



Big Idea

We strive to build a faith community with Jesus at the center. We do so first and foremost by celebrating the Holy Mass together, as well as by offering children the opportunity to journey with God through the sacraments.

First, A Story

The Shrine of Christ's Passion in St. John, Indiana, recreates the final moments of Jesus' life. You may know these events as the Stations of the Cross, which traditionally begin with Jesus being condemned to death by a Roman governor and end with the body of Jesus being laid in the tomb. But the Shrine, which features nearly life-size bronze statues of Jesus and those whom he encountered on his final human journey, begins before this with **Jesus seated at the table** on the evening before the day of his death, holding a cup and outstretching his hand to those gathered around him. We know from Scripture that he is inviting his disciples to eat the bread he has broken and drink the wine he has poured, telling them that this is his body and blood. But here, at the Shrine, he sits alone, surrounded by empty seats. Visitors are invited to sit with Jesus as his disciples today, gathering at his table before walking with him on his journey through death into new life.

The Shrine is not far from my home, and my family visits the morning of Good Friday every year. This tradition began for us in 2018, about six months after both of my children were struck by a car in their stroller and nearly died. My son, who was five at the time, survived remarkably unscathed. But my daughter, who was only eighteen months old, spent a week in the hospital with a traumatic brain injury. When we walked the stations that first time, I spent a long moment alone before one statue in particular: **Mary, mother of Jesus**, holding her son's body across her lap. Her posture, hands outstretched, mirrored almost exactly my own after I pulled my young daughter from her stroller, knocked over on the sidewalk, and laid her on the grass. It was the clearest reminder in my life that we are all part of Jesus' story, and that he is part of ours.

My daughter is five now, and this past Good Friday as we walked the Stations, Jesus carrying his cross to his own death, she kept asking, "He comes back, right?" Thankfully for me, the Shrine does not end with Jesus' being laid in the tomb. The tomb at the Shrine is empty, and as you follow the path you see Christ not only reappear, but eventually ascend to Heaven.

Connection: When people walk the Stations of the Cross, they remember and reflect upon Jesus' journey through suffering and death into new life. In the Holy Mass, this journey and sacrifice actually occurs again, with Jesus giving his body over to us so that we may truly live. As Jesus instructs, we walk alongside him in this journey by celebrating Mass together.

Mass is a time to gather as one community in praise and thanksgiving. At Mass, we:

- Listen to and reflect upon Scripture, the story of God's loving relationship with humanity.
- Bring our prayers of petition and thanksgiving to God.
- Join together with God in the Eucharist, accepting Jesus into our hearts.
- Go forth, bringing the love and new life we just experienced into the world.

Those students who are Catholic and choose to receive the Eucharist (bread and wine) understand that they are accepting the living Jesus into their hearts. However, those who are not Catholic or have not yet received First Communion still encounter God in the Mass, who is present in the community gathered and the Scripture, as well as in the Eucharist itself.