

A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

Priesthood in the New Covenant

A Twelve-Session Inductive Bible Study

From the Garden of Eden to the Liturgy of Heaven

"and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Exodus 19:6 (RSV2CE)

Catholic Armory

Using This Guide

A Kingdom of Priests is a twelve-session inductive study of priesthood across the whole of Scripture, built for young adults and parish groups, with sessions of 75 to 90 minutes. It follows a simple inductive arc: every session opens with questions that build trust, moves into guided discovery in the text itself, and ends by sending the group into the week with something concrete to live. All Scripture quotations follow the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (RSV2CE).

For Leaders

Each session has three parts. The Leader Preparation Guide gives you the session's aim, the background you need, three Voices of the Church, verified Catechism references, a leader-only Thread Watch, numbered goals, and a timed plan with pre-chosen cuts for shorter nights. The Discussion Guide is the script for the night: prayers, questions, shaded ANSWER boxes (marked "share after the discussion": let the group work before you reveal), live discovery moments in which the group finds the connecting passages themselves, and steelman chains that present the strongest objections at full strength before answering from the text. The Leader Reference Card lists every passage used, in order. Prepare with your own Bible open; the study's power is that the group discovers the connections on the page, so resist announcing destinations in advance.

For Participants

Participants need only a Bible and a pen. There is no participant workbook; after each session, distribute that session's two-page Take-Home sheet, which recaps what the group found, carries the session's Voices of the Church, the week's practices, the memory verse, and a short reading before the next session. Take-Home 1 includes a sealed guess that the study will resolve at the right moment; guard the seal.

A Note on Sources

Every patristic and magisterial citation in this study is either quoted from well-attested texts with their standard locations, or presented explicitly as a faithful summary of a saint's genuine teaching. Where the Church permits latitude, or where a text's interpretation is genuinely debated, the guide says so plainly. Honest hedges are part of this catalog's method: the claims are stronger honest than inflated.

Contents

Sessions

Session 1: Before There Were Priests	4
Session 2: A Kingdom Interrupted	13
Session 3: A Priest Forever	21
Session 4: A High Priest Able to Sympathize	29
Session 5: Once for All	38
Session 6: Do This	47
Session 7: Whose Sins You Forgive	56
Session 8: A Royal Priesthood	65
Session 9: One Mediator, Many Fathers	74
Session 10: The Laying On of Hands	83
Session 11: In the Person of Christ	92
Session 12: A Kingdom of Priests	101

Take-Home Sheets

Take-Home 1: Before There Were Priests	110
Take-Home 2: A Kingdom Interrupted	112
Take-Home 3: A Priest Forever	114
Take-Home 4: A High Priest Able to Sympathize	116
Take-Home 5: Once for All	118
Take-Home 6: Do This	120
Take-Home 7: Whose Sins You Forgive	122
Take-Home 8: A Royal Priesthood	124
Take-Home 9: One Mediator, Many Fathers	126
Take-Home 10: The Laying On of Hands	128
Take-Home 11: In the Person of Christ	130
Take-Home 12: A Kingdom of Priests	132

Session 1: Before There Were Priests

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers that priesthood does not begin at Sinai. It begins in a garden. Adam is placed in Eden with a job description that the Old Testament will later hand to sanctuary ministers; fathers and firstborn sons offer sacrifice for their households long before there is a Temple; and at Sinai, God names the destination of the whole story: "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6, RSV2CE). By the end of the night the group should feel a question forming that this study will spend twelve sessions answering: if Israel was meant to be a kingdom of priests, what happened, and what does Jesus do about it?

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that the whole People of God shares in the priestly office of Christ (CCC 784), that Israel was constituted by God as "a kingdom of priests" (CCC 1539), and that in the New Covenant this one priesthood of Christ is shared in two distinct ways: the common priesthood of all the baptized and the ministerial priesthood, which differ essentially and not only in degree (CCC 1546 to 1547). This session lays the Old Testament foundation for both. Nothing tonight pits the two against each other; the whole study will show that both flow from the one priesthood of Christ.

What You Need to Know

Priesthood is one of the most misunderstood words in the modern religious vocabulary, and most of our young adults inherit their picture of it from either movies or polemics. Strip the word down to its biblical bones and a priest is a mediator who offers sacrifice, blesses in God's name, and guards what is holy. Tonight the group will find each of those functions operating before the book of Exodus ever mentions a priestly tribe.

Start in the garden. Genesis 2:15 says God put the man in Eden "to till it and keep it." In Hebrew the two verbs are 'abad (to serve, to work) and shamar (to keep, to guard). Be honest with the group about what English hides: this exact verb pair reappears in Numbers 3:7 to 8, where it describes what the Levites do in the tabernacle. English translations render the pair differently in the two places ("till and keep" in Genesis, "perform duties" and "minister" language in Numbers), so the link is invisible in most Bibles, but it is right there in the Hebrew text, and anyone with an interlinear or a concordance can verify it. Many scholars, ancient and modern, have concluded from this and from Eden's other sanctuary features (God walking in its midst, the east-facing entrance later guarded by cherubim, gold and precious stone, the tree motif that reappears on the lampstand) that Genesis presents Eden as the first sanctuary and Adam as something like its first priest: placed in sacred space to serve and to guard it. Present this as the strong and widely held reading it is, not as defined dogma; the Church has not defined an exegesis of Genesis 2:15, and honesty about that strengthens rather than weakens the point.

Next, the fathers. Before Sinai, who offers sacrifice? Abel brings the firstlings of his flock (Genesis 4:4). Noah builds an altar and offers burnt offerings as he leads his household off the ark (Genesis 8:20; the household frame is the narrative's, an inference we name as such). Job rises early to offer burnt offerings for each of his children, "for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned" (Job 1:5). Abraham builds altars across the promised land (Genesis 12:7 to 8) and climbs Moriah with wood and fire (Genesis 22). Notice the pattern: no caste, no vestments, no temple, yet sacrifice is not a free-for-all either. It runs along the lines of the household:

Noah and Job offer as fathers for their families, and an ancient Jewish and Christian reading adds that the firstborn carried the family's worship (a tradition, not an explicit claim of these texts). Priesthood exists here in seed form, ordered to the family.

Then Sinai. In Exodus 19:5 to 6, before the Law is given, God announces Israel's vocation: "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The whole nation is called priestly: a people whose corporate life mediates God to the world. But the sentence begins with a condition, "if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant," and Exodus 32 is where the condition meets the golden calf. In the aftermath, the sons of Levi rally to Moses and are consecrated for the LORD's service (Exodus 32:26 to 29), and God later takes the tribe of Levi, in place of the first-born of Israel, for sanctuary service under Aaron and his sons, who alone hold the priesthood proper (Numbers 3:10 to 13). Two honesty notes to keep crisp: Levites serve, Aaronides are the priests; and the Aaronic priesthood itself was commanded before the calf narrative (Exodus 28 to 29). What follows is a venerable theological reading, which this study adopts while naming it as a reading: after the calf, Israel's priestly vocation is not revoked, but it is wounded and placed under guardianship. That tension, a priestly people served by a set-apart priesthood within it, is the engine of this entire study, and the group should leave tonight feeling it rather than having it resolved.

One more figure walks through tonight, and you must resist every urge to explain him. Genesis 14:18: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High." Read the verse, let it hang, and move on. The Take-Home sheet asks each participant to write a sealed guess about him. Do not preview where the study is going with it.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight is almost entirely roots, and that is by design: you cannot show what Christ fulfills until the group has touched what he inherits. The three root systems planted tonight are (1) the garden: sacred space served and guarded, which the study will follow to Christ the new Adam and to the sanctuary "not made with hands"; (2) the father and the firstborn: household priesthood, which the study will follow through Israel as God's "first-born son" (Exodus 4:22) to Christ the firstborn and, at the end, back down into every baptized household; and (3) the vocation of Exodus 19:6, whose exact words the group will meet again on the far side of the New Testament. When a New Testament author picks up one of these threads later in the study, the group will find the connection themselves with both passages open; that moment of discovery is the method.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Chrysostom

"The priesthood is exercised on earth, but ranks among heavenly institutions." For Chrysostom, the wonder of priesthood is precisely this vertical reach: a human being, standing on ordinary ground, handling holy things on behalf of others. Tonight the group watches that pattern appear before any official priesthood exists.

On the Priesthood, Book 3

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ephrem the Syrian

St. Ephrem, in his Hymns on Paradise, portrays Eden in the language of a sanctuary: a holy mountain ascending by degrees, with the glory of God at its height, and Adam placed within it as one set apart for communion with God. In substance, Ephrem reads the garden the way tonight's discovery does: as sacred space, with the man placed within it, set apart for communion with God. (This is a faithful summary of

Ephrem's imagery rather than a single quotation.)

Hymns on Paradise

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Leo the Great

St. Leo teaches, in substance, that all who are reborn in Christ share a royal and priestly dignity: the sign of the cross makes them a kingly people, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates them as priests. Leo is preaching to ordinary baptized Christians, not to clergy. Keep his voice in your pocket all study long; he will matter enormously when the group reaches 1 Peter 2 in Session 8.

Sermon 4 (summary of Leo's teaching)

Catechism Connection

- CCC 784: on entering the People of God through faith and Baptism, one shares in this people's priestly vocation.
- CCC 1539: the chosen people was constituted by God as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," with Exodus 19:6 cited in the paragraph itself.
- CCC 1546 to 1547: the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood both participate in the one priesthood of Christ, and differ essentially and not only in degree. Tonight you only plant this; do not lecture it.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD A, THE SEALED GUESS: Melchizedek's bread and wine (Genesis 14:18). Planted tonight as a single unexplained verse; guesses sealed on Take-Home 1; opened in Session 6. Say nothing.
- THREAD B, SERVE AND GUARD: the 'abad and shamar pair. Planted tonight in Eden and Numbers 3; returns with the Levites (Session 2), with Christ the guardian of his own (Sessions 4 and 7), and with the priest's charge today (Session 11).
- THREAD C, THE FIRSTBORN: father-priests and the firstborn swap (Numbers 3). Returns with Israel as firstborn son, Christ the firstborn, and resolves in Session 12 in the baptized household.
- THREAD D, THE TITLE THREAD: "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). The group will meet these words again in 1 Peter 2:9 (Session 8) and Revelation 1:6 (Session 12). Never point forward to those texts; let the recognition land on its own.

Session Goals

1. The group discovers the 'abad and shamar link between Genesis 2:15 and Numbers 3:7 to 8 with the texts open, and understands honestly why English translations hide it.
2. The group identifies the father-priest pattern in Abel, Noah, Job, and Abraham without being told it in advance.
3. The group hears Exodus 19:5 to 6 as Israel's vocation and the golden calf narrative as the wound that narrows, without revoking, that vocation.
4. The steelman ("priesthood was temporary scaffolding") is felt at full strength and answered from the text, with the full answer honestly deferred to later sessions.
5. Melchizedek is glimpsed and NOT explained; every participant leaves with a sealed guess written.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: The garden (20 min)
- 0:35 Build II: The fathers, and the steelman (20 min)
- 0:55 Build III: Sinai and the calf (15 min)
- 1:10 The Melchizedek minute (5 min; hold the silence)
- 1:15 Send questions (10 min)
- 1:25 Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper box and compress Build III to Exodus 19:5 to 6 plus a one-sentence summary of the calf narrative (read Exodus 32:26 to 29 aloud yourself rather than having the group work it). Never cut the Melchizedek minute or the sealed guess.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, eternal High Priest, you have gone before us into the sanctuary not made with hands. As we open the Scriptures tonight, open our eyes to see what you have been building since the garden. Give us honest questions, patient ears, and hearts willing to be surprised. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.

Win (choose warmth over depth here)

1. When you hear the word "priest," what picture comes to mind first, and where do you think that picture came from?
2. Tell us about a time someone stood in for you, spoke for you, or acted on your behalf. What did that feel like?

Build I: The Garden

Read Genesis 2:15 aloud.

Q1. What two jobs does God give the man in the garden? Just name them from the text.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"To till it and keep it." In Hebrew the verbs are 'abad (to serve, to work) and shamar (to keep, to guard). Do not reveal yet where this pair shows up again; the group finds that themselves in the next step.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Somewhere in Numbers 3:7 to 8 those same two Hebrew verbs, serve and guard, appear together again, describing a particular group of people and their work at a particular place. Find it. Who are they, and where do they do it?" Give the group two or three minutes with the passage.

Q2. The man in the garden and the ministers of the sanctuary share a job description. What might Genesis be telling us about the garden, and about the man?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Levites 'abad and shamar the tabernacle; Adam 'abad and shamar the garden. Genesis is painting Eden as sacred space, the first sanctuary, and Adam as one placed in it to serve and to guard it: the posture of a priest. Be honest that English translations hide the link (the RSV2CE has "till and keep" in Genesis but different wording in Numbers); it lives in the Hebrew, and anyone with a concordance can check it. Be equally honest that the Church has not defined an interpretation of this verse; this is a strong and widely held reading of the text, ancient in its instincts (St. Ephrem sang of Paradise as a sanctuary), and the study will treat it as a root, not a proof.

Build II: The Fathers

Read Genesis 4:2 to 5, Genesis 8:20, and Job 1:4 to 5 aloud, dividing the passages around the room.

Q3. In each passage, who is offering the sacrifice? What official position does he hold? What seems to authorize him to do this?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Abel, Noah, Job: none of them holds an office. No temple, no tribe, no vestments exist yet. But notice that sacrifice is not random: where the offerer is a father, Noah and Job, it runs along household lines; Job offers specifically for his children, as their father. Priesthood exists here in seed form, and its earliest ordered pattern is the parent who offers for the family. (Abraham fits the same pattern: Genesis 12:7 to 8 and Genesis 22, if the group brings him up.)

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Say this at full strength, and let it sit: "A thoughtful Protestant friend looks at these same passages and says: Exactly. Before Sinai, ordinary believers offered sacrifice with no priestly caste in sight. The Levitical priesthood was temporary scaffolding, erected for a season and torn down in Christ. So the New Testament church should look like the age of the patriarchs: every believer a priest, with pastors and elders for word and oversight if you like, but no SACRIFICING priestly class at all. Notice how much of the Bible that reading explains. What is right about it?"

Q4. Genuinely: what IS right about that reading? And then, what does Exodus 19:5 to 6 (coming next) start to do to it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Affirm what deserves affirming: sacrifice really did precede the Levitical caste; a priestly people really is God's design; and the New Testament really will say startling things about the priesthood of all believers. The friend is standing on real texts, and note his actual position fairly: most Protestant churches keep ordained pastors and elders; what they deny is a distinct sacrificing priesthood. That stronger form is the one this study answers.

But two observations complicate the scaffolding theory even inside Genesis. First, pre-Sinai sacrifice was never a free-for-all: it was ordered, running through the heads of households (and, in a reading ancient in Jewish and Christian tradition, through the firstborn). Order is not scaffolding; it is part of the design. Second, hold the question of where the story is headed until the group reads Exodus 19. Tell the group honestly: the full answer to this friend takes most of this study, and we will not pretend to finish it tonight. Sessions 8 through 11 return to it with the New Testament open.

Build III: Sinai and the Calf

Read Exodus 19:5 to 6 aloud, slowly. Have the group underline "a kingdom of priests."

Q5. This is God's stated vocation for the entire nation, spoken before the Law is given. What is the condition attached at the front of the sentence?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant." The vocation is real and the condition is real. Note the word "keep": shamar again, the guard-word from the garden. The guard-word may deliberately recall Eden: Israel invited to keep the covenant as Adam was placed to keep the garden. Offer it as an echo the canon invites, not a statement Exodus makes.

Read Exodus 32:26 to 29, then Numbers 3:11 to 13.

Q6. After the golden calf, what happens to the question of who serves God as priest? Who is taken, and in place of whom?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The sons of Levi rally to Moses and are consecrated for the LORD's service ("Today you have ordained yourselves," 32:29, RSV2CE); later God formally takes the Levites "instead of every first-born" in Israel, for sanctuary service under Aaron's priesthood (priesthood proper belongs to Aaron and his sons, Numbers 3:10). In a venerable theological reading, which we adopt while naming it as a reading: the priestly vocation of the whole people is not revoked, but after the calf it is wounded, disciplined, and placed under guardianship. The tension between a priestly people and a set-apart priesthood within it is now live, and it will not resolve until this study reaches the New Testament.

DIG DEEPER

Exodus 19:22 and 19:24 mention "the priests" before the tribe of Levi has been set apart, and the text never tells us who they are. A common suggestion, ancient and modern, is that these are the firstborn, exercising the household priesthood of the patriarchal age; but the honest answer is that Scripture does not say, and faithful interpreters differ. Let the group feel the gap. Not every thread in the Old Testament gets tied off, and saying "we are not told" is a habit this study wants to build.

The Melchizedek Minute

Read Genesis 14:18 to 20 aloud once. Then say only this: "We are not going to talk about him tonight. Your Take-Home sheet will tell you what to do with him." Do not answer questions about Melchizedek. Change the subject with a smile. The silence is doing work.

Send

1. Adam's first vocation was to serve and to guard sacred space. Where in your ordinary week, your desk, your kitchen, your job site, could "serve and guard" become an act of worship this week?
2. Who has been a Job-like figure in your life, someone who, you later learned, was quietly offering prayer and sacrifice for you? What would it look like to become that person for someone else?

Live It This Week

- Each morning, before your feet hit the floor, offer the day to God in your own words: your work, your family, your frustrations. This is not a warm-up for the study; it is the priestly act of the baptized (the Church calls it a morning offering), and it is Exodus 19:6 in miniature.
- Once this week, out loud and alone if you like, pray for your household by name, interceding for each person the way Job offered for each of his children (Job 1:5).
- Reread Genesis 2 and 3 once, slowly, with a single question in mind: what here looks like a sanctuary?

Memory Verse

"and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, you placed our first parents in a garden to serve you and to guard what is holy, and you called a whole people to be a kingdom of priests. We confess that, like them, we have not kept the charge. Thank you for not revoking your call. As we walk through the Scriptures together these coming weeks, show us the Priest you always intended, and make our lives an offering pleasing to you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 1

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- Genesis 2:15 (Build I, read aloud)
- Numbers 3:7 to 8 (Build I, live discovery)
- Genesis 4:2 to 5 (Build II, read aloud)
- Genesis 8:20 (Build II, read aloud)
- Job 1:4 to 5 (Build II, read aloud)
- Genesis 12:7 to 8; Genesis 22 (Build II, leader reference only, if raised)
- Exodus 19:5 to 6 (Build III, read aloud; memory verse source)
- Exodus 32:26 to 29 (Build III, read aloud)
- Numbers 3:11 to 13 (Build III, read aloud)
- Exodus 19:22, 24 (Dig Deeper, leader reference)
- Genesis 14:18 to 20 (The Melchizedek Minute, read aloud once)
- Exodus 4:22 (leader background only: Israel as firstborn son)

Session 2: A Kingdom Interrupted

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Last week the group watched Israel's priestly vocation narrow into a single tribe. Tonight they step inside the system God actually built: what a priest does (offers sacrifice, blesses, guards the holy), what the high priest wears (the names of Israel carried on his shoulders and over his heart), and what one day a year cost him (the Day of Atonement). Then, from inside the Old Testament itself, they discover the system's built-in limit, the one the Church will later name with Hebrews (CCC 1540): it repeats. Every year. Forever. The aim is reverence and hunger at the same time: this was God's gift, and God's gift was pointing past itself.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that the priesthood of Aaron and the service of the Levites was instituted for the proclamation of the word and for communion with God through sacrifices and prayer, and yet remained powerless to bring about salvation, needing to repeat its sacrifices ceaselessly (CCC 1540). The Church does not sneer at the Levitical priesthood; she sees in it a liturgy that the Church's own liturgy retains as a prefiguration of the New Covenant (CCC 1541 speaks of the Church seeing in that priesthood a prefiguring of the ordained ministry). Tonight is about honoring the shadow precisely as shadow.

What You Need to Know

The heart of the night is Exodus 28, and the detail your Take-Home already pointed the group toward: the vestments. The high priest wears two onyx stones on his shoulders, each engraved with six of the names of the sons of Israel (Exodus 28:9 to 12), and a breastpiece of judgment set with twelve stones, one for each tribe, worn "upon his heart, when he goes into the holy place, to bring them to continual remembrance before the LORD" (Exodus 28:29). Do not rush this. The high priest does not enter the sanctuary as a private person. He enters carrying everyone. Mediation is not a doctrine here; it is jewelry, weight, engraving. When someone in your group one day watches a priest at the altar and wonders what he is doing there, this is the picture underneath.

Second: the blessing. In Numbers 6:22 to 27 God dictates the words Aaron and his sons are to speak over Israel, and then adds the astonishing summary: "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them." The priest's blessing is not a wish; it is God placing his own name on people through appointed men. Notice, and let the group notice, the word "keep" in the blessing itself ("The LORD bless you and keep you"): shamar, the guard-word from Eden. The priest asks God to do for Israel what Adam failed to do for the garden.

Third: the guarding itself. Numbers 18:1 to 7 assigns Aaron and the Levites to "attend" and "keep guard" over the sanctuary so that wrath falls on no one; the Levites camp around the tabernacle like a living wall (Numbers 1:53). Priesthood protects people from approaching holiness wrongly, not because God is petty, but because holiness is real. Leviticus 10:1 to 3 (Nadab and Abihu) is the sobering proof text if the group wants one; handle it in the Dig Deeper, honestly, as a hard text the Church reads within divine pedagogy.

Fourth: the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16. One day a year, one man, behind the veil, with blood not his own, and first for his own sins (Leviticus 16:6, 11) before the people's. Then the refrain that gives the night its edge: "this shall be an everlasting statute for you... once in the year" (Leviticus 16:34). Once in the year, every year,

with no finish line in the text. The system works and never finishes. The group should discover that limitation from inside Leviticus, not from a New Testament spoiler; Hebrews will make the argument in Sessions 4 and 5, and it will land harder if the group has already felt the repetition for themselves.

Finally, the steelman. Sooner or later every serious reader meets the prophets' assault on sacrifice (Psalm 51:16 to 17, Isaiah 1:11 to 17, Hosea 6:6) and concludes that God never really wanted ritual priesthood at all: externals were always second-best to the heart. Build that case at full strength; it has real texts. The answer is also textual: Psalm 51 itself turns, two verses later, to "then you will delight in right sacrifices" (Psalm 51:19), and the same prophets who thundered against hollow offerings never called for the temple's abolition. The target of the critique is worship without obedience, not worship's form. God gave Israel both the altar and the prophets, and he was not arguing with himself.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight deepens all three root systems from Session 1. The guard-duty of Eden (Thread B) becomes the Levites' literal job description in Numbers 18 and echoes inside the priestly blessing's "keep you." The firstborn thread (Thread C) stands behind the whole tribe of Levi, taken in the firstborn's place. And the "kingdom of priests" vocation (Thread D) now lives in tension with a professional priesthood inside the kingdom. Resist every temptation to resolve these forward into the New Testament tonight; the fulfillment sessions are coming, and the group's hunger is an asset.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Gregory the Great

St. Gregory, in his Pastoral Rule, lingers over the high priest's breastpiece and teaches, in substance, that it is a standing lesson for every shepherd of souls: the one who goes before God for others must carry them engraved on his heart, their judgments and their burdens pressed against his chest. For Gregory, Exodus 28 is not archaeology; it is a job description that still convicts. (A summary of Gregory's teaching rather than a single quotation.)

Pastoral Rule, Book 2

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"A true sacrifice is every work done in order that we may cling to God in holy fellowship." Augustine's definition is the deep answer to tonight's steelman: the prophets and the altar were never enemies, because sacrifice was never merely the animal; it was the offered life the animal carried. What God rejected was the ritual emptied of the life.

City of God, Book 10, chapter 6

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas teaches that the ceremonies of the Old Law were two things at once: true worship of God for their own time, and prefigurations of Christ. In substance: nothing in the Levitical system was fake, and nothing in it was final. Every sacrifice of the Law pointed beyond itself. That double honesty, real and provisional together, is exactly the posture this session wants the group to hold. (Summary of his teaching on the ceremonial precepts.)

Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 102

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1539 to 1540: the priesthood of Aaron and the Levites instituted within the people who are "a kingdom of priests"; a priesthood established to proclaim the word and offer sacrifice, yet powerless to bring about salvation, needing endless repetition.
- CCC 1541: the Church's liturgy sees in the priesthood of Aaron and the service of the Levites a prefiguring of the ordained ministry of the New Covenant.
- CCC 433: the high priest entering the Holy of Holies once a year with sacrificial blood, and the mercy seat as the place of God's forgiving presence.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD A (sealed guess): untouched tonight. If anyone mentions Melchizedek or bread and wine, smile and move on. Next week they get most of him; the sealed part stays sealed until Session 6.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): major development tonight. Numbers 18:1 to 7 guard duty; "keep you" (shamar) inside the priestly blessing. Name the Eden echo only AFTER the group spots the word "keep" themselves.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): light touch; the Levites stand in the firstborn's place (recalled from Session 1). One sentence, no more.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): the tension sharpens tonight; a priestly people now watches one man enter for them. Do not resolve it.

Session Goals

1. The group can name the priest's three core works from the texts themselves: sacrifice, blessing, guarding.
2. The group discovers the names on the shoulders and over the heart in Exodus 28 and articulates what that says about mediation.
3. The group finds shamar ("keep") inside the priestly blessing and connects it to Eden without being told.
4. The group feels the Day of Atonement's "once in the year" as the system's own confession of incompleteness, discovered from Leviticus, not imported from Hebrews.
5. The prophetic-critique steelman is built at full strength and answered from Psalm 51 itself.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: The vestments, carrying the people (20 min)
- 0:35 Build II: The blessing and the guard (20 min)
- 0:55 Build III: The Day of Atonement and the steelman (25 min)
- 1:20 Send questions (5 min)
- 1:25 Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper (Nadab and Abihu), read Numbers 18:1 to 7 yourself with a one-sentence summary instead of group work, and take one Send question instead of two. Never cut the Psalm 51:19 discovery or the "once in the year" moment.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, you taught your people to draw near to you through priest and altar, and every gift you gave them pointed to a greater gift. As we walk through the sanctuary tonight, give us the reverence of those who remove their shoes, and the hunger of those who know the story is not finished. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. What is something you own that carries names on it, a ring, a bracelet, a tattoo, a photo in your wallet? Why do we carry names on our bodies?
2. Has anyone ever gone somewhere you could not go, and gone there for you? (A parent at a hard meeting, a friend at a hospital desk, a lawyer in a courtroom.) What did it mean that they went in your place?

Build I: Carrying the People

Read Exodus 28:9 to 12 and 28:15 to 21, 29 aloud, divided around the room.

Q1. Slow down and inventory: what exactly is written on the high priest's shoulders? What is set over his heart? And Exodus 28:29 gives the purpose in one phrase: what is it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Twelve names of the sons of Israel: six engraved on each shoulder stone, and twelve stones over his heart on the breastpiece. Purpose: "to bring them to continual remembrance before the LORD." The high priest never enters as a private individual; he physically carries the whole people into the presence of God. Mediation, before it is ever a doctrine, is a weight worn on the body.

Q2. Why shoulders and heart, do you think? What do those two places on a body suggest about what a priest is for?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let the group work; there is no single right answer, and say so. The classic reading, cherished by pastors for centuries (St. Gregory the Great built a whole chapter of advice to clergy on the breastpiece), is strength and love: the people are carried as a burden on the shoulders and as beloved names on the heart. A priest who carries people only as burden, or only as sentiment, is carrying them wrong.

Build II: The Blessing and the Guard

Read Numbers 6:22 to 27 aloud, slowly.

Q3. Whose words are these, originally? And what does verse 27 say actually happens when the priests speak them?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God's own words, dictated to Moses for Aaron and his sons. Verse 27: "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them." The priest's blessing is not a pious wish; it is God placing his own name on his people through appointed men, and God binding himself: "I will bless them." Appointed human lips, divine action. Keep that pattern; the whole study runs on it.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "There is one word inside this blessing that we have met before, back on our very first night, in a garden. Find it." Give them a minute with the text.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Keep": "The LORD bless you and keep you." The Hebrew is shamar, the guard-word of Genesis 2:15 and Numbers 3. Adam was placed to keep the garden and failed; now the priest asks God himself to keep the people. Only confirm the connection after someone finds the word.

Read Numbers 18:1 to 7.

Q4. What is the Levites' assignment around the tent, and what is it for? (Verse 5 states the purpose.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They attend to the sanctuary and keep guard over it, "that there be wrath no more upon the people of Israel." Priesthood is protective. By assignment, and by encampment (Numbers 1:53), the Levites stand between the people and the holy things like a living wall, not because God is hostile, but because holiness is real and approaching it wrongly is deadly. Guarding the holy is the Eden job, reassigned.

DIG DEEPER

Leviticus 10:1 to 3: Nadab and Abihu offer "unholy fire" and die before the LORD. This is a genuinely hard text; do not domesticate it and do not apologize for it. Read within the Church's understanding of divine pedagogy (CCC 53), this hard text can be understood this way: at the founding of the cult, God teaches with terrible clarity that worship is on his terms, not ours, and that the priesthood exists precisely to protect people from casual contact with what is holy. It is honest to say that a text like this remains difficult, and that reverence, not full comprehension, is the response Scripture asks for here.

Build III: Once in the Year

Set the scene for Leviticus 16 in your own words (one day a year, one man, behind the veil), then read Leviticus 16:2, 16:6, 16:11 to 16, 16:21 to 22, and 16:29 to 30 divided around the room.

Q5. Before the high priest can atone for the people, what must he do first (verses 6 and 11)? What does that tell you about him?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He must offer a bull "for himself, and for his house": atonement for his own sins first. The mediator himself needs mediation. The system is honest about its own personnel; every priest who ever entered that room was also a sinner who needed the room.

Now read Leviticus 16:34 aloud, and read it twice.

Q6. "Once in the year." An everlasting statute. Sit with the math: what does this system never say? What is missing from it that you would expect a rescue plan to have?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It never says "finished." There is no last Day of Atonement on the calendar, no verse where the repetition ends. God truly gave and honored this worship, yet by its own design it never completes (that it could not by itself take away sins is the Church's judgment, reading with Hebrews: CCC 1540); next year the blood must flow again, and the year after. Let the group feel this from Leviticus alone. Do not quote the New Testament tonight; when they meet the Letter to the Hebrews in two weeks, they will recognize this observation as its opening move, and it will be their own.

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Say it at full strength: "A serious reader of the prophets says: God told you himself what he thinks of all this. Psalm 51: sacrifice you do not desire; a broken and contrite heart you will not despise. Isaiah 1: your offerings are an abomination, wash yourselves, seek justice. Hosea 6:6: I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice. Ritual priesthood was always the concession; the heart was always the point. Christianity should have priests of the heart and nothing else. Feel how much Scripture is on that side."

Q7. What is right in that reading? Then turn to Psalm 51 itself and read verses 16 to 17, and then verse 19. What does verse 19 do to the theory?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

What is right: God truly rejects worship emptied of obedience and love, and says so with violence. The heart truly is the point. Never blunt that.

But Psalm 51 refuses the either-or. Two verses after "sacrifice you do not desire," the same psalm prays "then you will delight in right sacrifices... then bulls will be offered upon your altar." The prophets attack hollow worship, not worship's form; the same Isaiah who thunders in chapter 1 sees the LORD enthroned in the temple in chapter 6 and receives cleansing from its altar. God gave Israel both the altar and the prophets, and he was not arguing with himself. The question the Old Testament leaves open is not whether sacrifice, but what sacrifice could ever carry a whole heart. Hold that question; it is the door the next sessions walk through.

Send

1. The high priest carried names on his shoulders and over his heart. Whose names are you carrying right now, and where, as burden, or as love, or both?
2. Where in your life do you catch yourself offering God externals (attendance, routine, the minimum) with the heart parked outside? What would "right sacrifice" look like there this week?

Live It This Week

- Write down the names of five people you are responsible for or responsible to, and carry the list in your pocket or phone case all week. Pray for them by name once a day. You are practicing Exodus 28.
- At one Mass or one prayer time this week, when you catch your heart drifting into routine, stop and pray Psalm 51:17 from memory: "a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

- Ask God's blessing over one person out loud this week using the words of Numbers 6:24 to 26. Parents, this is made for your children.

Memory Verse

"The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."

Numbers 6:24 to 26 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord God, you taught Israel that no one climbs to you uninvited, and then you built the way down yourself: an altar, a blessing, a man carrying twelve names over his heart. Teach us reverence for everything you gave, and make us restless for everything it promised. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 2

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- Exodus 28:9 to 12; 28:15 to 21; 28:29 (Build I, read aloud)
- Numbers 6:22 to 27 (Build II, read aloud; live discovery of "keep"; memory verse source)
- Genesis 2:15; Numbers 3:7 to 8 (Build II, leader reference for the shamar echo)
- Numbers 18:1 to 7 (Build II, read aloud)
- Leviticus 10:1 to 3 (Dig Deeper)
- Leviticus 16:2, 6, 11 to 16, 21 to 22, 29 to 30 (Build III, read aloud)
- Leviticus 16:34 (Build III, read twice)
- Psalm 51:16 to 17, 19 (Build III, steelman and answer)
- Isaiah 1:11 to 17; Hosea 6:6 (steelman, leader reference; Isaiah 6:1 to 7 as leader backup)

Session 3: A Priest Forever

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Tonight the group returns to the stranger from Session 1, and they get almost all of him. From Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 they discover that the Old Testament itself, centuries after Levi, promises a different kind of priest: a king-priest, from Jerusalem, standing outside Levi's genealogy, established not by descent but by God's unbreakable oath, and holding the office "for ever." They will also discover that Jesus himself put Psalm 110 at the center of his own identity. One thing stays locked: the bread and the wine. Tonight the group learns everything about Melchizedek except the sealed question, and the discipline of not answering it is half the fun.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that everything the priesthood of the Old Covenant prefigured finds its fulfillment in Christ Jesus, the one mediator, and that the Church's tradition sees the unique high priest "after the order of Melchizedek" in him (CCC 1544). Christ fulfills the anointed offices of Israel, priest as well as prophet and king (CCC 436). Tonight builds the Old Testament half of that claim so that when the fulfillment arrives, it arrives on rails the group has laid themselves.

What You Need to Know

Genesis 14:18 to 20 gives Melchizedek three verses, and the three verses are strange on purpose. He is "king of Salem," which the Old Testament later identifies with Jerusalem (Psalm 76:2, "His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion"). He is "priest of God Most High," a legitimate priest of the true God, generations before Sinai, outside any Israelite line, because Israel does not exist yet. He blesses Abram, and Abram gives him a tenth of everything. In a book obsessed with genealogy, Melchizedek arrives with none: no father, no mother, no birth, no death recorded. Scripture's silences are load-bearing here, and later Scripture will lean on exactly that silence.

Then, roughly a millennium later, Psalm 110. David's psalm speaks of a lord enthroned at God's right hand, and then verse 4 detonates: "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Weigh every phrase with the group. Sworn: God takes an oath, something the Levitical institution never received. Will not change his mind: irrevocable. For ever: an enduring priesthood with no expiration written into it; its full, deathless weight the New Testament will unfold. After the order of Melchizedek: a priesthood that is royal, Jerusalem-rooted, and independent of Levi's bloodline. The psalm is Israel's own scripture announcing, while the Levitical system is running, that the ultimate priest will come from outside it.

Two supporting witnesses sharpen the picture. Zechariah 6:9 to 14 crowns Joshua the high priest (the crowning itself is verse 11) as a sign of "the Branch," the coming one who "shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule upon his throne. And there shall be a priest by his throne, and peaceful understanding shall be between them both"; the oracle strains toward one figure uniting crown and priesthood, and Christian tradition has read the Branch messianically. And 2 Chronicles 26:16 to 21 shows what normally happens when a king grabs priestly work: King Uzziah burns incense and is struck with leprosy on the spot. Royal priesthood is NOT routine in Israel; that is precisely why Psalm 110:4 is such a shock, and the Uzziah story is tonight's answer to the steelman.

The steelman tonight: "Melchizedek is a nobody, three verses of ancient Near Eastern local color, and Psalm 110:4 is just florid coronation poetry; Christians have inflated a footnote." Build it honestly; it is what many modern readers quietly assume. The answer is that the inflation, if that is the word, was done by the Old Testament itself (Psalm 110 is doing the typology, not the Church), that David's successors were emphatically NOT priests (Uzziah), so the psalm cannot be routine coronation flattery, and that Jesus of Nazareth personally placed this psalm at the center of the question of his identity (Mark 12:35 to 37), with Peter preaching its enthronement verse at Pentecost (Acts 2:34 to 36). Whatever Psalm 110 is, the New Testament did not discover it in a corner; it was already the loaded gun on the table.

Guard the seal. When the group re-reads Genesis 14:18 tonight, the bread and wine are sitting right there in the verse, and someone will reach for them. Your line, delivered with a grin: "Not yet. That part is still sealed." The group now knows enough to make their guesses very interesting, which is exactly the point.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight the fulfillment arc begins to bend. Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 are the two Old Testament poles, and the group discovers the first New Testament touch: Jesus quoting Psalm 110 about the Messiah (Mark 12:35 to 37) and Peter preaching its enthronement at Pentecost (Acts 2:34 to 36). Do not go further into the New Testament than those two texts; in particular, stay entirely out of Hebrews 7, which belongs to Session 5 and will land like a thunderclap precisely because the group will recognize every move it makes.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Justin Martyr

St. Justin, in his Dialogue with Trypho, argues in substance that Psalm 110 cannot finally rest on any merely human king, and he points to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High before circumcision was ever given, as a sign that God's priesthood was never confined to Levi's line and would reach the nations. Writing within a century of the apostles, Justin shows how early the Church was reading tonight's two texts together. (A summary of Justin's argument rather than a quotation.)

Dialogue with Trypho

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

St. Augustine, expounding Psalm 110, teaches in substance that the psalm is a prophecy of Christ, and that God's oath ("the LORD has sworn and will not change his mind") is the strongest possible language of divine promise: what God swears concerning this priest is irrevocable and eternal. For Augustine the "for ever" of verse 4 already rules out any priest who dies and is replaced. (Summary of his exposition.)

Expositions on the Psalms, Psalm 110 (109 in his numbering)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas teaches that the priesthood of the Old Law was a figure of the priesthood of Christ, in whom alone priesthood reaches its full reality: Christ is the fountain from which all true priesthood draws. In substance, for Thomas, Melchizedek and Aaron are not rivals; both are sketches, in different colors, of the one Priest to come. (Summary of his teaching on the priesthood of Christ.)

Summa Theologiae III, q. 22

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1544: everything the priesthood of the Old Covenant prefigured finds fulfillment in Christ, the one mediator, the unique high priest "after the order of Melchizedek."
- CCC 436: Christ fulfills the messianic hope of Israel in his threefold office of priest, prophet, and king; Israel's anointed priests, at their institution, foreshadow him.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD A (sealed guess): maximum discipline tonight. The group re-reads Genesis 14:18 with the bread and wine in plain sight. Deflect warmly, every time. Three more weeks.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): rest week. Do not force it.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): rest week, though Melchizedek's priesthood-without-genealogy quietly sets up the contrast with descent-based priesthood; you may plant the phrase "not by bloodline" tonight without explanation.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): note silently that a priest-king over Salem, blessing the father of the nation, stands at the head of the story before Levi exists. This becomes ammunition in Sessions 8 and 12.

Session Goals

1. The group inventories Genesis 14:18 to 20 and names what the text says and, crucially, what it withholds (no genealogy, no origin, no death).
2. The group weighs Psalm 110:4 phrase by phrase (sworn, will not change his mind, for ever, order of Melchizedek) and articulates why each phrase outstrips the Levitical institution.
3. The group discovers via Uzziah that Aaronic temple ministry was closed even to Judah's kings, so Psalm 110:4 cannot be routine court poetry.
4. The group discovers that Jesus himself made Psalm 110 the riddle of his identity.
5. The bread and wine remain sealed, and the group leaves more curious than they arrived.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: The stranger, second look (20 min)
- 0:35 Build II: The oath, Psalm 110 (25 min)
- 1:00 Build III: The steelman and Uzziah (15 min)
- 1:15 Build IV: Jesus asks the question (10 min)
- 1:25 Send, Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper (Zechariah 6) and compress Build IV by reading Mark 12:35 to 37 yourself and asking only its second question. Never cut Uzziah; the steelman answer depends on him.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, you swore an oath and you do not change your mind. Open the Scriptures to us tonight as you opened them on the road to Emmaus, and let us find in an ancient king of Salem the shadow of a face we love. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Have you ever met someone once, briefly, who left a mark on you completely out of proportion to the time you spent with them? What made them unforgettable?
2. What is a promise someone kept to you over a long time? What did the keeping of it, year after year, tell you about them?

Build I: The Stranger, Second Look

Read Genesis 14:17 to 20 aloud. Yes, the bread and wine are in there. No, we are still not talking about them.

Q1. Inventory time. List everything the text actually tells us about this man: titles, actions, location. Then the harder question: in a book that constantly tells you whose son everyone is, what does the text NOT tell us about him?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Told: he is king of Salem (later identified with Jerusalem, Psalm 76:2); he is "priest of God Most High," a true priest of the true God with no connection to Abram's family; he blesses Abram; Abram tithes to him. Withheld: any genealogy, any origin, any death. In Genesis, where genealogy is everything, a priest with no bloodline is not sloppy storytelling; it is a signal, and later Scripture will lean its full weight on exactly this silence.

Q2. Abram, the man who carries God's promise for the whole world, receives a blessing from this priest and pays him a tenth of everything. In the logic of the ancient world, who is the greater figure in this scene, and how do you know?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Melchizedek. The lesser is blessed by the greater, and the lesser tithes to the greater. The father of Israel, and in his loins the whole Levitical priesthood not yet born, bows toward a priesthood older and larger than his own line. Park that thought; you have just done, on your own, an argument a New Testament author will make to you in two weeks. Do not tell the group that last part.

Build II: The Oath

Read Psalm 110:1 to 4 aloud, slowly, then have everyone silently re-read verse 4.

Q3. Verse 4 has four loaded phrases: "sworn," "will not change his mind," "for ever," "after the order of Melchizedek." Take them one at a time. What does each phrase claim, and, thinking back to the last two sessions, which of these things did the priesthood of Aaron have?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Sworn: God binds himself by oath to this priesthood; the Levitical institution was commanded, but nowhere in its founding does God swear an oath about it. Will not change his mind: presented as irrevocable by oath; feel the contrast in tone with the "if you obey" of Exodus 19:5. For ever: an office with no end written into it, unlike Aaron's sons, each of whom died and handed it on; the deathless fullness of the word waits for the New Testament. After the order of Melchizedek: royal, rooted in Salem/Jerusalem, and standing entirely outside Levi's genealogy. Israel's own psalter, sung for centuries in the temple by Levitical priests, announces a priesthood beyond them.

DIG DEEPER

Zechariah 6:9 to 14: the prophet is told to set a crown on the head of Joshua the high priest (verse 11) as a sign of "the Branch," who will build the temple of the LORD, bear royal honor, and rule on his throne, with priesthood and throne in "peaceful understanding." Crown on a priest, priest by a throne: the oracle strains toward one figure holding both offices, and Christian tradition has heard the Branch messianically. The honest note: the Hebrew of verse 13 is genuinely debated (one figure or two in view?), and faithful interpreters differ on the details while agreeing on the messianic direction.

Build III: Just Poetry? The Steelman

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. At full strength: "A modern reader says: be serious. Melchizedek gets three verses of local color in Genesis, and Psalm 110 is a royal psalm in the ancient Near East's standard sacral-kingship idiom, the exalted coronation language many kings received. Kings dabbled in ritual anyway; David wore an ephod and danced before the ark. Christians found a footnote and built a cathedral on it. Feel the force: it is tidy, it is plausible, and serious scholars hold forms of it."

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "If priesthood were routine perks of David's crown, we would expect kings acting as priests to be no big deal. Somewhere in 2 Chronicles 26:16 to 21 a king of Judah tries exactly that. Find what he does and what happens to him." Give the group a few minutes.

Q4. What did King Uzziah do, how did the priests respond, and how did the affair end? Now: what does this story do to the "coronation flattery" theory of Psalm 110:4?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Uzziah, strong and proud, enters the temple to burn incense; eighty priests confront him: "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron." He rages, leprosy breaks out on his forehead, and he lives cut off, excluded from the house of the LORD, to his death. Priestly temple ministry was not a royal perk in Judah; grasping it was sacrilege, and heaven itself enforced the line.

So Psalm 110:4 cannot be routine court flattery. To sing to a Davidic figure "you are a priest for ever" is to promise the very thing Uzziah was struck for grasping. Either the psalm is reckless, or it is aiming past every ordinary king at someone with a right no son of David ever had. And as for the "footnote": the elevation of Melchizedek was performed by Psalm 110 itself, inside Israel's own Scriptures, a thousand

years before the Church existed. (Leader background, hold loosely: by Jesus' era some Jewish texts, like the scroll known as 11QMelchizedek found at Qumran, were already fascinated with Melchizedek as an exalted figure; the interest is not a Christian invention. Present as scholarly background, not as an argument the group needs.)

Build IV: Jesus Asks the Question

Read Mark 12:35 to 37 aloud.

Q5. Jesus, teaching in the temple in the last week of his life, chooses this exact psalm and asks the crowd a riddle about it. What is the riddle, and what is Jesus implying about the Messiah, and about himself?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

David calls the Messiah "my lord": how can the Messiah be merely David's son, a descendant and nothing more? Jesus is claiming the Messiah is greater than David, seated at God's right hand, and he poses it, in the temple, days before his death, in a way that unavoidably bears on his own identity. And notice what Jesus has now made unavoidable: whoever this enthroned lord is, verse 4 of the same psalm calls him a priest for ever. At Pentecost, Peter preaches this psalm's enthronement verse (110:1) over the risen Jesus (Acts 2:34 to 36); the priesthood verse, three lines below it, now stands loaded. The New Testament did not discover Psalm 110 in a corner. Jesus put it on the table himself.

Send

1. God's oath "will not change his mind" stands behind this priesthood. Where in your life right now do you most need a promise of God that does not depend on your performance?
2. Melchizedek blessed Abram at the end of a battle, when he was exhausted. Who in your week is walking out of a battle, and what would it look like to meet them with a blessing?

Live It This Week

- Pray Psalm 110 once a day this week, out loud. It is short. By Friday you will have the memory verse without trying. (Bonus: the Church prays this psalm at Evening Prayer II of every Sunday; you are joining her.)
- Find one person leaving a battle this week (an exam, a diagnosis, a brutal shift) and bless them concretely: a meal, a message, a prayer said with them, not just for them.
- Re-read your own sealed guess in your memory if you can recall it. You may not change it. You may, however, grin.

Memory Verse

"The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

Psalm 110:4 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, a thousand years before Bethlehem you swore an oath concerning an everlasting priesthood. Thank you that your promises are older than our questions and stronger than our failures. Keep our guesses sealed and our hearts open, and bring us back hungry. Through Christ our Lord, priest for ever. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 3

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- Genesis 14:17 to 20 (Build I, read aloud)
- Psalm 76:2 (Build I, leader reference: Salem is Zion)
- Psalm 110:1 to 4 (Build II, read aloud; memory verse source)
- Exodus 19:5 (Build II, leader reference: the conditional contrast)
- Zechariah 6:9 to 14 (Dig Deeper)
- 2 Chronicles 26:16 to 21 (Build III, live discovery)
- Mark 12:35 to 37 (Build IV, read aloud)
- Acts 2:34 to 36 (Build IV, in the ANSWER)

Session 4: A High Priest Able to Sympathize

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The study crosses fully into the New Testament tonight, and it arrives at a person before it arrives at an argument. From Hebrews 2, 4, and 5 the group discovers what kind of high priest Jesus is: one made like his brothers in every respect, tempted as we are yet without sin, appointed by the Father rather than self-exalted, and perfected through suffering. Two live discoveries anchor the night: the group traces Hebrews 5:7 ("loud cries and tears") back to Gethsemane, and Hebrews 5:4 ("one does not take the honor upon himself") back to the rebellion of Korah. The aim is that by the end of the night, "Jesus is our high priest" has stopped being a slogan and started being a face.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that the one priesthood of Christ fulfills and surpasses everything the old priesthood prefigured: he is the one mediator between God and men, and his sacrifice, offered once for all, is unique (CCC 1544 to 1545). It also teaches that in Gethsemane, in his agony the sinless One accepted the cup, his human will consenting to the Father (CCC 612). Hebrews holds both truths in one frame: total solidarity with us, and a priesthood no one else could exercise.

What You Need to Know

The Letter to the Hebrews is the New Testament's sustained meditation on Christ's priesthood, and the group has spent three weeks unknowingly preparing to read it. Everything they discovered on their own, the carrying of names, the mediator who himself needed mediation, the "once in the year" that never ends, the oath of Psalm 110, is the raw material Hebrews works with. Tonight deliberately takes the letter's pastoral chapters first (2, 4, 5) and saves its heavy artillery (7 through 10) for next week; do not let an eager group drag you into chapter 7 early.

Start with Hebrews 2:14 to 18. The logic is stunning: to be a priest FOR human beings, the Son became one OF them, "made like his brethren in every respect," so that he might be "a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people." Where every son of Aaron was a sinner who happened to be human, this priest is the sinless One who chose to be human. His solidarity for the work is the Incarnation itself; the appointment is the Father's (5:5 to 6). Note verse 16 and Hebrews 1:6 in the background: he is the "first-born," and he is "not ashamed to call them brethren" (2:11); the firstborn thread from Numbers 3 is quietly waking up.

Hebrews 4:14 to 16 gives the night its warmth. "We have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." The verb is strong: he suffers-with. And the consequence is an invitation with no asterisk: "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace." Every believer is summoned to draw near; be clear and glad about this, because it is Catholic teaching, and because tonight's steelman will try to turn this very verse against the Church.

Hebrews 5:1 to 10 supplies the anatomy of priesthood: taken from among men, appointed on behalf of men in relation to God, able to deal gently with the wayward, and, decisively, called by God rather than self-appointed: "one does not take the honor upon himself... So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, You are my Son" (citing Psalm 2:7), and then, inevitably, Psalm 110:4, the group's own memory verse, quoted back to them by Scripture itself. Let them find it on the page and enjoy the recognition. Verses 7 to 9 then hand you Gethsemane without naming it: "loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death... he learned obedience through what he suffered." The group finds the Gospel scene themselves.

The steelman tonight is the strongest one so far, and it comes from inside tonight's own texts: if Jesus is the one sympathetic high priest, and if every believer is invited to draw near to the throne with confidence, then human priests are worse than unnecessary; they rebuild the barrier Christ tore down. Handle this with total honesty. Affirm the access; the Church teaches it (the whole common priesthood rests on it). The answer tonight is deliberately partial: Hebrews itself sees no contradiction between universal access and ordered ministry (the same letter says "obey your leaders... for they are keeping watch over your souls," 13:17, and Hebrews 5:4's rule against self-appointment implies real, appointed office); and in Hebrews the high priest is never a barrier between the people and God but precisely the God-given way of approach. Whether and how Christ shares his priesthood is the question the rest of this study answers; tell the group plainly that the full answer is still four sessions away.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight is the hinge where roots visibly become fulfillment. Hebrews 5 quotes Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4 as the Father's own words of appointment; the group's memory verse from last week reappears inside the New Testament. Hebrews 5:4's "one does not take the honor upon himself" sends the group back to Numbers 16 and 17 (Korah's rebellion and Aaron's budding staff), where God settled forever that priesthood is conferred, not claimed. And Hebrews 5:7's loud cries and tears send them to Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36 to 44). Both connections are live discoveries; do not pre-announce either destination.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Gregory of Nazianzus

"What has not been assumed has not been healed." St. Gregory's famous line, written against those who wanted a Christ with something human missing, is the deep grammar of Hebrews 2:17: he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, because whatever the priest does not share, he cannot carry to God. Our whole humanity, body, mind, fear, and tears, went into the sanctuary with him.

Letter 101, to Cledonius

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"He is the priest who offers, and he is himself the offering." Augustine compresses the whole mystery into one line: at the altar of the cross, priest and victim are the same person. No son of Aaron could say that; every one of them offered blood not his own, first for his own sins. This priest has no sins of his own, and the blood is his.

City of God, Book 10, chapter 20

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Leo the Great

In his celebrated Tome, received with acclamation at the Council of Chalcedon, St. Leo teaches that in the one person of Christ each nature performs what is proper to it in communion with the other: the Word doing what belongs to the Word, the flesh what belongs to the flesh. This is the deep grammar of Hebrews' high priest: one person, truly God and truly man, which is why his single offering can carry every human being in it. (A faithful summary of the Tome.)

Letter to Flavian (the Tome), received at the Council of Chalcedon

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1544 to 1545: Christ the one mediator and unique high priest; his sacrifice offered once for all, fulfilling and surpassing the old priesthood.
- CCC 612: the agony at Gethsemane; the sinless One accepting the cup, taking on the full weight of our condition, his human will consenting to the Father.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD A (sealed guess): untouched. Two more weeks. Hebrews 5:10 names Melchizedek in passing; if eyes light up, enjoy it and move on.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): quiet development; the sympathetic high priest "keeps" his own in temptation (2:18, "he is able to help those who are tempted"). One sentence if it fits naturally.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): developing. Hebrews 1:6 calls him "the first-born"; 2:11 to 12, not ashamed to call us brethren. The firstborn who was swapped out at Sinai has walked back on stage in person. You may say that sentence aloud tonight; it earns its keep.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): untouched tonight. The "draw near" invitation of 4:16 is its seed; do not label it yet.

Session Goals

1. The group articulates from Hebrews 2 why the Incarnation is Christ's priestly qualification.
2. The group discovers Gethsemane behind Hebrews 5:7 with the texts open.
3. The group discovers Korah and the budding staff behind Hebrews 5:4, and states the principle: priesthood is conferred by God, never self-claimed.
4. The group recognizes their own memory verse (Psalm 110:4) quoted in Hebrews 5:6 and feels the study's architecture clicking together.
5. The access steelman is felt at full strength, the universal invitation of 4:16 is wholeheartedly affirmed, and the ministerial question is honestly deferred, not dodged.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: Made like his brethren, Hebrews 2 (20 min)
- 0:35 Build II: Able to sympathize, Hebrews 4, and the steelman (20 min)
- 0:55 Build III: Appointed, not self-exalted, Hebrews 5 and Korah (15 min)
- 1:10 Build IV: Loud cries and tears, Gethsemane discovery (10 min)

- 1:20 Send (5 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper, read the Korah background yourself in three sentences instead of the full live discovery (keep Numbers 17:8 on the table), and take one Win question. Never cut the Gethsemane discovery or the steelman.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, high priest of our confession, you were tempted as we are and you carried our flesh into the holy place. Tonight, as we read the letter written about you, let us not merely learn about a priesthood; let us meet a Priest. We ask this in your own name. Amen.

Win

1. When something goes badly wrong in your life, what kind of person do you instinctively want beside you: the expert who can fix it, or the friend who has been through it? Why?
2. Who is someone who truly gets what your daily life is like, and how did they earn that? What is it like to be understood without having to explain?

Build I: Made Like His Brethren

Read Hebrews 2:14 to 18 aloud.

Q1. According to verse 17, WHY did the Son have to be made like his brothers in every respect? What is the job title this passage attaches to that reason?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"So that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people." The Incarnation grounds his priestly solidarity; the office itself, as 5:4 to 6 will insist, is the Father's appointment. Aaron's sons were sinners who happened to share our nature; this priest is the sinless Son who chose to share it, down to blood, death, and temptation (2:14, 18). And notice 2:11: "he is not ashamed to call them brethren." Recall together, briefly, who got swapped out of priesthood at Sinai: the firstborn of every family. Hebrews has already called Jesus "the first-born" (1:6). The firstborn has walked back on stage, in person.

Build II: Able to Sympathize

Read Hebrews 4:14 to 16 aloud, then have everyone re-read verse 16 silently.

Q2. What exactly does verse 15 claim about Jesus and temptation? And who, according to verse 16, is invited to draw near to the throne of grace, and how?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Tempted "in every respect... as we are, yet without sin": real temptation, fully felt (sinlessness means he never gave in, not that it was easy; a classic spiritual reflection, not a doctrine, adds that only the one who never surrenders feels temptation's weight to the very end). And the invitation of verse 16 has no fine print: "let US draw near with confidence," all believers, directly, to the throne of grace itself. Affirm this without hedging. The Catholic Church teaches exactly this access; your baptism is your standing invitation. Do not let anyone leave tonight thinking Catholicism ration access to God.

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. At full strength: "A Protestant friend, Bible open to this very page, says: there it is. One sympathetic high priest, and every believer invited to draw near with confidence. The curtain tore. So what exactly is a Catholic priest for? Any human priesthood now rebuilds the barrier Christ died to remove; it inserts a man where Hebrews just removed one. If you take Hebrews 4:16 seriously, the Catholic priesthood is not just unnecessary; it is a step backward. Let that one land. It is the strongest objection this study will face, and it is made from a true verse."

Q3. First: what in that objection is simply TRUE, and should be affirmed with joy? Second: from tonight's chapters alone, what complicates the conclusion?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

True and to be affirmed: direct access for every believer is real; Christ's priesthood is unique and unrepeatable; no Christian minister replaces, supplements, or improves on Christ. If anyone has been taught to fear approaching God without an intermediary, Hebrews 4:16 is God's own correction, and the Church says amen.

What complicates the conclusion, from this same letter: (1) In Hebrews the high priest is never a barrier between people and God; he is the God-given WAY of approach. The objection quietly assumes priest means obstacle; the letter's whole vocabulary assumes priest means access. (2) The same letter that says "draw near" also says "obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls" (13:17): universal access and real, ordered office coexist in Hebrews without embarrassment. (3) Tonight's own chapter insists that priesthood is never self-claimed but conferred (5:4). And be fair about scope: Hebrews 13:17's leaders are not called priests, and many Protestants affirm ordained leadership while denying a sacrificial priesthood; these verses show that universal access and real, ordered office COEXIST in Hebrews, no more. Then say, honestly: whether and how Christ SHARES his priesthood, with a priestly people and with ordained men, is the question the rest of this study exists to answer, from the text. Tonight we do not finish it; we refuse to fake it. Sessions 6 through 11 are the answer.

Build III: Appointed, Not Self-Exalted

Read Hebrews 5:1 to 6 aloud.

Q4. Verse 4 lays down a rule about how a man becomes a priest. What is the rule? And in verses 5 to 6, who appoints Christ, and with which two Old Testament quotations? (One of them you may recognize.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The rule: "one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was." Priesthood is conferred, never seized. Christ keeps the rule perfectly: "Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest"; the Father appoints him with Psalm 2:7 ("You are my Son") and Psalm 110:4, your memory verse, quoted back to you by the New Testament itself: "You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." Enjoy the moment; the study's rails just met the train.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "That rule in verse 4, no one takes this honor on himself, was written in blood and almonds somewhere in Numbers 16 and 17. A rebellion, and then a sign involving a wooden staff. Find the story: what did the rebels want, what happened, and what settled the question permanently?" Give the group several minutes; it is a longer hunt. (Key verses: Numbers 16:1 to 7, 16:31 to 35, 17:1 to 8.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Korah, a Levite, with 250 leaders of the congregation, demands the priesthood itself: "all the congregation are holy, every one of them... why then do you exalt yourselves?" Moses puts it to God with censers of incense; the earth opens under Korah, fire consumes the 250, and then God settles it with a sign of pure grace rather than terror: twelve staffs laid in the tent of meeting before the testimony overnight, and in the morning Aaron's dead wood has sprouted, budded, blossomed, and borne ripe almonds. Priesthood belongs to the one God makes alive to it. Notice the irony worth naming gently: Korah's slogan ("all the congregation are holy") was TRUE, Exodus 19:6 said so, and it still did not entitle him to seize the priesthood. A holy people and a conferred priesthood were never contradictions in Israel. File that; it returns in Session 8.

DIG DEEPER

Hebrews 5:8, "he learned obedience through what he suffered," has puzzled readers for centuries: how does the sinless Son LEARN obedience? A traditional theological explanation, held carefully: not by moving from disobedience to obedience, but by living out in real human suffering the obedience he eternally is; what he possessed as God he experienced, inch by inch, as man. The Word did not skip any of the cost. It is fine to tell the group this remains a mystery the Church handles with reverence rather than a puzzle she has flattened.

Build IV: Loud Cries and Tears

Read Hebrews 5:7 to 10 aloud.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Verse 7 calls one specific scene to mind for nearly every reader. Prayers and supplications, loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death. Find the scene in the Gospels." (They will land in Gethsemane; Matthew 26:36 to 44. Read verses 36 to 39 aloud once someone finds it.)

Q5. Set Hebrews 5:7 and Matthew 26:36 to 39 side by side. What was Jesus doing in Gethsemane, in priestly terms? And what does it mean for you that THIS is what our high priest's prayer looked like?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

In Gethsemane, where the Church's tradition and most interpreters hear Hebrews 5:7 (an identification the texts invite rather than state), the high priest of our confession is doing his priestly work: offering prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears, his own will consenting to the Father's cup on behalf of all of us (CCC 612). Sympathy was purchased at full price. When Hebrews says he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, it is not a greeting card; it is Gethsemane. No one in your group will ever pray from a darker place than their priest has already prayed from.

Send

1. "Let us with confidence draw near." What keeps you personally from drawing near with confidence: shame, busyness, the suspicion that God is tired of you? What would you bring to the throne this week if you actually believed verse 16?
2. Jesus' priesthood ran through Gethsemane: he prayed for others from inside his own agony. Who could you pray for this week from inside something you are suffering, not after it resolves, but during?

Live It This Week

- Once a day, pray one sentence of raw honesty at the throne of grace: the thing you actually feel, not the thing you think God prefers to hear. Hebrews 4:16 is your warrant.
- Read the Gethsemane account (Matthew 26:36 to 46) once this week at night, slowly, as the prayer of your high priest for you.
- When temptation hits this week, try the short prayer of Hebrews 2:18 in your own words: "You were tempted. Help me now."

Memory Verse

"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."

Hebrews 4:16 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you were made like us in every respect, you wept in the garden, and you carried our names through the veil. Give us the confidence you paid for: to draw near, to be honest, to receive mercy. And as we draw near, teach us what it costs and what it means that you have called us brethren. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 4

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- Hebrews 2:14 to 18 (Build I, read aloud; 1:6 and 2:11 leader reference)
- Hebrews 4:14 to 16 (Build II, read aloud; memory verse source)
- Hebrews 13:17 (Build II, in the steelman ANSWER)
- Hebrews 5:1 to 6 (Build III, read aloud; quotes Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4)
- Numbers 16:1 to 7, 31 to 35; 17:1 to 8 (Build III, live discovery)
- Exodus 19:6 (Build III, leader reference: Korah's true premise)
- Hebrews 5:7 to 10 (Build IV, read aloud)
- Matthew 26:36 to 44 (Build IV, live discovery)

Session 5: Once for All

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Tonight the group reads Hebrews 7 and experiences something rare: Scripture agreeing with them. Every argument the letter makes about Melchizedek (greater than Levi through the tithe and the blessing, priest without genealogy, established by oath, priest for ever, holding his priesthood permanently because he lives) is an argument the group already built with their own hands in Session 3. Then Hebrews 9 and 10 answer Session 2's "once in the year" with the New Testament's great adverb: once for all, *ephapax*. And then the group faces the hardest steelman in the entire study: if once for all, what is the Mass? Tonight's answer, drawn from Hebrews itself, from Revelation, and from Malachi, is that the one sacrifice is not locked in the past; it is eternally present, and the prophets foresaw it offered among the nations perpetually. How the Church enters that offering is next week's discovery, and you will say so out loud.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: the victim is one and the same, and only the manner of offering is different; the Mass does not add to the Cross or multiply it, but makes it present (CCC 1364, 1366 to 1367). It also teaches that Christ's Paschal mystery, unlike other historical events, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is and did participates in the divine eternity and so transcends all times (CCC 1085). Tonight is the session where the study earns the right to those paragraphs from the text.

What You Need to Know

Hebrews 7 is the summit of the letter's Melchizedek argument, and your group owns the terrain. Walk it with them and let recognition do the teaching. Verses 1 to 3: the silence of Genesis (no father, no mother, no genealogy, no birth, no death) is read as a designed portrait, "resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever." Verses 4 to 10: the tithe and the blessing prove greatness, and even Levi, "still in the loins of his ancestor," tithed to Melchizedek through Abraham; the group made this exact argument in Session 3, Question 2. Verses 11 to 19: if perfection came through Levi, why does Psalm 110 promise ANOTHER priest, after a different order? The psalm's existence is itself the proof that the Levitical system was provisional. Verses 20 to 22: the oath, their memory verse, quoted in full. Verses 23 to 25: the many priests died; this one "holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever," and therefore "he always lives to make intercession" for those who draw near through him. Note what Hebrews never mentions in all of chapter 7: the bread and the wine. The one detail of Genesis 14:18 the letter leaves untouched is the one detail still sealed in your group's envelopes. Enjoy that privately; say nothing.

Hebrews 9 and 10 then close the loop opened in Session 2. The earthly sanctuary was "a copy and shadow"; Christ entered "once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (9:12). The word is *ephapax*, once-for-all, and the letter hammers it at 7:27, 9:12, and 10:10, with its sister word *hapax*, once, at 9:26 and 9:28. Then 10:11 to 14 paints the contrast your group can feel in their bones: "every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." Standing versus seated. Repetition versus completion. "It is finished."

Which sets the table for the steelman, and do not soften it: a Catholic altar has a priest standing at daily service, offering what Catholics themselves call a sacrifice. Is that not the exact photograph of the obsolete that Hebrews 10:11 develops? Worse: if Calvary was once for all, is the Mass not either redundant (Calvary sufficed) or blasphemous (re-crucifying)? Give the objection everything; some of your group has heard it from people they love, and half-strength answers insult everyone involved.

The answer tonight comes in three textual moves, and it deliberately stops short of the mechanism. Move one: the one sacrifice is not sealed in the past. Hebrews itself says the risen priest "always lives to make intercession" (7:25) and "entered... into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (9:24): present tense ministry, now, on the strength of the one offering. And when John is shown heaven, he sees "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Revelation 5:6): the sacrifice, perpetually present at the center of heaven's worship. The Mass does not reach back to repeat a past event; the Church is drawn up into a sacrifice that never stopped being present to God. Move two: Malachi. The last prophet of the Old Testament, disgusted by the polluted sacrifices of a corrupt priesthood, foresees the astonishing thing: "from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering" (Malachi 1:11). A pure offering, offered in every place, among the Gentiles: read from where Malachi stands, the oracle looks past the corrupt present to the nations, and the Church's ancient reading heard it as worldwide and perpetual. Early Christians (the Didache, an early church manual commonly dated to the late first or early second century) applied that oracle to the Eucharist without blushing. Move three: honesty about what remains. HOW the Church participates in the one sacrifice, by what words and by whose command, is precisely the Last Supper, and it is next week. Tell the group: tonight establishes that the one sacrifice is eternally present and that a perpetual pure offering was foretold; next week Jesus himself hands it over.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight is fulfillment in the strict sense: Hebrews 7 harvests Genesis 14 and Psalm 110, the group's Sessions 1 and 3; Hebrews 9 and 10 harvest Leviticus 16, their Session 2. The one new Old Testament root planted tonight is Malachi 1:6 to 11, discovered live, and it will bear fruit next week and again in Session 11. The study's architecture is now fully visible to the group; let them enjoy the view.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Chrysostom

Preaching on Hebrews, Chrysostom faces tonight's question head-on: "Do we not offer every day? We offer indeed, but making a remembrance of his death... We do not offer another sacrifice, as the high priest of old, but always the same." For Chrysostom there is no tension between once-for-all and the daily altar, because the altar offers nothing new: one victim, one offering, made present. Sixteen centuries before your group asked tonight's question, the Church's greatest preacher answered it in these words.

Homilies on Hebrews, Homily 17

VOICE OF THE CHURCH The Didache

The Didache, an early church manual commonly dated to the late first or early second century, instructs Christians to gather on the Lord's day, break bread, and give thanks, first confessing their sins "so that your sacrifice may be pure," and it invokes Malachi's pure-offering oracle (adapting 1:11 and 1:14) of that assembly. The earliest Christians we can hear called their Eucharist a sacrifice, and they reached for Malachi to explain it. (The Didache is an early Church document, not a single saint's writing.)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Paul II

St. John Paul II teaches, in substance, that the Mass makes sacramentally present the one sacrifice of the Cross: it does not add to that sacrifice and does not multiply it; what is repeated is the memorial celebration, while the sacrifice itself remains the one sacrifice of Christ, embracing every generation. Writing at the start of the third millennium, he is saying what Chrysostom said in the fourth century: same victim, same offering, made present. (A summary of his teaching in his encyclical on the Eucharist.)

Ecclesia de Eucharistia

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1085: Christ's Paschal mystery cannot remain only in the past; all that Christ is and did participates in the divine eternity and transcends all times.
- CCC 1364: in the liturgy the memorial is not merely recollection; the sacrifice Christ offered once for all remains ever present.
- CCC 1366 to 1367: the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are ONE SINGLE sacrifice; the victim is one and the same; only the manner of offering is different.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD A (sealed guess): final approach. Hebrews 7 expounds everything about Genesis 14 except the bread and wine; if anyone notices that silence, beam at them and say "one more week." The Take-Home tells everyone to BRING their sealed sheet next session, unopened.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): "he always lives to make intercession" (7:25) is the guard-thread in glory: the priest who keeps his people forever. One sentence.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): resting.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): resting, but Malachi's "in every place... among the nations" quietly widens the map for Sessions 8 and 12.

Session Goals

1. The group recognizes their own Session 3 arguments inside Hebrews 7 and can name at least three of them.
2. The group traces ephapax (once for all) through Hebrews 9 and 10 and states the standing-versus-seated contrast of 10:11 to 14 in their own words.
3. The Mass steelman is stated at maximum strength, including the "photograph of the obsolete" charge.
4. The group discovers Revelation 5:6 (the Lamb standing as slain) and Malachi 1:11 (the perpetual pure offering) and can articulate the three-move answer: eternally present sacrifice, foretold perpetual offering, mechanism deferred to next week.
5. No one leaves thinking the Catholic answer is "Hebrews does not really mean once for all." It means it. That is the point.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)

- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: Hebrews 7, the recognition (25 min)
- 0:40 Build II: Once for all, Hebrews 9 to 10 (15 min)
- 0:55 Build III: The steelman and the three moves (25 min)
- 1:20 Send (5 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: compress Build I by assigning Hebrews 7:1 to 10 as a silent read with one question instead of two, and drop the Dig Deeper. Never cut any part of Build III; the steelman is the session.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, your Son offered himself once for all, and he lives for ever to intercede for us. As we read tonight, give us minds sharp enough for hard questions and hearts humble enough for large answers. Through Christ our Lord, a priest for ever. Amen.

Win

1. Have you ever finished something completely, paid off a debt, submitted the thesis, crossed the finish line? What did "finished" feel like in your body?
2. Is there a moment from your past, good or hard, that is somehow still present to you, that you do not merely remember but almost re-enter? What makes some moments work that way?

Build I: The Recognition

Read Hebrews 7:1 to 10 aloud, divided around the room. Tell the group to interrupt you, out loud, every time the letter makes an argument this study has already made.

Q1. List the interruptions. Which of tonight's arguments did this group already build with its own hands, and in which session?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

At minimum: the loaded silence of Genesis (no genealogy, no birth, no death) read as a portrait "resembling the Son of God" (their Session 3, Question 1); greatness proven by the blessing and the tithe, "the inferior is blessed by the superior" (Session 3, Question 2); and even Levi, in Abraham's loins, bowing toward this priesthood (their own parking-lot thought from Session 3). Say it plainly: nobody smuggled you here. You did the exegesis first; the New Testament just agreed with you.

Read Hebrews 7:11 to 25.

Q2. Verse 11 asks a question about Psalm 110. What is the letter's argument from the psalm's mere EXISTENCE? And what do verses 23 to 25 say this undying priest is doing right now?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

If the Levitical priesthood could perfect anyone, why would Israel's own psalter, sung inside the Levitical system, promise ANOTHER priest after a different order? The psalm's existence proves the system knew itself provisional. And the priest who "continues for ever... always lives to make intercession" for those who draw near through him: present tense, right now, permanently. His priesthood did not end at the cross; it passed through death alive. Hold that present tense; it is tonight's hinge. (Also: notice what chapter 7 never mentions from Genesis 14. If someone spots it, congratulate them and say: one more week.)

Build II: Once for All

Read Hebrews 9:11 to 12 and 9:24 to 26 aloud. Then read 10:11 to 14 slowly, and have the group physically notice the two postures in it.

Q3. What are the two postures in 10:11 to 14, whose are they, and what does each posture mean? And what is the word Hebrews keeps repeating about Christ's offering (9:12 and 10:10, with the kindred hapax, once, at 9:26)?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Levitical priest STANDS, daily, because his work never finishes; Christ, having offered a single sacrifice for sins, SAT DOWN at the right hand of God, because his work is complete. The drumbeat word is "once for all" (Greek ephapax). This is the New Testament's answer to Session 2's "once in the year": the repetition problem is over. Do not rush past this or blunt it. The Catholic Church confesses ephapax without reservation: the Cross is complete, unrepeatable, and sufficient. Whatever the Mass is, it is not a repair.

Build III: Then What Is the Mass?

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength, no flinching: "Your Protestant friend opens to Hebrews 10:11 and reads it slowly: every priest stands DAILY at his service, offering REPEATEDLY the same sacrifices. Then he looks up and says: describe a Catholic parish to me. A priest, standing at an altar, daily, offering what your own catechism calls a sacrifice. Hebrews drew a photograph of the obsolete, and Rome framed it. And it is worse than redundant: if Calvary was once for all, then calling the Mass a sacrifice either adds to a finished work or crucifies Christ again. Once for all means once. For. All." Let the room be uncomfortable. Some of them have carried this exact speech home from a dorm room argument.

Q4. Before any answer: what does this objection get RIGHT that a Catholic must never deny?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

That the Cross is once for all, finished, sufficient, unrepeatable; that nothing can add to it; and that any account of the Mass which quietly treats Calvary as insufficient is not Catholic. Grant every word of that with joy. The Church's own teaching states it: the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice, and the Mass adds nothing to the Cross and multiplies nothing. The disagreement is not about whether Calvary is complete; it is about where Calvary is now.

LIVE DISCOVERY ONE. Say: "Hebrews said the risen priest always lives to make intercession, and appears in the presence of God NOW on our behalf. So: when heaven's door opens in Revelation chapter 5, and John sees the center of all heavenly worship, look at verse 6. How does the sacrificed one appear?" Give them the moment.

Q5. What does John see, and what does that image do to the idea that the sacrifice of Christ is locked in the past?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"A Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." Not a Lamb who was once slain and has moved on: the marks of the sacrifice are eternally present, at the center of heaven's liturgy, receiving worship. The one offering of Calvary is not behind us on a timeline; it stands, alive and slain at once, before the throne for

ever. So the Catholic claim is the opposite of repetition: the Mass does not drag Calvary back from the past; the Mass is the Church being drawn up into a sacrifice that has never stopped being present to God. Same victim, same priest; only the manner of offering differs.

LIVE DISCOVERY TWO. Say: "One more witness, and he is unexpected: the last prophet of the Old Testament. In Malachi 1:6 to 11, God is disgusted with the polluted sacrifices of a corrupt priesthood, and then in verse 11 he foresees something. Read the passage and tell me: what does God say will happen, where, and among whom?"

Q6. What are the marks of the offering Malachi foresees? And here is the hard question: what offering in the history of the world actually fits that description?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A PURE offering (unlike the polluted ones in front of him), offered "in every place" (not one temple), "from the rising of the sun to its setting" (perpetually), "among the nations" (Gentiles!). Pure, offered among the nations, in every place; and the Church's ancient reading, from the Didache on, heard in it a worldwide, ongoing offering. A single sacrifice offered once at one hill outside Jerusalem does not, by itself, fit "in every place" and "from the rising of the sun to its setting"; a memorial that merely thinks about that sacrifice is not naturally called an OFFERING. But the one sacrifice of Christ, made present on altars in every place, at every hour, among every nation: that fits like a key. And this is not a modern Catholic retrofit: the Didache, an early church manual, invokes this very oracle of the Christian Eucharist and calls that Eucharist a sacrifice.

Then say, honestly and out loud: one question remains wide open tonight. By what right, by whose command, and by what words does the Church enter the one sacrifice? That question has an answer, and the answer has a date: the night before he died. Next week. Bring your sealed guesses. Unopened.

DIG DEEPER

Hebrews 13:10: "We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat." Written to Christians, present tense: WE HAVE an altar. An altar is sacrifice furniture, and eating from it is participation language. The verse is compact and its exegesis is genuinely debated (the altar as the Cross, as Christ himself, or as the Eucharistic table, and these readings are not mutually exclusive); what no reading can remove is that the letter of "once for all" felt no embarrassment saying Christians have an altar and eat from it. File it beside next week.

Send

1. "He always lives to make intercession for them." Right now, tonight, the risen Christ is praying for you by name. What would change in your week if you actually believed that sentence?
2. Where in your life are you still standing at daily service, trying to finish by repetition something Christ has already finished, in your guilt, your perfectionism, your bargaining with God? What would it mean to let him be seated?

Live It This Week

- Once this week, pray with Hebrews 7:25: name your hardest situation out loud, then say: "Jesus, you live for ever to intercede for me. I hand this to the priest who never goes off duty."
- If you attend Mass this week, at the elevation of the host, silently pray Revelation 5:6: "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." Just look, and let the two pages sit on top of each other.
- Find your sealed guess from Session 1 and put it somewhere you will not forget it. It comes with you next week. Still sealed.

Memory Verse

"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."

Hebrews 7:25 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, Lamb standing as though slain, your one offering is finished and your intercession never ends. Free us from every altar of our own making, every attempt to finish what you have finished, and draw us upward into the worship that never stops. You live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 5

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- Hebrews 7:1 to 10 (Build I, read aloud)
- Hebrews 7:11 to 25 (Build I, read aloud; memory verse source at 7:25)
- Hebrews 9:11 to 12; 9:24 to 26 (Build II, read aloud)
- Hebrews 10:11 to 14 (Build II and steelman, read slowly)
- Hebrews 10:10; 7:27 (ephapax); 9:26, 28 (hapax) (leader reference: the once-for-all drumbeat)
- Revelation 5:6 (Build III, live discovery one)
- Malachi 1:6 to 11 (Build III, live discovery two)
- Hebrews 13:10 (Dig Deeper)

Session 6: Do This

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Reveal night. The group brings five weeks of sealed curiosity into the upper room and discovers that the Last Supper is a sacrifice being instituted: a Passover meal, a body "given for you," a "blood of the covenant poured out," and a command, "Do this in remembrance of me," spoken to the Twelve, that hands the memorial of the one sacrifice into human hands. Mid-session, the guesses are unsealed: Melchizedek, priest-king of Salem, brought out bread and wine; and on the night before he died, the priest for ever after his order took bread and wine and made them the offering of the New Covenant. The room should feel the click. Tonight also answers Session 5's open question: by whose command does the Church enter the one sacrifice? By his.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that at the Last Supper, in order to leave his Church a visible sacrifice by which the bloody sacrifice of the Cross would be made present, its memory perpetuated, and its saving power applied, Christ instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and resurrection, and instituted his apostles as priests of the New Covenant (CCC 611, drawing on the Council of Trent; see also CCC 1337). It further teaches that in the biblical sense, memorial is not merely the remembrance of past events but their proclamation and, in the liturgy, their being made present (CCC 1363 to 1364). The whole session lives inside those paragraphs, discovered from the text upward.

What You Need to Know

Frame first: the Supper is a Passover. Luke is explicit: "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). So before the upper room, take the group back to Exodus 12: a lamb without blemish, slain, its blood applied, and, easy to miss, EATEN: "they shall eat the flesh" (Exodus 12:8). The blood on the doorposts is the stated sign of deliverance (12:13), and the eaten lamb belongs to the same commanded rite: slaying, blood, and meal are one ordinance. And the whole rite is fixed as a permanent liturgy: "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever" (Exodus 12:14). The Hebrew idea behind "memorial" (zikkaron) is richer than recollection: in Jewish observance, to this day, the Passover is kept as participation; Jewish tradition teaches that in every generation each person is bound to regard himself as having personally come out of Egypt. Present that honestly as Jewish tradition (it is the classic teaching of the Passover haggadah), not as a Bible verse. The point stands on Exodus 12:14 alone: God builds memorials that generations ENTER, not memories they merely consult. Paul closes the frame with one line: "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival" (1 Corinthians 5:7 to 8): a sacrificed lamb, and therefore an ongoing feast.

Then the institution itself. Read it in stereo: Luke 22:14 to 20 and Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 11:23 to 26, which Paul says he "received from the Lord" and "delivered" to the church, our earliest written witness. Weigh the words like gold, because every word is doing sacrificial work. "This is my body which is GIVEN FOR YOU": given-for is offering language. "This cup which is POURED OUT for you is the new covenant in my blood": poured out is what happens to sacrificial blood at an altar, and "blood of the covenant," carried verbatim in Matthew and Mark's cup-word ("this is my blood of the covenant," Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24) and echoed in Luke's "new covenant in my blood," points to a scene the group will find live: Exodus 24:8, Moses dashing

sacrificial blood on the people to seal the covenant, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you." Jesus, cup in hand, is placing his final night inside Israel's covenant-sacrifice grammar on purpose. And then the command: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Greek anamnesis, a word at home in the Greek Old Testament's sacrificial-memorial vocabulary, as at Leviticus 24:7). "Do this" is an imperative creating an ongoing rite; "in remembrance of me" names it a memorial in the Exodus 12 sense; and it is spoken not to the crowds but to the Twelve, reclining as the new covenant's table is set. This is why the Church, from Trent to the Catechism, says that in this hour Christ instituted both the Eucharist and the priesthood of the New Covenant: the offering, and the men commanded to make it.

The reveal: run it as a small ceremony (the Discussion Guide scripts it). Guesses are opened and read aloud with no mockery and no grading; five-week-old guesses are acts of trust. Then three texts in sequence, no commentary between them: Genesis 14:18, Psalm 110:4, Luke 22:19. Then one question: what do you see? Most groups get there unaided: the priesthood "after the order of Melchizedek" is a priesthood whose offering is bread and wine; and the bread and wine of the New Covenant are what Jesus declared them to be, his body and blood, the one sacrifice under the forms Melchizedek carried out to meet Abraham. St. Cyprian made exactly this argument in the third century (Letter 63); your group will have made it themselves first. One honesty note, and make it: Genesis 14 does not SAY Melchizedek's bread and wine were a sacrifice; the text simply sets a priest and bread and wine side by side and says nothing more. It is the whole sweep (Genesis 14, Psalm 110, the Supper, and the Church's ancient reading) that lights the verse up. Typology is read backward from Christ; that is how the Church has always read, and being honest about the direction of the reading makes the claim stronger, not weaker.

The steelman tonight is the memorialist reading, and give it real muscle: "It was a farewell meal. This is my body is a metaphor, like I am the door or I am the vine; do this in remembrance means think of me when you eat together. Sacrament, sacrifice, priesthood: all of it read back into a simple goodbye." The answer works from Paul, the earliest witness: (1) Passover memorial was never spectator recollection (Exodus 12:14); (2) 1 Corinthians 10:16 to 21: "the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation (koinonia) in the blood of Christ?", and Paul's whole argument bans idol-feasts BECAUSE eating from an altar is real participation in the sacrifice, "the table of the Lord" set against "the table of demons": the parallel only works if the Lord's table is sacrificial; (3) 1 Corinthians 11:27 to 30: eating unworthily makes one "guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord," and Paul attributes real consequences to it. Paul's guilt-and-judgment language is hard to square with a mere figure of speech.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight harvests three plantings at once: Genesis 14:18 (Session 1, Thread A) meets its fulfillment; Exodus 12 (the lamb eaten, the memorial for ever) frames the meal; Exodus 24:8 (the blood of the covenant) is discovered live inside the cup-word. Note for your own delight what the group has now watched happen: the study's Old Testament spine (garden, fathers, Levites, Melchizedek, Passover, covenant blood) has converged on one table in one room on one night.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Cyprian of Carthage

St. Cyprian, writing around the year 253 on how the Eucharist must be celebrated, teaches that in Melchizedek, priest of God Most High who offered bread and wine and blessed Abraham, we see the sacrament of the Lord's sacrifice prefigured: what Melchizedek carried in figure, Christ, the true priest after his order, fulfilled when he offered bread and wine, that is, his own body and blood. Your group made Cyprian's argument tonight before they heard his name. (Faithfully summarized from his letter on

the Eucharist.)

Letter 63

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ignatius of Antioch

St. Ignatius, on the road to martyrdom around the year 107, warned against those who "abstain from the Eucharist... because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins." Within one lifetime of the upper room, the test of real belief was what you confessed the Eucharist to BE. The bishop of Antioch, one of our earliest witnesses, did not talk like a memorialist.

Letter to the Smyrnaeans

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Justin Martyr

St. Justin, describing Christian worship to the Roman emperor around the year 155, wrote that "not as common bread and common drink do we receive these," but that the food over which thanksgiving has been made by the word of prayer that comes from Christ "is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh." In the surrounding chapters (65 and 67) he then describes what your parish still does on Sunday. This is the earliest surviving outsider-facing description of the Mass, and it is recognizably the Mass.

First Apology, chapters 65 to 67

Catechism Connection

- CCC 611: at the Supper, Christ instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his sacrifice and instituted his apostles as priests of the New Covenant.
- CCC 1337: knowing his hour had come, he washed their feet, gave the commandment of love, and instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and resurrection, commanding his apostles to celebrate it until his return, thereby constituting them priests of the New Testament.
- CCC 1363 to 1364: in the biblical sense, memorial is not merely recollection of the past but proclamation and, in the liturgy of the Church, the making-present of the one sacrifice.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD A: RESOLVED TONIGHT. Run the reveal ceremony exactly as scripted. Afterward, the thread converts into the study's standing image: read from the Supper backward, Melchizedek's order offers under bread and wine.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): resting; Gethsemane already carried it this arc.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): one quiet note if the moment offers itself: the Passover was the night God spared the firstborn; the true Firstborn is not spared, he hands himself over.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): "Do this" is spoken to the Twelve, not the crowd; the ordered-ministry side of the tension takes a decisive step tonight. Do not editorialize; Sessions 8 to 11 harvest it.

Session Goals

1. The group frames the Supper as Passover from Luke 22:15 and Exodus 12, and can say why an eaten lamb and a perpetual memorial matter.
2. The group discovers Exodus 24:8 behind "blood of the covenant" with the texts open.
3. The reveal ceremony lands: guesses opened with honor, three texts in sequence, the click articulated by the group, and the honesty note about typology stated by you.
4. The memorialist steelman is built at full strength and answered from 1 Corinthians 10 and 11.
5. The group hears clearly, from CCC 611, what the Church claims happened to the Twelve in that room, as the study's bridge into the coming sessions.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: Passover frame, Exodus 12 (15 min)
- 0:30 Build II: The institution in stereo, and the covenant blood discovery (20 min)
- 0:50 THE REVEAL (15 min; do not rush it)
- 1:05 Build III: The memorialist steelman (15 min)
- 1:20 Send (5 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper, compress Build I by summarizing Exodus 12:1 to 13 yourself and reading only verses 8 and 14 aloud. Never cut or shorten the reveal; if the night runs long, the steelman may be carried as the opening of Session 7 instead.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, on the night you were betrayed you took bread. Tonight we take up five weeks of questions and bring them to your table. Open the Scriptures and break them open for us, and let our hearts burn within us. Amen.

Win

1. What is a meal you will remember for the rest of your life? What made it more than food?
2. Guesses on the table, still sealed: on a scale of one to ten, how confident are you in yours tonight, and has your number changed since Session 1?

Build I: The Frame Is Passover

Read Luke 22:14 to 15 aloud. Then go back: read Exodus 12:3, 5 to 8, and 12:14, divided around the room.

Q1. From Exodus 12: what must happen to the lamb besides being slain? And what does verse 14 command Israel to do with this night, for how long?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The lamb must be EATEN: "they shall eat the flesh." Blood on the doorposts as the stated sign of deliverance (12:13), and the lamb consumed as part of the same commanded rite: God joined deliverance to a meal. And the night is fixed as "a memorial day... an ordinance for ever," a feast every generation keeps. Note honestly what Jewish tradition has always taught about keeping it (this is the classic teaching of the Passover liturgy, not a Bible verse): in every generation, each person is to regard himself as having personally come out of Egypt. God builds memorials that generations enter. Jesus chose THIS night, of all nights, to say the words he is about to say.

Build II: The Institution, in Stereo

Read Luke 22:19 to 20 aloud, then Matthew 26:26 to 29. Then read 1 Corinthians 11:23 to 26, noting that Paul, writing within about twenty-five years of the event, says he received this from the Lord and delivered it to the church.

Q2. Underline every word or phrase in these two passages that belongs to the vocabulary of sacrifice rather than of an ordinary meal. What did you find?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Given for you": offering language. "Poured out for you": what happens to sacrificial blood at an altar. "The new covenant in my blood": covenants are cut in sacrificial blood. "Do this": an imperative instituting an ongoing rite, spoken to the Twelve. "In remembrance of me": anamnesis, a Greek memorial-offering word; the CATEGORY is Exodus 12:14's entered memorial (Hebrew zikkaron), whatever the exact Greek vocabulary there. Jesus is not reaching for meal vocabulary with a poetic flourish; he is speaking altar grammar at a table.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Matthew and Mark's cup-word, my blood of the covenant, is a quotation. It was spoken once before in Israel's story, at the foot of a mountain, with basins in hand. Find it in Exodus 24:3 to 8: who says it, and what is he doing as he says it?"

Q3. What happens in Exodus 24, and what is Jesus doing by quoting that exact phrase with a cup in his hand?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses seals the Sinai covenant in sacrificial blood, throwing half against the altar and half on the people: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you." The people are joined to God through applied sacrificial blood. Jesus lifts a cup and, in Matthew and Mark's wording, says the same words with one change that changes everything: "MY blood" (Luke's "new covenant in my blood" carries the same covenant-sacrifice grammar). He is deliberately standing his final night inside Israel's covenant-sacrifice grammar: a covenant is being cut, in blood, and the blood is his, and this time the people do not have it dashed on them; they drink it.

The Reveal

Run this as a ceremony, unhurried. First: everyone opens their sealed guess and reads it aloud, in turn, exactly as written. No grading, no laughing except with delight; a five-week-old guess is an act of trust. Thank each person. Then say: "Three texts, in order, no commentary." Read aloud, slowly: Genesis 14:18. Then Psalm 110:4. Then Luke 22:19. Then ask the one question:

Q4. What do you see?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let them say it; most rooms will. A priest-king of Salem, the first priest in the Bible, appears with BREAD AND WINE and blesses the father of the covenant people. A thousand years later God swears that the Messiah is a priest for ever AFTER THE ORDER of that man. And on the night before he died, the Messiah took BREAD AND WINE, declared them his body given and his blood poured out, and commanded, "Do this." Read backward from the Supper, as the Church has always read, Melchizedek's order is a priesthood whose offering appears under bread and wine; and at the Supper, the priest for ever made bread and wine the bearers of his one sacrifice. St. Cyprian argued exactly this in the year 253; you argued it first tonight.

Then the honesty note, stated by you, plainly: Genesis 14 never SAYS the bread and wine were a sacrifice; it sets a priest and bread and wine side by side and falls silent. Typology is read backward from Christ: it is the whole sweep, Genesis to Psalm to Supper to the Church's ancient reading, that lights the verse up. We say so out loud because the claim is stronger honest than inflated.

DIG DEEPER

On the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13 to 35), the risen Jesus is known "in the breaking of the bread," Luke's name for the Eucharist (Acts 2:42). Luke has built a pattern: opened Scriptures, burning hearts, and recognition at the table. Your group has spent six weeks in the first half of that pattern.

Build III: Just a Metaphor? The Steelman

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength: "A thoughtful memorialist says: it was a farewell dinner. This is my body is a metaphor, exactly like I am the door and I am the vine; nobody checks Jesus for hinges. Do this in remembrance of me means what it means at every memorial dinner in history: think of me when you gather. It is an instituted ordinance, a covenantal proclamation of his death, for many of us a real spiritual communion; what it is not is a sacrifice or a change in the bread. Everything else was read back in by later centuries. Notice how serious and biblical that position is; millions of earnest Christians hold it."

Q5. Take the earliest witness we have: Paul. Read 1 Corinthians 10:16 to 21, then 11:27 to 30. Does Paul talk about the Lord's table like a man describing a metaphor? Be specific from the text.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

No, and specifically: (1) "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" The word is *koinonia*, real communion, and Paul's entire argument in chapter 10 depends on it: he forbids idol feasts BECAUSE eating from an altar is real participation in the sacrifice, setting "the table of the Lord" against "the table of demons." The parallel collapses unless the Lord's table is sacrificial and its food joins you to the sacrifice. (2) In chapter 11, eating and drinking unworthily makes a person "guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord," to be discerned on pain of judgment. Paul's severity, guilt "of the body and blood of the Lord" with judgment attached, is very difficult to square with a merely symbolic account; his words treat the sacrament as something one can actually violate. (3) And the door and vine comparisons cut the other way: no one at any table was ever commanded to eat the door. The Supper words come with an imperative, a rite, and consequences. Our earliest surviving witnesses heard them accordingly: within about a lifetime, Ignatius could define the heretic as the one who denies the Eucharist is the flesh of Christ.

Send

1. Tonight you watched a five-week-old question resolve into something bigger than your guess. Where else in your life might God be working on a timeline longer than your patience?
2. "Do this in remembrance of me" was spoken over a table you can still approach this Sunday. What would it change to walk into Mass this week knowing what room you are walking into?

Live It This Week

- At Mass this week, listen for the exact words of tonight's texts in the Eucharistic Prayer ("this is my body, which will be given up for you... the blood of the new and eternal covenant... do this in memory of me"). You now know where every phrase was born.
- Read the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13 to 35) once, slowly, and note the two-part rhythm: Scriptures opened, bread broken. Which half of that rhythm is stronger in your life right now?
- Keep your opened guess sheet. Put it in your Bible at Genesis 14. Someday, show it to someone and tell them this story.

Memory Verse

"This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Luke 22:19 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, on the night you were betrayed you took Melchizedek's ancient sign, bread and wine, into your own hands and filled it with yourself. Thank you for answering questions we did not know how to ask. Make us hungry for your table, reverent before your sacrifice, and grateful beyond our words. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 6

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- Luke 22:14 to 15 (Build I, read aloud)
- Exodus 12:3, 5 to 8, 14 (Build I, read aloud)
- 1 Corinthians 5:7 to 8 (Build I, leader reference)
- Luke 22:19 to 20; Matthew 26:26 to 29 (Build II, read aloud; memory verse source at Luke 22:19)
- 1 Corinthians 11:23 to 26 (Build II, read aloud)
- Exodus 24:3 to 8 (Build II, live discovery)
- Genesis 14:18; Psalm 110:4; Luke 22:19 (The Reveal, read in sequence)
- Luke 24:13 to 35; Acts 2:42 (Dig Deeper)
- 1 Corinthians 10:16 to 21 (Build III, read aloud)
- 1 Corinthians 11:27 to 30 (Build III, read aloud)

Session 7: Whose Sins You Forgive

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Last week the Twelve received the offering. Tonight, Easter evening, they receive the absolution. From John 20:19 to 23 the group discovers a commissioning ("as the Father has sent me, even so I send you"), a creation echo they find themselves (God breathing into men, Genesis 2:7), and a transfer of authority whose words resist every attempt to shrink them: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Around it: the keys of Matthew 16 with their Old Testament background in Isaiah 22 (a steward's office in David's house), the crowd of Matthew 9 glorifying God for giving such authority "to men," and Paul naming his work "the ministry of reconciliation." The aim: by night's end the group can say from the text why the Church believes Christ truly shares his power to forgive, and can say honestly what developed later and what did not.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that only God forgives sins, and that Jesus, the Son of Man, exercises this divine power on earth and wills his Church to continue his work of healing and forgiveness, imparting to the apostles his own power to forgive sins (CCC 1441 to 1442). Christ willed that his whole Church be a sign and instrument of the forgiveness won by his blood, and he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry (CCC 1442, 1461). The Catechism is also candid that the concrete discipline of the sacrament changed over the centuries while the fundamental structure remained (CCC 1447); that candor is a gift to tonight's honesty, and you will use it.

What You Need to Know

Set the scene with care: Easter evening, doors locked, fear inside. The risen Christ stands among them: "Peace be with you." Then the sending: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." Weigh that sentence before moving on; the apostles' mission is patterned on the Son's own mission, and the Son was sent, among other things, to forgive sins. Then the gesture: "he breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit." The verb for breathed (*emphysao*) is rare and loaded; the group will hunt its ancestry themselves and land in Genesis 2:7, God breathing life into the man of dust. John, whose Gospel opened with "In the beginning," is showing a new creation beginning: as God's breath once made living men, Christ's breath now makes life-giving ministers. Then the words themselves: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Two-sided: forgive or retain. A power exercised case by case, which is why the Church understands this authority as ordinarily exercised by hearing the case (with narrow exceptions, such as general absolution in grave necessity); you cannot ordinarily bind or loose what you refuse to know.

Matthew supplies the office's furniture. In Matthew 16:18 to 19, Simon becomes Rock and receives "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," with binding and loosing ratified in heaven; Matthew 18:18 extends binding and loosing to the apostles together, in the context of sin and the church. The keys are not decoration: their Old Testament background, which the group discovers live, is Isaiah 22:20 to 22, where God deposes one royal steward and installs Eliakim over the house of David: "I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." The key marks a real OFFICE in the king's house: a steward with delegated authority, and, crucially for Session 10, an office that

outlives its holder and is refilled. In the Church's long-standing reading, Jesus, Son of David, is staffing his house.

Mark 2 arms the steelman and then defuses it. When Jesus tells the paralytic "your sins are forgiven," the scribes reason: "It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Their premise is true, and the Church affirms it (CCC 1441): only God forgives sins. Jesus answers not by denying the premise but by demonstrating that "the Son of MAN has authority ON EARTH to forgive sins," and heals the man to prove it. Then Matthew's version adds the detail that should raise every eyebrow in the room, and the group finds it live: the crowds "glorified God, who had given such authority TO MEN" (Matthew 9:8). Plural. Catholic readers have long heard in that plural an authority that would not terminate in Jesus' own hands; the verse invites the reading even if, alone, it does not compel it. Add Paul: God "gave US the ministry of reconciliation... So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:18 to 20); and James, who sends the sick to the elders of the church for anointing and prayer (5:14 to 15) and, alongside, tells believers to confess their sins (5:16). Ministry of reconciliation, entrusted to men, exercised through office: the pattern is native to the New Testament, not medieval.

Now the honesty, and lead with it before anyone can spring it on you: private confession as your group knows it (the box, the screen, frequent devotional confession) is not described in the New Testament, and the Church does not claim it is. The early centuries knew severe, often once-in-a-lifetime public penance for grave sins; the private, repeatable form spread later, carried notably by Irish monastic practice, and the Catechism says all of this out loud (CCC 1447), calling the fundamental structure (contrition, confession, satisfaction, and absolution through the Church's ministry) the constant beneath the changing discipline. The claim the study defends tonight is the apostolic AUTHORITY (John 20:23, Matthew 16 and 18, 2 Corinthians 5), not the antiquity of the furniture. Distinguishing those two claims honestly is the difference between apologetics that survives contact and apologetics that gets ambushed by its first church-history fact.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Two live discoveries carry the roots tonight: Genesis 2:7 behind the Easter breath (creation and new creation; the study began in Eden, and tonight Eden's breath returns), and Isaiah 22:20 to 22 behind the keys (a transferable stewardship in David's house). Thread B surfaces inside John 17:12 if you want it: "While I was with them, I kept them in thy name... I have guarded them": the shamar work, done by Christ, about to be delegated to shepherds.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Chrysostom

Returning to the book that opened our study: Chrysostom marvels at John 20:23 and teaches, in substance, that God has given to priests an authority he gave neither to angels nor to archangels, for to none of them was it said, whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven; what priests carry out below, God ratifies above. For Chrysostom this is not clerical pride but holy terror: he wrote *On the Priesthood* largely to explain why the office frightened him. (Faithfully summarized.)

On the Priesthood, Book 3

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ambrose of Milan

St. Ambrose, writing *On Penance* against a rigorist sect that denied the Church could absolve grave sinners, teaches in substance: the Church does not presume this power, she obeys it; Christ said "whose sins you forgive," and it would be strange obedience to refuse a gift the Lord commanded to be exercised.

Why, he presses, would Christ grant a power he intended no one to use? (A summary of his argument.)

On Penance

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"When Peter baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes; when Paul baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes; even when Judas baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes." (A close paraphrase of his teaching.) Augustine's famous principle, preached on John's Gospel, is the deep answer to "why confess to a man": in the sacraments the minister's hands move, but the power is never his. The priest in the confessional is an instrument; the forgiving is Christ's. Which is also why the minister's personal unworthiness, a scandal Augustine knew well, cannot poison the gift.

Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 6

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1441 to 1442: only God forgives sins; the Son of Man exercises this divine authority on earth and imparts it to men to exercise in his name.
- CCC 1444 to 1445: the office of binding and loosing given to Peter and to the college of apostles; reconciliation with the Church inseparable from reconciliation with God.
- CCC 1461: because Christ entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to his apostles, bishops and priests continue to exercise it.
- CCC 1447: the honest paragraph; the concrete form of the sacrament varied greatly over the centuries while its fundamental structure remained. Read it yourself before the session.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD A (resolved): the standing image may echo naturally ("the priest at the altar, the priest in the confessional: same gift, same night-and-day pair of Easter and Holy Thursday"). Do not force it.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): John 17:12, Christ kept and guarded his own; tonight he begins delegating the keeping. One sentence, well placed.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): resting.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): the authority tonight is given to the apostles specifically; next week the pendulum swings to the whole priestly people, and the study needs both swings at full arc. Do not blend them tonight.

Session Goals

1. The group discovers Genesis 2:7 behind the Easter breath and articulates the new-creation stakes.
2. The group states why "forgive... retain" implies case-by-case judgment rather than blanket announcement.
3. The group discovers Isaiah 22 behind the keys and can describe the steward's office in their own words.
4. The "only God can forgive" steelman is built at full strength, its true premise affirmed, and answered from Mark 2 and Matthew 9:8.
5. The development of the sacrament's form is stated honestly, by you, before anyone else raises it, with CCC 1447 on the table.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: Easter evening, John 20 and the breath discovery (25 min)
- 0:40 Build II: The keys and the steward, Matthew 16 and Isaiah 22 (15 min)
- 0:55 Build III: Only God can forgive, the steelman (20 min)
- 1:15 Build IV: The honesty minute, development of the form (5 min)
- 1:20 Send (5 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper and fold Build II to Isaiah 22:22 plus Matthew 16:19 read back to back with a single question. Never cut the honesty minute; it is five minutes that buys the whole night its credibility.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Risen Lord, you walked through locked doors and your first word was peace. Walk into whatever is locked in us tonight. Breathe on us as you breathed on them, and teach us what you were giving. Amen.

Win

1. What is the hardest part of apologizing: saying it, meaning it, or believing you are actually forgiven afterward? Why that part?
2. Has anyone ever said words out loud to you ("I forgive you," "we are okay," "it is over") that changed something no amount of silent knowing had changed? What did the OUT LOUD do?

Build I: Easter Evening

Read John 20:19 to 23 aloud, slowly, twice.

Q1. Take verse 21 first: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." What was the Father's sending of the Son FOR? So what is being said about the apostles' mission?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Son was sent to reveal the Father, to seek and save the lost, to give his life, and, as the whole Gospel insists, to take away sin ("Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," John 1:29). The apostles' mission is patterned on his own: not a new mission, but his mission, extended through sent men. Whatever verse 23 gives, verse 21 has already framed it as continuation, not innovation.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Verse 22 says he BREATHED on them. That gesture has an ancestry; God has breathed on a human being before, at one very particular moment. Find it, in the Bible's first two chapters." (They will land at Genesis 2:7. Read it aloud when found.)

Q2. Set Genesis 2:7 next to John 20:22. What happened when God breathed the first time? What is John telling us is happening now?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The first breath made dust into a living man; creation. John, whose Gospel deliberately opens with "In the beginning," shows the risen Christ, on the evening of the first day of the new week, breathing on men: new creation is beginning, and as God's breath once made living men, Christ's breath now makes life-giving ministers, carriers of the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins. Our study began with a man placed in a garden to serve and guard; the new Adam is now breathing that vocation, transformed, into his apostles.

Q3. Now verse 23 itself. It has two sides: forgive, and retain. Why does the second side matter? What does a two-sided authority require that a one-sided announcement would not?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"If you forgive the sins of any... if you retain the sins of any": this is discretion, exercised case by case. A blanket announcement ("God forgives whoever believes!") has no second side; there is nothing to retain, and the retaining clause becomes dead words. But forgive-or-retain requires knowing the case: hearing the sin, weighing the sorrow. From this two-sidedness the Church has understood that the gift ordinarily implies a ministry in which sins are actually told to the men who must forgive or retain them. The word "confession" is not in the verse; the logic of confession is.

Build II: The Keys and the Steward

Read Matthew 16:18 to 19 aloud.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Keys, opening and shutting, over a kingdom: this is furniture from an Old Testament office. In Isaiah 22:15 to 22, God fires one royal official and hires another. Find verse 22 especially: what is placed on the new man's shoulder, over whose house, with what powers?"

Q4. Describe the office in Isaiah 22 in your own words. Then: what is Jesus, Son of David, doing when he hands Simon "the keys of the kingdom"?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Isaiah 22: the steward of the royal palace, an office "over the house" of the king. Shebna is deposed; Eliakim is installed; "the key of the house of David" goes on his shoulder; "he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." A real office, with delegated royal authority, and, notice for later, an office that survives its holders: it passed from Shebna to Eliakim and could pass again. In the Church's long-standing reading of this background, Jesus, the Son of David, is staffing his royal house: Peter receives the steward's keys, with binding and loosing ratified in heaven; and in Matthew 18:18 the binding-and-loosing authority extends to the apostles together, spoken precisely in the context of dealing with sin. Delegated authority in the king's house is not a rival to the king; it is how a king runs a kingdom.

DIG DEEPER

John 17:12, the night before: "While I was with them, I kept them in thy name... I have guarded them." The keeping-and-guarding of Eden, done perfectly at last by Christ over his little flock, and about to be handed to shepherds ("Feed my sheep," John 21). The guard-thread of this study is quietly becoming the pastoral office.

Build III: Only God Can Forgive

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength: "Your friend says: Mark 2:7, the scribes were RIGHT about the principle: who can forgive sins but God alone? Forgiveness of sin is God's prerogative, full stop. So John 20:23 must mean the apostles were commissioned to PREACH forgiveness, to announce the terms: believe, and God forgives you. Read it that way, or read retain as the church declaring sins retained in unbelief, or as church discipline, and everything fits without a man in a box saying I absolve you, words no sinful man has any business saying to another. And notice: my reading honors God MORE than yours."

Q5. First, what is TRUE in that objection? Then read Mark 2:5 to 12 carefully, and find the detail Matthew adds in his version at Matthew 9:8. What do you find?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

True, and the Church teaches it in exactly those words: only God forgives sins (CCC 1441). Any account in which the priest forgives by his own power is not the Catholic account. Grant the premise completely.

But watch what Jesus does with the scribes' premise: he does not correct it; he demonstrates something they thought impossible: "that you may know that the Son of MAN has authority ON EARTH to forgive sins," and heals the paralytic as proof. God's prerogative, exercised on earth through the incarnate one. Then Matthew's telling adds the thunderclap: the crowds "glorified God, who had given such authority TO MEN." Plural. Catholic readers from early times have heard in Matthew's plural an authority that would not terminate in Jesus' hands; the verse invites that reading, and John 20 supplies what it lacks alone. Add Paul: God "gave US the ministry of reconciliation... we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:18 to 20); an ambassador speaks with his sovereign's authority, not his own. Add the two-sided grammar of John 20:23, and be fair to the stronger Protestant readings, which give "retain" real work: declaring sins retained in unbelief, or exercising church discipline. Credit them, then notice what they concede: the verse confers a discriminating authority exercised toward particular people, which is the Catholic premise. The remaining debate is whether that authority is declarative only or judicial and sacramental; and forgive-or-retain, spoken with Christ's own breath, reads most naturally as effective rather than merely descriptive. The Catholic reading is not that men replace God as forgiver; it is that God forgives THROUGH men he breathed on for the purpose: Christ's own principle, Christ's own breath, Christ's own words. As Augustine taught about baptism: when Peter baptizes, Christ baptizes; the hands are the instrument, the power is the Lord's.

Build IV: The Honesty Minute

Say this yourself, unprompted: "Before anyone asks: the confessional box, the screen, Saturday afternoon lines, frequent devotional confession, none of that is in the New Testament, and the Church does not claim it is. The early centuries knew severe public penance, often once in a lifetime, for grave sins; the private repeatable form your grandparents knew spread centuries later, carried notably by Irish monks. The Catechism itself lays out this development in paragraph 1447 and calls the underlying structure, sorrow, confession, satisfaction, and absolution through the Church's ministry, the constant beneath the changing discipline. What tonight defended from Scripture is the apostolic AUTHORITY, not the furniture. The furniture is the Church exercising, in different centuries in different ways, a gift given on Easter evening. Keep those two claims distinct and you will never be ambushed by a church history fact again."

Send

1. Christ's first gift to a room full of men who had abandoned him was peace, and his second was the power to give peace to others. Who needs to hear real, out-loud forgiveness from you this week, not vague warmth, but words?
2. If the words "I absolve you" are Christ keeping his Easter promise through a man he sent, what has been keeping you from hearing them lately, and what would it take to go?

Live It This Week

- Go to confession this week if you are able, and listen to the words of absolution as what tonight showed them to be: Easter evening, still happening. If it has been years, say exactly that to the priest; it is his favorite sentence to hear.
- Speak one out-loud forgiveness this week to someone who needs the words, not the vibe.

- Pray John 20:21 to 23 once each day, slowly, and each time thank Christ by name for one person through whom his forgiveness has reached you.

Memory Verse

"Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

John 20:21 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, on the evening of your resurrection you gave peace, breath, and the forgiveness of sins into human hands. Thank you for refusing to keep your mercy at a distance. Give us the humility to receive it the way you chose to give it, and the courage to carry it out loud into every room we enter. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 7

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- John 20:19 to 23 (Build I, read aloud twice; memory verse source at 20:21)
- John 1:29 (Build I, leader reference)
- Genesis 2:7 (Build I, live discovery)
- Matthew 16:18 to 19 (Build II, read aloud)
- Isaiah 22:15 to 22 (Build II, live discovery)
- Matthew 18:18 (Build II, in the ANSWER)
- John 17:12 (Dig Deeper)
- Mark 2:5 to 12 (Build III, read aloud)
- Matthew 9:8 (Build III, live discovery detail)
- 2 Corinthians 5:18 to 20 (Build III, in the ANSWER)
- James 5:14 to 16 (leader reference)

Session 8: A Royal Priesthood

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Tonight the pendulum swings, hard and on purpose. After three sessions on what Christ gave the apostles, the group opens 1 Peter 2 and hears the words they memorized on the first night spoken to the whole Church: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." The title of this study lands on the page. The aim is double: first, that every person in the room walks out KNOWING they are a priest, with real sacrifices to offer (their bodies, their work, their praise, their suffering: Romans 12:1, Hebrews 13:15 to 16); second, that the group discovers, from 1 Peter itself and from the Old Testament they now know well, why the royal priesthood of all the baptized was never a contradiction of ordained ministry, because it never was in Israel, and the letter that proclaims it is written by an officer of the Church who addresses other officers in its final chapter. Both priesthoods at full strength, differing essentially and ordered to one another, with no rivalry: that is the Catholic claim, and tonight the group assembles it themselves.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that the whole community of believers is, as such, priestly, exercising its baptismal priesthood through the offering of prayer, thanksgiving, witness, and holiness of life (CCC 1546, drawing on Lumen Gentium); and that the ministerial priesthood differs essentially from the common priesthood, not as higher rank in a spiritual aristocracy, but as a different KIND of participation in Christ's one priesthood, existing AT THE SERVICE of the common priesthood, directed at its unfolding (CCC 1547). The laity's sacrifices are named without embarrassment: their work, prayers, apostolic endeavors, family life, daily labor, hardships patiently borne, all become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, offered especially in the Eucharist (CCC 901). Tonight is the session where the study's title becomes the group's identity.

What You Need to Know

Read 1 Peter 2:4 to 10 until you can hear its architecture. Christ is the living stone, rejected by men, chosen and precious to God; and those who come to him are themselves living stones, "built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Then verse 9 detonates the study's title: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." Every phrase is harvested from the Old Testament, and the central one is your group's first memory verse: Exodus 19:6, quoted nearly verbatim (by way of its Greek translation). Peter is announcing that the vocation spoken at Sinai, in this study's traced reading wounded at the calf and held under Levi's guardianship, is proclaimed by Peter as the identity of the whole Church in Christ. The kingdom-of-priests destiny was never revoked; it was waiting for the Priest. When your group recognizes their own memory verse on the page, and they will, without help, let the moment breathe. It is the single largest recognition of the study.

Then make the priesthood concrete, because "spiritual sacrifices" can evaporate into a compliment if you let it. What do baptized priests actually offer? The group discovers Romans 12:1 live: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship": the body, the whole embodied life, laid on the altar. Hebrews 13:15 to 16 names more: "a sacrifice of praise... the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name," and "do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." The Catechism completes the inventory for the lay faithful (CCC 901): work, prayer, family life, hardships patiently borne. Press it into their actual week: the spreadsheet finished with integrity, the diaper changed at 3 a.m., the

illness carried without bitterness, offered through Christ, are priestly acts. This is not a consolation prize for the unordained; it is Exodus 19:6, paid in full.

Now the steelman, and it deserves its full historic weight: "1 Peter 2:9 is the Reformation's verse. Every believer is a priest: so the medieval machinery of a separate priestly caste was exactly the kind of thing this verse abolishes. Rome took a gift addressed to all and locked it in a sanctuary." Two discoveries answer it, both made by the group. First, the Old Testament one they can now make from memory: Exodus 19:6 was spoken to a nation that, within months, ALSO had an ordained priesthood at God's explicit command; in Israel, universal priestly vocation and ordained priestly office coexisted from the beginning, by design. Quoting Israel's vocation verse cannot abolish ordained ministry, because it never did the first time; Korah made a closely analogous appeal ("all the congregation are holy!") and the group already knows how God answered it. Second, the New Testament discovery: 1 Peter ITSELF. The letter proclaiming the royal priesthood opens "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" and closes with "So I exhort the ELDERS among you, as a fellow elder... Tend the flock of God that is your charge" (1 Peter 5:1 to 4): the universal-priesthood letter is written by an officer, to churches that have officers, with instructions for the officers. Peter saw no tension because there is none: the shepherds exist FOR the priestly flock (CCC 1547: at the service of the common priesthood), and the flock's priesthood is the point of the shepherds' work. One more exegetical honesty, which strengthens rather than weakens: the "you" of 1 Peter 2:9 is corporate, a people, a race, a nation, a house; the verse crowns the Church as a priestly PEOPLE rather than distributing private chaplaincies to individuals. That corporate shape is exactly Exodus 19:6's shape, and it is why the verse and ordained ministry have never collided in Catholic reading: the ministerial priesthood serves precisely to build the priestly house.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight is Thread D's great harvest: Exodus 19:6, planted as the first memory verse, discovered by the group inside 1 Peter 2:9. Revelation 1:5 to 6 extends it ("made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father"), and you will hold its full resolution for Session 12, where the study's last page returns to it in glory. Thread C also pays out quietly: "a chosen race... God's own people" is firstborn-nation language (Exodus 4:22) restored in the Firstborn.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Leo the Great

On the first night of this study, you met St. Leo and were told he would matter tonight. Here he is: preaching to ordinary baptized Christians, Leo teaches in substance that all who are reborn in Christ share a royal and priestly dignity, for the sign of the cross makes them a kingly people and the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates them as priests; every Christian, he insists, should recognize this dignity in himself. A pope, in the fifth century, telling the whole congregation they are royal priests: 1 Peter 2:9 was never a lost verse the Reformation recovered; it was the Church's own preaching all along. (A summary of Leo's teaching.)

Sermon 4

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"The whole redeemed city, that is, the congregation and society of the saints, is offered to God as a universal sacrifice through the great High Priest." Augustine, in the same chapter of the City of God this study has returned to twice, gives the royal priesthood its grandest sentence: the Church herself, the whole of us together, is the offering, carried through the one Priest. Your life is not beside the sacrifice; it

is in it.

City of God, Book 10, chapter 6

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thérèse of Lisieux

St. Thérèse teaches, in substance, that holiness is not the property of great deeds: the smallest acts, a difficult person loved, a hidden chore done, a discomfort accepted without complaint, become great offerings when done with great love. She is the royal priesthood's field manual. If "spiritual sacrifices" ever sounds abstract, Thérèse is the saint who shows what it looks like on an ordinary Tuesday. (A summary of the heart of her *Story of a Soul*.)

Story of a Soul

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1546: Christ has made the Church a kingdom of priests; the whole community of believers is, as such, priestly, and the faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood in prayer, thanksgiving, witness, and holiness of life.
- CCC 1547: the ministerial priesthood differs ESSENTIALLY from the common priesthood of the faithful, and it is AT THE SERVICE of the common priesthood; both participate, each in its own way, in the one priesthood of Christ.
- CCC 901: the laity's works, prayers, family life, daily labor, and hardships patiently borne become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, offered with the Lord's body in the Eucharist.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): the great harvest is tonight; the FULL resolution (Revelation, the liturgy of heaven, the study's last word) is Session 12. Harvest without closing.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): "chosen race... God's own people" restores the firstborn-nation identity; one sentence, or save it entirely for Session 12.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): 1 Peter 5:2, "Tend the flock of God that is your charge," is the guard-thread in pastoral form; a quiet setup for Session 10.
- THREAD A (resolved): the Melchizedek image can serve tonight if useful: the priestly PEOPLE offers its life through the Priest whose offering is on the altar.

Session Goals

1. The group recognizes Exodus 19:6 inside 1 Peter 2:9 unaided, and can narrate the vocation's arc: spoken at Sinai, wounded at the calf, restored in Christ.
2. Every participant can name at least two concrete sacrifices their own baptismal priesthood offers this week.
3. The Reformation steelman is stated with full historic weight and answered by the group's two discoveries: Israel held both priesthoods by design, and 1 Peter itself is an officer's letter that addresses officers.
4. The corporate shape of the "you" in 1 Peter 2:9 is stated honestly.
5. No one leaves thinking the common priesthood is a metaphor or a consolation prize. It is the study's title, and it is theirs.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: Living stones and the recognition, 1 Peter 2:4 to 10 (25 min)
- 0:40 Build II: What do we offer, Romans 12 and Hebrews 13 (15 min)
- 0:55 Build III: The Reformation steelman (20 min)
- 1:15 Send (10 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper and compress Build II by reading Romans 12:1 yourself and moving straight to the inventory question. Never cut the recognition moment or the 1 Peter 5 discovery.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, you called a people out of darkness into your marvelous light and named them priests. Tonight, read our own name to us from your word, and give us the honesty to believe what you call us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Was there a moment someone older named something in you ("you are a leader," "you are an artist," "you are good with people") and the naming itself changed you? What did being NAMED do that the ability alone had not?
2. What is a group you belong to where the belonging itself, not your individual role, is the point? What does that kind of belonging give you?

Build I: Living Stones

Read 1 Peter 2:4 to 10 aloud, divided around the room, and tell everyone to circle any phrase they have seen before, anywhere, in this study. Do not say more than that.

Q1. What did you circle? Where have you seen it, exactly?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The room should find it: "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" is Exodus 19:6, their first memory verse, the words of Sinai, quoted by Peter (by way of the Greek Old Testament) and spoken now to the whole Church. Some will also circle "chosen race" and "God's own people" (Exodus 19:5, "my own possession"). Let the recognition land fully before analyzing. Then ask them to narrate the arc themselves: spoken at Sinai; conditioned on covenant; wounded at the golden calf and, in the reading this study has traced, placed under Levi's guardianship; promised through the prophets; and now, on the far side of the Priest for ever and his one sacrifice, proclaimed by Peter over the whole Church, everyone in this room included. The study's title was never decoration. It is the plot.

Q2. Verse 5 says what this priestly people is FOR: "to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Notice the last four words. Why do they matter?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Through Jesus Christ": the common priesthood is not a million private priesthoods running on their own steam; it is participation in HIS. Every offering of the baptized rises through the one Priest and his one sacrifice, or it does not rise. This protects tonight from both errors at once: no clericalism (the people really offer) and no self-made religion (the offering rises through him alone).

Build II: What Do Priests Like Us Offer?

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "If we are priests, we need an offering. Paul names it in one verse near the end of Romans, chapter 12, right at the top. Find what he tells baptized people to present, and as what."

Q3. What is the offering in Romans 12:1? And add Hebrews 13:15 to 16 to the inventory: what else do the baptized offer?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Present your BODIES as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship": the whole embodied life, laid on the altar while still living it. Hebrews adds "a sacrifice of praise... the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name," and doing good and sharing what you have, "for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." The Church completes the inventory without blushing (CCC 901, speaking of the lay faithful): your work, your prayers, your family life, your daily labor, your hardships patiently borne, offered through Christ, especially united to his offering in the Eucharist. Now make it concrete around the room: the spreadsheet finished with integrity is a priestly act. The 3 a.m. feeding. The chronic pain carried without cursing God. The apology made first. Priests need altars; yours is your week.

DIG DEEPER

Revelation 1:5 to 6: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father." John, in exile, opens the Bible's last book by singing your study's title over the persecuted churches. Where this study will end, in Session 12, is inside that sentence. For tonight, just read it and let it shine.

Build III: The Reformation's Verse

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Give it full historic weight: "This is not a dorm-room objection; it moved a continent. The Reformers read 1 Peter 2:9 and said: there it is, in Peter's own hand: EVERY believer is a priest. So the medieval edifice, a separate priestly caste with powers the people lack, standing between the baptized and God, is precisely what this verse levels. The priesthood of all believers stands on Christ's finished sacrifice and sole mediation: with the one offering complete, no further sacrificing caste can stand between the baptized and God, and Rome's sacerdotal office does exactly that. And be honest: after seven weeks in this study, you have watched ordinary laypeople do real exegesis every session. Does that not feel like evidence for their side?"

Q4. Two discoveries answer this, and you already own both. First, from memory: when Exodus 19:6 was FIRST spoken, what did Israel's worship look like within months, at God's own command? And who once made a closely analogous appeal, and what happened?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Within the same Sinai narrative, at God's explicit command, Israel received an ordained priesthood: Aaron, vestments, ordination rites, the whole of Session 2 (commanded, note, in Exodus 28 to 29, even before the calf story). Corporate priestly vocation and ordained priestly office stood side by side at God's command; the verse being quoted never abolished ordained ministry, because it was never against it. And Korah made a closely analogous appeal: "all the congregation are holy, every one of them... why then do you exalt yourselves?" His premise was true, Exodus 19:6 said so, and the seizure was still rebellion; God answered with the earth, the fire, and then, gently, the budded staff. A holy, priestly people and a conferred priesthood within it were never contradictions in Israel. Quoting Israel's vocation verse cannot make them contradictions now.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Second discovery: stay inside 1 Peter itself. Read the letter's very first line, 1 Peter 1:1. Then flip to 1 Peter 5:1 to 4 and tell me who is being addressed, by whom, and told to do what."

Q5. What do you find at the two ends of the royal-priesthood letter? And so, how do the two priesthods actually relate, in Peter's own practice and in the Church's teaching?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The letter opens "Peter, an APOSTLE of Jesus Christ," an officer writing with authority; and near its close: "So I exhort the ELDERS among you, as a fellow elder... Tend the flock of God that is your charge." The universal-priesthood letter is written by an officer, to churches that have officers, with orders for the officers, and Peter senses no contradiction. Be precise about what this proves: it shows that universal priesthood and real office coexist in the New Testament, no more; the specifically SACRAMENTAL shape of Catholic priesthood rests on the grounds built in Sessions 6, 7, and 10. One honest note about the verse itself: the "you" of 2:9 is corporate, a race, a nation, a people, a house of living stones; it crowns the Church as a priestly PEOPLE, just as Exodus 19:6 did, rather than issuing private clerical credentials to individuals.

So the Catholic teaching, far from confiscating the verse, states both halves at full strength: the common priesthood of all the baptized is REAL (CCC 1546; tonight's whole first hour), and the ministerial priesthood differs from it essentially, not as a higher caste in a spiritual aristocracy, but as a different kind of participation in Christ's one priesthood that exists AT THE SERVICE of the common priesthood (CCC 1547). The shepherds are for the flock; the ordained offer the Sacrifice so that the priestly people can offer their lives inside it. Your seven weeks of lay exegesis is not evidence against the Church's structure; it is the structure working: the ministry equipping the royal priesthood to open the word and offer their lives. And say the last thing plainly: if you were baptized, tonight's verse is about you. You are the kingdom of priests this study is named for.

Send

1. Name your altar out loud: what is the one place in your ordinary week (a job, a person, a suffering) that you will consciously offer as a priest this week?
2. "You are a chosen race": the identity is corporate; nobody is a priest alone. Who in your life needs to be told they are part of this people, and might only hear it from you?

Live It This Week

- Each morning this week, name one concrete thing from the coming day and offer it out loud as your priestly sacrifice: "Father, through Jesus Christ, I offer you this." Watch what it does to the thing.
- At Mass, at the preparation of the gifts, place your week on the paten in your mind: your work, your family, your hardest thing. This is CCC 901 as an act, not a paragraph.
- Memorize the memory verse with someone: it is long, it is worth it, and it is your name.

Memory Verse

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

1 Peter 2:9 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, at Sinai you spoke a vocation over a people, and in your Son you kept your word past every failure, ours included. Thank you for calling us out of darkness. Make our bodies living sacrifices, our praise a pleasing offering, and our whole week an altar, through Jesus Christ, our great High Priest. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 8

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- 1 Peter 2:4 to 10 (Build I, read aloud; memory verse source at 2:9)
- Exodus 19:5 to 6 (Build I, recognition from memory)
- Romans 12:1 (Build II, live discovery)
- Hebrews 13:15 to 16 (Build II, read aloud)
- Revelation 1:5 to 6 (Dig Deeper)
- Numbers 16 (Build III, recalled from Session 4)
- 1 Peter 1:1 (Build III, live discovery)
- 1 Peter 5:1 to 4 (Build III, live discovery)
- Exodus 4:22 (leader reference, Thread C)

Session 9: One Mediator, Many Fathers

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Tonight the study walks straight at the two verses most often quoted against Catholic priesthood: "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5) and "call no man your father on earth" (Matthew 23:9). Both are built at full strength; both are answered by the simplest and most devastating tool this group now owns: reading the whole passage, and the rest of the New Testament, with the texts open. The group discovers that Paul commands universal intercession in the very paragraph that declares one mediator, that the New Testament itself is full of spiritual fathers, including Paul calling himself one, and that all fatherhood, and all mediation, flows from one source without rivalry. The night ends where the study began: with father-priests, now understood.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism, quoting the Second Vatican Council, teaches the exact principle tonight discovers in the text: just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways by his ministers and his faithful, so the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source (Lumen Gentium 62, quoted at CCC 970; the passage concerns Mary and states the principle of subordinate sharing in the one source). And on intercession: since Abraham, intercession, asking on behalf of another, has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy, and in the Church's intercession Christians participate in Christ's own intercession (CCC 2634 to 2636). One source, many sharers: the same grammar the study has used for priesthood all along.

What You Need to Know

Take the mediator text first, and take it whole. The sentence "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" is gloriously true, and the Church confesses every word; nothing tonight qualifies it. But 1 Timothy 2:5 has a context that the objection never quotes, and the group will read it live: verses 1 to 4. "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, INTERCESSIONS, and thanksgivings be made FOR ALL MEN... This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." Paul commands every Christian to mediate in prayer for everyone, kings included, and calls it pleasing to God, and then, in the same breath of the same paragraph, says there is one mediator. Either Paul contradicted himself within one breath, or "one mediator" was never aimed at the interceding Church; it was aimed at the uniqueness of the RANSOM: one God, one Savior, one price paid for all, which is precisely why prayer for all men makes sense. The unique mediation is the spring; our intercessions are water from it, not rival wells. The study has seen this grammar before: one priesthood, shared two ways, no rivalry. The Council said it in one sentence the Catechism preserves: the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but gives rise to, a manifold cooperation which shares in the one source. Sprinkle in the New Testament's startlingly strong participation language if the group wants more: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2); "pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16); and Paul to Timothy himself: "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching... for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). Paul tells a minister he will SAVE his hearers, in the same letter as the one-mediator verse, because instrumental language never threatened the source in Paul's mind.

Then "call no man your father." Read Matthew 23:1 to 12 whole and the target is unmistakable: religious leaders who "do all their deeds to be seen by men," who love the best seats and the salutations and the titles. And notice the command's full sweep, which the objection also never quotes: verse 8 forbids "rabbi" (teacher), verse 9 "father," verse 10 "master" or "instructor." Taken with wooden literalism, this outlaws calling your dad "father," your professor "teacher," and Mister anybody ("master" is where "mister" comes from). No one, in any church, lives that reading; the New Testament itself refuses it, and the group will catch the refusals live: Paul, "I became your FATHER in Christ Jesus through the gospel," telling the Corinthians they have countless guides but not many fathers (1 Corinthians 4:14 to 15); Stephen, before the Sanhedrin, "our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2); John writing to "fathers" (1 John 2:13 to 14); Jesus himself, in his own parable, having a man in torment cry "Father Abraham" without a syllable of correction (Luke 16:24, 30). And James 3:1 assumes the Church HAS teachers while Ephesians 4:11 says Christ GAVE teachers. The command, in context, forbids the craving of titles as self-exaltation and the treating of any man as the ultimate source of what only God gives. The positive teaching underneath it is Ephesians 3:14 to 15, tonight's memory verse: "every family" (RSV2CE; the Greek patria, built on pater, father, has traditionally also been rendered "every fatherhood") in heaven and on earth is NAMED from the Father; human fathers, biological and spiritual, are real precisely as derivations, never as replacements. A priest called "Father" is not a rival to God any more than your dad is; both are living signs pointing at the source, and both stand under Matthew 23's judgment the moment they forget it. End the night by closing the loop the study opened in Session 1: the first priests we ever met were fathers offering for their households; the new covenant's priests are fathers of households of another kind; and every baptized man in the room who becomes a father takes up the oldest natural pattern of priestly intercession there is, exercised through his share in the baptismal priesthood.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight leans on roots already planted: Abraham the interceding father (Genesis 18, pleading for Sodom, is the classic image behind CCC 2635; use it if the room wants an Old Testament anchor for intercession), Job the father-priest from Session 1, and Moses the mediator on the mountain (Exodus 32:11 to 14, 30 to 32, where Moses' intercession is honored by God, and even offers himself for the people). God has always delighted to work through asked-for mercy; the one Mediator did not end that pattern, he grounded it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas states tonight's distinction with his usual calm: Christ alone is the perfect mediator, for he alone reconciled the human race to God through his death; yet nothing prevents others from being called mediators in a qualified sense, as ministers and cooperators who dispose and serve, participating in the mediation of the one Mediator. In substance: subordinate mediation does not compete with Christ; it hangs from him. (A summary of his teaching on Christ the Mediator.)

Summa Theologiae III, q. 26

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Cyprian of Carthage

"He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother." Cyprian's most famous sentence names the family through which God fathers his children: the Church our mother. Set it beside Paul's "I became your father in Christ Jesus," and the household grammar of grace comes into view: a Father above and, within his family, motherhood and fatherhood in the order of grace.

On the Unity of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

St. Irenaeus teaches, in substance, that the one who has been taught the faith from another's mouth is called the son of his teacher, and the teacher his father: for the disciple is begotten in the order of teaching and grace. Writing in the second century, Irenaeus treats gospel fatherhood as ordinary Christian vocabulary, exactly as Paul used it of the Corinthians. (A summary from his great work against the Gnostic heresies.)

Against Heresies, Book 4

Catechism Connection

- CCC 970, quoting Lumen Gentium 62: the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source; the conciliar text itself draws the parallel with the one priesthood shared by ministers and faithful.
- CCC 2634 to 2636: intercession as participation in Christ's own intercession; praying as Abraham did, on behalf of all, even enemies.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD C (the firstborn / father-priest): major resolution movement tonight. The father-priests of Session 1 return as the deep background of "Father" as a priestly title, and of every Christian parent's vocation. Name the loop-closing explicitly at the end of Build III; the group has earned it.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): resting.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): the interceding congregation of 1 Timothy 2:1 IS the royal priesthood at work; one sentence connecting last week to this week.
- THREAD A (resolved): available as an image if needed; do not force.

Session Goals

1. The group reads 1 Timothy 2:1 to 6 whole and articulates the relationship between commanded universal intercession and the one mediator.
2. The group can state the participation principle (one source, many sharers) and connect it to the study's priesthood grammar.
3. The group reads Matthew 23:1 to 12 whole, names its actual target, and discovers at least three New Testament counterexamples to the literalist reading with the texts open.
4. The group can explain Ephesians 3:14 to 15 as the positive theology of derived fatherhood.
5. The father-priest loop from Session 1 is explicitly closed.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: One mediator, whole passage (25 min)
- 0:40 Build II: Call no man father, whole passage and the hunt (25 min)
- 1:05 Build III: Every fatherhood named from the Father, and the loop closes (10 min)
- 1:15 Send (10 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper and reduce the Build II hunt to two counterexamples (1 Corinthians 4:15 and Luke 16:24), reading them yourself. Never cut Build III; the loop-closing is the night's destination.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, teach us tonight what your Son's unique place means and does not mean. Give us clean readings, honest answers, and gratitude for every person through whom your life has reached us. Through Christ our Lord, the one mediator. Amen.

Win

1. Who is someone who has prayed for you faithfully over the years? How do you feel knowing you have been carried like that?
2. Besides your biological parents, who has been a father or mother to you, someone who formed you, corrected you, fed you in some way? What made them that?

Build I: One Mediator, Whole Passage

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength: "Your friend quotes 1 Timothy 2:5 from memory: there is ONE mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. One. Not a priest at an altar, not saints, not Mary, not anybody. Every Catholic structure that puts a creature between me and God, however politely, flunks this verse. It could not be clearer if Paul had underlined it."

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Fair. Now let us do the thing this group always does: read the whole passage. Open 1 Timothy 2 and read verses 1 through 6 aloud, and tell me what Paul COMMANDS in verses 1 to 4, before he ever says the word mediator."

Q1. What does Paul urge "first of all"? For whom? And how does God regard it? Now: how do verses 1 to 4 and verse 5 fit together in one paragraph without Paul contradicting himself?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul urges "supplications, prayers, INTERCESSIONS, and thanksgivings... for all men," kings and all in authority included, and calls this "good... acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." Intercession is a Christian mediating in prayer for another; Paul commands it universally, then says "one mediator" in the same paragraph, the same breath. So "one mediator" cannot be aimed at the interceding Church Paul just mobilized; it is aimed at the uniqueness of the RANSOM: one God, one Savior, one who "gave himself as a ransom for all," which is exactly WHY prayer for all people makes sense. The unique mediation is the spring; our intercessions are water from it, not rival wells.

And you have seen this grammar all study: one priesthood of Christ, shared by ministers and faithful without rivalry. The Council states the principle in those very terms (Lumen Gentium 62, preserved at CCC 970): the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but GIVES RISE TO, a manifold cooperation that shares in the one source. If the room wants the strongest verse: in this same letter, Paul tells Timothy that by attending to his teaching "you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). Paul tells a minister he will SAVE people, and feels no tension, because instruments never threaten the source.

DIG DEEPER

Genesis 18:22 to 33: Abraham haggling with God over Sodom, and God welcoming every round of it. Exodus 32: Moses on the mountain, and "the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people" at Moses' intercession, Moses even offering to be blotted out in their place. From the beginning, God has delighted to give mercy AS asked-for mercy, through the pleading of his friends. The one Mediator did not end that pattern; he is its source and summit, "always living to make intercession" (your Session 5 memory verse).

Build II: Call No Man Father

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength: "Your friend smiles and plays the ace: Matthew 23:9. Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Red letters. A direct command of Jesus. And what does every Catholic call the man at the altar? It is not a gray area; it is a habit of direct disobedience so old nobody notices it anymore."

Read Matthew 23:1 to 12 aloud, whole.

Q2. In context: who is Jesus talking about, what are they doing wrong, and what THREE titles does he forbid (verses 8, 9, 10)? What happens if we take all three with strict literalism?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The target is the scribes and Pharisees who "do all their deeds to be seen by men," who love the places of honor and the salutations and the titles. And the command forbids not one title but three: rabbi/teacher (v. 8), father (v. 9), and master or instructor (v. 10). Strict literalism outlaws "teacher," "professor," "doctor" (Latin for teacher), "mister" (from master), and calling your own dad "father." No Christian community on earth keeps that reading, because it is not the reading. The command targets the CRAVING of titles as self-exaltation, and the treating of any man as the ultimate source of what only God gives.

LIVE DISCOVERY: THE HUNT. Say: "If the apostles heard verse 9 as an absolute ban, the rest of the New Testament should be scrubbed clean of spiritual fathers. Split up and check these four: 1 Corinthians 4:14 to 15. Acts 7:2. 1 John 2:13 to 14. And, read this one carefully, Luke 16:24, noting who is telling the story. Report back."

Q3. What did the four teams find?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul: "I became your FATHER in Christ Jesus through the gospel," and he sharpens it: "you have countless guides in Christ, but not many fathers." Stephen, on trial, opens with "our father Abraham": father-language used freely for a revered ancestor in grace. John addresses "fathers" as a standing group in the churches. And in Luke 16, it is JESUS HIMSELF, in his own parable, who has the rich man cry "Father Abraham" (twice, Luke 16:24 and 30) without one syllable of correction. Add Ephesians 4:11 (Christ GAVE teachers to the Church) and James 3:1 (the Church has teachers, held to stricter judgment) against verse 8's "call no man teacher," and the literalist reading is refuted by the entire apostolic generation, including the Lord's own storytelling.

Build III: Every Fatherhood Named from the Father

Read Ephesians 3:14 to 15 aloud, slowly. It is tonight's memory verse.

Q4. According to Paul, where does every family, every fatherhood, in heaven and on earth get its NAME? So what is a human father, biological or spiritual, in relation to God the Father? And now, thinking all the way back to Session 1: who were the first priests this study ever met?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Every family," says the RSV2CE; the Greek patria is built on pater, father, and has long been rendered "every fatherhood." Either way, the point stands: every family, every fatherhood, is NAMED from the Father: derived, dependent, real precisely as a living sign of the source, never a replacement for it. Your dad being called "father" does not compete with God; it points at him, and stands under judgment the moment it forgets to. A priest called "Father" stands in exactly the same derived position: a father in the gospel, the way Paul was to Corinth, begetting and feeding a family in Christ, and Matthew 23 condemns him the moment the title becomes a throne instead of an apron.

And close the loop out loud: the first offerers this study met, back in Session 1, included FATHERS: Noah at his altar, Job rising early to offer for each of his children, Abraham building altars for his household. The oldest natural PATTERN of priestly intercession is parenthood; the new covenant's priests are fathers of households of another kind; and every parent in this room who raises children in the faith takes up that ancient pattern by way of the baptismal priesthood, a real sharing in Christ's priesthood that remains distinct from ordained office. The study began at a family altar. It was never an accident.

Send

1. Paul commanded intercession "for all men" first of all. Who is the person you have quietly decided not to pray for, and what would obeying 1 Timothy 2:1 about them cost you this week?
2. Who could you become a spiritual father or mother to, even in a small way, someone younger in the faith who needs feeding, correcting, encouraging? What is one concrete first step?

Live It This Week

- Pray 1 Timothy 2:1 to 2 literally once a day: intercede by name for one person in civil authority, whether or not you voted for them. This is priestly work, and it is commanded.
- Write or say a real thank-you this week to one spiritual father or mother in your life, and tell them one specific thing they gave you.
- If you are a parent or hope to be: bless your children (or your future children) aloud once this week, the Numbers 6 words you learned in Session 2: the domestic church at prayer.

Memory Verse

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."

Ephesians 3:14 to 15 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named, thank you for the one Mediator who gave himself as a ransom for all, and thank you for every hand and voice through whom his mediation has reached us: parents, priests, teachers, friends who prayed. Make us faithful links in that chain, and never its end point. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 9

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- 1 Timothy 2:1 to 6 (Build I, live discovery, read aloud)
- 1 Timothy 4:16 (Build I, in the ANSWER)
- Galatians 6:2; James 5:16 (Build I, leader reference)
- Genesis 18:22 to 33; Exodus 32:11 to 14, 30 to 32 (Dig Deeper)
- Matthew 23:1 to 12 (Build II, read aloud whole)
- 1 Corinthians 4:14 to 15 (Build II, hunt team one)
- Acts 7:2 (Build II, hunt team two)
- 1 John 2:13 to 14 (Build II, hunt team three)
- Luke 16:24 (Build II, hunt team four)
- Ephesians 4:11; James 3:1 (Build II, in the ANSWER)
- Ephesians 3:14 to 15 (Build III, read aloud; memory verse source)

Session 10: The Laying On of Hands

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

If Christ instituted a ministry at the Supper and on Easter evening, we should be able to watch the New Testament hand it on. Tonight the group watches. From Acts and the Pastoral Letters they discover office language at the Church's very first business meeting (Judas' vacant "office" that another must take), elders appointed "in every church," a gift conferred "through the laying on of my hands," warnings not to lay hands on anyone hastily, and Paul's four-generation relay: what you heard from me, entrust to faithful men, who will teach others also. They also face the sharpest terminological objection in the whole debate, that the New Testament never calls Christian ministers "priests," and answer it honestly, with Paul's own priestly-service vocabulary for his ministry and with the earliest voices outside the New Testament. The aim: succession stops being a diagram from a tract and becomes something the group watched happen on the page.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that in order that the mission entrusted to the apostles might be continued after their death, they consigned, by will and testament as it were, to their immediate collaborators the duty of completing and consolidating the work they had begun, and that this apostolic ministry continues in the episcopal office (CCC 861 to 862), with priests as the bishops' co-workers (CCC 1562): as the office which the Lord confided to Peter and to the apostles is permanent, it is transmitted through episcopal consecration (CCC 861 to 862, drawing on *Lumen Gentium*). And no one has a RIGHT to ordination; like Aaron, like the Son himself in Hebrews 5, one is called and conferred, never self-appointed (CCC 1578).

What You Need to Know

Begin at the beginning, because the group will not expect the first exhibit to be Judas. In Acts 1:15 to 26, before Pentecost, the Church's first order of business is filling a vacancy. Peter quotes the Psalms: "His OFFICE let another take" (Acts 1:20; the Greek word is *episkope*, the overseership word, the root of "episcopal" and "bishop"). Weigh what is being assumed: Judas held not merely a personal relationship with Jesus but an OFFICE, and the office survives the man and must be refilled. The group met this logic in Session 7: Isaiah 22's stewardship passed from Shebna to Eliakim; offices in the King's house outlive their holders. (An analogy of pattern, not an equation Acts itself draws.) Matthias is chosen and "enrolled with the eleven." Apostleship, at the Church's own founding moment, behaves like an office with succession, not like a title that dies with its holder.

Then watch the pattern spread. Acts 6: the Seven are chosen, and the apostles "prayed and laid their hands upon them"; prayer plus hands becomes the Church's ordination grammar. Acts 14:23: Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders... in every church" on the first missionary journey; church planting includes officer installation, immediately, everywhere. Acts 20:17, 28: Paul summons "the elders (*presbyteroi*) of the church" of Ephesus and tells them "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopoi*), to care for (shepherd) the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son": elder and overseer applied to the same men, with shepherding as their task, appointed by the Spirit to guard the flock (Thread B, now an office); the settled later distinction of bishop, priest, and deacon took its crisp shape over the following decades. Then the Pastorals make the mechanism explicit. To Timothy: "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you" (1 Timothy 4:14), and, unmistakably

instrumental, "rekindle the gift of God that is within you THROUGH the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6): a gift, resident in the man, conferred through the gesture. "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Timothy 5:22): the gesture is weighty precisely because it confers. Titus 1:5: "appoint elders in every town as I directed you": succession as standing instruction. And the relay of 2 Timothy 2:2, which the group counts live: "what you have heard from me before many witnesses (generation one: Paul) entrust to faithful men (generation two: Timothy... to generation three) who will be able to teach others also (generation four)." Four generations of transmission, commanded inside the New Testament itself. Whatever one calls this, it is not a church that expected ministry to end with the apostles.

Now the steelman, and it is the strongest terminological argument against the Catholic priesthood, so build it with respect: the New Testament calls these men elders (presbyteroi) and overseers (episkopoi), and NEVER ONCE calls a Christian minister hierous, the Greek word for a sacrificing priest. In the New Testament, hierous names cultic priests, Jewish and even pagan (Acts 14:13), and Melchizedek; it is applied to Christ; and, tellingly, its collective, hierateuma, priesthood, names the whole believing people (1 Peter 2), while Revelation calls believers hierois. So, the argument runs, "priest" was imported later, when the Church paganized or re-Levitized; the original ministry was preaching and administration, not sacerdotal. The answer has four honest layers. First, concede the word count; it is correct, and pretending otherwise costs credibility. Second, offer the plausible historical explanation, a scholarly account rather than a motive the texts state: through much of the period these documents were written, hierois in the plain sense were still offering lambs in a standing Temple, and the word-family's first Christian uses went to Christ (Hebrews) and the whole Church (1 Peter); the vocabulary was occupied. Third, and decisively: watch what the presbyteroi DO rather than what they are called. They are ordained by hands; they shepherd and guard; they teach with authority; they anoint and pray for forgiveness (James 5:14 to 16); and they preside where "do this" is done. And Paul reaches for explicitly cultic vocabulary for New Covenant ministry when it suits him, which the group discovers live: "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the PRIESTLY SERVICE of the gospel of God, so that the OFFERING of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:16; the verb is hierourgeo, to work as a priest). The reality is present and priestly; the noun waited. Fourth, the timeline of the noun's arrival is not what the objection needs it to be: in the generation or two after the apostles, the Didache calls the Eucharist a sacrifice (the group read it in Session 5); traditionally around the year 96, St. Clement of Rome describes the apostles appointing ministers and providing that on their death "other approved men should succeed to their ministry"; traditionally around 107, St. Ignatius makes the bishop the center of the Eucharist; and one small etymological delight for the room: the English word "priest" itself descends, through Old English, from presbyteros. The New Testament's own word for these men grew up into ours.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Two roots resurface tonight: Isaiah 22's transferable stewardship (Session 7) behind the "office" of Acts 1:20, and the conferral principle of Numbers 16 to 17 and Hebrews 5:4 (Session 4), now visible as the Church's actual practice: no one takes this honor on himself; hands are laid, or nothing happens. Moses commissioning Joshua by the laying on of hands (Numbers 27:18 to 23, Deuteronomy 34:9, "Joshua... was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him") is the Old Testament grammar the apostles inherited; use it as leader background or a Dig Deeper.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Clement of Rome

Writing from Rome to Corinth, traditionally dated around the year 96, St. Clement teaches in substance: Christ was sent from God, the apostles from Christ; the apostles, preaching through countryside and city, appointed their first converts as bishops and deacons for future believers; and, knowing there would be

strife over the title of bishop, they provided that when these men died, OTHER APPROVED MEN SHOULD SUCCEED TO THEIR MINISTRY. The first generation after the apostles describes succession as the apostles' own arrangement. (A faithful summary of his letter.)

Letter to the Corinthians (1 Clement), chapters 42 and 44

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ignatius of Antioch

Around the year 107, on the road to his martyrdom, St. Ignatius wrote: "Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is under the bishop or one to whom he has entrusted it... where the bishop is, there let the people be." For Ignatius, ordered ministry and the Eucharist are one fabric: the offering of the Church happens through the man the Church has ordered to it. He is not inventing this on a prison march; he writes as one of our earliest witnesses to the pattern.

Letter to the Smyrnaeans

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

St. Irenaeus, taught by St. Polycarp, who had known the apostles, teaches in substance that against the Gnostics' secret traditions the Church's answer is public and checkable: we can enumerate the men appointed bishops by the apostles, and their successors, down to our own day, church by church. Succession was the second century's receipt: proof that what the Church taught was what the apostles delivered. (A summary from his work against the heresies.)

Against Heresies, Book 3

Catechism Connection

- CCC 861 to 862: the apostles consigned their mission to immediate collaborators and provided for its continuation; as the office entrusted to Peter and the apostles is permanent, it is transmitted in the Church through ordination.
- CCC 1578: no one has a right to ordination; one is called by God and conferred by the Church, as Hebrews 5:4 taught and Session 4 discovered.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD B (serve and guard): strong development: Acts 20:28, "care for the church of God"; the guarding of Eden, of the tabernacle, of the flock, now an ordained charge. Name it once.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): the officers exist inside and for the priestly people; keep last week's balance explicit if the room tilts clerical.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): resting after last week's harvest.
- THREAD A (resolved): available; the succession question is "who may say Do This," so the Supper image is naturally nearby.

Session Goals

1. The group discovers the office language of Acts 1:20 and connects it, unprompted if possible, to Isaiah 22's stewardship.

2. The group assembles the ordination grammar from the Pastorals: a gift conferred through the laying on of hands, guarded by warnings against haste.
3. The group counts the four generations of 2 Timothy 2:2 with the text open.
4. The hierous steelman is stated at full strength, its word-count conceded honestly, and answered from what the ministers DO, from Romans 15:16, and from the immediate post-apostolic witnesses.
5. No one leaves thinking succession is a medieval diagram; they watched it happen in the text.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: The vacant office, Acts 1 (15 min)
- 0:30 Build II: Hands and elders, Acts and the Pastorals (25 min)
- 0:55 Build III: But never called priests, the steelman (25 min)
- 1:20 Send (5 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper (Moses and Joshua), and in Build II read Acts 6:6 and 14:23 yourself in one sentence each, keeping the group work for the Pastorals. Never cut the Romans 15:16 discovery; the steelman answer turns on it.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you chose apostles, breathed on them, and told them to make disciples to the close of the age. Tonight, show us how you kept that promise across the deaths of the very men you chose. Give us eyes for what is actually on the page. Amen.

Win

1. Have you ever received something that had been deliberately handed down: a trade, a recipe, a family business, a position? What did the handing-down add that the thing alone would not have had?
2. When a beloved leader leaves an organization, what determines whether the thing they built survives them?

Build I: The Vacant Office

Set the scene: after the Ascension, before Pentecost, one hundred twenty believers in an upper room. The Church's first item of business is in Acts 1:15 to 26. Read it aloud.

Q1. Focus on verse 20, Peter quoting the Psalms about Judas: "His _____ let another take." What is the word? And what is being assumed about what Judas held, if it can be TAKEN by another?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"His OFFICE let another take" (the Greek word is episkope, overseership, the root of episcopal and bishop). The assumption is enormous and easy to miss: Judas held not just a friendship with Jesus but an office, and the office survives the man and must be refilled; Matthias is chosen and enrolled with the eleven. You have met this logic before: Isaiah 22, where the steward's key passed from Shebna to Eliakim, an office in the King's house that outlives its holders. At the Church's founding meeting, apostleship behaves exactly that way. (Let someone in the group make the Isaiah connection before you do; many will.)

Build II: Hands and Elders

Read Acts 6:5 to 6, then Acts 14:23, then Acts 20:17 and 20:28, divided around the room.

Q2. Collect the pattern across these three scenes: what GESTURE keeps appearing, who performs it, and what are the appointed men told they are appointed to DO in Acts 20:28?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Prayer and the laying on of hands, performed by the apostles (and later by their delegates); elders appointed "in every church," immediately, as part of planting; and in Acts 20:28 the job description: "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for (shepherd) the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son." Elder and overseer, applied to the same men, with shepherding as the task; and its heart is the study's oldest verb pair: to serve and to guard. The guarding of Eden and of the tabernacle has become the pastoral office.

Read 1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6, and 1 Timothy 5:22 aloud.

Q3. Assemble the ordination grammar from these three verses: what is given, how is it given, and why the warning about haste?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A GIFT (charisma), resident in the man ("within you"), given THROUGH the laying on of hands, by the council of elders and by Paul. The instrumental language is unembarrassed: through the hands. And "do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" only makes sense if the gesture does something weighty; nobody warns against hastily giving a certificate. This is why the Church treats ordination as a sacrament: a sign that confers what it signifies, instituted by Christ, exercised and handed on from the apostolic generation.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Now read 2 Timothy 2:2 and COUNT. How many distinct generations of handing-on does this single verse contain? Name them."

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Four: (1) Paul ("what you have heard from me"); (2) Timothy ("entrust"); (3) "faithful men"; (4) "others also," whom the faithful men will teach. Four generations of transmission, commanded as strategy, inside the New Testament. Paul did not expect the ministry to die with the apostles; he wrote its relay instructions.

DIG DEEPER

The apostles did not invent the gesture. Numbers 27:18 to 23: Moses, at God's command, lays his hands on Joshua before the priest and congregation, investing him with authority; and Deuteronomy 34:9: "Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, FOR Moses had laid his hands upon him." Israel already knew commissioning through the laying on of hands: an important biblical precedent. The apostles reached for the grammar they had been raised in.

Build III: But They Are Never Called Priests

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength, and grant its scholarship: "Your sharpest friend says: I concede your offices, your hands, your succession. But notice the word that never appears. The New Testament calls these men presbyteroi, elders, and episkopoi, overseers, and NEVER, not once, calls a Christian minister hierous, a sacrificing priest. It applies hierous to Christ, and, ironically for you, the collective PRIESTHOOD word, hierateuma, to the whole believing people in 1 Peter 2, while Revelation calls believers hierais, priests. Sacrificing priesthood was imported later, when the Church re-Levitized. The original ministry was preaching and oversight, not altars. The word count is not close, and word counts do not lie."

Q4. First: is the word count correct? Say so. Then think historically: WHILE the New Testament was being written, who were the hierais everybody knew, and what were they doing? What had the word hierous already been assigned to in Christian usage?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The word count is correct; concede it cleanly, because it is true and because honesty is this study's house style. Historically: while many of these letters were written, priests in the plain sense were still slaughtering lambs in a standing Temple in Jerusalem; hierous meant THAT. And Christian usage had already committed the word-family elsewhere: hierous to Christ, the one high priest (Hebrews), and the

collective hierarchy, priesthood, to the whole baptized people (1 Peter 2; Revelation even calls believers hierarchs). The vocabulary was occupied at both ends. Calling the local elder a hierarch in the year 60 would plausibly have invited exactly those confusions; offer this as historical explanation, not as a motive Scripture records. The question is whether the REALITY was present under other names, so: watch what the presbyters do.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "One verse settles whether Paul was allergic to priestly vocabulary for New Covenant ministry. Romans 15:16: Paul describes his own ministry to the Gentiles. Find the two cultic words in the verse: what does Paul call his service, and what does he call its result?"

Q5. What does Paul call his gospel ministry in Romans 15:16? Assemble the full answer to the steelman.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul calls himself "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the PRIESTLY SERVICE of the gospel of God, so that the OFFERING of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." The verb is hierourgeo, to work as a priest; the noun is prosphora, offering. Paul reaches for altar vocabulary to describe apostolic ministry, on purpose, in his most careful letter.

So the full answer: (1) the word count is real, and explained by a standing Temple and a vocabulary already assigned to Christ and to the whole Church; (2) the ministers DO the work under other names: ordained by hands, guarding the flock, the elders anointing the sick and praying over them (James 5:14 to 15, with mutual confession alongside in 5:16), and, in the Church's earliest memory from the Didache to Ignatius, presiding where "do this" is done (a witness of tradition rather than a single proof text); (3) Paul himself uses priestly-work vocabulary for the ministry; (4) and the surrounding testimony arrived early, not centuries late: the Didache calling the Eucharist a sacrifice (late first or early second century), Clement of Rome describing succession (traditionally around 96), Ignatius binding Eucharist to bishop (traditionally around 107): the generation or two just after the apostles. One last delight: the English word "priest" is not derived from hierarch at all. It comes down, through Old English, from PRESBYTEROS, the New Testament's own word for these men. The objection's favorite word grew up into ours.

Send

1. Somebody laid hands on somebody who laid hands on somebody, an unbroken chain of ordinations, until a priest absolved you or placed the Eucharist in your hand. What does it do to you to be personally downstream of Acts 1?
2. "Entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also": the relay is not only for clergy. What have you been taught that you have not yet handed to anyone? Who is your Timothy?

Live It This Week

- Pray daily for your pastor and your bishop by name this week. The men in the relay carry what Paul told Timothy to guard; they need what Paul told Timothy to rekindle.
- Take one deliberate step in your own relay: teach one thing you have received (a prayer, a truth from this study, a way of reading) to one specific person.
- If you have ever felt a pull toward priesthood or religious life, or love someone who might, say one honest prayer about it this week. Hands are still being laid on.

Memory Verse

"Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands."

2 Timothy 1:6 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, you did not let the mission die with the men who first carried it. Thank you for every link in the chain of hands between that upper room and this one. Guard your shepherds, raise up faithful men, and make each of us a good relay of everything we have received. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 10

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- Acts 1:15 to 26 (Build I, read aloud; office language at 1:20)
- Isaiah 22:20 to 22 (Build I, recalled from Session 7)
- Acts 6:5 to 6; Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17, 28 (Build II, read aloud)
- 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Timothy 5:22 (Build II, read aloud; memory verse source at 2 Timothy 1:6)
- 2 Timothy 2:2 (Build II, live discovery: count the generations)
- Titus 1:5 (leader reference)
- Numbers 27:18 to 23; Deuteronomy 34:9 (Dig Deeper)
- Romans 15:16 (Build III, live discovery)
- James 5:14 to 16 (Build III, in the ANSWER)

Session 11: In the Person of Christ

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The synthesis session. Everything the study has assembled (the one priesthood of Christ, the Supper's "do this," Easter evening's breath, the laying on of hands) converges tonight on the question of what a Catholic priest actually IS. The answer is a phrase the group discovers, to their astonishment, inside Paul's own Greek: the ordained man acts in persona Christi, in the person of Christ. They will notice, many for the first time, whose "my" the priest speaks at the consecration ("this is MY body"), test the claim against Christ's own words ("he who hears you hears me"), and face two pastoral realities head-on and honestly: celibacy (a discipline, not a dogma, and the Church says so) and the scandal of unworthy ministers (answered by a principle the group already owns from Session 7). The night should leave the group looking at the man at the altar with more accurate eyes: smaller in himself, larger in his office, than they ever realized.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that in the ecclesial service of the ordained minister it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body: the priest, by the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts in persona Christi Capitis, in the person of Christ the Head (CCC 1548); that this sacrament configures the man to Christ by a specific grace of the Holy Spirit so as to serve as Christ's instrument for his Church (CCC 1581); that the presence of Christ in the minister does not preserve the minister from human weakness, error, or sin, and that the ministers' unworthiness cannot prevent Christ from acting (CCC 1550, 1584); and, with the honesty this study has practiced throughout, that celibacy in the Latin Church is a discipline of great fittingness while the Eastern Churches ordain married men to the priesthood, both venerable and legitimate (CCC 1579 to 1580). The most beloved line is saved for the Catechism's own quotation of the Curé of Ars: "The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus" (quoted in CCC 1589).

What You Need to Know

Open with the observation hiding in plain sight at every Mass, and let the group find it themselves before you name it. At the consecration, the priest does not say "this is Christ's body," reporting an event at a distance. He says, "Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is MY body, which will be given up for you." First person. Whose "my" is that? It is nonsense as the priest's own statement; his body is standing at the altar in vestments. The words only make sense if, at that moment, another is speaking through him: if the priest has lent Christ his voice and his hands, and Christ, the true priest of every Mass, is doing tonight what he did in the upper room. This is what the Church means by in persona Christi: not playacting, not impersonation, but instrumentality raised to a sacrament; the ordained man configured to Christ the Head so that Christ acts through him (CCC 1548, 1581). The group has been building toward this all study: Session 7 gave them Augustine's principle (Peter baptizes, Christ baptizes); Session 10 gave them the conferral (a gift, through hands); tonight names the result.

And here is the discovery that lands hardest with a group like yours: the phrase itself is Pauline. In 2 Corinthians 2:10, Paul, speaking of forgiving an offender, writes: "What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ." The Greek beneath "in the presence of Christ" is en prosopo Christou, and the ancient Latin Bible rendered it in persona Christi: in the person of Christ. Paul sets his own ministerial act of forgiveness "in the presence (or person) of Christ"; its precise sense in Paul is

debated, and the act is churchly forgiveness in a disciplinary case, not a description of sacramental absolution. What is certain is the genealogy: the Church's technical term was carried into theology from this sentence of Paul as the Latin Bible rendered it. Present this honestly: the English translations say "in the presence of Christ," and the Greek word *prosopon* spans face, presence, person; the point is not a gotcha but a genealogy. The Church's phrase is not medieval invention; it entered through Paul's Corinthian correspondence as the Latin Bible has carried it since the late fourth century. Corroborate it with Christ's own commissioning words, which need no Latin: "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me" (Luke 10:16), and Paul again: "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal THROUGH us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador's words, in the act of embassy, are his sovereign's.

Then the two honest hours. Celibacy first, because someone is waiting to ask: it is a DISCIPLINE of the Latin Church, not a dogma, and the Catechism says so plainly, noting that the Eastern Catholic Churches have ordained married men to the priesthood for centuries in full communion, and that the Latin practice is embraced for the kingdom's sake (Matthew 19:12, 1 Corinthians 7:32 to 35: the unmarried man is anxious "how to please the Lord," undivided). Presented accurately (a renounceable good renounced for a greater availability, in imitation of the celibate Christ), celibacy is coherent and even beautiful; presented as dogma or as squeamishness about marriage, it is a slander of the Church's actual position, so do not let either caricature stand, including the Catholic one. Then scandal, and do not flinch: everyone in the room knows the failures, and some carry wounds from them. The study's equipment is already in hand: Augustine's Donatist principle (the sacraments are Christ's acts through instruments, so "Judas baptizes, Christ baptizes"), now stated by the Catechism itself: the ministers' unworthiness cannot prevent Christ from acting; sin can wound the Church terribly, and it does not invalidate the sacraments, because the sacraments were never running on the minister's holiness in the first place (CCC 1550, 1584). Say clearly what this principle is NOT: it is not an excuse, not a minimization, and not a reason to protect anyone from justice; it is the reason a soul absolved by a bad priest is truly absolved, which, for someone in your room, may be a load-bearing consolation. Handle this stretch with pastoral gentleness; leave silence where silence is needed.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight's deepest root is the whole study: the high priest bearing the names on his heart (Session 2) becomes the priest at the altar carrying the parish into the sanctuary; the anointing and vesting of Aaron prefigure the configuration of Orders; and the "my" of the consecration recalls, in a typological echo this study offers rather than a defined equation, the pattern of Numbers 6:22 to 27: appointed priests put God's name on the people, and God himself blesses. If you want one Old Testament text on the table, use that one; the group memorized its blessing in Session 2.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Vianney

"The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus." The Catechism itself quotes the holy Curé of Ars saying it (CCC 1589), alongside his teaching that the priest continues the work of redemption on earth. Vianney, the patron of parish priests, was by every account a limited man: a struggling student, a country pastor. In persona Christi is why his confessional needed a sixteen-hour line. The office was never about the size of the man.

Quoted in CCC 1589

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Gregory of Nazianzus

St. Gregory, ordained against his own will, withdrew for a time after his ordination and then wrote a long apology explaining why: the guiding of souls, he teaches in substance, is the art of arts and the science of sciences, and the man who must stand between God and the people ought to tremble first. If the priesthood ever looks to your group like ambition's ladder, show them Gregory in flight from it. The saints took in persona Christi seriously enough to be terrified of it. (A summary of his Second Oration.)

Oration 2

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas teaches that the priest consecrates the Eucharist not by his own power but as the minister of Christ, in whose person he speaks: for the words of consecration are spoken as from the person of Christ himself, which is why the sacrament does not fail when the minister is unworthy, since the power at work was never the minister's own. In substance: the "my" of the altar is Christ's "my," and everything tonight hangs on that. (A summary of his teaching on the minister of the Eucharist.)

Summa Theologiae III, q. 82

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1548: in the ordained minister, Christ himself is present to his Church as Head of his Body; the priest acts in persona Christi Capitis.
- CCC 1581: Holy Orders configures the recipient to Christ by a specific grace of the Holy Spirit, to serve as Christ's instrument for his Church.
- CCC 1550 and 1584: the minister's weakness and even sin do not prevent Christ from acting; the guarantee is Christ, not the man.
- CCC 1579 to 1580: celibacy as the Latin Church's discipline, with married priests in the Eastern Churches; both presented honestly by the Church herself.
- CCC 1589: the Curé of Ars quoted: "The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus."

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD B (serve and guard): the priest as guardian of the mysteries and of the flock; one sentence at most, since Session 10 carried it.
- THREAD C (father-priest): "Father" as the natural address for the man who feeds the family from the table; connects to last session; one sentence.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): keep the balance explicit tonight: the ministerial priest exists to serve the royal priesthood's offering; if tonight drifts into clericalism, Session 8 is the corrective to quote.
- THREAD A (resolved): fully available: the priest at the altar handles Melchizedek's matter, bread and wine, with Christ's own words. Use freely.

Session Goals

1. The group notices, articulates, and wrestles with the first-person "my" of the words of consecration.
2. The group discovers 2 Corinthians 2:10's en prosopo Christou and hears the honest translation note alongside the genealogy of the phrase.
3. The group can state in persona Christi accurately: instrumentality by configuration, not impersonation, corroborated by Luke 10:16 and 2 Corinthians 5:20.

4. Celibacy is stated accurately as discipline with its scriptural logic, and the Eastern practice is named.
5. The scandal question is faced without flinching and without excuse-making, with CCC 1550 and 1584 in hand, gently.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: Whose "my"? (20 min)
- 0:35 Build II: In the person of Christ, Paul's own phrase (20 min)
- 0:55 Build III: The two honest topics, celibacy and scandal (20 min)
- 1:15 Send (10 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper and compress the celibacy segment to your own three-sentence accurate summary with CCC 1579 to 1580 cited for later reading. Never cut the scandal segment; skipping it tells the wounded person in your room that the Church cannot look at it.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, eternal High Priest, you have freely chosen to act through voices and hands. Tonight, help us see what you do through the men you have taken. And where any of us carries a wound from a shepherd's failure, come near first, before any explaining. Amen.

Win

1. Have you ever spoken FOR someone else, with their full authority: signed for them, negotiated for them, delivered their words? What was it like to say "I" on someone else's behalf?
2. What is the best homily, confession, or moment with a priest you have ever experienced? What made it what it was?

Build I: Whose "My"?

Say: "Think of the consecration at Mass. Quote it from memory, together, the bread first." (The room will produce: "Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my body, which will be given up for you.") Then ask the question and let it sit:

Q1. Whose body is "MY body"? The priest is speaking. Why does he say MY, and what would have to be true for that sentence to make any sense at all?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

As the priest's own first-person statement, the sentence is absurd; his body is standing there in vestments. The words only make sense if another is speaking through him: if the priest, at that moment, has lent his voice and hands to Christ, and Christ, the true priest of every Mass, is doing what he did in the upper room. Notice that the Church did not paraphrase the Supper into safer third-person words ("this is Christ's body"); she kept the "my," because she means it: the speaker is Christ. Everything else tonight unpacks that "my."

Q2. This study has met this pattern before, without the name. Where? (Think Session 2's blessing, and Session 7's baptizer.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Numbers 6:27: the appointed priests put God's name on the people ("so shall they put my name upon the people of Israel"), and God himself acts: "and I will bless them." Appointed human speech, with divine action riding on it. And Augustine's principle from Session 7: when Peter baptizes, Christ baptizes; even if Judas baptizes, Christ baptizes. The instrument moves; the power is the Lord's. Tonight simply names what the pattern is called when it is conferred by Holy Orders.

Build II: In the Person of Christ

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "The Church's technical name for this is a Latin phrase, in persona Christi, in the person of Christ. Here is tonight's surprise: the phrase has an address in your New Testament. Read 2

Corinthians 2:10, where Paul describes his own act of forgiving an offender, and read the last four words slowly."

Q3. How does Paul describe the setting of his ministerial act of forgiveness? (Leader: give the language note honestly after they answer.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"What I have forgiven... has been for your sake in the presence of Christ." Now the honest note: the Greek is en prosopo Christou; prosopon spans face, presence, and person, which is why English Bibles say "in the presence of Christ" while the ancient Latin Bible rendered it in persona Christi, in the person of Christ. The Church's technical term is not a medieval coinage; it descends from Paul's own phrase, in a sentence about a ministerial act of forgiveness, as the Latin Bible has carried it for over sixteen centuries. Its precise sense in Paul is genuinely debated, and the verse gives the phrase its genealogy, not a proof of sacramental absolution; we flag all of that out loud because this study's claims are stronger honest than inflated; and the concept never rested on the Latin anyway, as the next two texts show.

Read Luke 10:16, then 2 Corinthians 5:20, aloud.

Q4. In Christ's own words, what happens when someone hears his sent ones? And what does Paul's ambassador image add?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me": Christ identifies his voice with the voice of his sent ones, in the act of their sending. And "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal THROUGH us": an ambassador's official words are his sovereign's words; the embassy speaks the crown. In persona Christi is these two verses, conferred sacramentally: not impersonation, not playacting, but instrumentality raised to a sacrament, the man configured to Christ the Head so that Christ acts through him (CCC 1548, 1581). Which is also why the priest goes to confession like everyone else: the office is Christ's; the man remains a man.

DIG DEEPER

Why can only the ordained consecrate? Not because their prayers are louder, but because "do this" was a command with addressees, and the sacrament of Orders is how the addressees' mandate reaches the present (Sessions 6 and 10). The Eucharist is Christ's act through Christ's appointed instrument; an unordained man speaking the words performs a recitation, not a sacrament, for the same reason a private citizen's signature does not conclude a treaty: the words are real, the office is absent. This is not gatekeeping for its own sake; it is what it means that the sacrifice is CHRIST'S and not ours to generate.

Build III: Two Honest Topics

CELIBACY. Say it accurately yourself: "Celibacy is a DISCIPLINE of the Latin Church, not a dogma, and the Church says so herself: Eastern Catholic Churches in full communion with Rome have ordained married men for centuries (CCC 1579 to 1580). The Latin Church asks celibacy of her priests for the kingdom's sake, in Jesus' own category (Matthew 19:12) and Paul's own logic: the unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord, undivided (1 Corinthians 7:32 to 35). It is a renounceable good, marriage, renounced for a total availability, in imitation of the celibate Christ. Not squeamishness about marriage; a

wedding of another kind. If the discipline ever changed, no doctrine would fall; and while it stands, it is coherent, biblical, and costly on purpose."

SCANDAL. Slow down; someone in your room needs this handled with care.

Q5. Here is the hardest question tonight, and it deserves a straight answer: if priests act in the person of Christ, what happens to that claim when a priest sins gravely, even monstrously? Has everything he did sacramentally been poisoned? Were the absolutions real, the Masses real, the baptisms real?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Face the pain first: the failures are real, some are monstrous, and the wound they leave, especially when authority protected the guilty, is among the deepest a Catholic can carry. Nothing tonight excuses any of it or shields anyone from justice; in persona Christi heightens responsibility: sins that exploit the sacred office, or the persons entrusted to it, carry a gravity and a scandal all their own.

But here is the mercy hidden inside tonight's doctrine, and for some people it is load-bearing: because the sacraments were never running on the minister's holiness, the minister's sin does not invalidate them. The Church learned this in blood in the fourth century, when whole communities asked whether sacraments from priests who had failed under persecution were valid, and Augustine gave the answer this study already knows: even if Judas baptizes, Christ baptizes. The Catechism states it flatly: the presence of Christ in the minister is not a guarantee of the minister's holiness, and the ministers' sin cannot impede the fruit of grace, because the one acting in the sacraments is Christ (CCC 1550, 1584). Where the Church's ordinary conditions were in place (valid orders, the Church's matter, form, and intention, and, for absolution, faculties), your baptism is valid, the absolution that freed you was real, and the Masses were Masses. God does not let a man's corruption confiscate what Christ was giving you through him. Leave silence after this if the room needs it; silence is allowed.

Send

1. After tonight, what will you see differently the next time you watch a priest at the altar say the word "my"?
2. Priests carry an office bigger than themselves with a humanity as weak as ours. What is one concrete way you could carry your priest this month: prayer, encouragement, honesty, a meal?

Live It This Week

- At Mass, when the priest says "this is my body," silently name what is happening: "Jesus, that is your my." One sentence; it will change the moment.
- Write a short note of gratitude to a priest who has served you at some point in your life, and send it. Be specific.
- If the scandal discussion touched a wound of yours, do one gentle thing about it this week: a conversation with someone you trust, an honest prayer of anger and grief, or, if you are ready, a conversation with a priest who has earned your trust. The Church's failures are not a door God asks you to pretend is not there.

Memory Verse

"So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of

Christ, be reconciled to God."

2 Corinthians 5:20 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you have put your own words in human mouths and your own gifts in human hands. Thank you for every priest through whom you have fed and forgiven us. Heal what your shepherds have wounded, raise up shepherds after your own heart, and teach all of us, ordained and baptized, to disappear into you. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 11

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- The words of consecration (Build I, from memory; Luke 22:19 and parallels behind them)
- Numbers 6:27 (Build I, recalled from Session 2)
- 2 Corinthians 2:10 (Build II, live discovery)
- Luke 10:16 (Build II, read aloud)
- 2 Corinthians 5:20 (Build II, read aloud; memory verse source)
- Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:32 to 35 (Build III, celibacy)

Session 12: A Kingdom of Priests

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The last night goes to heaven. In the Book of Revelation the group finds every thread of this study resolved in glory: the Church sung over as "a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (the title, fulfilled); the Lamb standing as though slain at the center of a liturgy that never ends (Session 5, completed); twenty-four ELDERS around the throne with golden bowls of incense "which are the prayers of the saints" (the interceding, priestly people, at home); and the last two chapters returning to where the study began: a garden, a river, the tree of life, the curse gone, God's servants worshiping and SEEING HIS FACE, keeping for ever what Adam failed to keep. One final steelman tests the study's whole method, and the answer is the study itself. Then the group is sent: every one of them a priest of the kingdom, some of them perhaps called to hands being laid on. The last word belongs to the memory verse of the first night, kept at last.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that in the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ, minister of the true sanctuary, stands at the right hand of God (CCC 1090, quoting the Second Vatican Council); and that it is in this eternal liturgy that the Spirit and the Church enable us to participate whenever we celebrate the mystery of salvation in the sacraments, with the whole company of heaven: the Lamb, the elders, the great multitude (CCC 1137 to 1139, reading Revelation 4 and 5 as the shape of all Christian liturgy). What the group discovers tonight in Revelation, the Church claims they enter every Sunday.

What You Need to Know

Open with the doxology that has been waiting since Session 8: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us A KINGDOM, PRIESTS to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5 to 6). John, in exile on Patmos, writing to persecuted churches, opens the Bible's last book by singing Exodus 19:6 over them as accomplished fact. Then the throne room. In Revelation 4 and 5 the group will find the whole architecture of this study standing in glory, and the discoveries are theirs to make: the Lamb "standing, as though it had been slain" (their Session 5 discovery: the risen Lamb bearing the marks of his once-for-all sacrifice, the permanent center of heaven's worship); twenty-four crowned figures around the throne, and the Greek word for them is PRESBYTEROI, elders, the very word the group traced through Acts and the Pastorals last month; Revelation does not identify them, and interpreters differ, but the resonance is unmistakable and the Church's liturgical reading has always treasured it; and in the elders' hands, "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (5:8), with an angel at the heavenly altar mingling incense "with the prayers of all the saints" (8:3 to 4): the intercession of the whole priestly people, arriving at the throne as liturgy. And the new song names the study: "thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them A KINGDOM AND PRIESTS to our God, and they shall reign on earth" (5:9 to 10). Every phrase the group has carried since Session 1 is in heaven's hymnal.

Then the ending that is a beginning: Revelation 21 and 22. A new heaven and new earth; the dwelling of God with men; and then, unmistakably, Eden: "the river of the water of life... the tree of life... and there shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall

WORSHIP him; they shall SEE HIS FACE" (22:1 to 4). The study began with a man placed in a garden to serve and to guard, who failed; it ends with a garden-city whose gates never shut, into which "nothing unclean shall enter" (21:27), guarded perfectly at last, where the serving never ends and the face is finally seen. And one verse for Thread C, discovered live from Hebrews: "the assembly of the FIRST-BORN who are enrolled in heaven" (Hebrews 12:22 to 23): the firstborn office, forfeited at the calf, restored in Christ the Firstborn, now the family name of every baptized person on the rolls of the heavenly city. Every thread ties.

The final steelman examines the study itself, which is the most honest way to end: "This was twelve weeks of beautiful pattern-matching. But typology proves nothing; with enough motivation you can connect any dots you like: bread here, bread there; a priest here, a priest there. Impressive, and circular." Build it sincerely, because half-taught typology deserves the objection. The answer is the study's own method, reviewed: at every load-bearing joint, the connection was made BY SCRIPTURE, not by us. Psalm 110 connected the Messiah to Melchizedek, a thousand years before the Church. Jesus connected the cup to "the blood of the covenant" of Exodus 24. Hebrews connected Melchizedek's silence, the tithe, and the oath. Peter connected the Church to Exodus 19:6. Paul connected his ministry to priestly service. Revelation connects the end to Eden. The group did not draw lines between dots; they discovered lines already drawn on the page, with the texts open, usually before being told the destination. That is the difference between typology as the Bible's own deep grammar (CCC 128 to 130: the Church has always read the unity of the two Testaments through typology, God's own pedagogy) and typology as a parlor game. The last word on method belongs to Christ himself on the Emmaus road: "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight the roots ARE the fulfillment: Eden (Session 1) returns as the garden-city; Exodus 19:6 (Sessions 1 and 8) returns as heaven's new song; the incense and altar of the sanctuary (Session 2) return as the prayers of the saints; the Lamb of Passover (Session 6) stands at the center for ever; and the firstborn (Sessions 1, 4) are enrolled by name. Let the group narrate the whole arc themselves in the final Build; it is the study's last and best live discovery.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Instructing the newly baptized on the Mass, St. Cyril teaches in substance: when the priest cries "Lift up your hearts," we answer truly, for in that most awesome hour the heart is to be with God on high, not on earth; and we join the seraphim's own hymn, Holy, Holy, Holy, so that our song and heaven's song are one. The fourth-century catechist tells his people what tonight's texts show: the Sunday liturgy is the heavenly liturgy, entered. (A summary of his mystagogical instruction.)

Mystagogical Catecheses

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

"The glory of God is a living man, and the life of man is the vision of God." Irenaeus' most famous sentence is Revelation 22:4 in miniature: the end of the whole priestly story, from Eden's first charge to the last page, is not a task completed but a face seen, and human beings fully alive in the seeing. Everything the priesthood ever guarded, it guarded for this.

Against Heresies, Book 4

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end." The final sentence of the City of God, the book this study has walked with from its second week, describes the final state of the kingdom of priests: rest, vision, love, praise, without end. Augustine wrote twenty-two books to arrive at that sentence. Your group walked twelve weeks to be able to hear it.

City of God, Book 22, chapter 30

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1090: in the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy of the holy city toward which we journey.
- CCC 1137 to 1139: Revelation's throne, Lamb, elders, and multitude as the pattern of all the Church's liturgy, which the Spirit enables us to enter in every sacramental celebration.
- CCC 128 to 130: the Church's ancient reading of the unity of the Old and New Testaments through typology, God's own pedagogy; the method of this entire study.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD A (Melchizedek): fully resolved since Session 6; tonight the Lamb's eternal offering completes the picture. Available freely.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): FINAL RESOLUTION at Revelation 21:27 and 22:3: nothing unclean enters, and his servants serve him for ever; the Eden charge kept at last, by grace. Name it explicitly in Build III.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): FINAL RESOLUTION at Hebrews 12:22 to 23, the assembly of the first-born enrolled in heaven; discovered live in Build III.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): FINAL RESOLUTION at Revelation 1:6 and 5:9 to 10; the title thread closes in heaven's new song, and the first memory verse is prayed as the study's last word.

Session Goals

1. The group finds Exodus 19:6 fulfilled in Revelation 1:6 and 5:9 to 10, and the elders and incense of the throne room, with the texts open.
2. The group discovers the Eden restoration of Revelation 21 to 22 and explicitly closes Threads B and C.
3. The final steelman about typology is stated at full strength and answered by reviewing the study's own method: the connections were Scripture's, discovered, not ours, imposed.
4. The group connects Sunday Mass to the heavenly liturgy through CCC 1090 and 1137 to 1139, and through Cyril's *Sursum corda*.
5. Every participant leaves commissioned: named a priest of the kingdom, with one concrete practice chosen, and the study's first memory verse prayed as the last word.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: The doxology and the throne room, Revelation 1, 4 to 5 (25 min)
- 0:40 Build II: The garden at the end, Revelation 21 to 22, threads close (20 min)
- 1:00 Build III: The last steelman, the method itself (15 min)

- 1:15 Send and commissioning (10 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper and shorten Build I by reading Revelation 4:1 to 11 yourself as scene-setting, keeping the group work for chapter 5. Never cut the commissioning; it is the entire point of twelve weeks.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, twelve weeks ago you showed us a man in a garden and a promise at a mountain. Tonight, open heaven to us as you opened it to John. Let us see where the whole story was going all along, and send us home as what you have named us. Through Christ our Lord, the Lamb who was slain. Amen.

Win

1. Looking back across the whole study: what is the single discovery that most changed how you read the Bible?
2. What did you write in your sealed guess back in Session 1, and what does it feel like to remember who you were when you wrote it?

Build I: The Throne Room

Read Revelation 1:5 to 6 aloud, together, out loud, all of you at once.

Q1. John opens the Bible's last book with this doxology over persecuted little churches. Which words has this group been carrying since its first night, and what is John claiming about them?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Made us A KINGDOM, PRIESTS to his God and Father": Exodus 19:6, the study's title and first memory verse, sung as accomplished fact, by his blood. Not aspiration; identity. The kingdom-of-priests vocation, spoken at Sinai, wounded at the calf, restored at the cross, is the name of the Church under persecution and the name of everyone in this room.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Now the throne room. Read Revelation 4:2 to 11 and 5:6 to 10 in your teams, and hunt for THREE things: (1) how the sacrificed one appears; (2) who is seated around the throne, twenty-four of them, and, if your Bible has notes or you remember your Greek from Session 10, what their title is in Greek; (3) what is in their bowls, and what the text says it IS." Give this time; it is the study's last great hunt.

Q2. Report the three findings, and connect each one backward into the study.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

(1) "A Lamb standing, as though it had been slain": Session 5's discovery, now seen whole: the risen Lamb, bearing the marks of his once-for-all sacrifice, is the permanent center of heaven's worship (the abiding presence the Church names at CCC 1085). (2) Twenty-four ELDERS: the Greek is presbyteroi, the exact word the group traced through Acts and the Pastorals; Revelation does not say who they are, and interpreters propose angelic courtiers or glorified representatives of God's people, but Catholic readers have long delighted that heaven's liturgy is furnished with ELDERS, crowned and worshiping around the throne. (3) "Golden bowls full of incense, which ARE the prayers of the saints" (5:8; and 8:3 to 4 shows an angel mingling incense with the prayers of all the saints at the heavenly altar): the intercession of the whole priestly people, your Tuesday-night prayers included, arriving at the throne as liturgy. Then the new song (5:9 to 10): ransomed "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation... and hast made them

a kingdom and priests to our God." Malachi's "among the nations" (Session 5), Peter's royal priesthood (Session 8), and Sinai's vocation (Session 1), harmonized in heaven's hymnal.

Build II: The Garden at the End

Read Revelation 21:1 to 4, 21:22 to 27, and 22:1 to 5, divided around the room, slowly.

Q3. This study began in a garden. Inventory the last two chapters of the Bible: what from Eden has come back, what from Eden's failure has been repaired, and, listen closely to 21:27 and 22:3, what has happened to the two jobs Adam was given in Genesis 2:15?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Eden returns, enlarged into a city: the river of the water of life, the tree of life, God dwelling with men, no more curse. And hear the echo of Adam's two verbs, an echo this study offers as its traced reading of the canon's shape: his servants shall SERVE him (22:3, the worship-service word), the serving that never ends; and the guarding perfected by grace: "nothing unclean shall enter it" (21:27), gates that never shut because the city no longer needs defending. In this reading, what the first man failed to keep, the Lamb has kept for ever, and his people keep it in him. And the crown of it all: "they shall SEE HIS FACE" (22:4). Every altar, every veil, every priest, every sacrifice in this whole study existed to bridge a distance that will finally be gone.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "One thread left. In Session 1, the firstborn of every family lost the priesthood at the golden calf. Hebrews 12:22 to 23 describes who is enrolled in the heavenly city. Find the title given to the whole assembly."

Q4. What is the heavenly assembly called, and what does that close?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"The assembly of the FIRST-BORN who are enrolled in heaven." "The assembly of the first-born enrolled in heaven": Hebrews' own phrase. Set it beside the thread this study traced (the firstborn pattern of the fathers, the Levites taken in the firstborn's place, Christ "the first-born," Hebrews 1:6), and the resonance is unmistakable: in Christ the baptized are heirs with the Firstborn, enrolled in his city. Offer the tie as this study's traced reading resting on Hebrews' real words; the oldest thread comes home.

DIG DEEPER

CCC 1090 and 1137 to 1139: the Church reads Revelation 4 and 5 as the pattern of every Mass: the throne, the Lamb standing as slain, the elders, the incense of the saints' prayers, the acclamation of the multitude. When the priest says "Lift up your hearts," St. Cyril of Jerusalem told the fourth century's newly baptized, we answer truly, for in that hour the heart belongs on high; and the Sanctus is the seraphim's own hymn, borrowed. You do not wait for the liturgy of tonight's texts; you participate in it every Sunday (CCC 1090).

Build III: The Last Steelman: The Method Itself

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength, aimed at everything we have done: "A skeptical friend who watched all twelve weeks says: it was beautiful, I grant it. But typology proves nothing. With enough motivation you

can connect any dots: bread here, bread there; a garden here, a garden there; a priest here, a priest there. Pattern-matching feels like discovery from the inside and looks like confirmation bias from the outside. Twelve weeks of impressive circles."

Q5. Review the study's method honestly: at the load-bearing joints, WHO drew the connections: this group, or Scripture itself? Walk back through and name specific cases.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Name them: Psalm 110 connected the Messiah to Melchizedek, inside the Old Testament, a millennium before the Church existed. Jesus connected his cup to "the blood of the covenant" of Exodus 24 with his own words. Hebrews connected the genealogy-silence, the tithe, the blessing, and the oath, in the first century, on the page. Peter connected the Church to Exodus 19:6 by quotation. Paul connected ministry to priestly service with his own cultic vocabulary in Romans 15:16. Jesus connected Psalm 110 to himself in the temple. Revelation connects the end to Eden with a river, a tree, and a lifted curse. At every joint that carries weight, the line was drawn BY Scripture and DISCOVERED by this group with the texts open, usually before you were told the destination; that was the point of every live discovery in this study. That is the difference between typology as the Bible's own deep grammar, which the Church has read since the beginning (CCC 128 to 130 calls it God's own pedagogy), and typology as a parlor game. And be fair to the friend: bad typology exists, and the cure for it is exactly the discipline this group practiced: whole passages, both texts open, honest hedges where the Church has not defined. The last word on the method belongs to the risen Christ on the Emmaus road: "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." We did not invent the reading. We inherited it from him.

Send: The Commissioning

Do this simply and without hurry. Go around the room one final time. Each person answers both questions out loud:

1. "As a priest of the kingdom, the offering I most need to bring is..." (name the one thing: the work, the person, the suffering, the gift).
2. "The one practice from these twelve weeks I am keeping is..." (the morning offering, the blessing of Numbers 6, Psalm 110, the intercession list, confession, the paten prayer at Mass; anything from the Take-Homes).

Then say over the group, plainly: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. Go declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." And to any man in the room in whom these weeks have stirred the other question, say privately, afterward: the Church is still laying on hands, and the question deserves a real conversation, not a shrug.

Live It: From Here On

- Keep your one practice, named tonight, for the next ninety days. Priesthood is not a study topic; it is a daily office.
- Next Sunday, enter Mass through tonight's door: the throne, the Lamb standing as slain, the bowls of incense. Arrive early enough to remember where you are.
- Hand it on: 2 Timothy 2:2 is now yours ("entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"), and the relay belongs to the whole priestly people, women and men alike. Invite someone specific into the next study, or lead one.

Memory Verse

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Revelation 1:5 to 6 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, you placed a man in a garden to serve and to guard, and when he failed, you did not abandon the plan; you swore an oath, you sent the Priest, and you have brought us tonight to the city where your servants see your face. Seal in us everything you have shown us. Make our lives one long offering through Jesus Christ, priest for ever, and bring every person in this circle, and everyone we will ever hand the faith to, safely inside the gates that never shut. And now, the words you gave us on our first night, kept for the last: may we be to you a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 12

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- Revelation 1:5 to 6 (Build I, read together; memory verse source)
- Revelation 4:2 to 11 (Build I, team hunt)
- Revelation 5:6 to 10 (Build I, team hunt)
- Revelation 8:3 to 4 (Build I, in the ANSWER)
- Revelation 21:1 to 4, 22 to 27 (Build II, read aloud)
- Revelation 22:1 to 5 (Build II, read aloud)
- Genesis 2:15 (Build II, recalled from Session 1)
- Hebrews 12:22 to 23 (Build II, live discovery)
- Hebrews 1:6 (Build II, recalled from Session 4)
- Romans 15:16; Exodus 24:8; Psalm 110; Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9 (Build III, method review, recalled)
- Luke 24:27 (Build III, in the ANSWER)

Take-Home: Session 1

A Kingdom of Priests · Before There Were Priests

What We Found

The pattern of priesthood is older than Sinai; we traced it into a garden. Adam was placed in Eden "to till it and keep it," and we found that same Hebrew verb pair, 'abad (serve) and shamar (guard), describing the Levites' work in the sanctuary in Numbers 3:7 to 8. Before there was ever a temple, fathers like Abel, Noah, and Job offered sacrifice for their households. And at Sinai, God named the vocation of the whole people: "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). After the golden calf, that calling was not revoked; in the reading we traced together, it was wounded: the tribe of Levi was taken, in place of the first-born of every family, for sanctuary service under Aaron's priesthood. A priestly people, with a set-apart priesthood inside it. Hold that tension; this study is about what God does with it.

The Sealed Guess

MY GUESS *(write it, seal it, tell no one)*

Tonight we read one strange verse and refused to talk about it: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High" (Genesis 14:18).

A king, and a priest, who brings out bread and wine, centuries before Moses. Write your guess below: who is this man, and why bread and wine? Then fold this sheet closed. We will open our guesses together later in the study, and no, we will not tell you when.

My guess:

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH **St. John Chrysostom**

"The priesthood is exercised on earth, but ranks among heavenly institutions." A human being, standing on ordinary ground, handling holy things on behalf of others: that pattern is older than every temple.

On the Priesthood, Book 3

VOICE OF THE CHURCH **St. Ephrem the Syrian**

In his Hymns on Paradise, St. Ephrem portrays Eden in the language of a sanctuary: a holy mountain ascending by degrees, with the glory of God at its height, and Adam placed within it as one set apart for communion with God. (A summary of Ephrem's imagery rather than a single quotation.)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Leo the Great

St. Leo teaches, in substance, that all who are reborn in Christ share a royal and priestly dignity: the sign of the cross makes them a kingly people, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates them as priests. He was preaching to ordinary baptized Christians, people like you.

Sermon 4 (summary of Leo's teaching)

Live It This Week

- Each morning, before your feet hit the floor, offer the day to God in your own words: your work, your family, your frustrations. This is the priestly act of the baptized (the Church calls it a morning offering), and it is Exodus 19:6 in miniature.
- Once this week, out loud and alone if you like, pray for your household by name, interceding for each person the way Job offered for each of his children (Job 1:5).
- Reread Genesis 2 and 3 once, slowly, with a single question in mind: what here looks like a sanctuary?

Memory Verse

"and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Exodus 19:6 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Skim Exodus 28, the vestments of the high priest, and notice what he wears over his heart.

Catechism References

CCC 784; CCC 1539; CCC 1546 to 1547.

Take-Home: Session 2

A Kingdom of Priests · A Kingdom Interrupted

What We Found

We stepped inside the priesthood God gave Israel. The high priest wore the names of the twelve tribes engraved on his shoulders (Exodus 28:12) and set over his heart, "to bring them to continual remembrance before the LORD" (Exodus 28:29): he never entered the sanctuary alone; he carried everyone. In the priestly blessing God dictated in Numbers 6, we found our garden word again: "The LORD bless you and keep you," shamar, the guard-word of Eden. The Levites kept guard around the sanctuary so that wrath would fall on no one. And on the Day of Atonement we heard the system quietly confess its own limit: the high priest had to offer for his own sins first, and the whole thing happened "once in the year," every year, with no finish line anywhere in the text. God gave it and honored it, and by design it never finished. We also faced the prophets' fire against empty ritual, and found Psalm 51 answering itself: God rejects worship without the heart, and still promises delight in "right sacrifices."

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Gregory the Great

In his Pastoral Rule, St. Gregory lingers over the high priest's breastpiece and teaches, in substance, that it is a standing lesson for every shepherd of souls: the one who goes before God for others must carry them engraved on his heart. (A summary of Gregory's teaching.)

Pastoral Rule, Book 2

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"A true sacrifice is every work done in order that we may cling to God in holy fellowship." What God rejected was never the altar; it was the ritual emptied of the offered life it was meant to carry.

City of God, Book 10, chapter 6

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas teaches that the ceremonies of the Old Law were true worship for their own time and prefigurations of Christ: nothing in the Levitical system was fake, and nothing in it was final. (Summary of his teaching on the ceremonial precepts.)

Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 102

Live It This Week

- Write down the names of five people you are responsible for or responsible to, and carry the list with you all week. Pray for them by name once a day. You are practicing Exodus 28.

- When your heart drifts into routine at Mass or prayer this week, stop and pray Psalm 51:17: "a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."
- Ask God's blessing over one person out loud this week using the words of Numbers 6:24 to 26.

Memory Verse

"The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."

Numbers 6:24 to 26 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Genesis 14:18 to 20 one more time. Keep your guess sealed.

Catechism References

CCC 1539 to 1541; CCC 433.

Take-Home: Session 3

A Kingdom of Priests · A Priest Forever

What We Found

We went back to the stranger. Melchizedek is king of Salem (which is Jerusalem) and "priest of God Most High," a true priest of the true God before Sinai, before Levi, before Israel. In a book obsessed with genealogy, he has none: no father, no mother, no birth, no death recorded, and the silence is deliberate. Abram, carrying the promise for the whole world, is blessed by him and tithes to him: the lesser honored the greater. Then Psalm 110 detonated: "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Sworn: an oath the Levitical priesthood never got. For ever: a priest who does not die and hand it on. And King Uzziah showed us this was never routine royal privilege: he grasped at priestly work and left the temple a leper. Finally, Jesus himself, teaching in the temple in the last week of his life, put this exact psalm at the center of the question of his identity. One thing stayed sealed: the bread and the wine.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Justin Martyr

In his Dialogue with Trypho, St. Justin argues in substance that Psalm 110 cannot finally rest on any merely human king, and points to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High before circumcision was given, as a sign that God's priesthood was never confined to one bloodline. (A summary of Justin's argument.)

Dialogue with Trypho

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

Expounding Psalm 110, St. Augustine teaches in substance that God's oath is the strongest possible language of promise: what God swears concerning this priest is irrevocable, and the "for ever" of verse 4 already rules out any priest who dies and is replaced. (Summary of his exposition.)

Expositions on the Psalms, Psalm 110 (109 in his numbering)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas teaches that the priesthood of the Old Law was a figure of the priesthood of Christ, in whom alone priesthood reaches its full reality. Melchizedek and Aaron are not rivals; both are sketches, in different colors, of the one Priest to come. (Summary of his teaching.)

Summa Theologiae III, q. 22

Live It This Week

- Pray Psalm 110 once a day this week, out loud. The Church prays this psalm at Sunday Evening Prayer II each week; you are joining her.

- Find one person coming out of a battle this week (an exam, a diagnosis, a brutal shift) and bless them concretely: a meal, a message, a prayer said with them.
- You may not change your sealed guess. You may grin.

Memory Verse

"The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

Psalms 110:4 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews 4:14 to 16, twice. Bring one honest question about what a priest is for.

Catechism References

CCC 1544; CCC 436.

Take-Home: Session 4

A Kingdom of Priests · A High Priest Able to Sympathize

What We Found

We crossed into the New Testament and met the Priest. Hebrews says the Son was "made like his brethren in every respect" so that he might become "a merciful and faithful high priest" (Hebrews 2:17): the Incarnation grounds his solidarity with us, and the Father's own word confers the office (Hebrews 5:5 to 6). He was tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin, and because of him the invitation stands with no fine print: "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16), every believer: an access the Church affirms wholeheartedly, alongside and never against the ministry Christ instituted. He did not seize the office; "one does not take the honor upon himself" (Hebrews 5:4), a rule Israel learned through Korah's rebellion and Aaron's staff that budded overnight: priesthood is conferred by God, never self-claimed. The Father appointed the Son with words we already had memorized: "You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." And behind Hebrews 5:7, "loud cries and tears," we heard Gethsemane, as the Church's tradition has, and our high priest on the ground, consenting to the cup for our sake. Sympathy was purchased at full price.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Gregory of Nazianzus

"What has not been assumed has not been healed." Whatever the priest does not share, he cannot carry to God. Our whole humanity, body, mind, fear, and tears, went into the sanctuary with him.

Letter 101, to Cledonius

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"He is the priest who offers, and he is himself the offering." At the altar of the cross, priest and victim are the same person. Every son of Aaron offered blood not his own, first for his own sins. This priest has no sins of his own, and the blood is his.

City of God, Book 10, chapter 20

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Leo the Great

In his celebrated Tome, received at the Council of Chalcedon, St. Leo teaches that in the one Christ each nature performs what is proper to it in communion with the other: one person, truly God and truly man. That is the deep grammar of our high priest, and why his single offering can carry every human being in it. (A faithful summary of the Tome.)

Letter to Flavian (the Tome), received at the Council of Chalcedon

Live It This Week

- Once a day, pray one sentence of raw honesty at the throne of grace: the thing you actually feel, not the thing you think God prefers to hear. Hebrews 4:16 is your warrant.
- Read Matthew 26:36 to 46 once this week at night, slowly, as the prayer of your high priest for you.
- When temptation hits this week, pray Hebrews 2:18 in your own words: "You were tempted. Help me now."

Memory Verse

"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."

Hebrews 4:16 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews chapter 7, slowly, once. You have already met everything in it.

Catechism References

CCC 1544 to 1545; CCC 612.

Take-Home: Session 5

A Kingdom of Priests · Once for All

What We Found

Hebrews 7 agreed with us. Every argument we built about Melchizedek in Session 3 (the loaded silence, the tithe and the blessing, the oath, the "for ever") is the letter's own argument, and it adds the summit: this priest "holds his priesthood permanently," and "always lives to make intercession" for those who draw near through him. Then Hebrews answered Session 2's "once in the year" with the New Testament's great word: once for all. The Levitical priest stood daily because his work never finished; Christ offered a single sacrifice and sat down. We faced the hard question honestly: then what is the Mass? And we found the beginning of the answer where we did not expect it: in heaven, where John sees "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain": the risen Lamb bearing the marks of his one sacrifice at the center of heaven's unending worship (the abiding presence the Church names at CCC 1085); and in Malachi, who foresaw a pure offering made "in every place" among the nations "from the rising of the sun to its setting." One question stayed open on purpose: by whose command does the Church enter that offering? Next session has a date attached: the night before he died.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Chrysostom

"Do we not offer every day? We offer indeed, but making a remembrance of his death... We do not offer another sacrifice, as the high priest of old, but always the same." One victim, one offering, made present: the fourth century answering our question before we asked it.

Homilies on Hebrews, Homily 17

VOICE OF THE CHURCH The Didache

This early church manual, commonly dated to the late first or early second century, tells Christians to gather on the Lord's day, break bread, and give thanks, first confessing sins "so that your sacrifice may be pure," and it invokes Malachi's pure-offering oracle (adapting 1:11 and 1:14) of that assembly. (An early Church document, not a single saint's writing.)

Didache, chapter 14

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Paul II

St. John Paul II teaches, in substance, that the Mass makes sacramentally present the one sacrifice of the Cross: it does not add to it and does not multiply it; the sacrifice remains one, embracing every generation. (A summary of his teaching in his encyclical on the Eucharist.)

Ecclesia de Eucharistia

Live It This Week

- Once this week, name your hardest situation out loud, then pray: "Jesus, you live for ever to intercede for me. I hand this to the priest who never goes off duty."
- If you attend Mass this week, at the elevation of the host, silently pray Revelation 5:6: "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain."
- Find your sealed guess from Session 1. It comes with you next week. STILL SEALED.

Memory Verse

"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."

Hebrews 7:25 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Bring your sealed guess sheet from Session 1, unopened. That is the whole assignment. Guard it like a Levite.

Catechism References

CCC 1085; CCC 1364; CCC 1366 to 1367.

Take-Home: Session 6

A Kingdom of Priests · Do This

What We Found

The seals came off. Melchizedek, the first priest in the Bible, king of Salem, brought out BREAD AND WINE and blessed Abraham; God swore the Messiah would be a priest for ever after that man's order; and on the night before he died, Jesus took bread and wine, said "This is my body which is given for you... this cup... poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood," and commanded the Twelve: "Do this in remembrance of me." The Supper was a Passover, and the Passover lamb had to be eaten, and the night was fixed for ever as a memorial each generation enters, not just recalls. The cup-word of Matthew and Mark, "my blood of the covenant," quoted Sinai itself, where Moses sealed the covenant in sacrificial blood; Luke's "new covenant in my blood" carries the same grammar. And we were honest: Genesis 14 never calls the bread and wine a sacrifice; it is the whole sweep, Genesis to Psalm 110 to the upper room to the Church's earliest reading, that lights the verse up, read backward from Christ, the way the Church has always read. We also tested the memorial-only reading, the view that the bread and wine are bare symbols and the Supper only a remembrance, against our earliest witness, and found Paul calling the cup "a participation in the blood of Christ" and warning that unworthy eating makes a person "guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord." Paul's severity is hard to square with a merely symbolic account; stronger Protestant views of spiritual presence deserve their own conversation.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Cyprian of Carthage

Writing around the year 253, St. Cyprian teaches that in Melchizedek, priest of God Most High who offered bread and wine and blessed Abraham, the sacrament of the Lord's sacrifice was prefigured: what Melchizedek carried in figure, Christ the true priest fulfilled, offering his own body and blood. You made his argument before you heard his name. (Faithfully summarized from his letter on the Eucharist.)

Letter 63

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ignatius of Antioch

On the road to martyrdom around the year 107, St. Ignatius warned against those who "abstain from the Eucharist... because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins." Within one lifetime of the upper room, this was the test.

Letter to the Smyrnaeans

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Justin Martyr

Describing Sunday worship to the Roman emperor around the year 155, St. Justin wrote that "not as common bread and common drink do we receive these," but as the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus, over which thanksgiving has been made by the word of prayer that comes from him. The surrounding chapters (65 and 67) describe what your parish still does.

Live It This Week

- At Mass this week, listen for tonight's exact words in the Eucharistic Prayer. You will recognize where its central words were born, especially in the institution narrative.
- Read the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13 to 35) slowly: Scriptures opened, bread broken. Which half of that rhythm is stronger in your life right now?
- Keep your opened guess sheet in your Bible at Genesis 14. Someday, show someone and tell them this story.

Memory Verse

"This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Luke 22:19 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read John 20:19 to 23, twice: the evening of Easter.

Catechism References

CCC 611; CCC 1337; CCC 1363 to 1364.

Take-Home: Session 7

A Kingdom of Priests · Whose Sins You Forgive

What We Found

Easter evening, locked doors, and the risen Christ saying "Peace be with you." Then: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you," his own mission, extended through sent men. He BREATHED on them, and we found the ancestry of that gesture in Genesis 2:7: as God's breath once made dust into a living man, Christ's breath now begins the new creation, making ministers who carry the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Forgive or retain: a two-sided authority exercised case by case. Behind Peter's keys we found Isaiah 22, the steward's office in David's house: the background the Church has long heard beneath the keys, a delegated royal authority that outlives its holder. We faced the scribes' own objection, "who can forgive sins but God alone?", and found that Jesus never denied their premise; he proved "the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins," and Matthew records the crowd glorifying God "who had given such authority to MEN." And we were honest about history: the confessional box and frequent private confession developed over centuries, and the Church says so herself (CCC 1447); what Easter evening gave was the authority. The furniture came later; the gift did not.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Chrysostom

Chrysostom marvels, in substance: God has given to priests an authority he gave neither to angels nor archangels; what they carry out below, God ratifies above. He wrote *On the Priesthood* largely to explain why this office frightened him. (Faithfully summarized.)

On the Priesthood, Book 3

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ambrose of Milan

Writing *On Penance* against those who denied the Church could absolve grave sinners, St. Ambrose argues in substance: the Church does not presume this power, she obeys it. Christ said "whose sins you forgive"; why would he grant a power he intended no one to use? (A summary of his argument.)

On Penance

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"When Peter baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes... even when Judas baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes." (A close paraphrase of his teaching.) In the sacraments the minister's hands move, but the power is never his. The forgiving in the confessional is Christ's, which is why no minister's unworthiness can poison the gift.

Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 6

Live It This Week

- Go to confession this week if you are able, and hear the absolution as Easter evening, still happening. If it has been years, tell the priest exactly that; it is his favorite sentence to hear.
- Speak one out-loud forgiveness to someone who needs the words, not the vibe.
- Pray John 20:21 to 23 once each day, and thank Christ by name for one person through whom his forgiveness has reached you.

Memory Verse

"Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

John 20:21 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read 1 Peter 2:4 to 10 once, with a pen in hand. Circle anything that looks familiar. Trust your memory.

Catechism References

CCC 1441 to 1442; CCC 1444 to 1445; CCC 1447; CCC 1461.

Take-Home: Session 8

A Kingdom of Priests · A Royal Priesthood

What We Found

The title of this study turned out to be your name. "You are a chosen race, a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, a holy nation, God's own people": Peter, echoing our first memory verse, Exodus 19:6, by way of the Greek Old Testament, over the whole Church. The vocation spoken at Sinai, the arc this study traced, is proclaimed by Peter over the whole Church in Christ, and if you are baptized, that is you. And the priesthood is not a compliment; it has offerings: your body presented as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), a sacrifice of praise, good done and goods shared (Hebrews 13:15 to 16), your work, your family, your patient endurance, offered through Jesus Christ (CCC 1546; for the lay faithful's daily sacrifices, CCC 901). We also gave the Reformation's reading of this verse its full weight, and answered it with two discoveries of our own: Israel held its corporate priestly vocation and an ordained priesthood side by side at God's command (Exodus 19; Exodus 28 to 29; Numbers 16); and 1 Peter itself opens from an apostle and closes with orders to the elders who tend the flock. The letter of the royal priesthood is an officer's letter, and Peter felt no tension, because there is none: the ministers exist AT THE SERVICE of the priestly people (CCC 1547). Both priesthoods at full strength, differing essentially and ordered to one another, with no rivalry.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Leo the Great

Preaching to ordinary baptized Christians in the fifth century, St. Leo teaches in substance that all the reborn share a royal and priestly dignity: the sign of the cross makes them a kingly people, and the anointing of the Spirit consecrates them as priests. This verse was never lost; it was the Church's own preaching all along. (A summary of Leo's teaching.)

Sermon 4

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"The whole redeemed city, that is, the congregation and society of the saints, is offered to God as a universal sacrifice through the great High Priest." Your life is not beside the sacrifice; it is in it.

City of God, Book 10, chapter 6

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thérèse of Lisieux

St. Thérèse teaches, in substance, that the smallest acts, done with great love, become great offerings: a difficult person loved, a hidden chore done, a discomfort accepted without complaint. She is the royal priesthood's field manual for an ordinary Tuesday. (A summary of the heart of her Story of a Soul.)

Story of a Soul

Live It This Week

- Each morning, name one concrete thing from the coming day and offer it out loud: "Father, through Jesus Christ, I offer you this." Watch what it does to the thing.
- At Mass, at the preparation of the gifts, place your week on the paten in your mind: your work, your family, your hardest thing.
- Memorize the memory verse with someone. It is long. It is your name.

Memory Verse

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

1 Peter 2:9 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read 1 Timothy 2:1 to 6 once.

Catechism References

CCC 901; CCC 1546 to 1547.

Take-Home: Session 9

A Kingdom of Priests · One Mediator, Many Fathers

What We Found

We read the two most-quoted verses against Catholic priesthood, whole. 1 Timothy 2:5, "one mediator between God and men," turned out to sit in the same paragraph where Paul COMMANDS "supplications, prayers, intercessions... for all men" and calls it pleasing to God: the one mediation of the ransom is the spring; our intercessions are water from it, not rival wells (the Council states the principle, *Lumen Gentium* 62, quoted at CCC 970: the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but gives rise to, a shared cooperation from the one source). And Matthew 23:9, "call no man father," read in context, forbids three titles (teacher, father, master) as trophies of religious vanity, while the New Testament itself is full of gospel fathers: Paul ("I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel"), Stephen ("our father Abraham," honored ancestral fatherhood), John (writing to "fathers"), and Jesus' own parable ("Father Abraham," twice, uncorrected; Luke 16:24, 30). The positive teaching is Ephesians 3:14 to 15: "every family" (the Greek *patria*, from *pater*, traditionally also rendered "every fatherhood") in heaven and on earth is NAMED from the Father: derived, real, and pointing at the source. And the loop closed: among the first offerers this study met were parents offering for their households; baptized parents still take up that pattern through the common priesthood.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

Christ alone is the perfect mediator, who reconciled the human race to God by his death; yet nothing prevents others being called mediators in a qualified sense, as ministers and cooperators participating in the one mediation. Subordinate mediation does not compete with Christ; it hangs from him. (A summary of his teaching on Christ the Mediator.)

Summa Theologiae III, q. 26

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Cyprian of Carthage

"He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother." God fathers his children through a family, the Church our mother; Paul's "I became your father in Christ Jesus" fills in the household.

On the Unity of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

St. Irenaeus teaches, in substance, that the one taught the faith from another's mouth is called the son of his teacher, and the teacher his father: begotten in the order of grace. In the second century, gospel fatherhood was ordinary Christian vocabulary. (A summary from his work against the heresies.)

Against Heresies, Book 4

Live It This Week

- Pray 1 Timothy 2:1 to 2 literally once a day: intercede by name for one person in civil authority, whether or not you voted for them.
- Thank one spiritual father or mother in your life this week, specifically.
- If you are a parent or hope to be: bless your children aloud once this week with the Numbers 6 blessing: parents exercising the baptismal priesthood of the domestic church.

Memory Verse

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."

Ephesians 3:14 to 15 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read 2 Timothy 1:3 to 14 once. Notice what Paul says was given, and how.

Catechism References

CCC 970; CCC 2634 to 2636.

Take-Home: Session 10

A Kingdom of Priests · The Laying On of Hands

What We Found

We watched the ministry get handed on, on the page. The Church's first item of business was filling Judas' vacant OFFICE (Acts 1:20, the overseership word), an office that outlives its holder, a pattern this study heard alongside the steward's key of Isaiah 22. Elders were appointed "in every church" (Acts 14:23); the Ephesian elders were made overseers "to care for the church of God" (Acts 20:28); and the Pastorals gave us the ordination grammar: a GIFT, given THROUGH the laying on of hands (2 Timothy 1:6), guarded by the warning "do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Timothy 5:22). We counted four generations in one verse: Paul, to Timothy, to faithful men, to others also (2 Timothy 2:2). We conceded honestly that the New Testament never calls a Christian minister hieres (a sacrificing priest); through much of that period the Temple still stood, and the word-family had gone to Christ and, collectively, to the whole baptized people. But Paul described his own ministry as "the PRIESTLY SERVICE of the gospel of God, so that the OFFERING of the Gentiles may be acceptable" (Romans 15:16); and in the generation after the apostles (traditionally around 96), Clement of Rome described succession as the apostles' own arrangement. One delight to keep: the English word "priest" descends from presbyteros, the New Testament's own word for these men.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Clement of Rome

Writing traditionally around the year 96, St. Clement teaches in substance: Christ from God, the apostles from Christ; the apostles appointed bishops and deacons, and provided that when these men died, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. (A faithful summary of his letter.)

Letter to the Corinthians (1 Clement), chapters 42 and 44

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ignatius of Antioch

"Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is under the bishop or one to whom he has entrusted it... where the bishop is, there let the people be." Around the year 107, ordered ministry and the Eucharist are already one fabric.

Letter to the Smyrnaeans

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against secret Gnostic "traditions," St. Irenaeus teaches in substance that the Church's answer is public and checkable: we can enumerate the men appointed bishops by the apostles, and their successors, down to our own day. Succession was the second century's receipt. (A summary from his work against the heresies.)

Against Heresies, Book 3

Live It This Week

- Pray daily for your pastor and your bishop by name.
- Take one step in your own relay: teach one thing you have received to one specific person.
- If you have ever felt a pull toward priesthood or religious life, or love someone who might, say one honest prayer about it this week.

Memory Verse

"Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands."

2 Timothy 1:6 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read John 13:1 to 15 once: the Teacher and Lord with a towel around his waist, the night everything was handed over.

Catechism References

CCC 861 to 862; CCC 1578.

Take-Home: Session 11

A Kingdom of Priests · In the Person of Christ

What We Found

We finally asked whose "my" the priest speaks at the consecration: "this is MY body." As the priest's own sentence it is absurd; it only makes sense if Another is speaking through him, the true priest of every Mass doing what he did in the upper room. The Church calls this in persona Christi, and we found the phrase's address in the New Testament itself: 2 Corinthians 2:10, where Paul forgives "in the presence of Christ," en prosopo Christou, which the Latin Bible has rendered "in the person of Christ" since the late fourth century (we noted honestly that the Greek word spans face, presence, and person, that its sense in Paul is debated, and that the verse gives the phrase its genealogy, not a proof). Christ's own words carry the concept with no Latin needed: "he who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16), and "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). We handled two honest topics: celibacy is a discipline of the Latin Church, not a dogma (the Eastern Catholic Churches ordain married men, and the Catechism says so at CCC 1579 to 1580), embraced for the kingdom's sake in Jesus' and Paul's own categories; and the scandal of unworthy ministers, faced without excuses: sins that exploit the sacred office or the persons entrusted to it carry a gravity and scandal all their own; and yet a minister's sin does not invalidate the sacraments, because they never ran on his holiness: even if Judas baptizes, Christ baptizes. Where the Church's ordinary conditions were in place, your baptism is valid and the absolution that freed you was real.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Vianney

"The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus." The Catechism itself quotes the holy Curé of Ars saying it (CCC 1589). Vianney was by every account a limited man; in persona Christi is why his confessional needed a sixteen-hour line. The office was never about the size of the man.

Quoted in CCC 1589

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Gregory of Nazianzus

Ordained against his will, St. Gregory withdrew for a time, then wrote in substance: the guiding of souls is the art of arts and the science of sciences, and the man who must stand between God and the people ought to tremble first. The saints took this office seriously enough to be terrified of it. (A summary of his Second Oration.)

Oration 2

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

The priest consecrates not by his own power but as the minister of Christ, in whose person he speaks; which is why the sacrament does not fail when the minister is unworthy, since the power at work was never the minister's own. (A summary of his teaching on the minister of the Eucharist.)

Summa Theologiae III, q. 82

Live It This Week

- At Mass, when the priest says "this is my body," silently pray: "Jesus, that is your my."
- Write and send a short, specific note of gratitude to a priest who has served you.
- If the scandal discussion touched a wound of yours, do one gentle thing about it this week: a trusted conversation, an honest prayer of anger and grief, or a conversation with a priest who has earned your trust.

Memory Verse

"So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

2 Corinthians 5:20 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 1:1 to 8 once. Last session, we go to heaven. Bring your Session 1 Take-Home if you still have it.

Catechism References

CCC 1548; CCC 1550; CCC 1579 to 1581; CCC 1584; CCC 1589.

Take-Home: Session 12

A Kingdom of Priests · A Kingdom of Priests

What We Found

We ended in heaven, and everything was there. John opens the Bible's last book singing our first memory verse over the persecuted Church as accomplished fact: he "made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father." In the throne room: the Lamb **STANDING**, as though slain, the risen Lamb bearing the marks of his once-for-all sacrifice at the center of a liturgy that never ends; twenty-four **ELDERS** (presbyteroi, the word we traced through Acts) enthroned around the throne; and golden bowls of incense "which are the prayers of the saints": your prayers, arriving as liturgy. The new song gathers every thread: ransomed from every tribe and tongue, "made them a kingdom and priests to our God." And the last two chapters return to the garden: the river, the tree of life, no more curse, gates that never shut because "nothing unclean shall enter": the serving and the guarding this study traced from Eden, kept at last in the Lamb, and his servants "shall see his face." We tested our whole method one final time and found that at every load-bearing joint, Scripture drew the connections and we discovered them with the texts open: "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." And we were sent: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Teaching the newly baptized, St. Cyril says in substance: when the priest cries "Lift up your hearts," answer truly, for in that most awesome hour the heart belongs with God on high; and the Holy, Holy, Holy is the seraphim's own hymn, so that our song and heaven's are one. The Sunday liturgy participates in the heavenly liturgy (CCC 1090). (A summary of his mystagogical instruction.)

Mystagogical Catecheses

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

"The glory of God is a living man, and the life of man is the vision of God." The end of the whole priestly story, from Eden's first charge to the last page, is a face seen, and human beings fully alive in the seeing.

Against Heresies, Book 4

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end." The final sentence of the City of God describes the final state of the kingdom of priests: rest, vision, love, praise, without end.

City of God, Book 22, chapter 30

Live It: From Here On

- Keep the one practice you named at the commissioning for the next ninety days. Priesthood is a daily office, not a study topic.
- Next Sunday, enter Mass through Revelation's door: the throne, the Lamb standing as slain, the bowls of incense. Arrive early enough to remember where you are.
- Hand it on: invite someone specific into the next study, or lead one. "Entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2) is now yours, and the relay belongs to the whole priestly people, women and men alike.

Memory Verse

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Revelation 1:5 to 6 (RSV2CE)

Where to Go from Here

Read the Letter to the Hebrews straight through in one or two sittings; after these twelve weeks, it will read like a letter written to you. And keep the first memory verse where you can see it. It was never just Israel's vocation. It is your name: a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Catechism References

CCC 128 to 130; CCC 1090; CCC 1137 to 1139.