

# Salvation History: A Love Story

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The story of the Christian faith is a love story. The main characters are God and His people. Throughout human history God has pursued us. He has revealed Himself to us and made His love known to us. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 218 illuminates this mystery: “In the course of its history, Israel was able to discover that God had only one reason to reveal Himself to them, a single motive for choosing them from among all peoples as His special possession: His sheer gratuitous love. And thanks to the prophets, Israel understood that it was again out of love that God never stopped saving them and pardoning their unfaithfulness and sins.” The only reason God does anything is because of His love for us. Like any epic love story, the story of our faith has its ups and downs. But unlike any other human story of love, God is unfailingly faithful to His beloved, us, despite our persistent unfaithfulness.

We encounter this love story first and foremost in Scripture. The Bible is the written record of the story of our salvation. We call this salvation history. God made Himself known in specific ways, to prepare us, His people, for the gift of salvation. Salvation history is the story of God’s saving actions in human history. God entered into a series of covenants with mankind. A covenant is a sacred bond of family relationship. When two parties enter into a covenant, the family relationship that is formed is permanent. It cannot be dissolved.

Through each covenant, God gradually and in stages, in words and deeds, revealed more of Himself and drew us deeper into relationship with Him. God chose certain mediators, or individuals, who represent all those entering into the covenant with God. God first revealed Himself to Adam and Eve, and then continued His self-revelation with Noah and his family. Then God promised great blessings to the world through Abraham’s descendants. God freed His Chosen People from slavery through Moses and established them as a nation and then, under David, as a kingdom. Finally, God fully revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and saved His people from sin.

As God’s relationship with His people progressed, each covenant brought more people into the covenant family. From the original couple, to a faithful family, to a holy tribe, to a chosen nation and later a royal kingdom, culminating in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, God drew the entire human race to Him.

Each new covenant contained a sign, or an external representation of an internal reality. These signs were taken from human experience, to represent the depth of God’s love present at the heart of each covenant. Marriage between a man and a woman, the Sabbath, the rainbow, circumcision, the Law, Passover, and the Temple all took on greater meaning in their communication of God’s love and mercy.

At the appointed time, God Himself entered into human history by sending His only beloved Son as a man. Jesus, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, was like us in all things but sin. He fully revealed the Father and communicated His grace to us in and through His life and teaching. Jesus performed miracles as signs of God's love and mercy and to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God. And then He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. By His Cross and Resurrection we are set free from sin, our salvation is won, and we are made holy.

Jesus tells us to love one another, saying, "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you." To love as Jesus loved is far from the warm, fuzzy feelings of the modern notion of love. How did Jesus love us? St. John the Evangelist explains: "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins." Further, Jesus says, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." The greatest expression of

love is self-sacrifice, giving oneself as a gift to another.

On the night before He died, Jesus gathered with His Apostles for their last meal together. He took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to them, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26). Similarly, He took the cup of wine, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28). The next day, Jesus sacrificed Himself on the Cross, fulfilling His words by His actions. Christ loved us by giving Himself freely and completely to us in an act of mercy.

Rather than being an end to the love story, Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection, and glorification is a new beginning. Through this ultimate, undeserved act of love, each of us is invited to be a son or daughter of God, to receive salvation, and to enter into eternal life with a Father who loves us and has pursued us from the beginning of time.