

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 1 · God Has Spoken by a Son · Hebrews 1:1-2:4

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

God's final word is a Person. For centuries God spoke in fragments through the prophets; in these last days he has spoken by a Son: not another message, but himself. Revelation is complete in Christ; the Church expects no further public revelation, only ever-deeper understanding of the Word already given.

The sevenfold portrait. Heir, creator, radiance of God's glory, exact imprint of his nature, upholder of the universe, purifier of sins, seated at the right hand. As radiance is to light, the Son is to the Father: distinct, inseparable, equally eternal.

Israel's hymnal already sang it. In Psalm 45, God addresses someone as God and anoints him; in Psalm 102, the hymn to the unchanging Creator belongs, Hebrews says, to the Son. The old books preach him.

Hebrews is a homily. It calls itself a “word of exhortation,” the ancient name for a synagogue sermon: likely the earliest complete Christian homily we possess. Its human author is unknown (“God knows,” said Origen); its divine author is not.

The first danger is drift. Not rebellion: neglect. A boat slipping its moorings. “We must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away” (2:1). Attention is the anchor line.

Voices of the Church

St. Clement of Rome *Letter to the Corinthians*

Within a generation of this sermon, the bishop of Rome was already quoting its opening: Christ the radiance of God's majesty, greater than the angels. An early witness to the authority this sermon already carried in the church at Rome.

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Hebrews*

The sermon heaps up the glories of the Son at its threshold to lift the drooping spirits of a persecuted people: souls tempted to look back are healed by being made to look up.

St. John of the Cross *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*

In giving us his Son, his only Word, God has said everything to us at once in this sole Word, and he has no more to say. The Catechism itself quotes these lines to expound Hebrews 1:1-2 (CCC 65).

Live It This Week

1. Begin each morning with one sentence: “Father, today, speak to me in your Son.” Then give him thirty silent seconds to do it.
2. Re-tie the anchor line you named tonight: restore your one neglected practice this week, and tell someone in the group so it is real.
3. Complete the My Guess box below, fold this section over, and seal it. No peeking, no revising. We open them together later in the study.

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 1:1-2 (RSV2CE)

“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.”

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 2:5–18, and count: how many times does the passage insist that Jesus shared our flesh, our blood, our sufferings, our death? Bring the number.

Catechism Connections

CCC 65–66 (revelation complete in the Son) · CCC 102 (one Word in all the words) · CCC 241 (radiance and imprint: consubstantial) · CCC 331–332 (the angels, in service of the heirs of salvation)

MY GUESS · SEALED UNTIL LATER IN THE STUDY

This sermon will circle for three chapters around a man named Melchizedek, who appears in exactly three verses of Genesis and one verse of a psalm: a priest-king who walks on stage two thousand years before Christ, and walks off four sentences later. Here is your prediction to make and seal: who was he, and why would he matter more to Jesus' story than Aaron and all the priests of Israel?

Write your guess, fold this corner over, and seal it. It will be opened, unrevised, when the study tells us to.

My guess: _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 2 · Made Like His Brethren · Hebrews 2:5–18

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

Psalm 8 came true in one man first. Humanity's coronation psalm looks like a broken promise, “but we see Jesus”: made for a little while lower than the angels, crowned through the suffering of death, tasting death for every one.

Suffering vested him, not fixed him. The pioneer (archēgos, trailblazer) was “made perfect through suffering”: consecration language, not repair. He cut the path from inside our condition.

The crucified one is the cantor. Hebrews 2:12 puts Psalm 22:22 in his mouth: the psalm prayed from the cross turns to praise “in the midst of the congregation”. He leads your parish's worship from inside it.

Death's leverage is broken. He took flesh and blood in order to die, and through death destroyed the one who holds death's power, releasing those enslaved by lifelong fear of it (2:14–15).

He is not ashamed of us. With every fact in hand, he calls the people in our study his brethren (2:11). And the sermon dropped its first mention of its favorite title: a merciful and faithful high priest. We wrote it down.

Voices of the Church

St. Athanasius *On the Incarnation*

The Son of God became man so that we might become god, sharing by grace what he is by nature; by his death, death itself was slain from inside. The Catechism quotes his exchange formula at CCC 460.

St. Gregory Nazianzen *Letter 101*

What has not been assumed has not been healed: if the Son took only part of our condition, only that part is saved. The totality of the assumption is the totality of the cure.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies*

The Word of God became what we are, that he might bring us to be what he himself is (Book 5, Preface); elsewhere in the same work (Book 2) he shows Christ passing through every stage of human life and gathering it up healed.

Live It This Week

1. Pray Psalm 22 once this week, whole: the descent and the turn, remembering who prays it with you.
2. Once this week, bring a real temptation to him mid-struggle, with 2:18 in hand: you have suffered this; help me now.
3. Read Hebrews 3:1–4:13 before next session, and note which Old Testament story dominates it. If you pray any part of the Liturgy of the Hours, keep your ears open this week.

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 2:18 (RSV2CE)

“For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.”

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 3:1–4:13: a warning built on one wilderness story, and a psalm you may already know by heart.

Catechism Connections

CCC 456–460 (why the Word became flesh) · CCC 635 (death's tyrant disarmed) · CCC 609 (his free self-offering) · CCC 2602 (he prays for all he assumed)

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 3 · Today, If You Hear His Voice · Hebrews 3:1–4:13

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

Faithful over the house, and we are the house. Moses was faithful in God's house as a servant; Christ over it as Son and builder: “and we are his house, if we hold fast our confidence” (3:6). The whole passage lives in that if.

Rescued people refused the promise. At Kadesh (Numbers 14), the sea-crossed, manna-fed generation voted for Egypt at the border, and fell in the wilderness: not from weakness, but unbelief hardened one today at a time.

The Church warns herself every morning. Psalm 95, the psalm this passage expounds, is the Church's normal Invitatory: the psalm that ordinarily opens the Liturgy of the Hours each day. St. Benedict set it near the start of his Rule's Prologue. Vigilance is a morning liturgy.

The rest is still open. David, safe in Canaan, still said “today”: so Canaan was never the final rest. A sabbath rest (sabbatismos) remains for the people of God: entered by faith now, foretasted every Lord's Day, consummated in heaven.

The word is the scalpel. Hearts harden by self-deceit; the living and active word, sharper than any two-edged sword, reaches the hiding places (4:12–13), and it cuts the reader first.

Voices of the Church

St. Benedict *The Rule, Prologue*

Near the start of his Rule's Prologue, the father of Western monasticism sounds this session's verse, bidding us hear what the divine voice cries daily: today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts. The verse is a daily bell, not an emergency alarm.

St. Augustine *Confessions*

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. The rest was never Canaan, or Carthage, or achievement; it was God: the rest that has no evening.

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Hebrews*

The today of the psalm is always now, and the devil's favorite word is tomorrow. Hearts are rarely lost in a day, but often in a series of tomorrows: hence, exhort one another daily.

Live It This Week

1. Pray Psalm 95, whole, every morning this week: the Church's normal Invitatory, praise and warning in one breath.
2. Take the thing you have been telling God “tomorrow” about, and do it, or begin it, before we meet again.
3. Read Hebrews 4:14–5:10 before next session, and watch for two things: a sentence that begins “we have,” and a name you have not heard since Genesis. Do not unseal anything.

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 4:12 (RSV2CE)

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 4:14–5:10: the throne of grace, and a name surfaces.

Catechism Connections

CCC 1165 (the liturgy's today) · CCC 2659–2660 (prayer in the present moment) · CCC 131 (the force of the word) · CCC 1720 (entering God's rest)

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 4 · The Throne of Grace · Hebrews 4:14–5:10

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

Sympathy without sin, on a throne of grace. Tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sinning: he knows temptation's full weight because he never dropped it. Therefore: draw near with confidence (parrhēsia, bold and frank speech; the Catechism hears in it the confidence of a child at home, CCC 2778), for mercy and timely help.

A priest has a job description. From 5:1–4: chosen from among men; appointed to act for them before God; offering gifts and sacrifices for sins; dealing gently with the ignorant and wayward; and never self-appointed: called by God, as Aaron was.

The psalm contains an ordination. Psalm 110, read whole at last: the King enthroned in verse 1 is sworn a priest for ever in verse 4: two offices Israel's law kept firmly apart, from an order older than Levi, under a name from Genesis. The mystery stays sealed a little longer.

Gethsemane was already liturgy. In the days of his flesh he offered up prayers with loud cries and tears: the garden's agony described as a priestly offering, begun in the olive press and consummated on Calvary, and he was heard: through death, in resurrection.

Confession is the throne's embassy. The risen Christ sent men to forgive in his name (John 20:21–23); the confessor is the sacrament of the High Priest's gentleness: 4:16 with an address and office hours.

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom *On the Priesthood*

To men God has given a power he gave neither to angels nor archangels: what priests do below, God ratifies above. The wonder is that the great High Priest shares his work with clay.

St. John Vianney *Catechetical Instructions*

The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus: when you see a priest, think of our Lord. The Catechism itself hands him the last word on the office (CCC 1589).

St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*

On the cross, the offerer and the offered are one: Christ is both priest and victim, which is why his priesthood, sworn for ever, remains forever active. It did not retire at the Ascension; it reigns.

Live It This Week

1. Pray Hebrews 4:16 each morning as your approach: I draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, bringing the day's actual need, in time of need.
2. Go to confession this week if you can, or make the plan concrete: parish, day, time. Bring 5:2 in with you.
3. Read Hebrews 5:11–6:20 before next session, all the way to the last verse. Fair warning: the preacher will scold us, and then say something that has frightened readers for two thousand years. Read it anyway.

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 4:16 (RSV2CE)

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 5:11–6:20: the rebuke, the warning, and the anchor.

Catechism Connections

CCC 2778 (the boldness of children) · CCC 1465 (the priest, sign of the Father's mercy) · CCC 1589 (Vianney on priesthood) · CCC 612 (the agony in the garden)

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 5 · An Anchor of the Soul · Hebrews 5:11–6:20

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

Dullness is regression, and the cure is solid food. By now you ought to be teachers: the congregation had slid back to milk. The preacher's growth strategy is ambition: let us go on to maturity: you grow by being fed past your comfort.

The warning is real, and precisely aimed. The Church has long read Hebrews 6:4-6 as describing fully initiated Christians (many Fathers heard Baptism, Eucharist, and the gift of the Spirit in its phrases) and the sin of apostasy: the deliberate, persisting repudiation of Christ. On that reading, the impossibility lives in the persisting: repentance and ongoing contempt cannot share a heart.

The Church read this text and kept absolving. When real apostates returned after the persecutions, the Church condemned the rigorists who barred the door, and restored the penitent through real penance. As Chrysostom read it, the impossible thing is a second baptism, not repentance.

Two impossibilities, and the second outweighs the first. It is impossible to restore the heart that will not turn: and “it is impossible that God should prove false” (6:18). God swore by himself, for the heirs of the promise: us.

Our anchor holds by going in. Not down to the seabed but in behind the veil, into the innermost presence of God, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner: the advance runner who goes in so the rest can follow.

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Hebrews*

Is repentance then excluded? By no means: what is impossible is to be renewed again through baptism: the bath is once for all, but penance remains open all our days.

St. Ambrose of Milan *Concerning Repentance*

Written against those who wielded Hebrews 6 to bar the fallen forever: Christ gave his Church the keys, and those who deny pardon to the repentant make God's mercy smaller than his justice.

St. Cyprian of Carthage *On the Lapsed*

After the Decian persecution, Cyprian walked the narrow road: full seriousness about the fall, and full restoration through real penance. The Church read this chapter with the apostates weeping at her doors, and she absolved them.

Live It This Week

1. Pray for one person you or others have quietly written off as too far gone, daily, by name, with CCC 982 open beside you.
2. Eat solid food: take the hardest question this study has raised for you and spend twenty minutes with it: Catechism, a trusted book, or a note to your leader.
3. Read Hebrews 7 before next session, with Genesis 14:17–20 alongside, and refresh your memory of what you sealed in Session 1. Do not revise it.

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 6:19 (RSV2CE)

“We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain.”

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 7, and Genesis 14:17–20. Bring your memory of your sealed guess.

Catechism Connections

CCC 982 (no one beyond forgiveness) · CCC 1446 (the second plank) · CCC 1819 (Abraham's hope, ours) · CCC 2091–2092 (despair and presumption, the two ditches)

NEXT WEEK: THE SEAL COMES OFF

Five weeks ago you wrote a guess and sealed it. Next session, we open Genesis, we open the psalm, and we open your guesses: all in the same night. Come hungry, and keep the conspiracy one more week: if you read ahead and figure it out, guard the secret for the room.

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 6 · After the Order of Melchizedek · Hebrews 7

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

Three verses held it all. Genesis 14:17-20: Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High before Aaron existed: and he brought out bread and wine, blessed Abraham, and received a tenth of everything. Hebrews 7:1-2 unpacks the names: king of righteousness by translation, and king of Salem, that is, king of peace.

Scripture's silence was the portrait. No father, no mother, no genealogy, no death on the page: a priesthood drawn without the two documents (birth and death certificates) that governed every Levitical priest: resembling the Son of God, a priest for ever.

A priest by indestructible life. Jesus, from Judah, disqualified from every altar in Israel, is priest “by the power of an indestructible life” (7:16): his ordination certificate is the empty tomb: and by the only ordination oath in Scripture (Psalm 110:4).

He always lives to make intercession. The offering was once for all; the intercession presenting it never pauses (7:25). Right now, with wounds for credentials, he is presenting you to the Father by name.

The Church has said his name at the altar all along. The Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I) asks the Father to accept our offering as he accepted “the offering of your high priest Melchizedek”: sixteen centuries of Genesis 14 at the altar, and now you will always hear it.

Voices of the Church

St. Cyprian of Carthage *Letter 63*

Melchizedek prefigured the mystery of the sacrifice of the Lord: bread and wine offered by a priest of God Most High, fulfilled when Christ offered the very thing Melchizedek had offered, his own body and blood.

St. Ambrose of Milan *On the Sacraments*

The sacraments Christians receive are older in figure than the synagogue's: the bread and wine came forth from Salem's priest-king while Abraham still wandered.

St. Thomas Aquinas *Commentary on Hebrews*

Only Christ is the true priest; the others are his ministers: every ordained priest acts in his person, the one untransferable priesthood made present in every age (CCC 1545; 1548).

Live It This Week

1. Pray Hebrews 7:25 nightly, inserting your own name: he always lives to make intercession for ____.
2. Find a Mass this week using Eucharistic Prayer I and listen for the name: or read the Roman Canon slowly once, as prayer.
3. Read Hebrews 8 before next session. It contains the longest Old Testament quotation in the entire New Testament: find it, and note what God promises to do with the law, with knowledge of himself, and with sins.

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 7:25 (RSV2CE)

“Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 8: the better covenant, and the longest quotation.

Catechism Connections

CCC 1333 (Melchizedek's bread and wine) · CCC 1544-1545 (his priesthood, our ministers) · CCC 1548 (the priest acts in the person of Christ) · CCC 519 (he intercedes now)

YOUR GUESS, RETURNED

The slip stapled or tucked into this sheet is the guess you sealed in Session 1 and opened tonight. Keep it. Whatever it says, it is proof that Scripture was teaching you before it explained anything: and a souvenir of the night the bread and wine came out of Genesis.

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 7 · A Better Covenant · Hebrews 8

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

The sermon announced its own point. “We have such a high priest”: seated at the right hand of the Majesty, and a minister (leitourgos, from the same Greek root as liturgy) in the true tent. Heaven's throne room is a sanctuary in use: when you pray, you join a service already in progress.

The tabernacle was heaven's scale model. Moses copied a pattern shown him on the mountain (Exodus 25:40): the old priests served a copy and shadow. The Mass is not a better copy: it is participation in the original, now live (CCC 1090).

God announced the new covenant at the old one's funeral. Jeremiah 31, God's promise amid the catastrophe that destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BC: a new covenant, not like the old: because the fault was in the partners' hearts, the new one would be installed in hearts.

Four promises, one engine. The law within; I their God, they my people; all shall know me, least to greatest; and the one the old machinery could never enact: I will remember their sins no more.

Jesus claimed the oracle over a cup. “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20): Jeremiah's phrase, enacted at the Supper, prayed at every consecration. The Eucharist is Jeremiah 31 with an altar.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine *Questions on the Heptateuch*

The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old is unveiled in the New: the Church's rule for reading both covenants as one plan (CCC 129).

St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*

The New Law is chiefly the grace of the Holy Spirit itself, given to believers: the law written on hearts is a Person poured in, and the commandments become the shape love naturally takes (CCC 1965–1966).

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Hebrews*

The priest stands below, but the sacrifice is of things in the heavens: the eye sees the copy's furniture; faith sees the original in use.

Live It This Week

1. At Mass this week, listen for Jeremiah at the consecration: the new and eternal covenant: and answer interiorly with one line of the oracle: write it on my heart.
2. Practice the amnesty: choose one recorded grievance, yours against another or against yourself, and formally close the file, once, out loud, before God.
3. Read Hebrews 9 before next session, twice if you can. Bring every question you have ever carried, or been asked, about the Mass and the words once for all. Nothing is off the table.

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 8:1 (RSV2CE)

“Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.”

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 9, and bring your hardest questions about the Mass and “once for all.”

Catechism Connections

CCC 1090 (the earthly liturgy joins the heavenly) · CCC 1965–1966 (the New Law is grace) · CCC 121–123, 129 (the Old Covenant never revoked as God's word) · CCC 1365 (the blood of the covenant)

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 8 · Once For All · Hebrews 9

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

The old liturgy was a magnificent locked door. Priests daily in the outer room; the high priest alone, once a year, never without blood, into the inner: the floor plan preached that the way in was not yet open, and no bull's blood could reach the conscience.

Every axis of Yom Kippur inverted. His own blood, not another's; once for all, not annually; into heaven itself, not the copy; eternal redemption; and the conscience purified from dead works to serve the living God.

One sacrifice, three tenses. Offered once for all to put away sin (9:26); appearing now in the presence of God on our behalf (9:24); appearing a second time to save those who eagerly wait (9:28). Offered once, presented always, coming again.

Remembrance makes present. The Passover was a zikkaron, a memorial feast (Exodus 12:14); Jewish tradition drew out its logic: in every generation each one regards himself as having come out of Egypt, and the Church defines biblical memorial the same way (CCC 1363). "Do this in remembrance of me" uses that grammar: biblical memorial is participation, not nostalgia.

The Mass is the one sacrifice, made present. Trent's own words: the same victim, the same priest, the manner of offering alone differing. Not repetition: presence (CCC 1366–1367). The cross is too alive to stay in the past.

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Hebrews*

Do we not offer every day? We do, but as a memorial of his death; and this sacrifice is one, not many: we do not offer another sacrifice, but always the same: or rather, we perform a memorial of a sacrifice.

The Council of Trent *Session 22*

The victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of priests who then offered himself on the cross, the manner of offering alone being different. The fruits of that bloody oblation are received most plentifully through this unbloody one; so far is it from derogating in any way from that sacrifice.

St. Gregory the Great *Dialogues, Book 4*

Who of the faithful can doubt that at the very hour of the sacrifice, at the priest's voice, the heavens

are opened, and choirs of angels are present in that mystery of Jesus Christ; the lowest things are joined with the highest, earth is united to heaven, and the visible and the invisible become one.

Live It This Week

1. Memorize the three tenses as one sentence: offered once, presented always, appearing again: and pray it at the elevation this Sunday.
2. Reach out to one person who keeps their distance from the Church over this exact objection: not to win, but to reopen: with charity as the headline.
3. **Write down the oldest unanswered question you have carried through this study, so it is ready to bring next session.**

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 9:24 (RSV2CE)

“For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 10:1–25, watching the postures: who stands, who sits, and what each posture means.
Session 1 veterans: bring your oldest question.

Catechism Connections

CCC 1085 (Christ's Paschal mystery transcends all times) · CCC 1363–1364 (memorial, defined) · CCC 1366–1367 (one victim, made present) · CCC 613–614 (the definitive sacrifice)

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 9 · Full Assurance · Hebrews 10

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

Repetition confesses insufficiency. If the annual sacrifices had worked, they would have ceased: instead they were a reminder of sin year after year: the file re-read because it could never be closed.

What God wanted on the altar was a will. Psalm 40, in the Son's mouth: Hebrews quotes the Greek Old Testament, where the psalm's opened ear has become a whole self, not sacrifices, but "a body hast thou prepared for me... Lo, I have come to do thy will" (10:5-7): and by that will we have been sanctified, once for all.

The seated priest: our oldest question, answered. Every priest stands daily (there were no chairs in the tabernacle): standing is the posture of unfinished business. He offered a single sacrifice and sat down: the chair is the Gospel stated in furniture.

Both tenses, one gift. "By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (10:14). The Greek participle is present tense: those who are being sanctified. The verdict complete, the renovation ongoing: assurance without presumption, striving without fear.

The veil is a doorway, and the assembly is the charter. Confidence to enter by the new and living way through the curtain, his flesh: and the oldest bad habit in Christianity, skipping the assembly, gets the oldest prescription: encourage one another, all the more as the Day draws near (10:25).

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Hebrews*

Standing is the sign of ministry still in progress; sitting, of completed work. The priests stood because their sacrifices accomplished nothing final; the Christ, having offered one sacrifice, sat down. No one sits down with work left undone.

St. Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Ephesians*

Try to gather more frequently: when you assemble frequently, the powers of Satan are destroyed and his destructiveness undone by the concord of your faith. The assembly itself is the weapon.

St. Cyprian of Carthage *On the Unity of the Church*

He cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother.

For our study: the new and living way was opened for a people, and the people's habit of gathering is a lifeline.

Live It This Week

1. Pray 10:14 daily, both tenses, in the first person: by a single offering he has perfected me; and I am being sanctified. Then ask for the grace of perseverance, that I may remain among those he is sanctifying. Begin from the chair, not toward it.
2. Make one concrete act of stirring: invite, encourage, or accompany one drifted person toward the assembly, this week.
3. Read Hebrews 11 before next session, the whole gallery, and underline the verb that follows every “by faith.” Bring your count, and your favorite portrait.

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 10:23 (RSV2CE)

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 11, underlining the verb after every “by faith.”

Catechism Connections

CCC 2010 (sanctification's grammar) · CCC 2178 (the assembly, from apostolic times) · CCC 1817 (hope, defined by 10:23) · CCC 982 (no offense the Church cannot forgive, for the one who turns from sin)

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 10 · By Faith · Hebrews 11

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

Faith is the ground under hope. The assurance (hypostasis, substance) of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen: the faculty for exactly the two categories the senses cannot audit: the future, and the invisible.

Every “by faith” wears a verb. Offered, built, obeyed, went out, chose, refused, crossed, welcomed: even the chapter's thinking is load-bearing, for by faith we understand (11:3) and Abraham considered that God was able (11:19). Faith here is more than a private feeling or a bare list of correct opinions: it assents to what God has revealed and then acts on it. In this chapter faith is trust with its boots on: the verbs are faith's own body.

Abraham did resurrection math on Moriah. Promise and command could not both stand unless God could raise the dead: so he considered that God was able (11:19), and Isaac came down the mountain as a parable of Easter: on the hill country where the temple would one day stand.

Faith justifies, and justifying faith works. The Bible's only “faith alone” says not by it (James 2:24): we are justified by grace, through living faith working in love: the works are not faith's admission fee but faith's pulse.

The dark wing hangs under the same caption. Some by faith escaped the sword; some by faith died on it: of whom the world was not worthy. And none of them received the promise: God foresaw something better, “that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (11:40).

Voices of the Church

St. Clement of Rome *Letter to the Corinthians*

In one first-century letter: we are justified by faith, through which Almighty God has justified all from the beginning: and we must be justified by deeds, not words. Both truths, one saint, no contradiction.

St. Augustine *Sermon 169*

He who created you without you will not justify you without you. Grace does everything, and grace does not do it over your head: which is why the gallery's faith always has hands.

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Hebrews*

Faith gives substance to things hoped for: it makes the unseen stand solid before the soul. The heroes did sums with invisible integers: the reproach of Christ outweighing Egypt is only madness

if the reward is not real.

Live It This Week

1. Give your faith one costly verb this week: an obedience begun before the full itinerary arrives, Abraham-style, and tell someone in the group what it was.
2. Pray for the dark wing: the persecuted Church, by name where you can: those of whom the world is not worthy.
3. Read Hebrews 12 before next session. Bring your favorite saint's name with you: you will need it.

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 11:1 (RSV2CE)

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 12, and bring a favorite saint's name.

Catechism Connections

CCC 145–147 (Hebrews 11, the Catechism's own gallery) · CCC 1814–1815 (faith, alive or dead) · CCC 2008–2009 (merit as God's gift) · CCC 1821 (hope's grammar)

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 11 · The Cloud of Witnesses · Hebrews 12

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

The gallery is a stadium. We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses: the finished athletes ring the track: lay aside every weight (not all weights are sins), and run the race set before us, eyes fixed on Jesus, pioneer and perfecter.

Suffering, translated: paideia. The Lord disciplines him whom he loves: a Father's training of sons, not a judge's payback: and the sermon is honest: for the moment all discipline seems painful: later, the peaceful fruit of righteousness, for those trained by it.

You have come: perfect tense. Not Sinai's fire and dread, but Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem: innumerable angels in festal gathering, the assembly of the first-born, the spirits of just men made perfect, Jesus, and the sprinkled blood. The baptized already stand there in worship, and at every Mass the earthly liturgy really shares in that heavenly worship, above all at the Sanctus (CCC 1090).

The heroes are at the festival. Last week's "apart from us" resolved: the gallery's saints are the just made perfect, present, interceding, waiting for the family to fill in: the communion of saints as geography.

Two bloods, two words. Abel's blood cries from the ground for justice (Genesis 4:10); the sprinkled blood of Jesus speaks more graciously: innocent blood pleading pardon: Father, forgive them. The better word ends the case in mercy.

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Hebrews*

As a great crowd rouses the athlete, so the memory of the saints rouses the runner: the cloud shields and refreshes like shade at noonday. And strip like the athletes: no one runs well carrying luggage.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux *Sermon for All Saints*

Calling the saints to mind inflames us with longing: our desire is to share their company and joy, fellow citizens of the first-born enrolled in heaven. The saints await us; we should long for them.

St. Teresa of Ávila *The Bookmark*

Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; all things pass; God does not change; patience obtains all things; the one who has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.

Live It This Week

1. At Mass this week, at the Sanctus, consciously join the festal gathering: you are singing with the festal gathering of 12:22. Ask your saint's intercession by name on the way to Communion.
2. Reinterpret one current suffering as paideia: bring it to the Father once this week, out loud, as training rather than verdict, and ask what it is forming.
3. Read Hebrews 13 before the final session. Watch for one last “we have”: the strangest one yet: and count any final “better.”

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 12:1B-2A (RSV2CE)

“Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 13. Final session: the inventory is read, the board is totaled, and the study is sent.

Catechism Connections

CCC 954–957 (the three states of the one Church) · CCC 2683 (the witnesses' care for us) · CCC 1030–1031 (the final purification) · CCC 1090 (the Sanctus joins the festal city)

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Take-Home · Session 12 · We Have an Altar · Hebrews 13

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

The summit cashes out at a front door. Brotherly love, hospitality (some have entertained angels unawares: Abraham at Mamre), prisoners remembered as if bound with them, marriage honored, and contentment funded by a promise: I will never fail you nor forsake you.

The hinge of everything. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever” (13:8): the Son through whom the ages were made, the intercessor appearing now, the priest for ever by oath. Leaders die and fashions mutate; the Priest does not.

The sin offering that became a meal. Yom Kippur’s sin offerings, the bull and the goat whose blood entered the sanctuary, were burned outside the camp, never eaten (Leviticus 16:27). Jesus suffered outside the gate, fulfilling the pattern: and gave his sacrifice as food, shattering it. We have an altar: the altar you eat from (CCC 1182).

Sacrifice did not end: atonement-by-us did. The road’s liturgy for the baptized priesthood: the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name: and doing good and sharing what you have: such sacrifices please God (13:15–16).

The inventory of a pilgrim people. A great high priest: an anchor behind the veil: a seated priest in the true tent: confidence to enter: a great priest over the house: an altar: and here, no lasting city. Everything for worship and pilgrimage: nothing for settling.

Voices of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Philadelphians*

Be careful to observe one Eucharist: one flesh of our Lord, one cup, one altar, as there is one bishop. Within a generation of this sermon, the Church’s altar was a table she gathered at, and its oneness guarded her unity.

St. Augustine *The City of God*

Two cities, built by two loves: and the Christian a pilgrim of the city which is to come, using the earthly city’s peace without settling for it. Rome fell while he wrote, and the pilgrim people lost nothing truly theirs.

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Hebrews*

The sacrifice of praise needs no knife, no fire, no altar of stone: only a grateful heart and lips that confess: the one sacrifice a poor man can offer as magnificently as an emperor.

Live It This Week

1. Offer the two road sacrifices daily: praise out loud at least once a day, and one concrete planned act of doing good and sharing.
2. At Mass this Sunday, stand at 13:10 knowingly: the altar you have, the sin offering you eat: and bring the whole inventory to the rail.
3. Keep the multiplication commitment made tonight: leader, co-leader, study, start month: and pray Hebrews 13:20–21 daily for the ones who said yes.

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 13:8 (RSV2CE)

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.”

Before Next Session

There is no next reading: there is a next study, and some of you are leading it. Hebrews illuminated the sacrifice and the priesthood at the heart of the Mass; Revelation shows that worship from heaven's side of the veil.

Catechism Connections

CCC 1182 (the altar: cross and table) · CCC 1368 (the faithful's offerings united to Christ's) · CCC 2544–2547 (poverty of heart) · CCC 1544 (the study's first paragraph, now yours to teach)

THE STUDY'S LAST WORD · HEBREWS 13:20–21

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Twelve weeks, one Priest, and an altar you will stand at this Sunday. Go outside the camp: and take someone with you.