there were two babies and that their positions would make things complicated. It might mean a Caesarean birth.

I was consigned to the waiting room—to wait. The night passed. Dawn came up. I have no idea why, but at some point I felt impelled to try and find my wife, or at least someone who could bring me up to date.

I made my way toward the room where I had last seen my wife, and in the corridor I saw a small medical trolley, with an incubator on it. Inside the incubator was small shape, wrapped in tin foil. I bent over and looked into the one space that had been left in the foil wrapping, and found my gaze being returned by a pair of tiny eyes.

They seemed to say, “Here I am!” I had a sense of recognition, because I did not feel that this was a stranger; precisely because of that, those eyes seemed to be seeking trust. “What,” I felt them asking me, “are you going to do now that I am here?”

There are some aspects of life that are tangibly new. Our identical twin daughters were exactly that: so fresh, so new—their newness somehow heightened by being so tiny, so fragile.

And there are those interior moments that are new, moments that are hard to describe. Some say they feel them in their “heart”; others might talk about a change in “spirit.” All I can say is I knew I would never be the same again.

Easter eyes

“ I wish each of us
new eyes able to perceive
in death, life;
in guilt, forgiveness;
in separation, unity;
in wounds, glory;
in the human, God;
in God, the human;
and in the I, the you.”

Easter letter,
Bishop Klaus Hemmerle
(1924-94)

Invitation to Share

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on one of the following questions. Then share your reflections.

1. Share a moment in your life when you had an experience of “newness.”
2. Who or what experience in your life helped you to say “I will never be the same again”?

BREAKING OPEN GOD’S STORY

The Word of God

Sometime before the meeting, the leader asks a member of the group to be prepared to proclaim the passage from the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 36:24-28

New heart, new spirit

Reader The Word of the Lord.

All **Thanks be to God.**

Reflect

Moment of silent reflection

- What word, phrase, or image from the scripture reading touches your heart or speaks to your life?

Invitation to Share

The leader invites those who so wish to echo a key word or phrase that touched them from the scripture passage.

Reflection

“You know the history of this once great nation! Look at what we have become!”

No, not a quote from a recent political campaign. It is in fact a proposal designed to launch a sincere and radical faith-sharing.

Imagine that the group, the community to whom this is addressed, is living in a culture that is hostile to them and to their religious beliefs.

Imagine it is a community that has seen some of its most important religious symbols and institutions taken from it.

This is a community whose leaders, both spiritual and political, have betrayed their positions of responsibility; many of those leaders have, in fact been executed. The group has lost its trust in leaders, and because of that is losing its trust in God.

This is a community of people who have lost heart, who are completely dispirited.

Yet one leader remains with them, and it is this leader who now challenges them to re-read their experience with the eyes of faith. That leader's name is Ezekiel, and part of that challenge to a community some 2500 years ago is our reading today.

Today's text is part three of a one-two-three set of punches from Ezekiel.

One. Yes, you were great, you lived in your own land, but you forgot that your greatness was founded on God. You threw away your foundations! Now here we are, no land, scattered to the winds. Can you not see that this exile is the consequence of your actions? Through the eyes of faith, can you not see it as punishment for your wrongdoing?

Two (imagine the tone mounting). We were famous for being the people of God, and even here in exile people said, "See, these are the people of the Lord." What an opportunity for witness! What did you do? You went even further in your wickedness, your evil doing, to the extent that the "people of God" is now a term of mockery!

Three. (Instead of foretelling continued or even greater punishment, Ezekiel gently shares with the people a promise that comes from God). "I will bring you home ... I will pour clean water over you and cleanse you ... I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you ...with my spirit in you, you will keep my laws. You shall be my people and I shall be your God."

A voice that says to the people, “Arise!”

A voice that says, “Arise together!”

A voice that promises this “in Christ.”

Easter is a liturgy in which we remember that what we need is a new beginning. It is also the liturgy in which we remember in faith that God is the God of all beginnings, that the Lord who created, can, does recreate. It is the liturgy in which we celebrate the radical newness that has been entrusted to us in Christ. We celebrate it because it is real; we also celebrate to make it real.

Our quest for newness began in the desert, when Christ, pushed there by the Spirit, defined his life choices in terms of God, clearly showing that the Law was written on his heart (session one). The new heart and spirit Christ showed there were the first steps toward the newness of Easter: first for himself, and then for us.

It is a newness in which we already share, but whose complete fulfillment we hope, long, and work for in faith. It is the ever-present work of the Spirit, transforming our humiliation into glory, just as the humiliation of Good Friday turns into the glory of Easter (session two).

Just as the first moment of creation was light, so, too at Easter we celebrate our re-creation. In the liturgy we shatter the dark with our new fire; in life we do it with our very selves as children of light (session four).

It is a newness that is ever in need of being refreshed, a continual rebuilding to which we are called as “Church,” a hope-filled community founded on Christ (session three).

The newness is in responding to the call that Christ makes to the Lazarus in each one of us to “Come out!” It is this newness that we make real for others when we roll back the stone and unbind them (session five).

It is this newness that we gather to celebrate at the Easter Vigil, where we may hear the prophetic words of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:16-28 is the seventh reading

at the vigil); where we will stand with candles in hand, and renew in heart and in spirit our baptismal promises.

Those flames—like the premature twins in their incubators—are fragile. We are all fragile carriers of the God-given spark of new life.

Yet, through us, the world may see “that what was cast down is raised up, what had become old is made new, and all things are restored to integrity through Christ, just as by him they came into being.” (From the prayer after the seventh reading, Easter Vigil, *Roman Missal*).

“... for the people to rise again”

“

I want you to set your eyes and your hearts on these peoples who are suffering so much—some from poverty and hunger, others from oppression and repression. Then (since I am a Jesuit), standing before this people thus crucified you must repeat St. Ignatius’ examination from the first week of the Spiritual Exercises. Ask yourselves: what have I done to crucify them? What do I do to uncrucify them? What must I do for this people to rise again?”

Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J.

Invitation to Share

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the following questions. Then share your reflections.

1. What would be an effective sign of the new heart and the new spirit that are ours through baptism? What would be an effective sign in your personal life? And what would be an effective sign in the life of our parish community?
2. What newness of heart and spirit do you hope for as you anticipate the Easter Season: what newness for yourself, for your family, for our parish, for our world? How will you help bring this hope to life?

INVITATION TO ACT

Sharing and being together in a small Christian community fosters growth in our faith and in our spirituality. But no communal sharing is complete without a serious commitment to putting our faith into practice.

In this session we have reflected on the “new creation” promised by Ezekiel, fulfilled in Christ: to what kind of action does this inspire us?

Some Suggestions

1. Build on your sharing, and determine an action that you will, either as an individual or as a group, take during Holy Week that will help bring new hope for someone.
2. Ezekiel stayed with his people during the time of the Exile. Determine how you can be a support to someone who has dropped out of contact with former acquaintances; reach out to this person.
3. Commit to taking part in all three days of the Triduum: the Holy Thursday evening Mass, the Good Friday liturgy, and the Easter Vigil. Gather as a faith-sharing group for an informal celebration of Easter (a picnic together, or pot-luck supper, with our families).
4. The great call of Holy Week is to arise together in Christ. Share with your family and friends your experience of these six weeks of **ARISE**. Invite a friend, neighbor, or family member to join your **ARISE** group for Season Five (Fall).
5. Plan now to invite someone to join you for Easter dinner—someone who might need to share your new heart and new spirit.

Closing Prayer

Leader As we enter Holy Week together
let us pray for God's blessing.

May God, the Father of mercies,
who has given you an example of love
in the Passion of his Only Begotten Son,
grant that, by serving God and your neighbor,
you may lay hold of the wondrous gift of his
blessing.

All Amen

Leader So that you may receive the reward of everlasting
life from him,
through whose earthly Death
you believe that we escape eternal death.

All Amen

Leader And by following the example of his self-abasement, may you possess a share in his Resurrection.

All **Amen**

(from the solemn blessing for the Passion of the Lord, *Roman Missal*)

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Suggested Song
River of Glory

Season Four

Looking Back, Looking Ahead ...





Looking Back ...


- Reflecting on the *ARISE* experience as a whole, share as a group:
 1. What has touched your heart?
 2. What experiences have helped you grow as a person and as a community? Why?
 3. How has faith sharing moved you to live out the Gospel in a new way?
- Provide input to your small community leader for your parish survey, including photos of your small community in action.
- Send your Good News stories and pictures to goodnews@renewintl.org

Looking Ahead ...

Stay connected

- Pray for and stay in touch with each other.
- Encourage one another to participate in parish outreach efforts.
- Read our inspirational reflections at  blog.renewintl.org
- “Like” us at  [Facebook.com/renewintl](https://www.facebook.com/renewintl)

Keep it going

- Continue to faith share all year round. See RENEW International's resources on pages 77-84.
- View and discuss *Turning Points: Witness Stories*, a RENEW video series at  [youtube.com/user/turningpointstories](https://www.youtube.com/user/turningpointstories)
- Share your experience of **ARISE** with friends and family. Consider inviting new members into your group for the coming season.