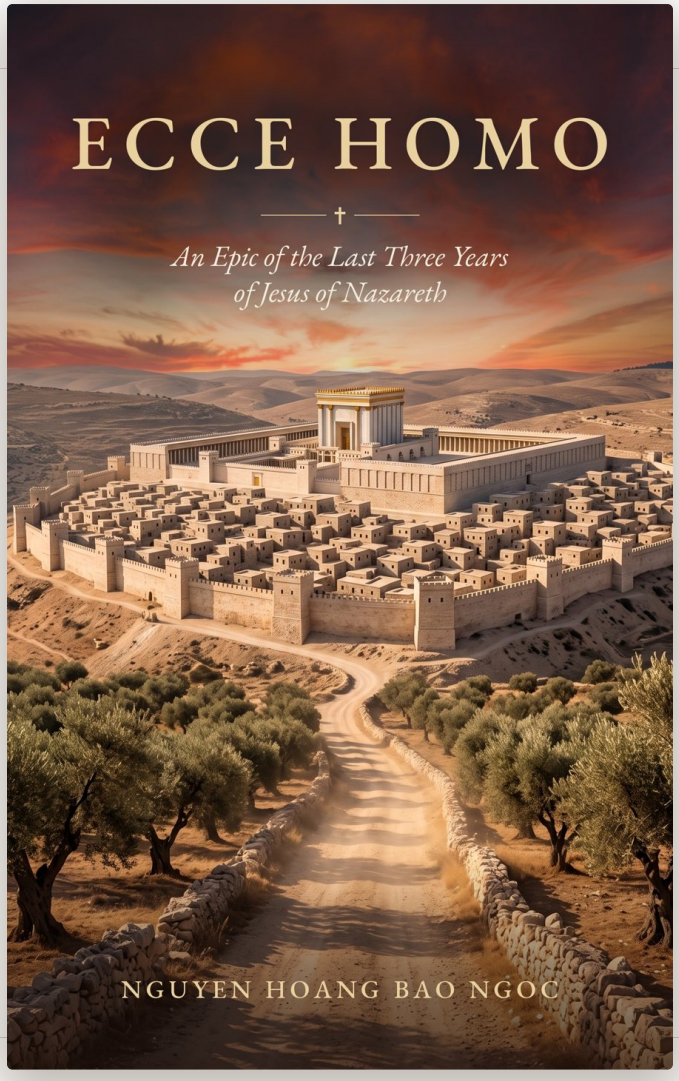
A LEADER'S GUIDE TO

Ecce Homo

Four Weeks of Advent · Six Weeks of Lent



NGUYEN HOANG BAO NGOC

A free companion for parish leaders and small groups

A Note to Leaders

Dear friend,

If you are holding this, someone in your parish has probably asked you to lead a group, or you offered before anyone could ask. Thank you. I know that mix of gladness and nerves the week before the first meeting.

I am a catechist at Phuong Lam Parish, in the Diocese of Xuan Loc, Vietnam. For many years I have taught the faith there: children preparing for First Communion and Confirmation, young people, adults entering the Church, and new catechists. *Ecce Homo* took me two years. I wrote a detailed outline of every scene out of what my classes had taught me, and talked it over with several priests. AI tools helped me turn that outline into prose, and helped with the English translation and the pictures; then I reworked the text with the editors at Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House over many months. It came out in January 2026, and Catholic readers at home received it warmly. It moves me to think of it now on a table in your parish hall.

Here is what my classrooms have taught me. The best evenings were seldom the ones where I talked the most. They were the evenings when someone read a Gospel scene slowly, and a quiet person said one honest sentence, and the room went still. A leader's work is mostly to open the door, keep the time, and leave enough quiet for Jesus to do the rest.

You do not need to be an expert. Read the week's chapters, pray for the people who will come, and arrive a few minutes early to set out the chairs. Everything else is in these pages. Use what helps and leave the rest.

I will be praying for your group.

Nguyen Hoang Bao Ngoc
Phuong Lam Parish, Diocese of Xuan Loc

Before You Begin

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is for anyone leading a group through *Ecce Homo: An Epic of the Last Three Years of Jesus of Nazareth*: parish small groups, directors of religious education, OCIA teams and sponsors, Bible study hosts, and book clubs. It follows the reading plans in the free *Reader's Guide*, so members can read at home with that guide and come to the meeting ready to talk.

Group size. Six to twelve people is a good size. With more than twelve, read the scene together, then split into tables of five or six for the questions, and come back together for the closing prayer.

What each person needs. A copy of the book in any format (paperback, hardcover, or Kindle) and the free *Reader's Guide*, which can be printed at home from hoangbaongoc.com/guide. A Bible is helpful but not required.

How long. Each session runs about 60 to 75 minutes. If you only have 45 minutes, use the shorter times in the table under *The Shape of Every Session*.

Which season. The Advent plan covers the whole book in four weeks, at about four scenes a day. For a gentler Advent, there is also a plan for Book One alone, one scene a day. The Lent plan covers the whole book in six weeks and reaches the cross in Holy Week. A second Lent plan, *Lent Following the Sunday Gospels*, reads a few scenes each week that tell that Sunday's Gospel, and suits parishes with catechumens preparing for Easter.

An Announcement You Can Copy

For the parish bulletin, website, or email. Fill in the details in brackets.

> **Walk with Jesus this Lent.** Join us for six weekly evenings with *Ecce Homo: An Epic of the Last Three Years of Jesus of Nazareth*, by Nguyen Hoang Bao Ngoc, a Catholic catechist in Vietnam. Each week we read a few chapters at home, then meet for about an hour to read one scene aloud, talk it over, and pray. No experience needed, and no one will be asked to speak. Bring the book in any format. A free Reader's Guide is at hoangbaongoc.com/guide. [Day, time, place.] Questions: [name and phone or email].

For Advent, change the first lines to *Walk with Jesus this Advent* and *four weekly evenings*. The full Advent plan asks more of people, about thirty scenes a week, so be honest about it: change *a few chapters* to *about four scenes a day*. If you choose the gentler Book One plan, write *one scene a day*.

A Few Gentle Tips

- **Silence is fine.** After you ask a question, count slowly to ten before you say anything. Someone is usually working up the courage to speak.
- **No one has to share.** Say so at the first meeting, and say it again when a new person comes. “I'll pass” is always a good answer.
- **Keep it prayerful.** A crucifix or a candle on the table helps. So does beginning and ending on time with prayer, even when the talk is lively.
- **“I didn't finish the reading.”** Welcome them warmly and never quiz anyone. That is why every session begins by reading one scene aloud together. Everyone in the room has at least that scene in common.
- **Stay with the scene.** When the talk drifts toward arguments about the Church or the news, gently bring everyone back to the page and to the face of Jesus in it.
- **You don't need every answer.** If a question comes up that you can't answer, write it down and ask your pastor or DRE before the next meeting.
- **Pick, don't rush.** Each session has five or six questions. Three good conversations are better than six hurried ones.

The Shape of Every Session

Every session in this guide follows the same simple order. After a week or two, the group will know it by heart, and that rhythm is part of the prayer.

PART	WHAT TO DO	ABOUT 60–75 MIN	ABOUT 45 MIN
Welcome and opening prayer	Greet each person by name. Make the Sign of the Cross and pray the opening prayer together.	5	3
Read one scene aloud	Read the week's chosen scene slowly. Two or three readers can take turns at the section headings. Stop before the *Reflection for Today*.	10	8
Questions	Talk through the questions, starting with the scene you just read.	35–45	25
Quiet time	One person reads the scene's *Reflection for Today* aloud. Then keep a few minutes of silence.	5–10	4
Intentions and closing prayer	Invite intentions, pray the closing prayer, and end with the Our Father.	5	5

Before each session, read the week's chapters yourself, then reread the scene you will read aloud and the notes for that session in this guide. Mark the two or three questions you most want to reach.

For the intentions, keep it simple. Each person who wants to may name one intention aloud, and after each one, all respond, "Lord, hear our prayer." Some people will prefer to pray silently, and that is fine.

Scenes are named the way the book names them: by Book, Chapter, and Scene number, with the scene's title. Each session also lists the Gospel passages to read alongside the week's chapters, the same passages the *Reader's Guide* gives.

FOUR WEEKS

Advent

Advent is a season of waiting, and the first scene you read aloud together is about an old man who waited his whole life. A word of honesty before you begin: *Ecce Homo* does not tell the story of Christmas night. Book One opens in the hidden years at Nazareth, and the earliest moment of Jesus' life it shows is the Presentation in the Temple, when he was forty days old. It does tell the birth of John the Baptist, the man who prepared the way, in Book One, Chapter II. From there the book follows Jesus through his last three years, to the cross and the sealed tomb.

That may seem an odd road toward Christmas. But the child old Simeon held in the Temple and the man on the cross are the same person. Simeon saw the shadow of the cross over him when he was forty days old. This plan reads the whole book in four weeks, about four scenes a day, so it suits a group that already knows the Gospels well. For a gentler pace, see the plan for Book One alone after Session 4.

WEEK	READ	SCENES
Week 1	Book One; Book Two, Chapters I–II	32
Week 2	Book Two, Chapters III–VI; Book Three, Chapters I–II	30
Week 3	Book Three, Chapters III–V; Book Four	32
Week 4	Book Five	16

ADVENT · SESSION 1

The Old Man Who Waited

READ THIS WEEK	Book One (all six chapters) and Book Two, Chapters I–II · 32 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book One, Chapter I, *Scene II, The Presentation in the Temple* · about 8 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Luke 1:57–80; Luke 2:22–52; Luke 3:1–20; Luke 4:16–30; Matthew 3:13–17; Matthew 4:1–11; Matthew 5–7; Matthew 11:2–11; Mark 1:9–11; Mark 1:16–39; Mark 6:14–29; John 1:35–2:12; John 3:1–21; John 4:1–42

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
Simeon waited his whole life to hold you,
and Anna prayed in the Temple night and day.
We are waiting for you too.
As we read, open our ears.
As we talk, help us listen to one another
the way you listen to us.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Mother Mary,
you held your son a little tighter in the Temple.
Hold close the people we worry about,
and teach us to wait as you waited.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for Simeon's long wait and the moment it ends: "He had seen. He had held him in his own arms." Then notice the turn. The blessing comes with a sword for Mary, and her answer is a small gesture: she takes her baby back and holds him a little tighter.

QUESTIONS

1. Simeon kept the Spirit's promise alive for years, "the way a village woman keeps a coal glowing in the hearth all night." What helps you keep hope alive while you wait for God to act? Book One, Chapter I, Scene II
2. Mary does not cry out or ask what Simeon means. What do you think was in her heart on the walk home to Nazareth? Book One, Chapter I, Scene II
3. *Scene VI, The Hidden Life* says the wood shavings under the bench in Nazareth were precious in God's eyes, "every curl of them." What part of your ordinary week could you offer to God, knowing no one else will notice it? Book One, Chapter I, Scene VI
4. When the crowds ask John, "What then must we do?" his answers are very down to earth: share your extra coat, collect no more than you should, be content with your wages. If you asked him that question this Advent, what would he point to in your life? Book One, Chapter II, Scene II
5. Each temptation offers a shortcut: bread for himself, a show for the crowd, the whole world for one bow. Which sounds most sensible to you? Book One, Chapter IV

LEADER'S NOTE

The book explains that a pair of doves or young pigeons was the offering the Law allowed for families who could not afford a lamb. The Holy Family came up the Temple steps with the other poor families. If anyone asks where the Christmas story is, explain that the book begins after it. Simeon, Anna, and Mary are still good company for Advent: each is waiting for God to keep a promise.

TAKE HOME

Find the date of your baptism, as Book One, Chapter III, Scene IV invites you to. Ask a parent or godparent, or call the parish where it happened.

ADVENT · SESSION 2

Light on the Mountain

READ THIS WEEK	Book Two, Chapters III–VI and Book Three, Chapters I–II · 30 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Three, Chapter II, *Scene II, The Transfiguration* · about 6 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Matthew 8:5–13; Matthew 13:1–52; Matthew 14:22–33; Matthew 15:21–28; Matthew 16:13–28; Matthew 17:1–9; Matthew 18:21–35; Matthew 20:1–16; Mark 1:40–2:17; Mark 5:21–43; Mark 7:1–8:27; Luke 6:12–16; Luke 7:1–50; Luke 9:28–36; John 6

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
on the mountain you let three tired friends see your glory.
In these dark weeks of the year,
let a little of that light reach us.
Keep us awake to you tonight,
in the scene we read and in each other.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
like your three tired friends on the mountain,
we are often half asleep when you come close.
Wake us gently.
And when our own Egypt closes in around us,
take us by the hand and lead us out
by the road you have already walked.

Our Father... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The light comes from within him, "as if it had always been there." Listen for what Moses and Elijah talk about: his "departure," which in Luke's Greek is *exodos*. And notice the timing. A week earlier the disciples heard him say he would suffer and be killed. Now they see who will carry the cross.

QUESTIONS

1. The book says the glory was there every other day too, hidden in an ordinary man, so people dared to come near him. Why do you think God chose to come so close that he could be overlooked? Book Three, Chapter II, Scene II
2. The scene compares the monstrance at Benediction to what the three saw that night: "What looks like bread veils the light. It does not put it out." Has time before the Blessed Sacrament ever helped you see him more clearly? Book Three, Chapter II, Scene II
3. The leper says, "If you want to, you can make me clean." He had no doubt that Jesus could. Why do you think he doubted that Jesus would want to? Book Two, Chapter III, Scene I
4. The book says Peter never doubted that Jesus was real; for a moment he doubted that Jesus was stronger than the wind. Have you known that kind of doubt? Book Two, Chapter V, Scene II
5. The Canaanite mother hears silence, then a no, then a word that hurts, and still she kneels in the road and asks again. What does her persistence teach you about prayer? Book Two, Chapter VI, Scene II
6. Set aside what the neighbors say, and even what you memorized for your First Communion. In your own words, who is Jesus to you? Book Three, Chapter I, Scene I

LEADER'S NOTE

As the scene explains, every Jewish family knew the word *exodos* from the Passover story of how God brought their fathers out of Egypt and through the sea. Luke uses it for the death Jesus would "accomplish at Jerusalem." His death would be a new exodus, leading his people through death itself and out the other side.

> **TAKE HOME**
>
> *Spend ten minutes this week in a church or adoration chapel, before the tabernacle or the monstrance. You don't need to say anything. Let him look at you.*

ADVENT · SESSION 3

Today I Must Stay at Your House

READ THIS WEEK	Book Three, Chapters III–V and Book Four (all four chapters) · 32 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Three, Chapter V, *Scene III, Zacchaeus* · about 6 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Matthew 21:12–17; Matthew 23; Matthew 25; Mark 10:17–27; Mark 10:46–52; Mark 11:1–12:44; Mark 14:32–52; Luke 10:25–42; Luke 15:1–2, 11–32; Luke 18:9–14; Luke 19:1–10, 28–44; Luke 22:14–34, 39–53; John 8:1–11; John 9:1–10:42; John 11:1–12:8; John 13–17

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
you stopped under a sycamore tree
and called a lonely man by name.
Call each of us by name tonight.
We are getting our homes ready for Christmas.
Help us get our hearts ready too.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
whatever keeps us at the back of the crowd,
you are still coming down the road.
Come into our homes this Christmas,
and make them glad to have you.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Zacchaeus "was trying to see who Jesus was," but it is Jesus who stops, looks up, and calls him by name. Listen for two small words in what Jesus says: *today* and *must*. Then watch what happens at the table. Nobody asks Zacchaeus to give anything back.

QUESTIONS

1. People had been looking down on Zacchaeus all his life. Jesus stood in the road and looked up at him. What do you think it meant to him to hear his own name? Book Three, Chapter V, Scene III
2. Nobody invited Jesus. He invited himself, and he said "must," as if this house had been on his road all along. What would it mean for you to hear him say, "Today I must stay at your house"? Book Three, Chapter V, Scene III
3. Zacchaeus took the hardest penalty in the Law on himself, and gave away half of everything besides. Why do you think his heart opened at the table, after Jesus came in, and not before? Book Three, Chapter V, Scene III
4. In the story of the prodigal son, the father goes out a second time, to the older son standing in the dark. The story stops before we learn whether he went in. Why do you think Jesus left it open? Book Three, Chapter III, Scene V
5. The jar, the basin, and the towel stood by the door, and nobody got up. Earlier that evening the disciples had argued about which of them was the greatest. What does Jesus do with that silence? Book Four, Chapter III, Scene I
6. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus told his friends ahead of time what the questions of the last day would be: I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, in prison. Which of these is closest to your own door this Advent? Book Four, Chapter II, Scene VII

LEADER'S NOTE

The scene explains what Zacchaeus was offering. The Law asked a man who had cheated his neighbor to pay back what he took and add a fifth. Paying back four times as much was the penalty for a man who stole a sheep and slaughtered it. Zacchaeus chose the hardest penalty without anyone asking. The sycamore he climbed was a broad, low fig tree, the kind every boy in Jericho had climbed, and a strange place for a rich man to be seen.

TAKE HOME

Each night this week, before you sleep, ask the question from Scene III, Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem (Book Four, Chapter I): Lord, where did you come by today, and did I know you?

ADVENT · SESSION 4

The Mother Who Stood

READ THIS WEEK	Book Five (all four chapters) · 16 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Five, Chapter III, *Scene II, Mary at the Foot of the Cross* · about 6 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Matthew 26:57–68; Matthew 27:57–66; Mark 15:33–39; Luke 22:54–23:49; John 18:12–40; John 19:1–42

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
in a few days we will kneel at the manger.
Tonight we stand with your mother at the cross,
because you are the same Lord in both places.
Give us her courage to stay close to you.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Holy Mary,
you stood by your son to the end,
and he gave you to us.
Come into our homes, as you came into John's.
Bring us safely to Christmas,
and through every hard night after it.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Remember Simeon from the first session. This scene calls him back: "Now she knew what he had meant." Listen for John's word *standing*, and for what Jesus gives away when he has nothing left to give.

QUESTIONS

1. At our first meeting you heard Simeon tell Mary that a sword would pierce her soul. How does it change your Christmas to know that the child in her arms and the man on the cross are the same person? Book Five, Chapter III, Scene II
2. Mary could not wipe his face or give him water. "She could only stay, and she stayed." Who do you know who stays beside someone they cannot fix? Book Five, Chapter III, Scene II
3. At his feet the soldiers had just divided his clothes. Jesus had nothing left, and still he gave his mother to John, and John to her. What does that tell you about him? Book Five, Chapter III, Scene II
4. After the rooster crows, "The Lord turned and looked at Peter." The book says there was no anger in that look, and no *I told you so*. What do you think Peter saw in his face? Book Five, Chapter I, Scene II
5. The thief beside Jesus asked only to be remembered. Jesus answered, "today you will be with me in Paradise." Why do you think he gave him so much more than he asked? Book Five, Chapter III, Scene I
6. The chief priests sealed the stone and posted a guard. The book says a stone can cover a seed, but nothing can tell it not to grow. What in your life feels sealed right now? Bring it to him this Christmas. Book Five, Chapter IV, Scene IV

LEADER'S NOTE

The *Reflection for Today* for this scene comes from the author's own country. It tells of Our Lady of La Vang, in central Vietnam, where in 1798 Catholic families hiding in the forest from soldiers prayed the Rosary, and by the tradition handed down among them, a lady holding a child appeared and comforted them. In 1961 the bishops of Vietnam made La Vang the national Marian shrine. Read it slowly in the quiet time.

TAKE HOME

Pray one decade of the Rosary at your kitchen table this week, alone or with your family. That is how the Reflection for Today suggests you begin.

Advent, the Gentler Way: Book One Only

If four scenes a day is too many, read Book One alone in Advent, one scene a day, and keep the rest of the book for Lent. Book One has twenty-three scenes in six chapters. The fourth week of Advent is often short, so it has the fewest. Use the same shape for each meeting. The first week borrows the prayers from Advent Session 1; weeks 2 to 4 have their own, written for the scenes you will read.

WEEK	READ	SCENES
Week 1	Book One, Chapter I	6
Week 2	Book One, Chapters II–III	7
Week 3	Book One, Chapters IV–V	8
Week 4	Book One, Chapter VI	2

BOOK ONE PLAN · WEEK 1

The Old Man Who Waited

READ THIS WEEK	Book One, Chapter I · 6 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book One, Chapter I, *Scene II, The Presentation in the Temple* · about 8 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Luke 2:22–52
PRAYERS	use the prayers from Advent Session 1

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Simeon's long wait, and Mary's quiet answer to the sword: she holds her baby a little tighter. See also the notes for Advent Session 1.

QUESTIONS

1. Simeon kept the Spirit's promise alive for years, "the way a village woman keeps a coal glowing in the hearth all night." What helps you keep hope alive while you wait? Scene II
2. Mary does not cry out or ask what Simeon means. What do you think was in her heart on the walk home? Scene II
3. In *Scene V, The Finding in the Temple*, Mary says "your father," and the boy answers "my Father's house." Then he goes home to Nazareth and does what Joseph and Mary tell him. Why do you think Luke wants us to see both side by side?
4. In *Scene I*, *Scene IV*, and *Scene VI*, the book fills in small details of village life: an armful of kindling, a cracked yoke mended at sunset so the ox could plow in the morning. Which detail stayed with you, and why?
5. *Scene VI* says the shavings under the workbench were precious in God's eyes, "every curl of them." What part of your ordinary week could you offer to God, knowing no one else will notice it?

> TAKE HOME
>
> *Find the date of your baptism before Book One, Chapter III asks you to.*

BOOK ONE PLAN · WEEK 2

Prepare the Way

READ THIS WEEK	Book One, Chapters II–III · 7 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book One, Chapter II, *Scene II, "Prepare the Way of the Lord"* · about 7 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Luke 1:57–80; Luke 3:1–20; Matthew 3:13–17; Matthew 11:2–11; Mark 1:9–11; Mark 6:14–29

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
John went ahead of you
to make your road straight.
Clear a path in our hearts tonight.
Show us what to fill in and what to straighten,
so there is room for you when you come.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
you waited your turn at the river with sinners
and were not ashamed to stand among us.
This week, give us the courage
to do the one thing we have put off too long.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

When a king was going to travel through, villages filled in the holes in his road and straightened the bends. John asks people to get their hearts ready the same way. Listen for how practical his answers are, and for the sandal strap he says he is not worthy to untie.

QUESTIONS

1. The book says repentance meant "a whole life turned around," like a man striding toward a cliff who stops short, turns, and walks back to solid ground. Where is God asking you to turn around this Advent? Chapter II, Scene II
2. When the crowds ask, "What then must we do?" John points to a coat handed over and a bribe turned down. What does that tell you about what repentance looks like? Chapter II, Scene II
3. From prison John sends to ask, "Are you he who comes, or should we look for another?" Jesus sends back no scolding, and then praises John in front of the crowd. What does that gentleness say to you about your own times of doubt? Chapter II, Scene III
4. In *Scene I, The Baptism of the Lord*, Jesus gets in line with the people waiting at the river and waits his turn. What does this picture tell you about him? Chapter III
5. The Father calls Jesus "my beloved Son" before he has preached a single sermon or healed anyone. Why might it matter that the love came first? Chapter III, Scene III

> **TAKE HOME**
>
> *The Reflection for Today in Chapter II, Scene II says repentance can start this afternoon, "with the one thing you've known for a long time you ought to do." Do that one thing this week.*

BOOK ONE PLAN · WEEK 3

Come and See

READ THIS WEEK	Book One, Chapters IV–V · 8 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book One, Chapter V, *Scene I, "Come and See"* · about 6 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Matthew 4:1–11; John 1:35–2:12

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
you turned to two strangers by the Jordan
and asked what they were looking for.
Ask us too, and help us answer honestly.
Wherever you are staying, let us come and see.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
thank you for the people who pointed us to you.
Give each of us an hour with you this week
that we will remember for a long time,
and let our lives point someone else to you.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

John the Baptist lets his two disciples go without a speech. Listen for Jesus' first words to them, a question: "What are you looking for?" And notice the hour the old evangelist still remembered.

QUESTIONS

1. The book says John the Baptist's whole life had been "a finger pointing at someone else." Who pointed you toward Jesus? Chapter V, Scene I
2. Jesus could have asked who they were. Instead he asked, "What are you looking for?" How would you answer him today? Chapter V, Scene I
3. The Gospel remembers the exact hour: "about the tenth hour," four in the afternoon. What makes an hour like that impossible to forget? Do you have one? Chapter V, Scene I
4. The tempter's first words are "If you are the Son of God." The Father had spoken at the Jordan with no *if* at all. Why do you think the enemy starts there? Chapter IV, Scene II
5. At Cana, Mary says only "They have no wine," and then tells the servants, "Whatever he says to you, do it." What do you notice about the way she asks? Chapter V, Scene III

TAKE HOME

Find ten minutes this week near him: in an adoration chapel on the way home, or with the Gospel before the house wakes up.

BOOK ONE PLAN · WEEK 4

An Old Man by Lamplight

READ THIS WEEK	Book One, Chapter VI · 2 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book One, Chapter VI, *Scene I, Nicodemus Comes by Night* · about 8 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	John 3:1–21; John 4:1–42

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
Nicodemus came to you by night,
and the woman of Sychar came alone at noon.
You were waiting for both of them.
We come as we are tonight, tired or thirsty.
Speak to us as you spoke to them.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Father,
you so loved the world that you gave us your only Son.
As Christmas comes near,
let none of us think it is too late to begin again.
Give us the living water he promised,
and send us home with good news to share.
Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Nicodemus is a respected old man, tired inside. Listen for his question, "How can a man be born when he is old?" and for the words Christians know by heart as John 3:16. John sets them in a night conversation with a tired old man who badly needed to hear them.

QUESTIONS

1. Nicodemus came by night, perhaps so his colleagues on the council would not see him go. What keeps people today from coming to Jesus in the daylight? Scene I
2. Underneath his question the book hears another one: *Is it too late for me?* Have you ever felt that way? Scene I
3. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." The book compares it to a poor mother who gives her last piece of bread to her child and says she has already eaten. How does that picture help you get ready for Christmas? Scene I
4. Nicodemus comes by night, with a good name to protect. The woman of Sychar comes to the well alone at noon. What do these two have in common, and how are they different? Scenes I and II
5. She left her water jar by the well and ran into town to the very people she had been avoiding. What would you need to set down to come to him more freely? Scene II

LEADER'S NOTE

On the afternoon Jesus died, when most of his friends had fled, Nicodemus came out in the daylight to help bury him. Your group will meet him there if they keep reading in Lent.

TAKE HOME

The Reflection for Today says, "Leave the résumé at home and bring him the tiredness." Bring him yours on Christmas night.

SIX WEEKS

Lent

This plan follows the Church's year. You begin on Ash Wednesday and reach the cross in Holy Week, the same days the Church remembers it. Each chapter is read whole, so the group always talks about complete chapters.

WEEK	READ	SCENES
Ash Wednesday and Week 1	Book One, Chapters I–V	21
Week 2	Book One, Chapter VI; Book Two, Chapters I–III	18
Week 3	Book Two, Chapters IV–VI; Book Three, Chapter I	19
Week 4	Book Three, Chapters II–V	17
Week 5	Book Four (all four chapters)	19
Holy Week	Book Five (all four chapters)	16

In Holy Week, invite everyone to read Book Five, Chapter III on Good Friday and Chapter IV on Holy Saturday. If they can, they may also reread Book Four, Chapter I on Palm Sunday and Chapter III on Holy Thursday, the night he washed their feet. The last scene ends at the door of the Easter Vigil.

LENT · SESSION 1

One Bow, Just a Short One

READ THIS WEEK	Book One, Chapters I–V · 21 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book One, Chapter IV, *Scene IV, The Third Temptation* · about 5 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Luke 1:57–80; Luke 2:22–52; Luke 3:1–20; Matthew 3:13–17; Matthew 4:1–11; Matthew 11:2–11; Mark 1:9–11; Mark 6:14–29; John 1:35–2:12

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
you went into the desert hungry and alone,
and you came out faithful to your Father.
We begin these forty days with you.
Give us courage to stay in the quiet places,
and to say no to the easy bargains.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
you chose to be poor and win our hearts
rather than rule the earth and lose us.
When the easy bargain comes this week,
help us remember whose we are.

Our Father... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The devil drops the Scripture and goes straight to bargaining: the whole world for "one bow." This time Jesus doesn't argue. He gives an order. Listen for the line about the only throne he would ever accept.

QUESTIONS

1. "One bow. It would take less time than tying a sandal." Why do small compromises tempt us so easily? Book One, Chapter IV, Scene IV
2. The book says many in Israel were praying for a king with a sword, and here was the throne "with no war and no waiting." Why might this offer have sounded good, even holy? Why did Jesus refuse it? Book One, Chapter IV, Scene IV
3. Each time, Jesus answers with words from Scripture he had heard as a boy in the synagogue at Nazareth. What does that suggest about the quiet years in Chapter I? Book One, Chapter IV
4. *Scene I, The Baptism of the Lord* describes the people waiting at the river: an old woman rehearsing what she will confess, a young shepherd half ready to turn for home, a tax collector turning the rings on his fingers. Jesus gets in line with them. What does this tell you about him? Book One, Chapter III
5. Simeon tells Mary that her son will be "a sign which is spoken against." The book explains that no one could meet him and simply shrug. How have you seen that to be true? Book One, Chapter I, Scene II
6. The *Reflection for Today* says the offer rarely comes on a mountaintop. It comes at a desk, or in a friendly word from someone who means well. Where in your life is someone asking you for "one bow, just a short one"? Book One, Chapter IV, Scene IV

LEADER'S NOTE

Scene I, Led into the Desert (Book One, Chapter IV) explains the number forty: Noah in the ark for forty days, Moses on the mountain for forty days, and Israel in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus walked back over the road where his people had stumbled, "and he did not stumble." Our Lent takes its forty days from his.

TAKE HOME

Make a small pocket of wilderness this week, as Scene I, John in the Wilderness (Book One, Chapter II) suggests: ten minutes in the morning with the phone in another room.

LENT · SESSION 2

The Hand He Stretched Out

READ THIS WEEK	Book One, Chapter VI and Book Two, Chapters I–III · 18 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Two, Chapter III, *Scene I, Jesus Touches a Leper* · about 7 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Matthew 5–7; Matthew 8:5–13; Mark 1:16–2:17; Mark 5:21–43; Luke 4:16–30; Luke 7:1–50; John 3:1–21; John 4:1–42

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
you did not keep your distance from the sick,
and you are not afraid of what is broken in us.
Stretch out your hand to us tonight.
Make us clean, and send us home to one another.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
the hand you stretched out on that road is ours now.
Show each of us one person to visit this week,
and give us the courage to knock.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The leper has no doubt that Jesus can heal him. What he doesn't know is whether Jesus will want to. Jesus could have healed him with a word from where he stood, and he chose to touch him. By the end of the scene, the two of them have changed places.

QUESTIONS

1. "If you want to, you can make me clean." Why do you think this man doubted that Jesus would want to? Book Two, Chapter III, Scene I
2. Mark says Jesus was "moved with compassion," and the book explains that the word comes from the word for a person's insides, the feeling a mother has when her child cries out in the night. Where have you seen compassion like that? Book Two, Chapter III, Scene I
3. Everyone expected the uncleanness to pass from the leper to the rabbi. "It went the other way." What might that say about the sacrament of Reconciliation this Lent? Book Two, Chapter III, Scene I
4. At the well, Jesus begins by asking the woman for something: "Give me a drink." Why do you think he started there? Book One, Chapter VI, Scene II
5. After the most exciting day anyone in Capernaum could remember, Jesus slips out before dawn to pray. Simon finds him: "Everyone is looking for you." Jesus answers, "Let's go elsewhere." Why do you think he left a town that loved him? Book Two, Chapter I, Scene IV
6. The *Reflection for Today* names people living "outside the town" in their own way: the widower nobody has visited since spring, the man just home from prison, the teenager who eats lunch alone. Who is that person near you? Book Two, Chapter III, Scene I

LEADER'S NOTE

The scene gives helpful background. In those days "leprosy" was a name for a whole range of skin diseases. A leper had to live apart and call out "Unclean!" so no one would come near him by mistake. By the purity laws, whoever touched him became unclean until evening. Jesus sent the healed man to the priest because Leviticus laid out the steps for being declared clean, and only after that could he go home. Jesus wanted him back at his own table.

> **TAKE HOME**
>
> *Choose one name, and knock on one door this week, in person or by phone.*

LENT · SESSION 3

Who Do You Say That I Am?

READ THIS WEEK	Book Two, Chapters IV–VI and Book Three, Chapter I · 19 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Three, Chapter I, *Scene I, "But Who Do You Say That I Am?"* · about 6 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Matthew 13:1–52; Matthew 14:22–33; Matthew 15:21–28; Matthew 16:13–28; Matthew 18:21–35; Matthew 20:1–16; Mark 7:1–8:27; Luke 6:12–16; John 6

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
you asked your friends who they said you were,
and you ask us the same thing tonight.
Give us honest hearts and plain words.
Let the Father show us who you are.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.
Help us say it with our lives this week,
in the places where no one is listening for words.

Our Father... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Jesus asks two questions. The first is easy: everyone has heard something at the village wells. The second has nobody to hide behind. Listen for what goes through Simon's mind before he answers, and for who Jesus says showed it to him.

QUESTIONS

1. Jesus asks his question at the foot of a great red cliff, near the cave the Greeks gave to Pan and a white temple built for Caesar. Why might he have chosen that place to ask? Book Three, Chapter I, Scene I
2. Repeating what the neighbors said had cost the disciples nothing. Why is the second question, "But who do you say that I am?", so much harder to answer? Book Three, Chapter I, Scene I
3. Before he answers, Simon thinks back over what he has seen: a dead girl's fingers moving in Jesus' hand, bread that did not run out, lepers touched and sinners welcome at his table. Which moment in the book so far would you point to if someone asked you why you believe? Book Three, Chapter I, Scene I
4. When many disciples walk away, Jesus asks the Twelve, "You don't also want to go away, do you?" Peter answers, "Lord, to whom would we go?" When have you stayed with Jesus without understanding? Book Two, Chapter V, Scene IV
5. Peter thought forgiving seven times was generous. In Jesus' story, the servant forgiven a debt he could never pay grabs a fellow servant by the throat a few steps outside the palace. Why is it so easy to forget what we ourselves have been forgiven? Book Three, Chapter I, Scene V
6. In the parable of the sower, which ground sounds most like your heart this Lent: the hard path, the rocky ground, the thorns, or the good soil? Book Two, Chapter IV, Scene III

LEADER'S NOTE

The scene explains what Simon's words meant. *The Christ* means the Anointed One, the king Israel had waited for. *The Son of the living God* went further still. The emperor whose temple stood nearby called himself the son of a god, and the god of the cave was carved stone. Simon gave both titles to a man who had no house of his own. Note that the scene ends just as Jesus turns to Simon's new name; the keys come in the next scene.

TAKE HOME

Write your own answer to Jesus' question in one sentence. Keep it in your missal or your wallet, and read it again on Good Friday.

LENT · SESSION 4

The Father Who Ran

READ THIS WEEK	Book Three, Chapters II–V · 17 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Three, Chapter III, *Scene V, The Prodigal Son* · about 10 minutes, or 6 minutes if you begin at the heading *The Father Who Ran*
READ ALONGSIDE	Matthew 17:1–9; Mark 10:17–27; Mark 10:46–52; Luke 9:28–36; Luke 10:25–42; Luke 15:1–2, 11–32; Luke 18:9–14; Luke 19:1–10; John 9:1–10:42; John 11:1–12:8

OPENING PRAYER

Father,
you watch the road for every child who has wandered,
and you go out to every child who stands outside.
Whichever son we are tonight,
come out to meet us.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Father,
late have we loved you,
and the door was still open.
Bring us home this Lent,
and give us a glad heart for every brother and sister
who comes home with us.

Our Father... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

If you read the whole scene, it opens with a feast where none of the invited guests come, and then the doors open to the poor. Listen for the father who runs, which no man of his standing would do, and who then leaves his place a second time to go out to his older son. The story stops before we learn whether the older brother went in.

QUESTIONS

1. In the villages Jesus knew, a man of standing did not run. Why do you think the father ran?
   Book Three, Chapter III, Scene V
2. The younger son went over his speech all the way home, and the father didn't let him finish it. What does that tell you about going to confession? Book Three, Chapter III, Scene V
3. The older brother can't bring himself to say *my brother*. He says "this your son." The book says that in all those years at home he thought of himself as a servant waiting for his wages. Where do you recognize him in yourself?
   Book Three, Chapter III, Scene V
4. The priest and the Levite both had reasons to walk past the man in the ditch. What reasons do you give yourself for walking past? Book Three, Chapter III, Scene II
5. The man born blind gets his sight and loses his place among his people on the same day. Then Jesus hears what has happened and goes looking for him. What does that tell you about Jesus? Book Three, Chapter IV, Scene I
6. Jesus knew that in a few minutes Lazarus would be standing in the daylight, and still he wept. Why do you think he wept? Book Three, Chapter V, Scene I

LEADER'S NOTE

The scene explains what Jesus' listeners would have heard. A son who asked for his inheritance while his father was alive was saying, in effect, that he could not wait for him to die. Pigs were animals no Jew would touch. The ring meant the boy was family again; the sandals meant he was no servant. The father gave up his own dignity in the street so that his son would not have to walk home in shame.

TAKE HOME

If you can, go to confession before Holy Week. Many parishes offer extra times during Lent.

LENT · SESSION 5

Stay Here and Watch

READ THIS WEEK	Book Four (all four chapters) · 19 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Four, Chapter IV, *Scene I, The Agony in the Garden* · about 5 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Matthew 21:12–17; Matthew 23; Matthew 25; Mark 11:1–12:44; Mark 14:32–52; Luke 19:28–44; Luke 22:14–53; John 8:1–11; John 13–17

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
on the night before you died,
you asked your friends to stay awake with you.
We are here.
Keep us awake to you this hour,
and teach us to pray your prayer when we are afraid.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
when we are afraid, we bring our fear to your garden.
Not what we desire, but what you desire.
Stay with us in the dark,
and keep us near you this Holy Week.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Jesus hides nothing of his fear from his three friends. Listen for the family word he uses for his Father, *Abba*. Then listen for this line: "The fear did not leave him, and his yes did not leave him either."

QUESTIONS

1. Jesus tells his three closest friends, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch." Why do you think the Son of God wanted company on that night? Book Four, Chapter IV, Scene I
2. The fear did not leave him, and his yes did not leave him either. What does it mean to you that Jesus said yes while he was still afraid? Book Four, Chapter IV, Scene I
3. The book sets this garden beside the first garden, where the first man reached for the one tree he was told not to touch. What is the difference between the two choices? Book Four, Chapter IV, Scene I
4. That week Pilate probably rode into the city on horseback at the head of his soldiers. Jesus asked for the loan of a village donkey. What is Jesus saying without words? Book Four, Chapter I, Scene I
5. When the woman caught in adultery is dragged before him, Jesus stoops and writes in the dust, and for a few moments nobody is looking at her at all. Why do you think he did that before he said a word? Book Four, Chapter II, Scene IV
6. Jesus finds his friends asleep and asks Peter, "Couldn't you watch one hour?" When could you give him one hour on purpose in these last days of Lent? Book Four, Chapter IV, Scene II

LEADER'S NOTE

The chapter opening explains that Gethsemane means "the place of the oil press," where ripe olives were crushed under heavy stones. The *Reflection for Today* tells of Saint Thomas More, who wrote a book about this night, *The Sadness of Christ*, while locked in the Tower of London. More believed Jesus showed his fear for the fearful, for people who think their fear means they have no faith. The last paragraph of the Reflection is worth reading twice. It begins, "If you are afraid tonight, your fear is not a lack of faith."

> **TAKE HOME**
>
> *On Holy Thursday night, after the Mass of the Lord's Supper, many parishes keep the church open for prayer. Plan now to give him that hour.*

LENT · SESSION 6

Holy Week: The Look Across the Fire

READ THIS WEEK	Book Five (all four chapters) · 16 scenes. Chapter III on Good Friday, Chapter IV on Holy Saturday.
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Five, Chapter I, *Scene II, Peter's Denial* · about 6 minutes
READ ALONGSIDE	Matthew 26:57–68; Matthew 27:57–66; Mark 15:33–39; Luke 22:54–23:49; John 18:12–40; John 19:1–42

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
in this holy week we walk with you
from the courtyard to the cross to the tomb.
When we have failed you, look at us again.
Let us see in your face what Peter saw.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
you prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail,
and you pray for us.
Carry us through these holy days,
through Friday and the long quiet of Saturday,
to the morning you rise.
Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The servant girl who questions Peter carries no weapon. Listen to how each denial grows stronger than the last. Then listen for the line only Luke records: "The Lord turned and looked at Peter."

QUESTIONS

1. The book says there was no anger in that look, and no *I told you so*. What do you think Peter saw in his face? Book Five, Chapter I, Scene II
2. Judas and Peter were both sorry that morning. The book says Peter "had seen the Lord's face, and he could not forget it." What is the difference between their sorrows? Book Five, Chapter I, Scene II
3. Pilate asks, "What is truth?" and walks out without waiting for an answer. Why do you think he left the room? Book Five, Chapter I, Scene III
4. Simon of Cyrene was seized on the road and made to carry the beam behind Jesus. Mark calls him "the father of Alexander and Rufus," as if the first Christians knew those two young men well. What do you think that day did to Simon and his family? Book Five, Chapter II, Scene III
5. On Good Friday you will read how people on the road shouted, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" Your group first heard those words, "If you are the Son of God," in the desert. Why didn't he come down? Book Five, Chapter III, Scene I
6. The *Reflection for Today* invites you to look back over your day for "courtyard moments," when you laughed along, changed the subject, or said nothing so that no one would look at you twice. Name one to him tonight, plainly, as you would tell a friend. Book Five, Chapter I, Scene II

LEADER'S NOTE

The bystanders knew Peter by his speech: he talked like a fisherman from the north. Point out the charcoal fire where he warmed his hands; the *Reader's Guide* shows where another charcoal fire appears, by the lake after the Resurrection. Before you close, remind the group of the Holy Week readings: Book Four, Chapter III on Holy Thursday, the night he washed their feet; Book Five, Chapter III on Good Friday; and Chapter IV on Holy Saturday.

TAKE HOME

On Holy Thursday, reread Scene I, The Washing of the Feet (Book Four, Chapter III) before or after the evening Mass. Then, if you can, go to the Easter Vigil, and come early.

Lent Following the Sunday Gospels

This plan follows the Sunday Gospels of Lent from the Church's Year A cycle: the temptation in the desert, the Transfiguration, the woman at the well, the man born blind, the raising of Lazarus, and Matthew's Passion on Palm Sunday. Each week your group reads a few scenes from *Ecce Homo* that tell the same Gospel, meets in the days before the Sunday, and then hears that Gospel at Mass already knowing the story well. In a Year B or C, ask which Mass will celebrate the scrutinies, and go to that one if you can. The first meeting can fall between Ash Wednesday and the First Sunday.

The Gospels for the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays are the scrutiny Gospels. On those Sundays the elect, the people preparing to be baptized at the Easter Vigil, come forward at Mass, and the whole parish prays over them. The Church allows these three Gospels in any year, especially where there are catechumens, so this plan fits a parish with an OCIA group especially well. Sponsors, team members, and the elect themselves can meet together and pray the same Gospels the elect will hear at their scrutinies.

About the year. The Church reads the Year A Gospels on every Sunday of Lent in 2029 (Ash Wednesday, February 14). Lent 2027 falls in Year B, but parishes that celebrate the scrutinies read these Gospels at those Masses, and on the First, Second, and Palm Sundays the Year B Gospel from Mark tells the same story. The dates below are for 2027, with 2029 in the table.

SESSION	SUNDAY	2027	2029	GOSPEL (YEAR A)	READ ALOUD TOGETHER
1	First Sunday of Lent	Feb 14	Feb 18	Matthew 4:1–11	Book One, Ch. IV, Scene II
2	Second Sunday of Lent	Feb 21	Feb 25	Matthew 17:1–9	Book Three, Ch. II, Scene III
3	Third Sunday of Lent	Feb 28	Mar 4	John 4:5–42	Book One, Ch. VI, Scene II
4	Fourth Sunday of Lent	Mar 7	Mar 11	John 9:1–41	Book Three, Ch. IV, Scene I
5	Fifth Sunday of Lent	Mar 14	Mar 18	John 11:1–45	Book Three, Ch. V, Scene I
6	Palm Sunday of the Passion	Mar 21	Mar 25	Matthew 26:14–27:66	Book Five, Ch. I, Scene IV

Groups that want to read the whole book in Lent, in any year, can use the six-week plan, Lent: Six Weeks*, instead.*

The shape of each meeting is the one in *The Shape of Every Session*, with one step added: after the opening prayer, someone reads the Sunday Gospel aloud from a Bible. The three Gospels from John are long. If time is short, read the shorter form the lectionary gives: John 4:5–15, 19b–26, 39a, 40–42; John 9:1, 6–9, 13–17, 34–38; John 11:3–7, 17, 20–27, 33b–45. Take the extra time from the questions. For the quiet time, read the *Reflection for Today* at the end of the scene you read aloud.

SUNDAY GOSPELS · SESSION 1

Stones That Looked Like Bread

SUNDAY	First Sunday of Lent · February 14, 2027
GOSPEL	Matthew 4:1–11 (in 2027, Mark 1:12–15)
READ THIS WEEK	Book One, Chapter IV: *Scene I, Led into the Desert*; *Scene II, The First Temptation*; *Scene III, The Second Temptation*; *Scene IV, The Third Temptation* · 4 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book One, Chapter IV, *Scene II, The First Temptation* · about 5 minutes

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
you went hungry in the desert
and trusted your Father for your bread.
As we begin these forty days,
make us hungry for his word
more than for anything else.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
when the voice in our head says we have to look after ourselves,
remind us whose we are.
Feed us with every word from your Father's mouth,
and keep us faithful in small things this week.

Our Father... Glory Be...

QUESTIONS

1. The tempter begins with "If you are the Son of God." The book points out that at the Jordan "the Father had spoken with no *if* at all." Why do you think the enemy starts with a small doubt instead of a big lie?
   Book One, Chapter IV, Scene II
2. "It was not a stupid idea. Hungry people are hard to preach to." Why would Jesus rather stay hungry than win people by filling their stomachs? Book One, Chapter IV, Scene II
3. On the Temple wall Jesus asks his Father for nothing, because "a son who jumps off a roof to see whether his father will catch him has stopped trusting and started testing." When are you tempted to test God instead of trusting him?
   Book One, Chapter IV, Scene III
4. *Scene I* ends with a question: "when everything else is gone, whose are you?" What small hunger could you choose this Lent, so that you can answer it more honestly? Book One, Chapter IV, Scene I

A LINE TO CARRY

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of God's mouth." (Matthew 4:4)

LEADER'S NOTE

The first week of Lent is the week of fasting, so this session stays with the first temptation, the one about bread. The scene explains where Jesus' answer comes from: Moses' words to Israel about the manna, which came down every morning, enough for one day. Point out the small word *if*, and tell the group to watch for it. It comes back at the cross. The Rite of Election is usually celebrated on or near this Sunday. If your parish has catechumens, pray for them by name.

TAKE HOME

Choose one small fast this week. Each time you feel it, pray for the people in your parish who will be baptized at Easter.

Jesus Alone

SUNDAY	Second Sunday of Lent · February 21, 2027
GOSPEL	Matthew 17:1–9 (in 2027, Mark 9:2–10)
READ THIS WEEK	Book Three, Chapter II: *Scene I, Up the High Mountain*; *Scene II, The Transfiguration*; *Scene III, Three Tents and a Cloud*; *Scene IV, Coming Down the Mountain* · 4 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Three, Chapter II, *Scene III, Three Tents and a Cloud* · about 4 minutes

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
you took three tired friends up the mountain
because words were not enough for them.
We are tired too.
Show us a little of your face tonight,
and teach us to listen to you.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
when the light fades and the good feelings go,
stay beside us as you stayed beside your friends.
Touch us, and say it to us again:
get up, and do not be afraid.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

QUESTIONS

1. Peter offers to build three tents. The book says "He wanted to put a roof over this glory and keep it there." What was he hoping to hold on to? What good moment do you wish you could keep, and why can't we stay there? Book Three, Chapter II, Scene III
2. The Father says, "Listen to him." The book says that meant "listening when he spoke of glory, and listening just as closely when he spoke of the cross." Which of the two is harder for you to hear? Book Three, Chapter II, Scene III
3. The three lay with their faces against the rock. "Then they felt a hand." Why do you think Jesus touched them before he spoke? Book Three, Chapter II, Scene III
4. Think of one day when God felt close. *Scene IV* asks you to keep your own mountaintop days somewhere safe, for the hard days: "Which of those days will you carry down the mountain with you?" Book Three, Chapter II, Scene IV

A LINE TO CARRY

"Get up, and don't be afraid." (Matthew 17:7)

LEADER'S NOTE

This scene follows Matthew closely. Only Matthew tells us that Jesus came and touched the three men lying face down, and Matthew's "Jesus alone" is where this scene ends. The Gospel of the day goes one step further, to the order on the way down, which is in *Scene IV*. The book explains the bright cloud: the cloud that went before Israel in the desert and filled the tent where Moses met God. Remind the group that a week before, Peter had heard Jesus call him "Satan." He climbed this mountain carrying that.

TAKE HOME

Write down one day when God felt close, and keep it in your Bible or missal for a hard day.

SUNDAY GOSPELS · SESSION 3

Give Me a Drink

SUNDAY	Third Sunday of Lent · February 28, 2027 · first scrutiny
GOSPEL	John 4:5–42 (at Masses without the scrutiny in 2027, John 2:13–25)
READ THIS WEEK	Book One, Chapter VI, *Scene II, The Woman at the Well* · 1 scene. Read it twice: once early in the week, and again the night before you meet.
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book One, Chapter VI, *Scene II, The Woman at the Well* · about 10 minutes

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
you sat tired by a well at noon
and waited for a woman everyone avoided.
We come to you thirsty tonight.
Ask us for what we have,
and give us the water only you can give.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
you know the wells we keep going back to.
Help us leave our old jars by the well
and run to tell someone about you.
Bless all who will be baptized this Easter,
and give them your living water to drink.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

QUESTIONS

1. She came for water alone, at the hottest hour, "perhaps because she had had enough of the talk that stopped when she walked by." What does the hour tell you about her life? Where do people go today to avoid the talk?
   Book One, Chapter VI, Scene II
2. Jesus starts by "making himself the one who needed help, a tired traveler with no bucket, and letting her be the one with something to give." Why do you think he began that way? Book One, Chapter VI, Scene II
3. "*He knows,* she thought. *He knows all of it, and he hasn't gone.*" What made it possible for her to hear the truth about her life from him? Book One, Chapter VI, Scene II
4. The *Reflection for Today* names "the wells I keep going back to." Which well do you keep going back to, and what jar might you leave behind this Lent? Book One, Chapter VI, Scene II

A LINE TO CARRY

"whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again." (John 4:14)

LEADER'S NOTE

The scene fills in what the group needs to know: the centuries of bad blood between Jews and Samaritans, Mount Gerizim rising above the well, and the hard fact that in that world only a man could end a marriage. Listen for where Jesus begins. He asks her for something. At the first scrutiny the parish prays that the elect will be freed from what holds them back and strengthened in all that is good. Read the scene with that in mind. In Palm Sunday week, Book Five, Chapter III, *Scene IV* will bring "Give me a drink" back, at the cross.

TAKE HOME

Before Sunday, pray for the elect by name if you know them, and at Mass pray with the whole parish as they come forward.

SUNDAY GOSPELS · SESSION 4

He Went Looking for Him

SUNDAY	Fourth Sunday of Lent · March 7, 2027 · second scrutiny
GOSPEL	John 9:1–41 (at Masses without the scrutiny in 2027, John 3:14–21)
READ THIS WEEK	Book Three, Chapter IV, *Scene I, The Man Born Blind* · 1 scene. Read it twice this week.
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Three, Chapter IV, *Scene I, The Man Born Blind* · about 8 minutes

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
light of the world,
you put mud on a blind man's eyes
and sent him to wash.
Show us where we are still blind,
and give us the courage to go where you send us.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
you went looking for the man they threw out.
Send us looking too,
at the edges of our parish and our own families.
Open the eyes of all who will be baptized this Easter,
and open ours again.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

QUESTIONS

1. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" The book says the man "sat there and heard it asked about him, again, by strangers." How does Jesus' answer change the way the man is seen? Book Three, Chapter IV, Scene I
2. He is no scholar, and his answer is simple: "though I was blind, now I see." Why is a plain story of what Jesus has done sometimes stronger than any argument? Book Three, Chapter IV, Scene I
3. The man had never seen Jesus' face. "But he knew this voice." How have you come to know Jesus' voice before you could see much else? Book Three, Chapter IV, Scene I
4. "Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, and he went looking for him." The *Reflection for Today* says he often sends us. Who near you has been put out, and how could you go looking this week? Book Three, Chapter IV, Scene I

A LINE TO CARRY

"One thing I do know: that though I was blind, now I see." (John 9:25)

LEADER'S NOTE

The scene sets this sign at the Feast of Tabernacles, when great lamps lit the Temple courts, and Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." The book explains that kneading mud was work the Sabbath forbade, that Siloam means *Sent*, and what it meant to be put out of the synagogue: cut off from the prayers, the feasts, and the neighbors. Early Christians called Baptism *enlightenment*. The elect hear this Gospel on their way to the font, and the rest of us remember our own.

TAKE HOME

One evening this week, light a candle at home, your baptismal candle if you still have it, and pray for all who will be baptized at Easter.

SUNDAY GOSPELS · SESSION 5

Lord, Come and See

SUNDAY	Fifth Sunday of Lent · March 14, 2027 · third scrutiny
GOSPEL	John 11:1–45 (at Masses without the scrutiny in 2027, John 12:20–33)
READ THIS WEEK	Book Three, Chapter V: *Scene I, The Raising of Lazarus*; *Scene II, The Plot to Kill Jesus* · 2 scenes
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Three, Chapter V, *Scene I, The Raising of Lazarus* · about 9 minutes

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
you wept at your friend's grave
and called him out into the daylight.
We bring you our griefs tonight,
and the people we have lost.
Speak your word over us again.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
call us out of whatever tomb we have settled into.
Give us friends who will help untie us,
and make us that kind of friend.
Remember all our dead,
and bring them into your light.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

QUESTIONS

1. Jesus stays two more days. "John does not explain the delay. He only makes sure we read about the love before we read about the waiting." When have you had to hold on to his love through a long wait? Book Three, Chapter V, Scene I
2. Martha says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died," and in the same breath, "Even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." How can both be true in one heart? Book Three, Chapter V, Scene I
3. Caiaphas said one man should die for the people. John says he spoke more truly than he knew. Caiaphas meant *better him than us*. John hears *him for us*. Where have you felt that *for us* in your own life? Book Three, Chapter V, Scene II
4. Lazarus comes out bound, and Jesus says to the people standing there, "Free him, and let him go." Who helped untie you, and who might you help untie this Lent? Book Three, Chapter V, Scene I

A LINE TO CARRY

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will still live, even if he dies." (John 11:25)

LEADER'S NOTE

The book explains why the fourth day mattered: by then no one could doubt the body had begun to decay, and some held that the soul had gone for good. Notice that "Lord, come and see" were once Jesus' own words to his first disciples. Then read *Scene II* together if there is time, or ask the group to read it again. The sign that gave Lazarus back his life is the one that made the council decide to take Jesus' life. Gently invite anyone who is grieving to bring their loss to the quiet time.

TAKE HOME

Pray this week for someone you have lost, at their grave if you can, and give one person a hand with what is holding them back.

Palm Sunday: The One Who Walked Free

SUNDAY	Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord · March 21, 2027
GOSPEL	Matthew 26:14–27:66, or the shorter form, Matthew 27:11–54 (in 2027, Mark 14:1–15:47)
READ THIS WEEK	Scenes from Book Five that follow Matthew's Passion · 10 scenes. Chapter I: *Scene I, Jesus Before the Sanhedrin*; *Scene II, Peter's Denial*; *Scene IV, Barabbas*. Chapter II: *Scene I, The Crowning with Thorns*; *Scene III, Simon of Cyrene and Veronica*. Chapter III: *Scene I, The Crucifixion*; *Scene III, "My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?"*; *Scene IV, Jesus Dies on the Cross*. Chapter IV: *Scene II, The Burial of Jesus*; *Scene IV, The Guard at the Tomb*. In Holy Week, read the rest of Book Five.
READ ALOUD TOGETHER	Book Five, Chapter I, *Scene IV, Barabbas* · about 7 minutes

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
this Sunday we will carry palms for you,
and then we will hear a crowd shout for Barabbas.
Do not let us stand at a distance this Holy Week.
Keep us near your cross,
and near your mother.
Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

After the quiet time and the intentions, pray together:

Lord Jesus,
you stood in our place,
and Barabbas walked out into the morning.
Teach us to live like people set free.
Carry us through these holy days
to the light of the Easter fire.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

QUESTIONS

1. While Pilate waits, a message comes from his wife. "A pagan woman, troubled in her sleep, saw what the governor would not let himself see." Why do you think God let an outsider see what the powerful would not? Who has been that voice for you? Book Five, Chapter I, Scene IV
2. "Water cannot wash that away. The man with the power to free Jesus handed the choice to a crowd, and called it innocence." Where are we tempted to wash our hands of something we could change? Book Five, Chapter I, Scene IV
3. The book calls Barabbas walking free "the Gospel in one picture: Barabbas deserved to die, and someone else would die for him." What does it mean to you to stand where Barabbas stood? Book Five, Chapter I, Scene IV
4. This week you read the story of Saint Maximilian Kolbe, who died in another prisoner's place. The *Reflection for Today* ends with a question: "Who have you told about the one who died in yours?" Book Five, Chapter III, Scene IV

A LINE TO CARRY

"Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54)

LEADER'S NOTE

Three things in this scene and this week's reading come from Matthew alone: the dream of Pilate's wife, Pilate washing his hands, and the guard sealing the tomb. Read the scene beforehand, especially the part on the cry "May his blood be on us and on our children!" The book explains, with the Second Vatican Council, that the Passion cannot be charged against all the Jews then living or the Jews of today, and, with the Catechism, that all of us sinners share in the blame. If someone asks about that cry, read the book's paragraph on it aloud. Matthew's Passion begins at the Supper; anyone who wants more can read Book Four, Chapters III and IV.

TAKE HOME

Read the rest of Book Five in Holy Week, and go to the Good Friday liturgy and the Easter Vigil if you can.

After the Last Session

The book stops at the sealed stone on Holy Saturday, on purpose. Many of us know that Saturday well: the silence, the waiting, the stone not yet moved. But your group knows how the story goes on. The women went out to the tomb in the gray light and found the stone rolled away.

If your group met through Lent, think about meeting once more in the Easter season, just to read the Easter Gospels together and give thanks. The *Reader's Guide* has a simple plan for the week after you finish, one Easter Gospel a day, each one picking up a thread from the book. If your group met in Advent, your last meeting falls just before Christmas. The child you will kneel before at Midnight Mass is the one no grave could hold.

Thank the people who came. Some of them said very little and listened hard, and that counts too.

A Small Request

If *Ecce Homo* helped your group pray, would you think about leaving a short, honest review? A sentence or two is enough. Reviews are how other parishes and readers find a book like this one, and your words may be what helps another group choose it for Lent.

- Review on Amazon: amazon.com/review/create-review?asin=B0HLWXD9MH
- Review on Goodreads: goodreads.com/book/show/260279746

The free *Reader's Guide* for your group members is at hoangbaongoc.com/guide, and there is more about the book and its author at hoangbaongoc.com.

A Leader's Guide to Ecce Homo: An Epic of the Last Three Years of Jesus of Nazareth

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