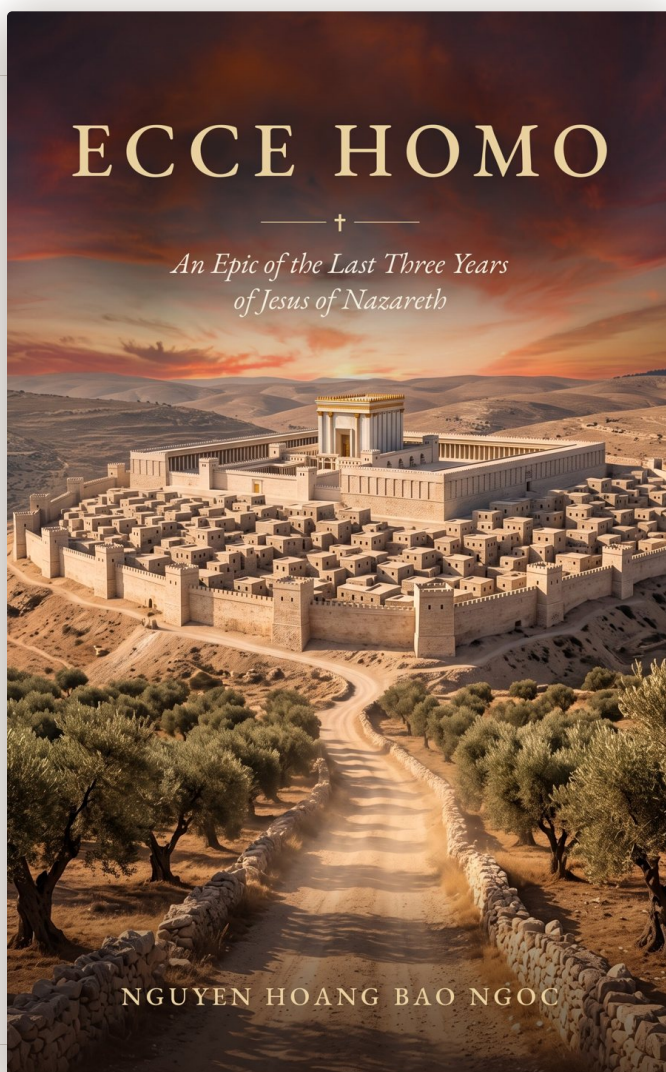


A READER'S GUIDE TO

Ecce Homo

Questions, prayers, and reading plans for walking with Jesus through the last three years of his life. For reading alone, with a friend, or with your parish.



NGUYEN HOANG BAO NGOC

A free companion for readers, couples, and parish groups

A Word Before You Begin

Dear friend,

Thank you for walking with Jesus through the pages of *Ecce Homo*. I made this small guide for anyone who wants to stay a little longer with those scenes, and to talk them over with someone else.

I am a catechist. For many years I have taught the faith in my parish: children preparing for First Communion and Confirmation, young people, adults entering the Church, and new catechists. I am not a scholar. Over those years I have learned that one good question, asked slowly, often does more than a long explanation. So most of what you will find here is questions. There are no right answers to look up at the back. Some questions ask you to look closely at what happened in a scene. Others ask why a person acted as they did, or what Jesus might have been carrying in his heart. And each chapter ends with a question for your own life, because the Gospel is meant to be lived on an ordinary Tuesday.

The book stops at the sealed tomb on Holy Saturday. This guide goes one week further, into Easter, because that is where the story was always going.

If one question here helps you see him a little more clearly, or love him a little more, it was worth printing.

Nguyen Hoang Bao Ngoc

Phuong Lam Parish, Diocese of Xuan Loc

Three Ways to Use This Guide

On your own, one scene a day. Read a single scene, including its *Reflection for Today*, then turn to the questions for that chapter in this guide and choose one. Ten or fifteen minutes is enough. At one scene a day, the whole book takes about sixteen weeks. You may like to keep a small notebook beside you for the line you want to carry into the day.

With a husband or wife, or a friend. Read the same chapter during the week, each on your own. Then sit down together once, over coffee or after the children are in bed, and talk through the questions for that chapter. You do not have to agree. Listening to how someone you love sees Jesus is a gift in itself.

With a parish group or book club. Meet once a week for about an hour and follow one of the reading plans below. A simple order for each meeting:

- Begin with the Sign of the Cross and a short prayer, or a moment of silence.
- Read one scene from the week aloud, slowly. A different person can read each part.
- Keep two minutes of quiet. Ask each person to notice one sentence that stayed with them.
- Talk through three to five questions from the week's chapters. Nobody has to speak, and nobody has to be right.
- Read "A line to carry" for one chapter together, and close with the Our Father.

A note for leaders: you do not need to have the answers. Let silences last. When the talk drifts toward arguments about the Church or the news, gently bring everyone back to the scene and to the face of Jesus in it.

Reading Plans

The book has five Books, twenty-five chapters, and one hundred and ten scenes. Both plans below keep each chapter whole, so a group always talks about complete chapters.

Lent: six weeks, the whole book. 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.

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, try to read Book Five, Chapter III on Good Friday and Chapter IV on Holy Saturday. If you can, 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.

Advent: four weeks, the whole book. This is a brisk pace, about four scenes a day. It suits a group that already knows the Gospels well and wants the whole story before Christmas.

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

The fourth week of Advent is often short, so it has the fewest scenes. It may feel strange to stand at a tomb just before Christmas. But the child old Simeon held in the Temple and the man on the cross are the same person, and Simeon saw the shadow of the cross over him when he was forty days old. If four scenes a day is too many, read Book One alone in Advent, one scene a day, and keep the rest for Lent.

How the Questions Are Marked

Each chapter in this guide has four questions, marked by kind:

- **Notice** asks you to look closely at what happens in the scene, and at what it shows you.
- **Ponder** asks why: what a person might have felt, or what Jesus was showing by what he did.
- **For you** brings the scene home to your own life this week.

Scenes are named the way the book names them: by their number within the chapter and their title, for example *Scene II, The Presentation in the Temple*. Each chapter also lists a Gospel passage to read alongside it, and one short line of Scripture to carry with you.

Praying with a Scene

You do not need a method to pray. But if you would like one, here is a simple way that grows out of the Church's old practice of *lectio divina*, praying slowly with Scripture.

1. **READ** Read the scene once, slowly. If you can, read it aloud. Do not hurry to the end.
2. **NOTICE** Go back and find the one moment that caught you: a face, a word, a gesture of Jesus. Stay there. Picture the place, the weather, the people standing nearby.
3. **TALK TO JESUS** Tell him what you noticed and why it stayed with you. Tell him what it stirred up in you, even if it is anger, fear, or tiredness. Then be quiet for a minute and let him look at you.
4. **CARRY ONE LINE** Choose one sentence from the scene, or from the Gospel, and take it with you into the day. Say it at a red light, while the coffee brews, or before you fall asleep.

That is all. Some days the prayer will feel full and some days empty. Both days count.



BOOK ONE

The Call from the Wilderness

Book One begins in the hidden years at Nazareth, with a boy gathering kindling on the hillside, and follows Jesus down to the Jordan and out into the desert. Then come his first friends, a wedding at Cana, a visitor who comes by night, and a woman at Jacob's well. Here we meet Jesus as one of us: the one who became man, hungry in the wilderness and sweating in the carpenter's shop.

CHAPTER I

Thirty Years of Silence: A Seed Asleep in the Ground

Scenes I–VI • Read alongside: Luke 2:22–52

NOTICE In *Scene I, Nazareth*, *Scene IV, The Child Grew*, and *Scene VI, The Hidden Life*, the book fills in small details of village life: an armful of kindling, an old woman's door dragging on its post, a cracked yoke mended at sunset so the ox could plow in the morning. Which detail stayed with you, and why?

PONDER At the Temple, Simeon tells Mary that a sword will pierce her soul (*Scene II, The Presentation in the Temple*). She does not cry out or ask what he means. She takes her baby back and holds him a little tighter. What do you think was in her heart on the walk home?

PONDER 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 of these things side by side?

FOR YOU *Scene VI* says that every curl of wood that fell under the workbench in Nazareth was precious in God’s eyes. What part of your ordinary week could you offer to God, knowing that no one else will notice it?

A LINE TO CARRY

“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was subject to them.”

Luke 2:51

CHAPTER II

A Voice in the Desert: The Man Who Prepared the Way

Scenes I–III · Read alongside: Luke 1:57–80, Luke 3:1–20, Matthew 11:2–11, and Mark 6:14–29

NOTICE When the crowds at the river ask John, “What then must we do?” his answers are very down to earth: share your extra coat, collect no more than you should, don’t extort, be content with your wages (*Scene II, “Prepare the Way of the Lord”*). What does that tell you about what repentance looks like?

PONDER From his prison cell John sends two disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you he who comes, or should we look for another?” (*Scene III, The Beheading of John the Baptist*). 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?

PONDER Mark says Herod was “exceedingly sorry,” but he gave the order anyway because he had sworn in front of his guests (*Scene III*). Why is it so hard to back down once others are watching?

FOR YOU The *Reflection for Today* in *Scene I, John in the Wilderness* suggests a small pocket of wilderness: ten minutes in the morning with the phone in another room. Where and when could you find yours this week?

A LINE TO CARRY

“Make ready the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.”

Luke 3:4

CHAPTER III

Baptism in the Jordan: The Coronation of a Humble King

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: Matthew 3:13–17 and Mark 1:9–11

NOTICE *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 and waits his turn. What does this picture tell you about him?

PONDER John says, “I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?” (*Scene II, John and Jesus at the Jordan*). Why do you think he held back, and what do you make of the word *us* in Jesus’ answer?

PONDER The Father calls Jesus “my beloved Son” before he has preached a single sermon or healed anyone (*Scene III, The Heavens Opened*). Why might it matter that the love came first?

FOR YOU *Scene IV, What Baptism Means* invites you to find the date of your own baptism. Do you know it? How could you mark it this year?

A LINE TO CARRY

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:17

CHAPTER IV

Forty Days of Combat: Temptation in the Desert

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: Matthew 4:1–11

NOTICE The tempter’s first words are “If you are the Son of God” (*Scene II, The First Temptation*). The book points out that the Father had spoken at the Jordan with no *if* at all. Watch for those same words later in the book. Where do they come back?

PONDER Each temptation offers a shortcut: bread for himself, a show for the crowd, the whole world for one bow. Which of the three sounds most sensible to you, and why do you think Jesus turned it down?

PONDER 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?

FOR YOU The *Reflection for Today* in *Scene IV, The Third Temptation* 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”?

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

CHAPTER V

“Follow Me!” The Call of Love and the First Sign

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: John 1:35–2:12

NOTICE The Gospel remembers the exact hour the first two disciples stayed with Jesus: “about the tenth hour,” four in the afternoon (*Scene I, “Come and See”*). If the unnamed disciple was John himself, as Christians have long believed, he was an old man when he wrote it down. What makes an hour like that impossible to forget?

PONDER Nathanael scoffs, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” but comes anyway. Then Jesus tells him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you” (*Scene II, The First Disciples*). Why do you think those words changed him so quickly?

PONDER At Cana, Mary says only “They have no wine,” and then tells the servants, “Whatever he says to you, do it” (*Scene III, The Wedding at Cana*). What do you notice about the way she asks?

FOR YOU The servants filled six stone jars with plain water, trip after trip from the well, without being told why (*Scenes III and IV*). What ordinary “water” is God asking you to carry faithfully right now?

A LINE TO CARRY

“Whatever he says to you, do it.”

John 2:5

CHAPTER VI

Private Conversations: From the Dead of Night to the Heat of Noon

Scenes I–II • Read alongside: John 3:1–21 and John 4:1–42

NOTICE Nicodemus comes by night, with a good name to protect (*Scene I, Nicodemus Comes by Night*). The woman of Sychar comes to the well alone at noon, the hottest hour (*Scene II, The Woman at the Well*). What do these two have in common, and how are they different?

PONDER At the well, Jesus begins by asking her for something: “Give me a drink.” Why do you think he started there?

PONDER When Jesus names her past, she waits for the look and the step back that always came next, and they do not come. What does that moment show you about the way he sees people?

FOR YOU She left her water jar lying 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?

A LINE TO CARRY

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

John 3:16



BOOK TWO

The Good News of the Kingdom in Galilee

If the life of Jesus were a year, the book says, this would be its springtime. By the lake in Galilee he calls fishermen, teaches on a hillside, touches a leper, eats with sinners, raises the dead, and feeds the hungry. Here he is the one who has power over wind and sea, sickness, and demons. Book Two ends far from home, under a pagan cliff, with most of the crowds gone and only the Twelve still walking with him.

CHAPTER I

The Galilean Mission Begins: From Nazareth to Capernaum

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: Luke 4:16–30 and Mark 1:16–39

NOTICE In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus says one short sentence: “Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (*Scene I, Rejected at Nazareth*). Soon men who had said good morning to him for thirty years are pushing him toward a cliff. What turned them?

PONDER Zebedee is left in the boat with the half-mended net across his knees, watching his two sons walk away (*Scene II, Fishers of Men*). What do you imagine was in his heart as he watched them go?

PONDER After the most exciting day anyone in Capernaum could remember, Jesus slips out before dawn to pray. Simon finds him and says, “Everyone is looking for you.” Jesus answers, “Let’s go elsewhere” (*Scene IV, Prayer Before Dawn*). Why do you think he left a town that loved him?

FOR YOU Simon’s mother-in-law is raised from her fever, and the first thing she does is serve (*Scene III, A Sabbath in Capernaum*). Who in your house could use your hand this week?

A LINE TO CARRY

“Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 4:21

CHAPTER II

The Constitution of the Kingdom: The Sermon on the Mount

Scenes I–V · Read alongside: Matthew 5–7

NOTICE The book sets the Sermon on a real hillside: a widow pulling her dark cloak tighter, sparrows wheeling over the slope, red anemones in the grass, a dry streambed below (*Scenes I, IV, and V*). How does picturing the place change the way you hear the words?

PONDER A man near the front had been putting coins aside for a lamb to offer in Jerusalem, and Jesus’ next words seem meant for him: leave your gift at the altar and first be reconciled to your brother (*Scene II, Salt of the Earth, Light of the World*). Why do you think he puts the relationship ahead of the offering?

PONDER *Scene III, The Our Father* points out that nobody prays this prayer alone, because its first word is “our.” What changes when you pray it with that in mind?

FOR YOU In the story of the two builders, the wise man had nothing to show his neighbors for a whole season but a hole and a pile of broken rock (*Scene V, The House Built on Rock*). What foundation are you building now, in the quiet, before the storms come?

A LINE TO CARRY

“Seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:33

CHAPTER III

The Power of the Word: The Hands of the Great Physician

Scenes I–VII · Read alongside: Mark 1:40–2:17, Matthew 8:5–13, Luke 7:1–50, and Mark 5:21–43

NOTICE Jesus touches a leper, the bier of a dead young man, and the hand of a dead girl (*Scenes I, VI, and VII*). By the Law, each touch should have made him unclean. What happens instead?

PONDER The leper says, “If you want to, you can make me clean” (*Scene I, Jesus Touches a Leper*). He had no doubt that Jesus could. Why do you think he doubted that Jesus would want to?

PONDER Simon the Pharisee had seen the weeping woman the whole evening, the book says, and had never once really looked at her (*Scene V, The Woman Who Wept at His Feet*). What is the difference between seeing a person and really looking at her? And why did Jesus ask him, “Do you see this woman?”

FOR YOU Four friends dug through a roof to bring a man who could not walk to Jesus (*Scene III, The Paralytic Lowered Through the Roof*). Who could you carry to him this week, and how?

A LINE TO CARRY

“Lord, I’m not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

Matthew 8:8

CHAPTER IV

Founding a New Israel: The First Stones of God’s House

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: Luke 6:12–16 and Matthew 13:1–52

NOTICE Among the Twelve are Matthew, who collected tolls for Herod, and Simon the Zealot, who may have hated men exactly like him (*Scene I, The Choosing of the Twelve*). What does that choice tell you about the kind of community Jesus was building?

PONDER The book says Jesus chose Judas “with his eyes open,” and the Gospels never explain why. What do you make of that?

PONDER After the parables, many people wandered off shaking their heads, while the Twelve stayed behind and asked what the stories meant (*Scene II, Why He Spoke in Parables*). The book says a parable never forces anyone; it leaves a person free. Why do you think Jesus chose to teach that way?

FOR YOU In the parable of the sower, which ground sounds most like your heart this season: the hard path, the rocky ground, the thorns, or the good soil (*Scene III, The Parable of the Sower*)?

A LINE TO CARRY

“Have you understood all these things?” They answered him, “Yes, Lord.”

Matthew 13:51

CHAPTER V

Summit and Crisis: The Loaves, and the Hunger of the Soul

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: John 6 and Matthew 14:22–33

NOTICE On the hillside Jesus took the loaves, blessed God, broke them, and gave them (*Scene I, The Feeding of the Five Thousand*). Where else in the book do you see those same four movements?

PONDER The disciples' plan was sensible: send the people off to buy their own bread. Jesus answers, "You give them something to eat," and begins with a boy's five barley loaves. Why do you think he started with so little?

PONDER Peter begins to sink when he looks away from Jesus, down at the black water (*Scene II, Jesus Walks on the Water*). 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?

FOR YOU When many disciples walk away, Jesus asks the Twelve, "You don't also want to go away, do you?" Peter does not understand it all, but he knows whom he is trusting (*Scene IV, "This Is a Hard Saying"*). When have you stayed with Jesus without understanding?

A LINE TO CARRY

"Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life."

John 6:68

CHAPTER VI

Confrontations, and a Journey to the Edges

Scenes I–V · Read alongside: Mark 7:1–8:27 and Matthew 15:21–28

NOTICE The visitors from Jerusalem complain about the disciples' unwashed hands. Jesus answers with the vow called Corban, by which a respected son could leave his old father without help (*Scene I, Clean and Unclean*). What is Jesus pointing at?

PONDER The Canaanite mother hears silence, then a no, then a word that hurts, and still she kneels in the road and asks again (*Scene II, The Canaanite Woman*). Why do you think Jesus was glad to lose this argument?

PONDER The blind man of Bethsaida first sees people "like walking trees" and needs a second touch (*Scene IV, The Blind Man of Bethsaida*). The book says the disciples were seeing the same way. Where in your own faith do you still see only blurs?

FOR YOU In the boat, the disciples argued about having only one loaf while the Bread of Life sat beside them (*Scene IV*). What worry has you counting loaves this week, when he is right there in the boat with you?

A LINE TO CARRY

"Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!"

Mark 7:34



BOOK THREE

The Turning Point, and the Road to Jerusalem

Under the red cliff at Caesarea Philippi, Peter names Jesus the Christ, and from that day Jesus begins to speak of the cross. Three friends see his face shine on the mountain, and then the long road south begins: the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, a man born blind, Lazarus called out of the tomb, Zacchaeus in his tree, and blind Bartimaeus by the road. Here he is the one who shows mercy, and the book ends at Bethany with a jar of nard poured out for his burial.

CHAPTER I

“You Are the Christ!” When Faith Faces Down the World

Scenes I–VI · Read alongside: Matthew 16:13–28, 18:21–35, and 20:1–16

NOTICE Jesus asks “But who do you say that I am?” at the foot of a great rock, near the cave the Greeks gave to Pan and a white temple built for Caesar (*Scene I, “But Who Do You Say That I Am?”*). Why might he have chosen that place to ask?

PONDER On a single morning Peter is called “blessed” and then hears the words “Get behind me, Satan!” (*Scene I and Scene III, The First Prediction of the Passion*). What did Peter get right, and where did his love go wrong?

PONDER Peter thought forgiving seven times was generous (*Scene V, Seventy Times Seven*). 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?

FOR YOU The *Reflection for Today* in *Scene I* asks you to set aside what the neighbors say, and even what you memorized for your First Communion. In your own words, who is Jesus to you?

A LINE TO CARRY

"But who do you say that I am?"

Matthew 16:15

CHAPTER II

Glory on the Mountaintop: The Transfiguration

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: Matthew 17:1–9 and Luke 9:28–36

NOTICE Luke says Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about his “departure,” and the Greek word is *exodos* (*Scene II, The Transfiguration*). What does that word add to the way you think about his death?

PONDER Peter wants to build three tents and stay on the mountain (*Scene III, Three Tents and a Cloud*). What do you think he was afraid of finding when they went back down?

PONDER When the cloud and the light are gone, the three see “no one, except Jesus alone,” in his worn tunic with his tired, dusty face. The book says he was enough to walk down with. Why might that be?

FOR YOU *Scene IV, Coming Down the Mountain* calls the mountain bread for the road. Which bright day of your own would you want to remember when a hard season comes?

A LINE TO CARRY

"Get up, and don't be afraid."

Matthew 17:7

CHAPTER III

The Road to Jerusalem: Lessons Along the Way

Scenes I–VI · Read alongside: Mark 10:17–27, Luke 10:25–42, 15:1–2, 15:11–32, and 18:9–14

NOTICE The rich young man had kept the commandments all his life, and the Gospel says “Jesus looking at him loved him.” Then Jesus asked him for everything (*Scene I, He Set His Face Toward Jerusalem*). Why do you think the love and the hard request came together?

PONDER The priest and the Levite both had reasons to walk past the man in the ditch, and the book says Jesus' listeners would have understood the priest all too well (*Scene II, The Good Samaritan*). What were their reasons? And what reasons do you give yourself for walking past?

PONDER In the story of the prodigal son, the father runs down the road, and later goes out a second time to the older son standing in the dark. The story stops before we learn whether the older brother went in (*Scene V, The Prodigal Son*). Why do you think Jesus left it open?

FOR YOU Martha told Jesus exactly what was on her heart (*Scene III, Martha and Mary*). The tax collector in the Temple brought one honest sentence (*Scene VI, “Lord, Teach Us to Pray”*). What would you say to Jesus today if you were just as plain with him?

A LINE TO CARRY

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

Luke 18:13

CHAPTER IV

Arguments in Jerusalem: The Light and the Shepherd

Scenes I–II · Read alongside: John 9:1–10:42

NOTICE The disciples ask, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (*Scene I, The Man Born Blind*). Later the Pharisees throw the same idea at the man as an insult. How does Jesus answer that way of thinking?

PONDER The man gets his sight and loses his place among his people on the same day, and even his parents will not stand up for him. Then Jesus hears what has happened and goes looking for him. What does that tell you about Jesus?

PONDER The hired hand runs from the wolf because the sheep are not his (*Scene II, The Good Shepherd*). What makes the difference between a hired hand and a shepherd, in a family or in a parish?

FOR YOU The *Reflection for Today* in *Scene I* names people who have been “put out”: the relative nobody invites anymore, the parishioner who stopped coming after a divorce. Who is that person near you, and how could you go looking for them?

A LINE TO CARRY

“One thing I do know: that though I was blind, now I see.”

John 9:25

CHAPTER V

Fateful Encounters: The Last Sign

Scenes I–V · Read alongside: John 11:1–12:8, Luke 19:1–10, and Mark 10:46–52

NOTICE John tells us that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and then that he stayed two days where he was (*Scene I, The Raising of Lazarus*). The book says John makes sure we read about the love before the waiting. How do you hold those two sentences together?

PONDER Jesus knew that in a few minutes Lazarus would be standing in the daylight, and still he wept. Why do you think he wept?

PONDER Caiaphas told the council it was better “that one man should die for the people” (*Scene II, The Plot to Kill Jesus*). What did Caiaphas mean by it, and what did God mean by the same words?

FOR YOU Zacchaeus climbed a tree in front of the whole town (*Scene III, Zacchaeus*). Bartimaeus shouted louder and threw off his cloak (*Scene IV, Blind Bartimaeus*). Mary of Bethany broke the jar of nard (*Scene V, The Anointing at Bethany*). What would it look like for you to stop being careful with Jesus?

A LINE TO CARRY

“I am the resurrection and the life.”

John 11:25



BOOK FOUR

Holy Week, the Final Confrontation

Jesus comes into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, and in one short week the same streets hear cheering and plotting. He weeps over the city, clears the Temple courts, answers every trap, and then kneels with a towel at his friends' feet and gives them his body and blood. In these pages he is the one who gives himself, holding nothing back, to the end. The book follows him into a garden at night, to a traitor's kiss and the moment his friends run.

CHAPTER I

The King Enters the City: Greeted with Palms, Then Crowned with Thorns

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: Luke 19:28–44 and Mark 11:1–14, 20–25

NOTICE 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 (*Scene I, A Donkey for the King*). What is Jesus saying without words?

PONDER In the middle of his own procession, with the crowd cheering, Jesus stops and weeps aloud over the city (*Scene III, Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem*). Why do you think his grief came in the very hour of his welcome?

PONDER Jesus reaches into a fig tree full of leaves and finds no fruit (*Scene IV, The Barren Fig Tree*). The book reads it as a sign pointing down the road to the Temple. In a life of faith, what are the leaves, and what is the fruit?

FOR YOU The *Reflection for Today* in *Scene III* offers a question to ask before you sleep: *Lord, where did you come by today, and did I know you?* Try it tonight. What comes to mind?

A LINE TO CARRY

"Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Matthew 21:9

CHAPTER II

The Last Teachings: When the House Was Swept Clean

Scenes I–VII · Read alongside: Mark 11:15–12:44, Matthew 21:12–17, Matthew 23, John 8:1–11, and Matthew 25

NOTICE After Jesus clears the tables from the Court of the Gentiles, “the lame and the blind came to him in the temple, and he healed them” (*Scene I, The Cleansing of the Temple*). Whom was that courtyard meant for, and who could finally come in once the tables were gone?

PONDER 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 (*Scene IV, The Woman Caught in Adultery*). Why do you think he did that before he said a word?

PONDER Jesus watches a widow let two tiny coins slide into the offering chest, and he calls his friends over to see (*Scene VI, The Widow's Mite*). The book says she quietly did what he was about to do. What does it mean to give “all that she had to live on”?

FOR YOU Most exams are kept secret, the book says. 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 (*Scene VII, On the Mount of Olives*). Which of these is closest to your own door this week?

A LINE TO CARRY

"Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From now on, sin no more."

John 8:11

CHAPTER III

The Last Supper: When Love Got Down on Its Knees

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: John 13–17 and Luke 22:14–34

NOTICE The jar, the basin, and the towel stood by the door, and nobody got up (*Scene I, The Washing of the Feet*). Earlier that evening the disciples had argued about which of them was the greatest. What does Jesus do with that silence?

PONDER Jesus knelt and washed the feet of Judas, and later handed him the dipped bread with no word to shame him in front of the others (*Scene I and Scene III, “One of You Will Betray Me”*). What do you make of that love?

PONDER Peter says, “I will lay down my life for you.” Jesus tells him he will deny him three times. Then he speaks his name twice, “Simon, Simon,” and adds, “I prayed for you, that your faith wouldn’t fail” (*Scene III*). Why do you think Jesus told him both things?

FOR YOU “On the night before he died, you were in his prayer,” says *Scene IV, The Farewell Discourse*. The *Reflection for Today* there suggests writing the name of someone who carried his word to you on a slip of paper and keeping it in your missal. Whose name would you write?

A LINE TO CARRY

“No longer do I call you servants... But I have called you friends.”

John 15:15

CHAPTER IV

The Garden of Olives and the Betrayal: Love's Longest Night

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: Mark 14:32–52 and Luke 22:39–53

NOTICE The chapter opening explains that Gethsemane means “the place of the oil press,” where olives were crushed under heavy stones. How does that name fit what happens there that night?

PONDER Jesus tells his three closest friends, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch” (*Scene I, The Agony in the Garden*). Why do you think the Son of God wanted company on that night?

PONDER With the soldiers waiting behind Judas, Jesus calls him “Friend” (*Scene III, The Kiss of Judas*). With his own hands about to be tied, he heals the ear of the high priest’s servant (*Scene IV, The Arrest of Jesus*). What do these two moments tell you about him?

FOR YOU Jesus finds his friends asleep and asks Peter, “Couldn’t you watch one hour?” (*Scene II*). This month, when could you give him one hour on purpose, in an open church or at your kitchen table?

A LINE TO CARRY

“Not my will, but yours, be done.”

Luke 22:42



BOOK FIVE

The Cross, the Glory of Love

Book Five runs from midnight at the house of Annas to a sealed tomb on Holy Saturday. Jesus is struck and mocked, shown to the crowd in a purple cloak while Pilate says, “Behold, the man!”, nailed to a cross between two others, and laid in a garden tomb by two men who had once been afraid. Here he is the one who saves, who cries out from the cross: “It is finished!” The book stops at the stone, in the silence before Easter.

CHAPTER I

The Trials: Judgment Turned Upside Down

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: Matthew 26:57–68, Luke 22:54–23:25, and John 18:12–40

NOTICE Jesus is silent before the false witnesses, and he gives Herod not a single word. Yet he answers Caiaphas under oath, and he speaks to Pilate about the truth (*Scene I, Jesus Before the Sanhedrin* and *Scene III, Jesus Before Pilate*). When does he speak, and when does he keep silent?

PONDER After the rooster crows, “The Lord turned and looked at Peter” (*Scene II, Peter’s Denial*). 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?

PONDER Pilate asks, “What is truth?” and walks out without waiting for an answer (*Scene III*). Why do you think he left the room?

FOR YOU The prayer at the end of *Scene IV, Barabbas* begins, “Lord Jesus, I am Barabbas.” The book calls Barabbas walking free while Jesus takes his place “the Gospel in one picture.” What is it like to read the story from Barabbas’s side?

A LINE TO CARRY

“For this reason I have been born, and for this reason I have come into the world, that I should testify to the truth.”

John 18:37

CHAPTER II

The Way of Sorrows: The Procession of a Rejected King

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: John 19:1–24 and Luke 23:26–31

PONDER The book takes its name from Pilate’s words in *Scene I, The Crowning with Thorns*: “Behold, the man!” What did Pilate mean by those words, and what have Christians heard in them ever since?

PONDER Simon of Cyrene was seized on the road and made to carry the beam behind Jesus. He had not chosen it, and he was the first to do it (*Scene III, Simon of Cyrene and Veronica*). 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?

PONDER Veronica’s story comes to us from tradition. The *Reflection for Today* says she could not pull out a single thorn; she only came close and wiped his face. Why do you think the Church has kept her story with love for so many centuries?

FOR YOU Think of one face you know that is worn out with pain. How could you come close to that person this week, knowing you cannot fix it?

A LINE TO CARRY

“Daughters of Jerusalem, don’t weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”

Luke 23:28

CHAPTER III

“It Is Finished!” Glory on Calvary

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: Luke 23:32–49, Mark 15:33–39, and John 19:25–30

NOTICE People on the road shout, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!” (*Scene I, The Crucifixion*). You first heard “If you are the Son of God” in the desert, in Book One. Why didn’t he come down?

PONDER 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?

PONDER In every other prayer the Gospels record, Jesus calls God *Father*. Only in the cry from Psalm 22 does he say “my God” (*Scene III, “My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”*). The book says the cry was real, and it was also a prayer. What does that mean for your own nights when God feels far away?

FOR YOU From the cross, Jesus gave his mother to John, and John took her into his own home (*Scene II, Mary at the Foot of the Cross*). The *Reflection for Today* suggests a decade of the Rosary at your kitchen table. When could you begin?

A LINE TO CARRY

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!”

Luke 23:46

CHAPTER IV

The Tomb and the Silence of the Sabbath: A Grain of Wheat Asleep

Scenes I–IV · Read alongside: John 19:31–42 and Matthew 27:57–66

NOTICE Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had believed in Jesus quietly for a long time. On Friday afternoon they come out into the open (*Scene II, The Burial of Jesus*). What did it cost them?

PONDER The book sets Nicodemus's hundred Roman pounds of spices beside Mary of Bethany's jar of nard. Why do you think love so often looks like waste to people who play it safe?

PONDER On Holy Saturday the tabernacle stands open and empty, and the Church does not hurry to Easter (*Scene III, Holy Saturday*). Why might it be good to stay a while in that silence?

FOR YOU The chief priests sealed the stone and posted a guard (*Scene IV, The Guard at the Tomb*). The book says that 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.

A LINE TO CARRY

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

John 12:24

For the Week After You Finish

The book leaves you at the sealed stone on purpose. Many of us know that Saturday well. But the story did not end there, and you already know how it goes on. For the week after you close the book, read one Easter Gospel each day. Each one picks up a thread you have followed all the way from Galilee.

DAY	READ	A THREAD FROM THE BOOK
1	John 20:1-18	Peter and John run to the tomb and find the linen cloths lying there, the very scene the book points to at the grave of Lazarus. Then Mary Magdalene hears her name.
2	Matthew 28:1-15	The guards the chief priests posted at the sealed stone become witnesses, against their will, that something happened there. His enemies had posted their own witnesses at the door.
3	Luke 24:13-35	Two disciples on the road recognize him in the breaking of the bread: taken, blessed, broken, given.
4	John 20:19-31	He breathes on his friends and gives them the power to forgive sins, the authority you saw at work over the man lowered through the roof. Thomas, who once said “Let’s also go, that we may die with him,” meets the risen Lord.
5	John 21:1-14	Back on the lake where it began, the fishermen haul in a net, and breakfast is waiting on a charcoal fire.
6	John 21:15-19	Beside that charcoal fire, Peter, who warmed his hands at another one on the night he denied Jesus three times, is asked three times, “Do you love me?”
7	Matthew 28:16-20	The Eleven are sent to all the nations. Remember the Canaanite mother and her crumbs, and the seven baskets in Gentile country in Book Two. He promises to be with them always.

If your group has met through Lent, think about meeting once more in the Easter season, just to read these together and give thanks.

A Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus,
you grew up in a small town and worked with your hands.
You stood in line with sinners at the river,
and you were hungry in the desert.
You touched the people no one would touch,
and you ate with the ones no one would eat with.
You wept for your friend and for your city.
You knelt at your friends' feet,
and you gave us your body and blood.
You were afraid in the garden, and you said yes.
You forgave the men who nailed you to the cross,
and you gave your mother to us.

I have walked with you from Nazareth to the tomb.
Stay with me now on the ordinary roads,
at my table and at my work,
on the good days and the hard ones.
When I am the one on the mat, carry me.
When I am the one who denied you, look at me again.
When I stand at a sealed stone, teach me to wait for morning.

Behold, the man.
Let me never stop looking at you.
Amen.

A Small Request

If *Ecce Homo* helped you pray, or helped you see Jesus a little more clearly, would you think about leaving a short, honest review? A sentence or two is enough. Reviews are how other readers find a book like this one, and your words may be what helps someone else pick it up during Lent, or on a hard night when they need it.

- Review on Amazon: [amazon.com/review/create-review?asin=BoHLWXD9MH](https://www.amazon.com/review/create-review?asin=BoHLWXD9MH)
- Review on Goodreads: [goodreads.com/book/show/260279746](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/260279746)

To learn more about the book and its author, visit hoangbaongoc.com.

And if a particular scene stayed with you, share it with a friend. That is how the Good News has always traveled: one person telling another, “Come and see.”

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

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