

A RANSOM FOR MANY

A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

*"For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Mark 10:45 (RSV2CE)

A Fourteen-Session Inductive Bible Study for Young Adults

[Leader Guides](#) | [Discussion Guides](#) | [Take-Home Sheets](#)

Using This Guide

Welcome to *A Ransom for Many*, a fourteen-session inductive journey through the Gospel of Mark: the shortest, fastest, and fiercest of the four Gospels, by ancient and influential tradition the preaching of St. Peter preserved by his companion, and a book built with a craftsman's care that this study is designed to let your group discover for themselves.

The Format

Each session is designed for 75-90 minutes with a young adult group and follows the Win-Build-Send inductive arc. Win (about 15 minutes) opens with two accessible questions that surface the session's human theme. Build (about 55 minutes) is the heart: numbered inductive questions walk the group through the text, with shaded ANSWER boxes for the leader, always labeled "share after the discussion," because the discoveries belong to the group, not the guide. Send (about 15 minutes) turns the text toward life, followed by Live It This Week practices, a closing prayer, and a Scripture memory verse.

The Three Parts of Each Session

- **Leader Preparation Guide:** everything you need before the night: the Session Overview with its Discovery Aim and Catholic Touchstone, What You Need to Know, Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment, three Voices of the Church (verified citations from the Fathers, Doctors, and saints, faithfully paraphrased), the Catechism Connection, the leader-only Thread Watch, numbered Session Goals, and a Time Note with pre-chosen cuts if the night runs long.
- **Discussion Guide:** the run-of-show itself: prayers, questions, discovery moments where the group finds the Old Testament sources with their own hands, build-then-press steelman chains that present objections at full strength before answering them, and Dig Deeper boxes for the questions sharp participants will raise.
- **Leader Reference Card:** every passage used in the session, in order, so you can prepare your Bible tabs in five minutes.

The Take-Home Sheets

Each session has a two-page Take-Home sheet, distributed AFTER the session, never before. It recaps What We Found (consolidating the group's discoveries, not lecturing), carries that session's three Voices of the Church, the Live It This Week practices, the memory verse, the reading for next session, and the Catechism references. Take-Home 1 contains the sealed My Guess exercise: guard it, collect the envelopes, and do not let anyone open them until Session 14 tells you to.

The Threads

Mark plants motifs early and resolves them late, and this study is built around letting your group watch them grow: a torn sky, a strange pattern of commanded silence, a road, bread that keeps multiplying, two requested thrones, and a clock with four watches. The leader-only Thread Watch box in each session tells you what is planted, what is developing, and what must not be revealed early. Trust the architecture: the payoffs, especially in Sessions 13 and 14, land with force precisely because nothing was spoiled. If you keep only one rule, keep this one: never explain a thread before its session resolves it.

The Standards

All Scripture quotations follow the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (RSV2CE). Patristic citations are verified and faithfully paraphrased, never fabricated. Where the Church has not defined a question (authorship debates, textual variants, scholarly proposals), this study says so plainly, because a group that

watches its leader be honest about small questions will trust the Church's confidence about the great ones. Doctrinal content is anchored throughout to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

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Participant Take-Home Sheets (Sessions 1-14) are provided as separate two-page handouts, distributed after each session, and merged in the companion Take-Homes PDF.

Session 1

The Beginning of the Gospel

Mark 1:1-13 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that Mark hands them the answer to the Gospel's central question in its very first verse, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and then spends the rest of the story asking whether anyone inside the story will see it. They will find that the baptism of Jesus is not a quiet riverside scene but a cosmic event: the heavens are torn open, the Spirit descends, and the Father's voice weaves together three Old Testament threads that define who Jesus is and what he came to do.

Catholic Touchstone: The Baptism of the Lord. At the Jordan the Trinity is manifested: the Father speaks, the Son stands in the water, the Spirit descends. The Church teaches that Jesus' baptism is his acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant, and that he sanctifies the waters for our own Baptism (CCC 535-537, 1224).

What You Need to Know

Mark is the shortest, fastest, and most urgent of the four Gospels. There is no genealogy, no infancy narrative, no long opening discourse. Mark begins at a sprint: "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*" (Mark 1:1). The word *euangelion* ("gospel," good news) carried a double charge in the first century: Israel knew it from the Greek Isaiah, the herald announcing God's reign (Isaiah 40:9; 52:7), and the Roman world knew it as imperial language, the kind of announcement heralds carried about the accession or victory of a king. Mark seizes that word and declares a different King.

Ancient tradition connects this Gospel to St. Peter's preaching in Rome, with Mark, the John Mark of Acts, as Peter's companion and interpreter. The Church has never dogmatically defined the human authorship of the Gospels, and modern scholars debate the details, but the tradition is early, widely attested, and worth taking seriously. It explains the Gospel's vivid eyewitness texture: Mark alone tells us Jesus was asleep "on the cushion" in the boat (4:38) and that the grass at the feeding was "green" (6:39). Tradition has delighted to hear in such details the texture of an eyewitness's memory preserved through Peter's preaching; hold that as a traditional reading rather than a proof.

Two Greek words drive this session. First, *euthys*, "immediately," which appears over forty times in Mark, giving the Gospel its breathless pace. Second, and more important, *schizo*, "to tear." In verse 10 the RSV2CE says Jesus "saw the heavens opened," but Mark's Greek is stronger: the heavens are *torn apart*. Matthew and Luke both soften it to "opened." Mark chose violence. Hold that word. It appears exactly one more time in this Gospel, at 15:38, and the two tearings frame the entire story. Do not reveal this to the group; they will discover it in Session 14.

Finally, notice what the group should feel by the end of the night: Mark has told the reader who Jesus is (1:1), and the Father's voice has declared it over him (1:11, addressed "to you"). But inside the story, no human character has yet said it aloud. That dramatic tension, the reader knowing what the characters do not, is the engine of Mark's Gospel.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 (with Exodus 23:20).** Mark opens with a composite citation. He names Isaiah, but the first line ("Behold, I send my messenger before your face") is Malachi 3:1, echoing Exodus 23:20, and only then comes Isaiah 40:3 ("the voice of one crying in the wilderness"). Naming the more prominent prophet in a blended quotation was accepted Jewish practice. The theological payload is enormous: in Isaiah 40 the way being prepared is the way of the LORD, of God himself returning to his people. Mark applies it to Jesus. The messenger prepares *his* way. Before a single miracle, Mark has identified Jesus with the God of Israel.
- **Isaiah 64:1.** "O that you would rend the heavens and come down." Isaiah's anguished prayer that God would stop speaking through intermediaries and personally tear through the barrier. Mark's torn-heavens language may deliberately evoke that prayer: the God who had already come down in the Incarnation now tears the veil of heaven open in public manifestation.
- **2 Kings 1:8 and Malachi 4:5.** John's camel hair and leather belt deliberately mirror Elijah's description, and Malachi promised Elijah would return before the great day of the LORD. Mark is signaling: the forerunner has come, so the LORD himself is next.
- **Psalms 2:7, Isaiah 42:1, Genesis 22:2.** The Father's voice at the baptism braids three texts. "You are my Son" evokes Psalm 2, the coronation psalm of the Davidic king. "With you I am well pleased" evokes Isaiah 42:1, the first Servant Song, introducing the Servant who will ultimately suffer for the many (Isaiah 53). "Beloved Son" evokes Genesis 22:2, where Abraham is told to offer "your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love." King, Servant, and beloved son carried up the mountain for sacrifice: the whole Gospel is compressed into one sentence from heaven. And name the endpoint plainly in your own mind, even though the group will discover it gradually: the beloved Son is not merely moving toward suffering, but toward the offering of himself to the Father for the sins of the world, the Servant who "makes himself an offering for sin" (Isaiah 53:10; CCC 606, 613).
- **Wilderness, forty days, wild beasts (Mark 1:12-13).** Forty days recalls Israel's forty years of testing after passing through the waters. Where Israel failed, the beloved Son is faithful. Many commentators, ancient and modern, also hear an echo of Eden in "he was with the wild beasts": a new Adam at peace with creation where the first Adam fell. The Church has not defined this reading, and Mark does not spell it out, but it harmonizes with CCC 538-540, which presents Christ as the new Adam who recapitulates Israel's trials and remains faithful where Adam gave way.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: Papias of Hierapolis (2nd century, preserved by Eusebius, Church History 3.39)

Papias, a bishop writing within living memory of the apostles, records the tradition that Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote down accurately, though not in strict order, what he remembered of the Lord's words and deeds, taking care to omit nothing he had heard and to state nothing falsely. This is our earliest window into how the Church received this Gospel: as the preaching of Peter, preserved by his companion.

Voices of the Church: St. Irenaeus of Lyons (Against Heresies 3.1.1)

St. Irenaeus, taught by St. Polycarp who knew the apostle John, testifies that after the departure of Peter and Paul, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, handed down to us in writing the things

Peter had preached. For St. Irenaeus, the Gospel's apostolic root anchors its witness: what you hold in your hands is Peter's preaching; and as Sacred Scripture its authority rests on divine inspiration.

Voices of the Church: St. Jerome (Preface to his Commentary on Matthew)

Reflecting on the four living creatures of Ezekiel and Revelation as images of the four evangelists, St. Jerome assigns the lion to Mark, because his Gospel opens with a voice roaring in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord." This is why the lion became the enduring symbol of St. Mark. It fits the whole book: sudden, powerful, untamed, a Gospel that moves like a lion on the hunt.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 535-537:** Jesus' baptism is his acceptance and inauguration of his mission as the suffering Servant; he allows himself to be numbered among sinners, and the open heavens, the Spirit, and the Father's voice manifest the Trinity. In our own Baptism we are plunged into his.
- **CCC 538-540:** The temptation in the wilderness: Christ as the new Adam who remains faithful where Adam fell, recapitulating Israel's forty years of testing in his forty days.
- **CCC 1224:** Our Lord submitted to John's baptism, meant for sinners, to "fulfil all righteousness," a manifestation of his self-emptying.
- **CCC 436:** "Christ" means "Anointed One" (*Mashiach*); in Israel priests, prophets, and kings were anointed for their mission, and Jesus fulfills all three.
- **CCC 422:** "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son." The Gospel is the good news that the promises have been kept.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

Torn (*schizo*): PLANTED this session at 1:10. The heavens are torn open and the Father declares "my beloved Son." Do not tell the group the word recurs. It resolves at 15:38-39, where the temple veil is torn and a centurion declares "Son of God."

The Messianic Secret: SEEDED this session. Mark tells the reader Jesus' identity in 1:1, but no human character knows. The silence commands begin next session (1:25, 1:34). Take-Home 1 carries the sealed My Guess box tied to this thread.

The Way (*hodos*): PLANTED at 1:2-3, "prepare the way of the Lord." Develops through the central discipleship section ("on the way," chapters 8-10) and resolves with Bartimaeus following Jesus "on the way" at 10:52.

The Bread: Not yet planted. First appears in Session 6 (feeding of the five thousand) and resolves at the Last Supper. Hold this in view from tonight: the beloved Son carried toward sacrifice will one day give his own body as food, and in Mark the sacrifice and the meal are one gift.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain why Mark 1:1 functions as the thesis of the whole Gospel and can state the dramatic tension it creates.
2. Participants discover the composite Old Testament citation in Mark 1:2-3 themselves and can articulate what it implies: the way being prepared is the way of the *LORD*.
3. Participants connect the torn heavens to Isaiah 64:1 and the Father's words to Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 42:1, and Genesis 22:2.
4. Participants can answer the "low Christology" objection from Mark's own text.
5. Participants leave with a concrete practice: renewing their baptismal identity daily this week.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** drop Build question 9 (wild beasts and Eden, cover its content in one leader sentence) and the second Dig Deeper box (the manuscript note). Do not cut the steelman chain or the discovery of Isaiah 64:1; they carry the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, at the Jordan you tore open the heavens and would not stay distant from us. You named Jesus your beloved Son, and in Baptism you have spoken that same word over each of us. Send your Holy Spirit on this table tonight. Open the Scriptures to us, and open us to the Scriptures, that we may know your Son and follow him wherever the way leads. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Think of the best news you have ever received in your life. How did it arrive, and what did you do in the first sixty seconds after hearing it?
2. When you hear the word "gospel," what do you picture? Where do you think that word came from before Christians used it?

Leader bridge: Tonight we open the shortest, fastest Gospel, very likely the memories of St. Peter himself, written down by his companion Mark. It begins with a single verse that gives away the ending, and then dares us to watch the whole world miss it.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 1:1-13 aloud slowly, once through. Then work through the questions.

1. **Verse 1 is not a sentence; it is a title. What three claims does Mark make about Jesus in his first eleven words?** Let the group find them.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(1) He is *Jesus*, a real man in history, whom Mark locates in Nazareth two verses later (1:9). (2) He is the *Christ*, the Messiah, the anointed King promised to David. Make sure the group hears that "Christ" is not a last name: it is a title, *Christos*, the Greek rendering of the Hebrew *Mashiach*, "Anointed One." In Israel three kinds of men were anointed with oil for their mission: priests, prophets, and kings. Jesus fulfills all three in fullness (CCC 436). (3) He is the *Son of God*. Notice also the word "gospel" (*euangelion*): in the Roman world this was a herald's announcement about an emperor, news of an accession or a victory. Mark is making a royal proclamation, and Caesar is not the king it announces. One more thing: Mark tells YOU this in verse 1. No person inside the story has heard it. Keep asking all study long: who knows, and how did they find out?

2. **DISCOVERY: Mark says he is quoting "Isaiah the prophet." Split the group: half look up Isaiah 40:3, half look up Malachi 3:1. Read both aloud. What do you notice?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Mark's quotation is a blend. Line one ("Behold, I send my messenger before your face") is Malachi 3:1, which itself echoes Exodus 23:20; line two ("the voice of one crying in the wilderness") is Isaiah 40:3. Naming the greater prophet when weaving texts together was normal Jewish practice, not an error. Now the crucial step: in Isaiah 40, whose way is being prepared? Read the verse again. It is the way of the LORD, the way of God himself, coming in person to comfort and rescue his people. Mark applies that text to Jesus. Before Jesus says a single word in this Gospel, Mark has identified him with the God of Israel. So much for the idea that Mark has a "low" view of Jesus.

3. **Look at how John the Baptist is described in verses 4-6: the wilderness, the camel's hair, the leather belt. DISCOVERY: someone look up 2 Kings 1:8, and someone else Malachi 4:5. Who is John dressed as, and why does that matter?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

John is dressed as Elijah: Mark's camel's hair garment and leather belt (1:6) deliberately evoke the prophet 2 Kings 1:8 describes as a hairy man with a leather belt about his loins. The two descriptions are not word for word identical, and they do not need to be; the costume alone identified the man. Malachi 4:5 promised that Elijah would return before "the great and terrible day of the LORD." Mark's point is a drumroll: if the Elijah figure has arrived, then the next one to walk on stage is the LORD himself. And the next person to walk on stage, in verse 9, is Jesus of Nazareth.

4. **Verse 10 in our translation says Jesus "saw the heavens opened." Mark's Greek word is *schizo*, "torn apart," the word you would use for ripping fabric. DISCOVERY: look up Isaiah 64:1. What prayer is being answered at the Jordan?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Isaiah 64:1: "O that you would rend the heavens and come down." Israel's desperate prayer that God would stop being distant, tear through the barrier, and come in person. At the Jordan, many hear that prayer being answered in public: the Son, already among us, is manifested as the heavens tear. Matthew and Luke both say the heavens were "opened"; Mark alone says torn. A door that has been opened can be closed again; something torn open cannot simply be shut. The image is Mark's way of saying what the Church teaches plainly: in Christ, God has permanently opened access between heaven and earth, a "new and living way" (Hebrews 10:19-20). He is not going back to distance.

5. **The Father speaks: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (1:11). DISCOVERY: divide into three groups. Group one: Psalm 2:7. Group two: Isaiah 42:1. Group three: Genesis 22:2. Each group reads its verse aloud and reports what it adds to the Father's sentence.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Psalm 2:7 ("You are my son") is the coronation psalm of the Davidic king: Jesus is the KING. Isaiah 42:1 ("my chosen, in whom my soul delights," on whom God puts his Spirit) opens the Servant Songs that climax in Isaiah 53, the Servant who suffers for the many: Jesus is the SERVANT. Genesis 22:2 ("your son, your only son, whom you love") is Abraham told to offer Isaac on the mountain: Jesus is the BELOVED SON carried toward sacrifice. King, Servant, beloved Son bound for the altar. The Father has preached the entire Gospel of Mark in one sentence, and the reader has heard it before any human character has confessed it.

Dig Deeper

The voice says "with you I am well pleased" before Jesus has performed a single miracle, preached a single sermon, or called a single disciple. The Father's delight is not a wage paid for performance. If you are baptized, you have been adopted into the beloved Son, and in him the Father's "beloved" truly rests on you (CCC 1265). Everything you do for God flows from that word; nothing you do earns it. This is why the Church has us renew our baptismal promises every Easter, returning to the identity that precedes all our work.

6. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. Some readers, ancient and modern, argue that Mark teaches an "adoptionist" Christology: Jesus was an ordinary man who BECAME God's Son at his baptism. Their case: Mark has no virgin birth, no infancy narrative, no pre-existence language like John 1; a few early manuscripts even lack "the Son of God" in 1:1. The story simply opens with a man getting baptized and a voice declaring sonship, and Psalm 2:7 was a coronation formula, the day a man became king. Have the group state this case as persuasively as they can. Then ask: does Mark's own text support it? Where has tonight's study already answered it?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Take the objection seriously; it is built on real observations. But the text itself dismantles it. First, Mark 1:1: the narrator confesses Jesus as Son of God before the baptism ever happens (and even where a few manuscripts lack the phrase in 1:1, the Father's declarations at 1:11 and 9:7 and the whole book's architecture carry it); the title is the premise of the book, not a status acquired in chapter one. Second, Mark 1:2-3: the composite citation identifies Jesus with the LORD whose way is prepared, language that strains any exaltation reading, for the messenger prepares the way of the LORD himself. Third, listen to the verb: "You ARE my beloved Son," not "you have now become." The baptism reveals and inaugurates; it does not create. The heavens tear open to announce what is already true. Mark writes a Gospel of discovery: the reader is told the truth on page one and then watches the world catch up. That is a literary strategy, not a lower doctrine.

7. **Why would the sinless Son of God stand in line for a baptism of repentance meant for sinners (1:9; see also 1:4-5)? What does that tell you about how he intends to save us?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He is not confessing sins; he has none. He is standing where sinners stand. From his first public act, Jesus places himself among the guilty, numbering himself with us, an overture of the cross, where he will be counted among transgressors in earnest. The Catechism puts it beautifully: his baptism is his acceptance and inauguration of his mission as the suffering Servant, and it anticipates the "baptism" of his bloody death (CCC 536). He also sanctifies the waters: because he went down into the Jordan, our Baptism truly plunges us into him.

8. **Immediately after the baptism, "the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness" for forty days of testing (1:12-13). Where has Israel heard "through the waters, then into the wilderness, then testing" before?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The Exodus. Israel passed through the Red Sea, entered the wilderness, and was tested forty years, and failed, grumbling and worshiping the golden calf. Jesus passes through the Jordan's waters, enters the wilderness, is tested forty days, and is faithful. He is re-living Israel's story and getting it right, the faithful Son where the first "son" (Exodus 4:22) failed. Note also that it is the Spirit who drives him there: the testing is not an accident interrupting the mission; it is the mission's first campaign.

9. **Mark adds a strange detail no other Gospel has: "he was with the wild beasts" (1:13). What might that evoke?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Let the group speculate; there is no defined answer. Many commentators, ancient and modern, hear Eden: a Son of God at peace among the animals, where Adam once was before the fall, with angels ministering to him. Mark does not spell it out, and the Church has not defined this reading, so hold it lightly, but it harmonizes with the Church's teaching that Christ is the new Adam who conquers where Adam fell (CCC 538-540). Others simply hear danger: the wilderness is the untamed edge of the world, and the Son walks into it unafraid. If the Eden echo is right, paradise lost has begun to be paradise regained; if the simpler reading is right, the Son walks the world's wild edges unafraid. Both preach.

Dig Deeper

Honest footnote for the curious: a few early manuscripts of Mark 1:1 lack the phrase "the Son of God," and scholars debate whether a copyist added or accidentally dropped it. The phrase is well attested and the Church's translations, including our RSV2CE, include it. And nothing hangs on the debate: the Father declares Jesus' sonship at 1:11 and 9:7, the demons know it, and the whole Gospel drives toward a human confession of it. Mark's message is the same either way. We can afford to be honest about small questions because the big claim is everywhere.

Send (15 minutes)

1. God tore the heavens open rather than stay distant from you. Where in your life have you been assuming God is distant, waiting, or withholding, and what would change if you took the torn heavens seriously?
2. The Father's "beloved" came before any accomplishment. Who is one person in your life this week who needs to hear who they are before they hear what they should do, and what will you say?

Live It This Week

- Each morning, before checking your phone, make the Sign of the Cross with intention and say: "I am a beloved son / daughter of the Father." Let the day begin from identity, not performance.
- Once this week, bless yourself with holy water on entering a church and consciously renew your baptismal promises: reject sin, profess the Creed's first line.
- Read Mark 1:1-13 once more on your own, slowly, and mark every Old Testament echo you can now hear.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, you did not stay behind the veil. You tore the heavens and came down to us in your beloved Son. Teach us this week to live from the name you gave us in Baptism, beloved, and to prepare the way of the Lord in our own wilderness. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 1:1-13

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 1:1 (title verse: Christ, Son of God)
- Mark 1:2-3 (composite citation)
- Isaiah 40:3 (voice in the wilderness; the way of the LORD)
- Malachi 3:1 (I send my messenger)
- Exodus 23:20 (background echo of the messenger)
- Mark 1:4-6 (John the Baptist)
- 2 Kings 1:8 (Elijah's clothing)
- Malachi 4:5 (Elijah before the day of the LORD)
- Mark 1:9-11 (the baptism; the torn heavens; the voice)
- Isaiah 64:1 (O that you would rend the heavens)
- Psalm 2:7 (You are my son: the King)
- Isaiah 42:1 (my chosen, in whom my soul delights: the Servant)
- Genesis 22:2 (your son, your only son, whom you love: the beloved son offered)
- Mark 1:12-13 (wilderness, forty days, wild beasts, angels)
- Exodus 4:22 (Israel is my first-born son, background)
- Isaiah 53:10 (he makes himself an offering for sin, leader background)
- Hebrews 10:19-20 (the new and living way, leader background)
- CCC 422, 436, 535-537, 538-540, 606, 613, 1224
- Memory verse: Mark 1:11

Session 2

Immediately

Mark 1:14-45 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the shape of Jesus' first day of public ministry: a kingdom announced, disciples called, demons silenced, the sick healed, a leper touched. They will find the first commands of silence, the seed of the study's central mystery, and they will see that from the very beginning Jesus' holiness does not retreat from what is unclean; it advances and heals it.

Catholic Touchstone: The kerygma and ongoing conversion. "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (1:15) is the sentence the Church places on our foreheads every Ash Wednesday. The kingdom is at hand because the King is here, and he immediately begins gathering a visible community around himself (CCC 541-543, 1427-1429).

What You Need to Know

Mark 1:15 is the summary of Jesus' entire preaching: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." The word for time here is *kairos*, not clock time but the appointed moment, the hour history has been waiting for. Every promise from Session 1 is now coming due.

Watch the word "immediately" (*euthys*) pile up: the fishermen leave their nets immediately, the demon is confronted immediately, the leper is cleansed immediately (1:42). Mark's pace is a theological statement: when the King arrives, everything happens now.

Three times in this passage Jesus commands silence: to the demon in the synagogue (1:25), to the demons at evening "because they knew him" (1:34), and to the cleansed leper (1:43-44). Scholars call this pattern the Messianic Secret, and it will run through the whole Gospel. Why would Jesus hush true statements about himself? Do not answer this for the group yet; let the question itch. Part of the answer: demons shouting titles is not the kind of knowing Jesus wants, and a wonder-working Messiah acclaimed by crowds would be misunderstood as a political liberator. Who Jesus is cannot be understood apart from where he is going, and nobody knows where he is going yet. This is the thread behind the sealed guesses the group wrote last week.

The leper scene (1:40-45) deserves special care. Leprosy in the Law meant total exclusion: torn clothes, covered lips, the cry "Unclean, unclean," dwelling alone outside the camp (Leviticus 13:45-46). Touching a leper made you unclean. Jesus touches him, and the contagion runs in reverse: instead of uncleanness flowing into Jesus, holiness flows out of him. Then Jesus sends the man to the priest to offer "what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people" (1:44), honoring the Law's public, priestly verification of cleansing (Leviticus 14). The Church has long seen here a pattern that finds its full form in the Sacrament of Penance: the healing comes from Christ, and Christ himself wills that it be verified and celebrated through a priestly ministry. Present this as a resonance the text invites, not as a proof-text; the direct institution of the sacrament is John 20:21-23, which arrives in Session 3's discussion of forgiveness.

One translation note to hold honestly: in 1:41 our RSV2CE reads "moved with pity," and most manuscripts have that word (*splanchnistheis*). A few early witnesses instead read "moved with anger" (*orgistheis*), and some scholars think anger, at the disease, at what sin and death have done to God's world, is what Mark wrote. The Church's translation is what we teach from, and nothing doctrinal turns on the variant, but if a sharp

participant has read about it, you can say honestly: either way, Jesus' response to human misery is not indifference. It moves him, and he acts.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Daniel 2:44 and 7:13-14.** "The kingdom of God" is not a vague spiritual mood; it is Daniel's promised reign that God himself sets up, which crushes the kingdoms of the world and grows to fill the earth. When Jesus says this kingdom "is at hand," he is announcing that Daniel's clock has struck.
- **1 Kings 19:19-21.** Elijah calls Elisha, who asks to kiss his father and mother goodbye, and is permitted. Simon, Andrew, James, and John are given no such scene: they leave nets, boat, and father immediately. The call of the greater Elijah's Lord outranks even the greatest prophet's call.
- **Leviticus 13:45-46 and Leviticus 14.** The leper's living death outside the camp, and the elaborate priestly ritual for verified cleansing, the ritual Jesus explicitly tells the healed man to complete. Jesus does not abolish the Law's priestly economy; he fulfills and works through it.
- **2 Kings 5:1-14.** Naaman the Syrian. When the king of Israel is asked to cure leprosy he tears his clothes: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?" (5:7). In Israel's memory, cleansing a leper is God's work. Keep that in your pocket for question 8.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew, on the call of the fishermen)

Preaching on the calling of the first disciples, St. John Chrysostom marvels at the quality of their obedience: they were in the middle of their work, nets in hand, and at a word they left everything, not waiting to finish the day's catch. This, he says, is the obedience Christ asks: not to delay, not to negotiate the timing, but to follow at once, leaving even legitimate goods for the sake of the One who calls.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Expositions of the Psalms, on Psalm 86 [85])

St. Augustine gives us the key to scenes like Mark 1:35, where Jesus rises before dawn to pray: Christ "prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God." The Son's prayer is not playacting; the eternal Son, having truly become man, truly prays, and he draws our prayer up into his own. When you pray this week, Augustine says, recognize your own voice in him, and his voice in you.

Voices of the Church: St. Bede the Venerable (Commentary on Mark, on the cleansing of the leper)

St. Bede observes that in touching the leper, the Lord shows he is not rendered unclean by the contact; rather his healing power cleanses, for he is the Law's Lord: where our touch would be defiled, his touch heals, because the divine power works through his true human flesh. And by sending the man to the priest with the offering Moses commanded, Christ shows humility toward the Law he himself gave, and shows honor toward the Law he himself gave; and the Church has long drawn the further lesson: do not despise her public ministry in the very moments God has

healed you privately.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 541-543:** In Jesus' word and works the kingdom is at hand; to enter it one must accept his word and join the family gathering around him.
- **CCC 1427-1429:** Jesus' call to conversion ("repent") is not a one-time event but the ongoing task of the whole Church and every baptized life.
- **CCC 1503-1505:** Christ the physician: his compassion toward the sick, his touch of lepers, and his identification with the suffering.
- **CCC 2602:** Jesus often withdraws to pray in solitude; his prayer embraces all people, and he teaches us by his example.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Messianic Secret: OFFICIALLY PLANTED this session: 1:25, 1:34 ("he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him"), 1:43-44. Note carefully for the sealed guesses: the beings who correctly identify Jesus so far are demons, and they are silenced. The guess asked for the first HUMAN confession. Say nothing; just enjoy watching them notice.

Torn (*schizo*): Dormant this session. Do not mention it.

The Way: Developing quietly: Jesus is constantly in motion, "throughout all Galilee" (1:39), and following him means leaving where you were (1:18, 1:20).

The Bread: Not yet planted.

Session Goals

1. Participants can state Mark 1:15 from memory as the summary of Jesus' preaching and explain "kingdom," "repent," and "believe" in Catholic terms.
2. Participants notice the silence commands themselves and begin forming theories (without leader resolution).
3. Participants discover the Naaman background and articulate why cleansing a leper is a divine act.
4. Participants can answer the "even the demons believe" question: what saving faith is and is not.
5. Participants commit to one concrete morning-prayer practice modeled on Mark 1:35.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** drop Build question 4 (Simon's mother-in-law) and compress the Elisha comparison in question 3 to a single leader sentence. Do not cut the leper sequence or the steelman; they carry the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you walked into Galilee announcing that the waiting was over. Walk into this room tonight. Give us ears to hear your call the way four fishermen heard it, and hearts willing to leave the nets we grip. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Tell us about a time you had to drop everything, no notice, no preparation. What made you willing to do it?
2. When you hear the word "repent," what tone of voice do you imagine? Where do you think that tone came from?

Leader bridge: Tonight covers roughly one day and its aftermath, and Mark narrates it at a sprint. Count how many times you hear the word "immediately." And watch for something strange: Jesus keeps telling people, and other things, to be quiet.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 1:14-45 aloud, once through. Then work through the questions.

1. **Verse 15 is the whole sermon: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." Four clauses. Take them one at a time: what is each one actually claiming or demanding?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"The time is fulfilled": *kairos*, the appointed hour; all the promises we traced last week are coming due. "The kingdom of God is at hand": not a place or a feeling but God's own reign breaking in, and it is "at hand" because the King is standing in front of you. "Repent" (*metanoete*): literally a change of mind and direction, a whole reoriented life, and the verb form implies keep on repenting, ongoing conversion, not a single moment (CCC 1427-1429). "Believe in the gospel": entrust yourself to the good news, not merely agree with it. The Church puts this exact sentence on our foreheads with ashes every Lent because it is the doorway sentence of the Christian life.

2. **DISCOVERY: someone look up Daniel 2:44 (and, if time, glance at Daniel 7:13-14). When a first-century Jew heard "the kingdom of God is at hand," what story did those words belong to?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Daniel's. God promises to set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, which breaks the empires of the world in pieces and grows to fill the whole earth. The kingdom is concrete, historical, and unstoppable, a stone that becomes a mountain. Jesus is not announcing a new private spirituality; he is announcing that Daniel's promised reign has arrived, and, as we will see all study, that it arrives in a way no one expects: hidden, small, and crowned with thorns.

3. **Look at the call of the four fishermen (1:16-20). DISCOVERY: someone look up 1 Kings 19:19-21, Elijah's call of Elisha. Compare the two scenes. What is Mark showing us about Jesus by the difference?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Elisha asks leave to kiss his father and mother goodbye, and Elijah grants it; even the greatest prophetic call in the Old Testament allows a farewell. The fishermen get no farewell scene: they leave nets, boat, hired servants, and father "immediately." The One calling here outranks Elijah. Only God's own call has this kind of absolute claim. Notice too what he calls them to: "I will make you become fishers of men." He does not merely recruit them for tasks; he promises to remake what they are. And notice that his first act after announcing the kingdom is to gather a visible community around himself. The kingdom, from minute one, has people in it, together.

4. **In the synagogue (1:21-28), the demon shouts the truth: "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." Jesus' response: "Be silent." At 1:34 he again "would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him." Why on earth would Jesus silence true statements about himself? Let the group build theories; do not resolve this.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Do not give a final answer; the Gospel itself withholds one for now. Affirm good partial theories: testimony from demons is the wrong witness (truth from a hostile mouth corrupts); shouted titles without understanding would ignite political messianic fever; Jesus insists on being known through his whole story, not through headlines. Tell the group to keep a running list every week of who is told to be quiet, and to remember their sealed guesses. The question of how Jesus can rightly be known is becoming the plot of the book.

5. **Simon's mother-in-law (1:29-31): Jesus takes her by the hand, lifts her up, the fever leaves, "and she served them." Small scene; what is the pattern in it?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Grace, then response. He touches, lifts, heals; she serves. Mark's word for her serving (*diekonei*) is the root of our word deacon, and it is the same word Jesus will use of himself later in the Gospel: the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. The first healed person in Mark responds to being raised by becoming a servant, the whole Christian life in one verse. Healed people serve; it is what healing is for.

6. **At 1:35, after the most successful day imaginable, Jesus rises "a great while before day" and goes to a lonely place to pray, and then walks away from a town full of people still asking for him (1:37-38). What do those two choices teach?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First: if the eternal Son, in his humanity, needed to begin the day in solitary prayer with the Father, our claim that we are too busy collapses. His prayer is real prayer, and it is also our school (CCC 2602). St. Augustine says Christ prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God. Second: Jesus' agenda is set in prayer, not by demand. The crowd wants more of yesterday; the Father sends him to the next towns, "for that is why I came out." Popularity is not mission. That discernment happened before dawn, alone with the Father.

7. **The leper (1:40-45). First, DISCOVERY: someone read Leviticus 13:45-46 aloud, what was this man's daily life? Then look closely at Mark: what does the leper ask, and what does Jesus do before he says anything?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The leper's life: torn clothes, covered lips, crying "Unclean" at anyone who approached, dwelling alone outside the camp, a living death, cut off from family, synagogue, and Temple. He does not even ask to be healed; he asks to be made *clean*, restored to God and community. And before Jesus says a word, Mark gives us the shock: "he stretched out his hand and touched him." Nobody touched lepers; touch transmitted uncleanness. But with Jesus the current runs backward: holiness flows out and heals. He could have healed with a word from a distance; he chose touch, because this man's disease was isolation, and the healing had to begin with contact.

8. **DISCOVERY: someone look up 2 Kings 5:1-7, the king of Israel's reaction when asked to cure Naaman's leprosy. In light of that, what is Mark quietly claiming when Jesus says "I will; be clean"?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The king of Israel tears his clothes: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?" In Israel's memory, cleansing leprosy belongs to God alone; even Elisha only relays instructions and credits God. Jesus does not relay or pray aloud or invoke a higher name. He wills it: "I will; be clean." The verse-1 claim keeps cashing out in the narrative: the LORD whose way was prepared is walking around Galilee doing the things only the LORD does.

9. **Jesus sends the cleansed man to the priest "and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people" (1:44). Why does the divine healer bother with the priestly ritual of Leviticus 14, and does anything in Catholic life rhyme with this?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Jesus honors the economy he himself established: healing verified and celebrated publicly through priestly ministry, restoring the man not just biologically but socially and liturgically. He is no enemy of mediation; he works through it. Catholics will rightly hear a rhyme with the Sacrament of Penance: Christ heals, and Christ wills that his healing pass through the Church's priestly ministry, where it is spoken aloud into human ears. Be precise here: this scene is a resonance and a pattern, not the institution of the sacrament; the Lord institutes that ministry explicitly when he breathes on the apostles in John 20:21-23, which we will meet head-on next week. Note also the sad irony of verse 45: the one man told to speak (to the priest) instead talks freely to everyone else, and Jesus can no longer enter towns openly. Disobedient publicity costs the mission.

Dig Deeper

A few early manuscripts of 1:41 read "moved with anger" instead of "moved with pity," and scholars debate which Mark wrote. Our RSV2CE reads "moved with pity," with the majority of witnesses. Nothing doctrinal hangs on it, and the two readings converge on one truth: Jesus is not neutral before human misery. Whether it stirs his compassion or his righteous anger at what disease and death have done to God's creatures, it *moves* him, and he acts. In the true humanity of the Son, God has a human heart that is genuinely moved; the divine nature does not undergo change, but neither is our God the serene, indifferent deity of the philosophers.

10. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. Notice something unsettling: the most theologically accurate voices in Mark so far are demons. "I know who you are, the Holy One of**

God." Perfectly true. Now, many of our Protestant friends rightly cherish the truth that we are saved by faith. Build their best case: Scripture says "believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31); Jesus himself says "repent, and believe" (1:15); and thoughtful Protestants are careful to say saving faith is not mere intellectual assent but personal trust. State that case as strongly as you can. Then ask: what do the demons of Mark 1 contribute to this conversation, and where does James 2:19 land?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Honor the steelman: our Protestant friends are right that salvation is by grace through faith, right that faith must be personal trust and not bare assent, and Catholics agree with both statements without reservation (see CCC 1814-1816). Now the demons: they possess flawless theological information, and they are not saved. James 2:19 makes the point with a smirk: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder." So correct belief, even correct belief plus strong feeling (shuddering!), is not yet saving faith. What is missing? Love, and the obedience love produces. The Catholic tradition, echoed by the Catechism (CCC 1814-1816), speaks of justifying faith as faith formed by charity, "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6), a faith that entrusts, follows, and obeys, like four fishermen dropping nets. The real difference with our thoughtful Protestant friends is narrower than the slogans suggest, and worth stating at full strength: they speak of faith as the sole instrument receiving Christ's imputed righteousness, with obedience as its necessary and inseparable fruit; the Catholic teaching is that in justification God truly infuses righteousness, so that charity belongs to living faith's very form. A real difference, honestly held on both sides, and far from either cartoon. Mark's first chapter stages the question perfectly: the demons know; the fishermen follow. Only one of those is living, saving faith.

Send (15 minutes)

1. What net is Jesus asking you to leave, not necessarily a job, but a habit, a grudge, a comfort, a plan you grip too tightly? What would "immediately" look like for you this week?
2. The leper asked to be made clean, not just cured. Is there a part of your life where you have settled for managing symptoms when Christ is offering restoration? What would it cost to ask him for the whole thing?

Live It This Week

- Claim your own 1:35: pick one morning this week to rise fifteen minutes early and pray before you speak to anyone or touch your phone. Just you, the Father, and tomorrow's Gospel passage.
- Pray Mark 1:15 as a nightly examen: Where did I hear the King today? Where do I need to turn (repent)? Where do I need to trust (believe)?
- The leper was healed by touch. Make contact this week with one person who is isolated, a text is fine, a visit is better.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you stretched out your hand and touched what everyone else avoided. Touch what is unclean in us. Teach us to pray before dawn, to follow before we feel ready, and to trust that your call is worth every net we leave behind. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 1:14-45

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 1:14-15 (the kingdom proclamation)
- Daniel 2:44; Daniel 7:13-14 (the kingdom background)
- Mark 1:16-20 (call of the four)
- 1 Kings 19:19-21 (Elijah calls Elisha)
- Mark 1:21-28 (synagogue exorcism; first silence command)
- Mark 1:29-31 (Simon's mother-in-law)
- Mark 1:32-34 (evening healings; demons silenced)
- Mark 1:35-39 (prayer before dawn; mission over popularity)
- Mark 1:40-45 (the leper)
- Leviticus 13:45-46 (the leper's exclusion)
- Leviticus 14 (priestly verification of cleansing, background)
- 2 Kings 5:1-7 (Naaman; only God cleanses leprosy)
- John 20:21-23 (leader background; institution of the ministry of forgiveness, previewed for Session 3)
- Acts 16:31; James 2:19; Galatians 5:6 (steelman chain)
- CCC 541-543, 1427-1429, 1503-1505, 1814-1816, 2602
- Memory verse: Mark 1:15

Session 3

Five Controversies

Mark 2:1-3:6 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that Mark has arranged five conflict stories into a deliberate arc, from silent objections in the heart to an open plot to destroy Jesus, and that at the center of the storm stands one staggering claim: the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. They will trace that authority from the paralytic's roof to the upper room of John 20, and into the confessional.

Catholic Touchstone: The forgiveness of sins and the Sacrament of Penance. Only God can forgive sins, and God, in Christ, has willed that this forgiveness reach us through human ministry: "he gave such authority to men" (Matthew 9:8; CCC 1441-1445).

What You Need to Know

Mark 2:1-3:6 is a tightly built unit of five controversies: the paralytic and the forgiveness of sins (2:1-12), eating with tax collectors and sinners (2:13-17), the question about fasting (2:18-22), plucking grain on the Sabbath (2:23-28), and the withered hand on the Sabbath (3:1-6). The arrangement is deliberate: the first and last both involve a healing and a charge; the opposition escalates from "questioning in their hearts" (2:6) to public interrogation to watching him "so that they might accuse him" (3:2), and it ends with Pharisees and Herodians, groups with no natural sympathy for each other, uniting on "how to destroy him" (3:6). Mark puts the shadow of the cross over the story by chapter three. The verdict that kills Jesus is not a late misunderstanding; it is the world's early answer to his claims.

The center of gravity is 2:5-12. Jesus says "My son, your sins are forgiven," and the scribes reason: "It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Notice: their theology is correct. Sin, whatever else it wounds, is finally an offense against God (Psalm 51:4), so the forgiving of sins as such is God's prerogative. Jesus does not correct their premise. He accepts it and then demonstrates that he holds the prerogative, attaching the forgiveness to a visible, checkable healing "that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." The phrase "on earth" matters enormously and will anchor the steelman.

"Son of Man" enters the Gospel here (2:10, 2:28). To casual ears it sounds humble, and it can mean simply "a human being." But its home address is Daniel 7:13-14: "one like a son of man" who comes with the clouds of heaven and receives from the Ancient of Days everlasting dominion, glory, and kingdom. It is Jesus' favorite self-title precisely because it is veiled: humble on the surface, cosmic underneath, and it lets him define his messiahship on his own terms. It fits the Secret perfectly.

The bridegroom saying (2:19-20) carries two quiet bombs. First, in the prophets, the Bridegroom of Israel is the LORD himself (Hosea 2:19-20; Isaiah 62:5); Jesus calmly steps into that role. Second, "the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast": "taken away" is often heard as the Gospel's first whispered hint of the Passion, and it is also the charter of Christian fasting. We keep Fridays penitential and observe the Lenten fast not because the Bridegroom never came, but because we live between his being taken and his return.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Daniel 7:13-14.** The son of man who receives everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days. Read alongside Mark 2:10, it turns "the Son of Man has authority" from a modest idiom into an enthronement claim.
- **Psalms 51:4.** "Against you, you only, have I sinned." David, having wronged Bathsheba and murdered Uriah, still says the sin is finally against God. This is why the scribes' premise, only God can forgive sins, is sound, and why Jesus' claim is either blasphemy or divinity.
- **Hosea 2:19-20 and Isaiah 62:5.** The LORD betrothes Israel to himself forever; the Bridegroom of the covenant is God. Jesus' self-designation as bridegroom quietly claims the divine role, and the Church will unfold it: Christ the Bridegroom, the Church his Bride (CCC 796).
- **1 Samuel 21:1-6.** David, the anointed king not yet enthroned, flees from the murderous reigning power and receives the holy bread of the Presence for himself and his companions. Jesus' use of the story is precise typology: the true Anointed One, not yet enthroned, hunted by the authorities, whose companions' needs outrank ritual regulation. And the detail that the greater David's story also runs through holy bread is one to keep silently in mind; this Gospel will return to bread.
- **Genesis 2:2-3 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15.** The Sabbath's double root: God's rest crowning creation, and Israel's liberation from slavery. "The Sabbath was made for man" (2:27) restores the gift to its purpose: a day for man's good, worship, rest, mercy, not a cage. The Church's Sunday flows from this logic, transfigured by the Resurrection (CCC 2173).

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Ambrose of Milan (On Penance)

Writing against the Novatianists, who admitted that God forgives but denied that the Church could absolve grave sinners, St. Ambrose argues that Christ truly conferred this ministry on his Church: those who deny the Church's power to forgive sins would have to deny Baptism itself, for there too sins are remitted through human ministers. The Lord's gifts are not diminished by passing through the hands he chose; it is one and the same Christ who forgives in both fonts of mercy.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (On the Priesthood, Book 3)

St. John Chrysostom stands in awe of the ministry of absolution: God has given to priests, he says, a power he gave neither to angels nor to archangels, for to no angel was it said, "whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." What priests perform on earth, God ratifies above. Chrysostom's point is not clerical pride but the opposite: trembling humility that God should work heaven's business through earthen vessels.

Voices of the Church: St. Ignatius of Antioch (Letter to the Magnesians)

Within living memory of the apostles, St. Ignatius describes believers who had lived in the old order as now "no longer keeping the Sabbath, but living in accordance with the Lord's day, on which our life also rose through him." The earliest Church did not experience Sunday as a betrayal of the Sabbath but as its flowering: in Christ, the Lord's Day fulfills and transfigures the Sabbath's

spiritual truth (CCC 2175).

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1441-1445:** Only God forgives sins; because Jesus is the Son of God he says "your sins are forgiven"; and by his own authority he gives this power to men to be exercised in his name.
- **CCC 574:** From the beginning of his public ministry, Pharisees and supporters of Herod together with priests and scribes agreed to destroy him.
- **CCC 796:** The nuptial imagery: Christ the Bridegroom, the Church his Bride, prepared for the wedding feast.
- **CCC 2173:** Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath, gives the law of rest its authentic meaning: doing good, saving life, mercy.
- **CCC 1503:** Christ the physician of souls and bodies, who came to call sinners.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Messianic Secret: DEVELOPING with a twist: here Jesus goes public, deliberately, about his authority ("that you may know," 2:10). The Secret is not about hiding his power; it is about controlling how his identity is understood. Authority to forgive he demonstrates; the title Son of God he keeps veiled under "Son of Man." Watch the group wrestle with the difference.

The Cross: The shadow arrives at 3:6 ("how to destroy him") and in the bridegroom's being "taken away" (2:20). Name neither as a thread; just make sure both verses get read aloud and felt.

The Bread: Still officially unplanted, but note privately: the David typology of 2:25-26 runs through holy bread given to the anointed one's companions. When the thread plants in Session 6 and resolves at the Last Supper, this scene will retroactively glow. Say nothing now.

Torn / The Way: Dormant this session.

Session Goals

1. Participants can trace the five-controversy arc and its escalation to 3:6.
2. Participants discover Daniel 7 and can explain why "Son of Man" is a veiled enthronement title.
3. Participants can make the full argument from Mark 2, Matthew 9:8, and John 20:21-23 for the Church's ministry of absolution, having first stated the Protestant objection at full strength.
4. Participants can explain Christian fasting and Sunday from the bridegroom saying and the Sabbath controversies.
5. At least a soft commitment: participants consider going to Confession before the study ends.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress question 6 (fasting/bridegroom) into a leader summary and drop the second Dig Deeper (Abiathar note) unless someone raises it. Do not cut the paralytic sequence or the steelman chain; they are the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of Man, you have authority on earth to forgive sins. Give us tonight the honesty of the four friends who tore open a roof, the joy of Levi who threw a party, and the humility to bring you the one thing you ask for: our sins. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Who is the most persistent person you know? Tell us about a time their refusal to give up changed an outcome.
2. Have you ever been given news so good you were almost afraid to believe it was allowed? What was that like?

Leader bridge: Tonight, five arguments in a row, and they escalate fast. By the end of the passage, people are planning a murder. Watch what claim of Jesus sets it all off.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 2:1-3:6 aloud, once through. Then work through the questions.

1. **The paralytic (2:1-12). Four friends dig through a roof, and Mark says: "When Jesus saw THEIR faith, he said to the paralytic, My son, your sins are forgiven." Two surprises in one verse: whose faith moves Jesus, and what gift does he give first? What is Mark teaching in each?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First surprise: *their* faith, which surely includes the four bearers and may well include the man himself, occasions grace for the man on the mat. Faith is personal but not private; we really can carry one another to Christ, which is the logic of all intercession, of infant Baptism, of praying for the dead, of the communion of saints. Ask the group: who carried you to Jesus, and whose mat are you holding a corner of right now? Second surprise: the man came for legs and was given absolution first. Jesus reads the deeper paralysis. Forgiveness is not the consolation prize; it is the primary healing, and the walking is the visible proof of the invisible gift.

2. **The scribes reason: "It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" DISCOVERY: someone look up Psalm 51:4, David's confession after Bathsheba and Uriah. Is the scribes' theology wrong?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

No, and this is crucial: their premise is perfectly sound. David had wronged Bathsheba, Uriah, and all Israel, yet he prays "Against you, you only, have I sinned," because every sin is finally an offense against God, so only God can forgive sin as sin. I can forgive your debt to me; I cannot forgive your debt to him. Jesus never corrects the scribes' premise. He does something far more shocking: he accepts it and then proves he holds the prerogative. Given their premise, there are only two options: blasphemy, or God is on the mat-side of the room. The scribes chose their answer at 3:6. The whole Gospel asks us to choose ours.

3. **DISCOVERY: Jesus answers with a new title: "that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (2:10). Someone look up Daniel 7:13-14 and read it aloud. What does that background do to the title, and why might Jesus prefer it to "Messiah" or "Son of God"?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

In Daniel, "one like a son of man" rides the clouds to the Ancient of Days and receives everlasting dominion, glory, and kingdom, an enthronement scene. So the title is a paradox: on the surface it just means "a human being"; underneath it names the figure who receives God's own authority. That is exactly why Jesus loves it. It is true at both levels, it carries no political baggage the crowds could weaponize, and it lets him fill in its meaning himself, which he will do most fully at 10:45 with a definition no one expects. It is the Messianic Secret in a single phrase: revealed and veiled at once.

4. **Levi and the dinner party (2:13-17).** A tax collector, a collaborator with Rome, gets the same call as the fishermen, and Jesus eats at his house with "many tax collectors and sinners." The objection comes; Jesus answers: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." What does the physician image demand of the Church, and what does it forbid?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It demands that the Church go where the sickness is: a hospital that admits only the healthy is a fraud, and a Christian community that makes sinners feel they must get well before approaching Christ has inverted the Gospel. It forbids two opposite errors. First, the Pharisees' error: quarantine, keeping oneself clean by keeping sinners out. Second, the modern error: pretending the sickness is health, a physician who tells the sick they need no cure is not merciful but useless. Jesus eats with sinners AND calls them sinners AND heals them. Note also the irony in "I came not to call the righteous": those who believe themselves well are the only ones the physician cannot help, not because he refuses, but because they will not open the door.

5. **The fasting question (2:18-22).** Jesus' answer: wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, "but the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day." **DISCOVERY:** someone look up Hosea 2:19-20 or Isaiah 62:5. Who is Israel's Bridegroom, and what two things is Jesus therefore claiming?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

In the prophets, the Bridegroom of Israel is the LORD himself, who betroths his people to himself forever. So claim one: Jesus quietly steps into God's own role in the covenant romance; the wedding of God and his people is happening at his table. Claim two, darker: the bridegroom will be "taken away", widely heard as the first whispered hint of the Passion, violence hiding inside a wedding image. And notice what this makes of Christian fasting: we do not fast because the feast never came; we fast because we live between the Bridegroom's being taken and his return. That is why the Church keeps every Friday penitential, through abstinence or another penance, the day he was taken, and feasts on Sundays. Fasting is bridal longing, not gloomy self-improvement.

6. **Grain on the Sabbath (2:23-28).** **DISCOVERY:** someone look up 1 Samuel 21:1-6, the story Jesus cites. Map the parallels: who is David in the story, what is his situation, and what does he receive? What is Jesus claiming by choosing THIS story?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

David in that scene is the anointed king, but not yet enthroned, fleeing a murderous ruling power, and the priest gives him the holy bread of the Presence, which "it is not lawful" for any but priests

to eat, for himself and his companions. The typology is surgical: Jesus is the true Anointed One, not yet enthroned, already hunted (3:6 is coming), whose companions' hunger outranks ritual regulation, because "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Then the thunderclap: "the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." The Sabbath is God's day; its Lord is God. Once again the claim hides in plain sight. File one detail away without comment: the greater David's story, too, runs through holy bread shared with his companions.

Dig Deeper

Sharp readers may notice that Mark 2:26 says this happened "when Abiathar was high priest," while 1 Samuel 21 names the priest as Ahimelech, Abiathar's father. Be honest: this is a real difficulty, noticed since ancient times, and several serious solutions exist. The Greek phrase can plausibly mean "in the days of Abiathar," a general era reference, and Abiathar, the far more famous priest of David's reign, may name the period or even the scroll-section by convention, much as we might say "in the days of King David" about an event from Saul's final years. The Church does not require one solution, and no doctrine rests on the verse. What the difficulty does helpfully show is this: difficulties like this were left standing rather than smoothed away, a limited but real sign that the text was not tidied up for its critics.

7. **The withered hand (3:1-6). They watch him "so that they might accuse him." Jesus asks: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" They are silent, and Mark records something rare: Jesus' emotions. Find them in verse 5. Then read verse 6. Who allies with whom, and what is the terrible irony of their timing?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Verse 5: "he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart", anger and grief together, the response of love to a locked door. The irony of verse 6 is savage: the men who would not permit a healing on the Sabbath walk out of the synagogue, on that same Sabbath, to plan a killing. Pharisees and Herodians, groups otherwise deeply at odds, unite on one project: "how to destroy him." Jesus' question answered itself: they chose "to do harm, to kill." By chapter three, the cross is already on the horizon, and it is there because of who Jesus claimed to be in these five arguments.

8. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. A thoughtful Protestant friend says: "The scribes were right that only God forgives sins, and that is exactly why I confess straight to God. Confession to a priest inserts a middleman Scripture never authorizes. There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). And even where Scripture gives the Church something to do about sins, John 20 was spoken to the apostles in that room; nothing in the text hands that power down to a priest in a confessional centuries later. What the Church has is the commission to preach the Gospel that declares forgiveness. Nowhere does the Bible show Christians confessing to a priest for absolution." Build that case as persuasively as you can, it is sincere, biblical, and jealous for God's honor. Then answer it from tonight's text plus two more passages: Matthew 9:8 and John 20:21-23.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Grant everything true in it: only God forgives sins; Christ is the one mediator; and no priest has one drop of forgiveness that is his own. Catholics affirm all three without crossing our fingers (CCC

1441). And grant the counter-readings their strength: many Protestants read John 20 as the Church's commission to DECLARE forgiveness through the Gospel, and Matthew 9:8 as a crowd's awed acclamation rather than an office; the question is whether those narrower readings survive the texts read together and read with the earliest Church, and whether a commission the apostles could not hand on is what the earliest Church thought it had received; St. Ambrose, writing against the Novatianists, treats the Church's power to absolve as simply given, the same power already at work when sins are remitted in Baptism. Now the answer, from the text. First, Mark 2:10: the stunning phrase is "authority ON EARTH to forgive sins", God's heavenly prerogative deliberately brought down into human history, exercised through a human voice a paralytic could hear. Second, Matthew's account of this same scene ends with the crowd glorifying God "who had given such authority TO MEN" (Matthew 9:8), plural, the Catholic tradition has heard in this story the charter of a continuing ministry. Third, the risen Lord makes it explicit: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:21-23). Forgive OR RETAIN implies discernment, and discernment implies disclosure: this is why the Church has always understood the gift to entail confession (CCC 1448), the inference her sacramental Tradition drew from the beginning. So the priest is not a middleman blocking the one Mediator; he is the one Mediator's chosen mouth, so that forgiveness reaches you the way the paralytic got it: out loud, in your ears, in a real human moment; received with sincere contrition and integral confession, it leaves no room to wonder. The Catholic claim is not that God's forgiveness is rationed through clergy; it is that God, who could forgive silently, loves us too much to leave us guessing, exactly as he attached the paralytic's invisible absolution to a visible walking man "that you may know."

Send (15 minutes)

1. Whose mat are you carrying right now, and is there a corner you have quietly put down? Who once carried yours?
2. Jesus gave the paralytic forgiveness before the man asked for it, because it was the deeper need. If Jesus read your deepest need tonight, before the requests you usually lead with, what do you suspect he would address first?

Live It This Week

- Go to Confession before this study ends, this week if you can. Hear the words out loud. If it has been years, say exactly that to the priest; it is his joy, not your shame.
- Reclaim one Friday practice as bridal longing for the taken Bridegroom: a real fast, a meatless day done with intention, or an act of penance offered for one person.
- Do one deliberate act of "Sabbath good" this Sunday: rest that restores, worship that costs, or mercy that inconveniences you.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, Son of Man, you carried heaven's pardon down to a paralyzed man's ears. We are the ones on the mat, and we are the friends at the roof. Give us the humility to be carried, the strength to carry, and the courage to hear your forgiveness spoken out loud. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 2:1-3:6

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 2:1-12 (the paralytic; authority to forgive)
- Psalm 51:4 (sin is finally against God)
- Daniel 7:13-14 (the Son of Man enthroned)
- Mark 2:13-17 (Levi; the physician)
- Mark 2:18-22 (fasting; the bridegroom taken away)
- Hosea 2:19-20; Isaiah 62:5 (the LORD as Bridegroom)
- Mark 2:23-28 (grain on the Sabbath; lord of the Sabbath)
- 1 Samuel 21:1-6 (David and the bread of the Presence)
- Genesis 2:2-3; Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (Sabbath roots, leader background)
- Mark 3:1-6 (the withered hand; the plot)
- Matthew 9:8 (authority given to men, steelman chain)
- John 20:21-23 (the ministry of forgiveness instituted, steelman chain)
- 1 Timothy 2:5 (steelman objection text)
- CCC 574, 796, 1441-1445, 1503, 2173
- Memory verse: Mark 2:17

Session 4

The Secret of the Kingdom

Mark 3:7-4:34 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that as opposition hardens, Jesus does two constructive things: he finds, appointing Twelve "to be with him and to be sent out," and he veils, teaching in parables that reveal the kingdom to the receptive and conceal it from the hardened. They will meet the sower, the secret seed, and the mustard tree, and they will learn how to hold the hardest sayings in the passage, the unforgivable sin and the "brothers" of Jesus, with Catholic clarity and pastoral calm.

Catholic Touchstone: The apostolic foundation of the Church and the patience of the kingdom. Jesus builds his community on twelve chosen men, a new Israel, and describes its growth in images of seed: small, slow, hidden, and unstoppable (CCC 551, 543-546, 858-860).

What You Need to Know

The section opens with huge crowds and a now-familiar note: unclean spirits fall down crying "You are the Son of God," and "he strictly ordered them not to make him known" (3:11-12). Keep a straight face: the sealed guesses asked who would be the first human to say those words, and the demons keep almost spoiling it. The Secret is holding.

Then the founding scene (3:13-19): on the mountain, the place of covenants, Jesus "called to him those whom he desired," and "appointed twelve." The number is not administrative; it is architectural. Israel was built on twelve tribes; Jesus is constituting a new Israel around himself, with a defined inner structure and a first name on the list: Simon, whom he surnamed Peter. Their twofold job description repays memorization: "to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority." Being with him precedes being sent; every apostolate that skips the first clause dries up. Note also that Jesus delegates real authority, the same word from 2:10, into human hands. The pattern of mediated divine power we traced last week is now institutional.

The Beelzebul controversy (3:20-30) contains the saying that has frightened more tender consciences than any other: "whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness." Read the frame Mark provides in verse 30: "for they had said, He has an unclean spirit." The scribes were looking at the Spirit's own liberating work and calling it demonic, rejecting the very hand that forgives. The Church's constant reading, classically stated by St. Augustine, is that this sin is final impenitence: the persevering refusal of the Spirit's mercy. It is unforgivable not because God's mercy hits a limit but because it is the refusal of forgiveness itself; a man who will not open his hand cannot receive what is being pressed into it (CCC 1864). Pastoral key for young adults: the anguished question "have I committed it?" is itself the strongest evidence of a conscience still alive to the Spirit. The hardened do not lose sleep.

Then 3:31-35: "your mother and your brothers are outside." Two Catholic questions land at once. First, the "brothers" of Jesus, handle it head-on in the steelman; the short version is that neither Hebrew nor Aramaic has an ordinary single word for cousin, Hebrew saying "son of his uncle" (Leviticus 25:49), so "brother" regularly carries the wider sense of kinsman, Scripture routinely calls kinsmen "brothers" (Lot is Abraham's "brother," Genesis 13:8, though actually his nephew), and Mark later places at the cross "Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses" (15:40), most naturally read as a woman other than Jesus' mother. The Church has

confessed Mary's perpetual virginity from the earliest centuries (CCC 499-501). Second, does Jesus slight his mother by saying "whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother"? Precisely the opposite, and Luke makes it explicit: Mary is the first and greatest member of the family he describes, the one whose entire identity is "let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Jesus is not shrinking his family; he is opening its doors, and his mother stands at the head of the new line.

Finally the parables (4:1-34). The sower is the parable about parables: the same seed, four soils, and the variable is never the seed. The hard saying in 4:11-12 (quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, "so that they may indeed see but not perceive") must be handled honestly: parables both reveal and conceal. To the open, they are windows; to the hardened, riddles that leave freedom intact. God does not force the kingdom on anyone; Isaiah's commissioning language is best read, on a common Catholic account, as the ratified consequence of persistent hardening, permitted in judgment, never desired (see 1 Timothy 2:4). Then two seed parables found nowhere else together: the seed growing secretly (4:26-29, unique to Mark), the farmer sleeps and rises and "knows not how" it grows, and the mustard seed becoming a tree where "the birds of the air can make nests in its shade," an image straight from the prophets' pictures of a kingdom sheltering the nations. The kingdom's growth is real, hidden, gradual, and not our doing, a word every anxious catechist and every discouraged evangelist needs.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **The twelve tribes (Genesis 49; Exodus 24:4).** Israel is founded on twelve sons; Moses seals the covenant with twelve pillars. Jesus' twelve apostles announce, without a word of explanation, that the covenant people are being refounded around him.
- **Isaiah 6:9-10.** Isaiah's commissioning: preach to a people who "hear and hear, but do not understand." Jesus cites it to explain the parables' double edge. In both cases a common Catholic reading takes the hardening as the ratified consequence of persistent refusal, permitted in judgment rather than willed, since God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4); the same Isaiah ends with all nations streaming to the mountain of the LORD.
- **Ezekiel 17:22-23 and Daniel 4:12, 21.** A tender sprig planted by God becomes a noble cedar, "and under it will dwell all kinds of beasts; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest." The mustard seed's grown tree with nesting birds is widely heard as prophet-speak for a kingdom sheltering the nations. The tiny seed in Galilee is aimed at the whole world.
- **Genesis 13:8 (with Genesis 14:14-16).** Lot, Abraham's nephew, is called his "brother." (The Hebrew reads "brothers"; the RSV2CE renders the sense as "kinsmen.") Keep this text loaded for the steelman: biblical "brother" covers kinsmen broadly, because the languages Jesus' family spoke had no ordinary single word for cousin, so the kinship term stretched to cover the wider family.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Jerome (Against Helvidius, On the Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary)

When Helvidius argued from the "brothers of the Lord" that Mary bore other children, St. Jerome answered with the Bible's own usage: Scripture calls men "brothers" by nation, by kindred, and by affection, not only by birth from one mother, and he marshals the cases, Lot the "brother" of Abraham, Laban the "brother" of Jacob, though each was in fact a nephew. The "brothers" of Jesus, he argues, are kinsmen, sons of another Mary, and the Church's ancient faith in the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God stands untouched by the idiom.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Sermon 71, on the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit)

St. Augustine devoted an entire great sermon to the saying that troubles so many souls, and his conclusion has anchored the Church ever since: the blasphemy that "never has forgiveness" is final impenitence, the heart's persevering refusal, unto the end, of the forgiveness the Holy Spirit offers. Every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven in those who repent; what cannot be forgiven is the fixed refusal to be forgiven, for it slams the only door by which pardon enters.

Voices of the Church: St. Bede the Venerable (Commentary on Mark, on the seed growing secretly)

On the farmer who sleeps and rises while the seed sprouts "he knows not how," St. Bede sees the whole mystery of the Church's growth: the preacher casts the word, but the increase is God's, working unseen in hearts by night and by day. The lesson the Church has drawn with him is patience and trust: the kingdom does not advance by our anxiety, and the harvest belongs to the One who alone gives growth.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 551, 858-860:** Jesus chose the Twelve to share his mission and authority; they are the foundation stones of the new Israel, the Church, and their office continues.
- **CCC 543-546:** The kingdom belongs to the poor and lowly; Jesus' parables invite and demand a decision, the decision the kingdom demands.
- **CCC 499-501:** The Church confesses Mary's real and perpetual virginity; the "brothers and sisters" of Jesus are close relations, an Old Testament expression.
- **CCC 1864:** There are no limits to God's mercy, but whoever deliberately refuses to accept it by repenting rejects the forgiveness of sins; such hardness can lead to final impenitence.
- **CCC 148-149 (with 967):** Mary as the supreme exemplar of the obedience of faith, the one who heard the word of God and kept it, first of the disciples.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Messianic Secret: ESCALATING: demons shout "Son of God" (3:11) and are strictly silenced; the parables themselves become an instrument of veiling ("to you has been given the secret [*mysterion*] of the kingdom," 4:11). The Secret is now a teaching method, not just a gag order. Sealed-guess watch: if anyone gasps at 3:11, smile and move on; demons are not humans, and the guess stands.

The Way: Quietly present in the sower: the first soil is "along the way / path (*hodos*)," where the word is snatched before it starts. Following on the way versus lying beside it.

The Cross: Present in the strong man saying (3:27): binding the strong man to plunder his house previews the whole campaign against Satan that runs to Calvary. No need to name it; just read it slowly.

Torn / The Bread: Dormant. The Bread plants in two weeks.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain the Twelve as the deliberate refounding of Israel and recite the twofold apostolic job description of 3:14-15.
2. Participants can give the Church's reading of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and pastorally reassure a frightened conscience.
3. Participants can state the Helvidian objection about the "brothers" of Jesus at full strength and answer it from Scripture's own usage plus Mark 15:40.
4. Participants discover the prophetic background of the mustard tree and can explain the kingdom's hidden, patient, Gentile-sheltering growth.
5. Each participant identifies their current soil honestly and names one thorn or stone.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress question 3 (strong man) into a leader sentence and drop the lamp-and-measure question 8. Do not cut the blasphemy question, the brothers steelman, or the sower; they carry the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you called to yourself those whom you desired, and you still do. Make our hearts good soil tonight: break up what is hard, clear out what is thorny, and let your word go deep. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Have you ever planted, grown, or built something that took far longer than you expected? What did the waiting do to you?
2. Think of a group you were deliberately chosen for, a team, a job, a wedding party. What did being chosen, by name, do in you?

Leader bridge: Tonight Jesus responds to a world turning against him, not by retreating, but by founding something and by changing how he teaches. Watch for a mountain, a list of twelve names, and a farmer who gets to sleep in.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 3:7-35 aloud, then pause for questions 1-6; read Mark 4:1-34 before question 7.

1. **At 3:11-12 the unclean spirits fall down shouting "You are the Son of God," and Jesus "strictly ordered them not to make him known." Add this to your running list. Given everything since 1:25, what pattern is now undeniable, and what question should it force?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The pattern: every supernatural being that correctly identifies Jesus is immediately gagged, while Jesus keeps choosing the veiled title "Son of Man." The forced question: if he is not hiding his power, he heals in public constantly, what exactly is he protecting? Let theories accumulate; affirm the best one if it surfaces: perhaps the title "Son of God" cannot be safely spoken until some event gives it its true meaning. Do not confirm or deny. The sealed guesses are circling the answer.

2. **The founding (3:13-19). Three details deserve interrogation: the mountain, the number twelve, and the job description in 3:14-15. DISCOVERY: someone look up Exodus 24:4. What is Jesus building, and what are the Twelve for?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The mountain evokes covenant geography: Sinai, where Israel was constituted, where Moses built an altar "and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes." Twelve is therefore not a roster size but a blueprint: Jesus is refounding the covenant people around himself, a new Israel with a defined structure, and Mark's list leads with "Simon whom he surnamed Peter." The job description has a non-negotiable order: "to be with him, AND to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons." Communion before mission; you cannot be sent from where you have not been. And note the word "authority", *exousia*, the same authority we watched Jesus wield in chapter 2, now deliberately shared with men. The mediated-power pattern from last week is becoming an institution with names, one that the Church confesses continues in the apostles' successors (CCC 858-860).

3. **The scribes explain Jesus' exorcisms: "He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons" (3:22). Walk through Jesus' two-part answer: the divided house (3:23-26) and the strong man (3:27). What is each argument doing?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The divided house is pure logic: if Satan is casting out Satan, hell is in civil war and already finished; the accusation refutes itself. The strong man is the positive claim, and it is breathtaking: "no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man." The strong man is Satan; the house is this world he has squatted in since Eden; the goods being carried out are human beings, every exorcism, every healing. Which means someone stronger has already entered and is binding him. The wilderness confrontation of 1:12-13 was the opening of a war, and the plundering has begun.

4. **Now the saying that frightens people (3:28-30). Read it with its frame: verse 28 first ("ALL sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter"), then 29, then Mark's explanation in verse 30. What were the scribes doing, what does the Church, with St. Augustine, understand this sin to be, and what should you say to someone terrified they have committed it?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Start where Jesus starts: verse 28 is one of the widest mercy-statements in Scripture, ALL sins, whatever blasphemies. The exception is defined by verse 30: the scribes were looking at the Holy Spirit's own liberating work and calling it satanic, rejecting the Rescuer as the enemy. St. Augustine, in a sermon devoted to this text, gives the Church's enduring reading: the unforgivable blasphemy is final impenitence, the persevering refusal, to the end, of the forgiveness the Spirit offers. It is unforgivable not because God's mercy runs out but because it is the refusal of mercy itself; you cannot fill a fist that will not open (CCC 1864). To the terrified soul, say this plainly: that very fear is strong evidence of grace at work, for dread of having offended the Spirit is the Spirit's own stirring in a living conscience; and the sure road is the one fear cannot argue with, repentance and Confession, with a good pastor's counsel if the anxiety persists. The people in actual danger are not asking the question.

5. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. At 3:31-32 the crowd says: "Your mother and your brothers are outside." A sincere Protestant friend says: "There it is, plainly. Jesus had brothers; Mark even names them later, James, Josue, Judas, and Simon (6:3). Add the stronger texts: Matthew 1:25 says Joseph knew her not UNTIL she bore a son, Luke 2:7 calls Jesus her FIRST-BORN, and Greek had a word for cousin, anepsios (Colossians 4:10), which the evangelists never use here. Perpetual virginity is a later tradition contradicted by the Bible's plain sense." Build that case honestly, it cites real verses. Then answer from Scripture's own usage. DISCOVERY: someone look up Genesis 13:8 and Genesis 14:14, and someone else keep a finger in Mark 15:40.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Grant the data: the texts are real, and "brothers" is the word. Now the usage. Genesis 14:14 tells us Lot is Abraham's nephew, his brother's son; Genesis 13:8 has Abraham call Lot his "brother." Laban is likewise Jacob's "brother" (Genesis 29:15) though actually his uncle. The reason is simple: Hebrew and Aramaic had no common everyday word for cousin, so "brother" covered the wider kin, and the Greek of a Jewish milieu inherited the idiom (the RSV2CE renders Genesis 13:8 "kinsmen" for

exactly this reason: the Hebrew says brothers, the sense is kin; and though Greek had *anepsios*, "cousin," Colossians 4:10, the evangelists write in Semitic idiom). The stronger texts, answered in turn: "until" (*heos*) in Scripture regularly asserts nothing about what follows (Michal had no child "until" her death, 2 Samuel 6:23; Christ is with us "until" the close of the age, Matthew 28:20, and hardly ceases after); "first-born" is a legal status conferring Torah rights on the child who opens the womb (Exodus 13:2), used whether or not others follow, as ancient funerary inscriptions confirm; and the Gospels' Greek everywhere wears Semitic dress, the Septuagint itself calling Lot and Abraham brothers. So the word alone settles nothing; context must. And Mark supplies converging evidence: at the cross stands "Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses" (15:40), the same pair of names as 6:3, most naturally read as a woman other than Jesus' mother, since Mark never elsewhere designates the Mother of Jesus by the names of other sons. This is convergent evidence rather than a proof standing alone; the identification of these men is still debated, and the Catholic case rests on the whole pattern of usage plus the Church's constant confession, not on 15:40 by itself. Add the oldest riddle in the debate: at the cross Jesus entrusts his mother to the beloved disciple (John 19:26-27), a detail the tradition has always found hard to square with four living sons. This is why the Church from her early centuries, and St. Jerome in full armor against Helvidius, has confessed Mary ever-virgin (CCC 499-501), and why even the first Protestant reformers held it. Then land the scene's actual point, which is not a slight to Mary: "whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother." Jesus is not shrinking his family but throwing its doors open, and by his own definition, who among his disciples has answered the will of God more perfectly than the woman who said "let it be to me according to your word"? Mary is not displaced by the new family; she is its first member.

6. **Before the parables, one verse of tenderness people miss: at 3:21 those close to him (the Greek is ambiguous: his family, or his people) went out to seize him, "for they said, He is beside himself." What does it cost to follow a call the people closest to you do not yet understand, and what comfort is hidden in Jesus having experienced this first?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Keep this one mostly open; it is a wound many in the room carry. The comfort: Jesus knows from the inside what it is to be thought a fool by people who love you, and misunderstanding at home is not evidence of a false call. The caution: he neither obeys the family pressure nor severs the bond; his mother is still there in verse 31, still seeking him, and history's verdict is that she understood more than anyone. Hold both: fidelity to the call, patience with the people.

Read Mark 4:1-34 aloud, then continue.

7. **The sower (4:1-20). Jesus supplies the interpretation himself, rare and precious. Walk the four soils: the path, the rocky ground, the thorns, the good soil. For each: what happens, what is the modern face of it, and, the question the parable is engineered to force, which one is currently you?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The path (*hodos*): the word never penetrates; Satan snatches it, the heart armored by cynicism or distraction, scrolling past the Gospel. The rocky ground: instant joy, no root; faith that lives on retreat highs and dies at the first cost, "when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word." The thorns: the word grows but is strangled by "the cares of the world, the delight in riches, and the desire for other things", the quiet, respectable suffocation, and for most people in this room,

the honest answer. The good soil: hearing, accepting, bearing fruit at rates no farmer in Galilee dreamed of (thirty was excellent; a hundredfold is miracle). Two leader notes: the seed is constant, the Sower is not stingy, and the variable is receptivity; and soils are not fixed identities but present conditions, path can be plowed, rocks dug out, thorns cleared, which is exactly what the Send section is for.

8. **The hard verses (4:10-12): "to you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive." Jesus is quoting Isaiah 6:9-10. Is he saying he tells parables in order to damn people? Handle this honestly.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

No, and do not flinch from the difficulty; the text rewards honesty. Parables have a double edge by design: to the open-hearted they are windows, to the hardened they are opaque riddles, and the same story sorts its hearers by what they are willing to receive. Jesus quotes Isaiah's commissioning, where God tells the prophet in advance that preaching will harden the already-rebellious, judicial language that a common Catholic reading takes as the ratified consequence of persistent refusal, permitted rather than desired, for "God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). The parable form protects freedom: it never forces, it invites, and it leaves the resistant unforced. And notice the mercy inside the mystery: "those outside" in this scene include people who will later be inside; the door has not shut, the seed keeps being thrown, even onto the path. If the kingdom came as an overwhelming proof, there would be no room left for love.

9. **The lamp and the measure (4:21-25). "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a bushel? For there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest." Wait, has this whole study not been about Jesus hiding things? What is this doing here?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

This is Mark winking at his own plot. The Secret is temporary and purposeful: the veiling exists "except to be made manifest", hiddenness ordered toward revelation, a lamp carried under wraps only until it reaches the lampstand. Whatever Jesus is concealing, he is concealing it FOR a future unveiling, at the right moment, in the right light. File that away; it is a promissory note the Gospel will pay. And the measure saying turns it personal: attention is compounding, "to him who has will more be given." The more receptivity you bring to the word, the more it opens; neglect it, and even what you had evaporates.

10. **The two seed parables (4:26-32). The first, the seed growing secretly, appears ONLY in Mark. The farmer "sleeps and rises... and the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how." Then the mustard seed. DISCOVERY: someone look up Ezekiel 17:22-23 (or Daniel 4:12). What are the birds nesting in the branches, and what do these two parables together say to anyone discouraged about the Church, or about a person they have prayed for, for years?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

In Ezekiel, God's tender sprig becomes a noble cedar sheltering every winged thing, and Daniel's imperial tree shades the beasts and birds; the traditional reading hears in the nesting birds the Gentiles, the peoples of the world. So the mustard seed is an outrageous promise made in a Galilean backwater: this tiny, mockable beginning, one man, twelve names, will become the tree in which

the nations nest, and here we sit, birds in the branches, reading his book two thousand years later. The secret seed adds the manner: growth that is real but hidden, gradual, and not our doing; the farmer's honest job description is sow, sleep, trust, harvest. Together they are the cure for two diseases: the anxiety that everything depends on us, and the despair that nothing is happening because nothing is visible. God grows things underground first. The person you have prayed for through years of silence may be a field in April, not a field in ruin (see St. Bede's comment on your Take-Home sheet).

Send (15 minutes)

1. Name your soil out loud, path, rocks, thorns, or good, and name one specific stone or thorn. What would clearing it actually involve this month?
2. "To be with him, and to be sent": which half of the apostles' job description is thinner in your life right now, and what is one concrete way to restore the balance this week?

Live It This Week

- Practice "being with him" before "being sent": fifteen minutes of silence before the Blessed Sacrament, or at home before a crucifix, with no requests, just presence.
- Do a soil examen with Mark 4:1-20 one evening: read it slowly and ask the Holy Spirit to show you your path-places, your rocks, and your thorns. Write down one of each.
- Choose one person you have grown discouraged about and recommit to hidden sowing: pray for them daily this week, tell no one, and expect nothing visible. The farmer sleeps; the seed grows.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, your kingdom comes like seed: small, silent, and certain. Make us good soil, make us patient farmers, and keep us close to your Son, that being with him we may be worth sending. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Mark 3:35, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 3:7-4:34

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 3:7-12 (crowds; demons silenced)
- Mark 3:13-19 (the Twelve appointed)
- Exodus 24:4 (twelve pillars at Sinai)
- Genesis 49 (the twelve tribes, background)
- Mark 3:20-27 (Beelzebul; divided house; strong man)
- Mark 3:28-30 (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit)
- Mark 3:31-35 (the true family)
- Genesis 13:8; 14:14 (Lot the "brother" of Abraham)
- Genesis 29:15 (Laban the "brother" of Jacob, leader background)
- Mark 6:3; Mark 15:40 (the named brothers; the other Mary)
- John 19:26-27 (Mary entrusted to John, steelman chain)
- Mark 4:1-20 (the sower and its interpretation)
- Mark 4:10-12 with Isaiah 6:9-10 (the purpose of parables)
- 1 Timothy 2:4 (God desires all to be saved)
- Mark 4:21-25 (lamp and measure)
- Mark 4:26-29 (seed growing secretly, unique to Mark)
- Mark 4:30-32 (mustard seed)
- Ezekiel 17:22-23; Daniel 4:12, 21 (the tree and the nesting birds)
- Luke 1:38 (Mary's fiat, leader background)
- CCC 499-501, 543-546, 551, 858-860, 148-149, 551, 858-860, 967, 1864
- Memory verse: Mark 3:35

Session 5

Who Then Is This?

Mark 4:35-5:43 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover four scenes of escalating impossibility, a storm, a legion, an incurable flow of blood, and death itself, and find that each one is territory the Old Testament reserves for God alone. The disciples' terrified question in the boat, "Who then is this?", is the session title because it is the question Mark wants burning in every reader by the end of chapter 5.

Catholic Touchstone: Grace through contact. Power goes out from Jesus' body through a touched garment; a girl is raised by a grasped hand. The Catechism teaches that the sacraments are "powers that come forth" from the Body of Christ, ever-living and life-giving (CCC 1116), and this session is where that language comes from.

What You Need to Know

Mark 4:35-5:43 is a deliberate tour of the four things no one can control: chaos in nature, evil in persons, chronic disease, and death. Jesus walks through all four and is obeyed. The unit answers the question it plants: "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" (4:41).

The storm scene runs on Old Testament rails. In the Scriptures, the raging sea is the emblem of chaos, and taming it is God's signature move: he shut in the sea with doors at creation (Job 38:8-11), and Psalm 107 describes sailors in a storm crying to the LORD, who "made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed." Mark stages Psalm 107 in a fishing boat. Notice also the word Jesus uses: "Be still" (*pephimoso*) is a cognate form of the muzzling word he used on the demon in 1:25 (*phimotheti*). He silences the sea with a cognate of the muzzling word he used on the demon, an echo many hear as deliberate: behind chaos, the same enemy. And do not miss the two-natures theology sleeping on the cushion: exhausted, truly human, he sleeps; awakened, he commands creation with a word. Both are fully real (see St. Gregory Nazianzen below).

The Gerasene demoniac takes Jesus into Gentile territory, the Decapolis (the pigs strongly signal it; swineherding marks Gentile country). "Legion" is a Roman military term for thousands of soldiers; this man is occupied territory in a land occupied by Rome. Watch the aftermath closely: the townspeople, faced with their tormented neighbor "sitting there, clothed and in his right mind," are afraid and beg Jesus to leave. People can prefer a manageable misery to an uncontrollable holiness. And then the thunderbolt for our study: the healed man begs to come with Jesus, and Jesus refuses, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you." After four chapters of "tell no one," Jesus commands proclamation. Why here? Because in Gentile country there are no messianic political expectations to ignite, which suggests the Secret is strategic, not absolute. This man becomes a uniquely commissioned herald, an early witness to the Decapolis, and, leader's eyes only, when Jesus returns to the Decapolis in chapter 8 and finds a crowd of four thousand waiting, you may quietly wonder who prepared that soil.

The chapter closes with Mark's most famous sandwich: the story of Jairus's dying daughter wrapped around the story of the hemorrhaging woman. Mark intercalates stories so each interprets the other, and the numbers invite it: the woman has bled for twelve years; the girl is twelve years old. The woman's condition made her ritually unclean and made her bed, her seat, and what she touched carriers of impurity (Leviticus 15:19-27), a state whose social cost we can cautiously infer, and left her impoverished by physicians besides. She touches his

garment, and once again the contagion runs backward: instead of her uncleanness passing to him, his power passes to her, "perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him." Jesus' insistence on finding her is not embarrassment-theater; it converts an anonymous transaction into a face-to-face relationship: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." She is the only person in the Gospels Jesus addresses as "Daughter." Many commentators, ancient and modern, also hear the two twelves as a quiet parable of Israel, the daughter of Zion bleeding and dying, restored by the Messiah's touch; the Church has not defined the reading, so offer it as an insight, not a doctrine.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Psalm 107:23-30 and Job 38:8-11.** Stilling the sea is the LORD's prerogative: sailors cry to him and he hushes the waves; he alone shut in the sea when it burst from the womb. The disciples' question "Who then is this?" points where only the LORD stands.
- **Jonah 1:4-6.** The one other biblical scene with a prophet asleep in a storm-tossed boat while pagan sailors panic. The parallels are deliberate and so is the difference: Jonah must be thrown into the sea to still it; Jesus stills it with a word. Something greater than Jonah is here.
- **Leviticus 15:19-27.** The legal architecture of the woman's isolation: a chronic discharge rendered her, her bed, her chair, and everyone she touched unclean. Leviticus governs the transmission of impurity rather than forbidding contact outright, so her reaching out to touch a rabbi in a crowd was an act of desperate courage that risked spreading her uncleanness to him, and Jesus' response rewrites her world.
- **Daniel 12:2 with 2 Kings 4:32-37.** Raising the dead belongs to God and to the age to come; Elisha raising the Shunammite's son is the closest precedent, and he must stretch himself over the child and pray at length. Jesus takes a hand and speaks two words in Aramaic. The contrast is the theology.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Gregory Nazianzen (Third Theological Oration)

Defending the full deity and full humanity of Christ, St. Gregory piles up the Gospel's paradoxes: he hungered, yet he fed thousands; he was wearied, yet he is the rest of the weary; he was heavy with sleep, yet he treads the waves and stills the wind and sea. Gregory's point is that we must not choose between the sleeping man and the sea-commanding Lord: the one Christ is both, true God and true man, and scenes like Mark 4 are where the Church learned to say so.

Voices of the Church: St. Peter Chrysologus (Sermons on the Gospel)

Preaching on the woman with the flow of blood, St. Peter Chrysologus marvels that she drew from the hem of a garment what twelve years of physicians could not supply: faith touched him whom the crowd only jostled. Many press against Christ, he observes, and receive nothing; one touches him in faith and power goes out. It is not proximity to holy things that heals, but the faith that reaches through them to the Lord himself.

Voices of the Church: St. Bede the Venerable (Commentary on Mark, on the raising of Jairus's daughter)

St. Bede lingers on the tenderness of the scene: the Lord takes the child by the hand, speaks to her in her own tongue, and then commands that she be given something to eat, proving the resurrection was no phantom and providing for her weakness. So, Bede teaches, Christ deals with every soul he raises from the death of sin: he takes it by the hand through his ministers, restores it with his word, and does not leave it without food, the nourishment of the Word and of the Sacrament, lest it faint on the way.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1116:** The sacraments are "powers that come forth" from the Body of Christ, ever-living and life-giving, language drawn directly from this scene and its parallels.
- **CCC 1503-1504:** Christ the physician: the sick try to touch him, "for power came forth from him and healed them all," and in the sacraments he continues to touch us.
- **CCC 994:** Jesus gives a sign and pledge of the resurrection by restoring some of the dead to life, announcing his own Resurrection, which is of another order.
- **CCC 1670-1673:** Sacramentals and the Church's ministry of blessing and deliverance; the Church continues to confront evil with Christ's authority.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Messianic Secret: MAJOR DEVELOPMENT: in Gentile Decapolis, Jesus commands proclamation (5:19-20), while back in Jewish territory he orders silence about the raising (5:43). The group should be allowed to catch this contrast; it strongly suggests the Secret is strategic, tied to Israel's political messianic expectations, not to shame or uncertainty. Sealed-guess watch: still no human confession of "Son of God"; the demoniac's "Son of the Most High God" (5:7) is another demonic near-spoiler, silenced by the narrative itself.

The Bread: Plants NEXT session. Note privately that Jesus tells them to give the raised girl something to eat (5:43); feeding follows raising in this Gospel's grammar.

Torn / The Way: Dormant this session.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover Psalm 107 and Job 38 themselves and can state why the storm-calming forces a divine identity question.
2. Participants can explain the Decapolis commission and what it reveals about the logic of the Secret.
3. Participants can articulate how the scene illumines embodied mediation, faith reaching through matter, and answer the superstition objection with the Church's fuller distinctions in view.
4. Participants can read Mark's sandwich technique and the two twelves.
5. Each participant identifies one "storm question" they will bring to Christ in prayer this week.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress question 2 (Jonah comparison) to a leader sentence and drop question 5 (the townspeople's fear), covering its point in one line. Do not cut the hemorrhaging woman sequence or the steelman.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you are in the boat with us, even when you seem to be sleeping. Tonight, speak your peace to whatever is raging in us, and give us the courage of the woman who reached out, believing one touch would be enough. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Describe a moment when you were genuinely not in control, weather, illness, an accident, a diagnosis. What did it expose in you?
2. Is there a difference between being near someone and actually being in contact with them? When have you felt that difference?

Leader bridge: Tonight Mark lines up the four things nobody can control, chaos, evil, sickness, and death, and walks Jesus straight through all four. Keep asking the disciples' question with them: who then is this?

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 4:35-41 aloud.

1. **The storm (4:35-41). DISCOVERY: half the group look up Psalm 107:23-30, half look up Job 38:8-11. Read both aloud. In Israel's Scriptures, who stills seas, and what does that make of the disciples' question, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The sea in Scripture is chaos itself, and mastering it is God's signature: he shut it behind doors at creation, and in Psalm 107 storm-tossed sailors cry to the LORD, who "made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed." Mark has staged Psalm 107 in a Galilean fishing boat, and the disciples' question points where only the LORD stands, which none of them dares say out loud. Two details to savor: Jesus is asleep "on the cushion," a detail tradition delights to hear as an eyewitness's memory, truly human, truly exhausted; and his command "Be still" (*pephimoso*) is a cognate of the muzzling word he used on the demon in 1:25. He silences the sea the way he silences demons, an echo many hear as deliberate: behind the weather, the same war.

2. **There is one other Bible story with a prophet asleep in a storm while sailors panic. DISCOVERY: someone look up Jonah 1:4-6. Line up the parallels, then name the one great difference.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Same staging: storm, boat, terrified sailors, a sleeping prophet awakened with a reproach. The difference is everything: Jonah must be thrown into the sea, a life given to still the waters, while Jesus stills them with a word of command. He is greater than Jonah, and yet, hold this thought gently, the day is coming in this Gospel when this Lord of the sea will also be the life handed over so that others survive the storm. Mark loves to let his echoes travel forward.

Read Mark 5:1-20 aloud.

3. **The Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20). Take inventory of verses 3-5: what has this man's existence become? And what does the name "Legion" tell a reader living under Rome?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He lives among the tombs, already housed with the dead; no one can bind him; night and day he cries out and bruises himself with stones. This is what the enemy does with a human being when given room: isolation, self-destruction, a living death. "Legion" is a Roman military word, thousands of soldiers under one standard, so the man is occupied territory inside occupied territory. And notice the demons' posture before Jesus: they see him from afar, run, fall down, and beg. There is no battle scene; there is a surrender scene. The strong man of 3:27 is being bound and his house plundered, one captive at a time.

4. **The aftermath (5:14-17): the townspeople find their neighbor "sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid," and they beg Jesus to depart. Why would a healing frighten people more than a demoniac did?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because they had learned to live with the misery; it was horrifying but predictable, and it stayed out among the tombs. A power that can undo it is a power outside their control, and it just cost them a herd of pigs, holiness has economic consequences. People still make this trade: better a familiar dysfunction than a Lord who might rearrange everything. The gentle, searching question for the room: has there ever been a corner of your life where, honestly, you would rather Jesus stayed on the boat?

5. **Now the shock (5:18-20): the healed man begs to come with Jesus, and Jesus says no: "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you." After four chapters of "tell no one," why is THIS man commanded to proclaim, and what happens because he does?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Location, location, location: this is the Decapolis, Gentile country, where there are no expectations of a political warrior-Messiah to ignite. Most interpreters read the silence commands as crowd-control rather than embarrassment or indecision: a truth Israel would misread until the cross reinterpreted it. Mark never spells out the reason, so hold this as the strongest available reading, not as defined teaching. Here the truth can run free, so Jesus commissions the Gospel's unlikely herald, a man with no theological training and a one-sentence testimony: what the Lord has done for me. "And all men marveled." Notice also what Jesus does with the man's request: he refuses the man's plan (come with you) and gives him a harder, better mission (go home, to the people who knew you at your worst). Sometimes "no" is the commissioning.

Read Mark 5:21-43 aloud.

6. **Mark wraps one story inside another: Jairus's dying daughter around the hemorrhaging woman, and he plants matching numbers: twelve years of bleeding, a twelve-year-old girl. First, DISCOVERY: someone look up Leviticus 15:19, 25-27. What has this woman's life been for twelve years, and what is she risking by touching him?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Under the Law her chronic flow made her perpetually unclean, and everything she touched, bed, chair, person, carried the impurity (Leviticus 15:19-27). The social cost can be cautiously inferred: years without ordinary touch, exclusion from the sanctuary's worship, and Mark adds the

economic ruin: she "had spent all that she had" on physicians "and was no better but rather grew worse." Touching a rabbi in a crowd was therefore an act of desperate courage. She risks the last thing she owns, her anonymity, on the conviction that one touch would be enough. And Mark's twelves are winking at us: many wise readers, ancient and modern, hear in these two daughters a picture of Israel herself, the daughter of Zion, bleeding and dying, restored by the Messiah's touch. Hold that reading lightly, the Church has not defined it, but do not miss it.

7. **Verses 30-34: "perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him," Jesus stops a life-and-death journey to ask "Who touched my garments?" He knows. Why does he insist on finding her, and what do his final words to her change?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because he refuses to let it end as an anonymous transaction. She sought a cure and a clean getaway; he insists on an encounter. Trembling, she tells him "the whole truth," and he gives her three things no garment could: a name, "Daughter," the only person in the Gospels he addresses that way, a public restoration, the whole crowd now knows she is clean and touchable, and a verdict: "your faith has made you well; go in peace." Grace came through the touch, but he will not let her believe the hem was magic; the power belongs to a Person who wanted her face, not just her healing. That is the difference between superstition and sacrament, and it sets up our steelman.

8. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. A Protestant friend watches Catholics touch relics, wear medals, and bring home holy water, and says: "This is exactly the superstition this woman started with, power in objects. Notice Jesus corrects her: YOUR FAITH has made you well, not my hem. God is spirit; grace does not travel through cloth and bones and water. That is magic thinking. And do not answer me with Paul's handkerchiefs or Elisha's bones. I grant those. They are sovereign acts of God recorded in Scripture, not a system anyone was authorized to reproduce. My question is the next one: who instituted this medal, this water, this bone as a channel of grace, and what actually keeps the woman lighting a candle for a lottery ticket from believing precisely what your own Catechism calls superstition?" Build the case honestly, then answer it from this scene plus three texts: Acts 19:11-12, Acts 5:15-16, and 2 Kings 13:21.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Grant what is true: faith is essential, Jesus says so here; objects have no power of their own; and superstition, treating things as automatic grace-dispensers detached from God, is a real sin Catholics are warned against by their own Catechism (CCC 2111). Grant the second half too: the biblical cases are God's free acts, not a franchise, and the Church distinguishes sharply between the sacraments, which Christ instituted and which act by his power, and sacramentals, which the Church institutes and which dispose us to grace through the Church's intercession rather than by any power in the object. That distinction, not a denial of matter, is the actual Catholic answer to the charge of magic. Now look at what the text actually says: "power had gone forth from him", Mark states flatly that power passed through the garment; Jesus confirms the healing rather than correcting the means; and he attributes it to her faith, faith and material contact together, not faith instead of contact. Then watch the pattern refuse to die: God works "extraordinary miracles" through handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul (Acts 19:11-12); the sick are laid out in the hope that even Peter's shadow might fall on them (Acts 5:15); a dead man revives on contact with Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:21), relics, in the Old Testament. Why does God keep doing this? Because he made us embodied, and ever since the Word became flesh, matter has been his chosen delivery

system: water that regenerates, oil that heals, bread that becomes his Body. The sacraments, says the Catechism in language taken from this very scene, are "powers that come forth from the Body of Christ" (CCC 1116). So the Catholic answer is not "objects instead of faith" but exactly what the woman had: faith that reaches for the Lord through the material means he provides. The crowd pressed against him and received nothing; she touched him in faith and was healed. Proximity is not faith, and matter is not magic; but faith through matter is simply how the incarnate God likes to work.

9. **Back to Jairus (5:35-43). The message arrives: "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" Jesus' response is the memory verse: "Do not fear, only believe." Walk the scene to the end: the laughter, the small circle, the Aramaic words, and the two commands afterward. What is Mark preserving for us?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First, the interruption itself preaches: Jairus had to stand and wait, watching Jesus give his dying daughter's minutes to a nobody from the crowd, and in the delay the worst happened. Every believer eventually stands where Jairus stood, when God's pace feels like God's absence. "Do not fear, only believe" is spoken into exactly that moment. Second, the raising: professional mourners laugh at "the child is not dead but sleeping," and Jesus puts them all out; resurrection is not performed for scoffers. Then the Aramaic itself, preserved untranslated, a detail tradition loves to hear as Peter's ear-memory: *Talitha cumi*, "Little girl, I say to you, arise", so gentle it is barely a miracle-formula at all, a father waking his daughter for school. Compare Elisha, who had to stretch himself over the Shunammite's boy and pray at length (2 Kings 4): Jesus takes a hand and speaks. And then two utterly characteristic commands: tell no one (we are back in Jewish territory; the Secret resumes, notice the contrast with the Decapolis an hour ago), and "give her something to eat", the Lord of life worrying about a twelve-year-old's lunch. He raises; then he feeds. Keep that sequence in mind for next week.

Dig Deeper

Raising the dead is the outer edge of the impossible, and Mark will not let it become routine: this Gospel records exactly one raising, done in near-secrecy before five witnesses. The Catechism reads such miracles precisely: they are signs and pledges, real restorations to ordinary mortal life, announcing something of a different order entirely, the Resurrection, in which Christ does not return to this life but passes beyond death's reach and opens the way for us (CCC 994). Jairus's daughter would one day face death again; her raising was a promissory note. The empty tomb is the payment.

Send (15 minutes)

1. Name your storm question honestly: the situation where you have been asking, "Teacher, do you not care?" What would it mean this week to let him be in the boat, even asleep?
2. The woman touched him deliberately while the crowd jostled him accidentally. In your week, where are you jostling Christ, near him but not in contact, and what would one deliberate touch look like: a sacrament, a confession, real prayer?

Live It This Week

- Bring one storm to him deliberately: write your "do you not care?" question on paper, take it to a church, and pray Psalm 107:23-30 over it.
- Touch, do not jostle: get to Mass early enough to make one act of deliberate faith at Communion, the woman's prayer works: "If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well."
- Be the Decapolis man once this week: tell one person, plainly and briefly, one thing the Lord has done for you. No training required; that was the point.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, wind and sea obey you, demons beg before you, disease dries up at your hem, and death itself lets go of a child's hand when you take it. Do not fear, only believe: speak that word into each of us now, and give us the faith that touches instead of the crowd that presses. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"Do not fear, only believe." (Mark 5:36, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 4:35-5:43

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 4:35-41 (the storm)
- Psalm 107:23-30 (the LORD stills the storm)
- Job 38:8-11 (God shuts in the sea)
- Jonah 1:4-6 (the sleeping prophet)
- Mark 1:25 (phimotheti, "be muzzled," leader background)
- Mark 5:1-20 (Legion; the Decapolis commission)
- Mark 3:27 (the strong man bound, leader background)
- Mark 5:21-34 (the hemorrhaging woman)
- Leviticus 15:25-27 (the woman's uncleanness)
- Acts 19:11-12; Acts 5:15-16; 2 Kings 13:21 (steelman chain: grace through material means)
- Mark 5:35-43 (Jairus's daughter raised)
- 2 Kings 4:32-37 (Elisha and the Shunammite's son)
- Daniel 12:2 (resurrection hope, leader background)
- CCC 994, 1116, 1503-1504, 1670-1673, 2111
- Memory verse: Mark 5:36

Session 6

The Shepherd and the Bread

Mark 6 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the chapter of two banquets: Herod's birthday feast, which ends with a prophet's head on a platter, and the Shepherd's feast on green grass, where five loaves feed five thousand. Between them they will watch the Twelve sent out with authority, anointing the sick with oil, and they will see Jesus walk on the sea speaking words that belong to the burning bush.

Catholic Touchstone: The Eucharist prefigured. The feeding miracles, says the Catechism, prefigure the superabundance of the unique bread of Christ's Eucharist (CCC 1335), and the verbs of Mark 6:41, took, blessed, broke, gave, are the verbs of the Last Supper. This is also the chapter the Church cites for the verse the Church hears as alluding to the Anointing of the Sick (Mark 6:13; CCC 1511).

What You Need to Know

The chapter opens with rejection at Nazareth (6:1-6). "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" Familiarity has bred contempt: they think knowing his trade and his family means knowing him. Two notes for careful readers. Calling a man "son of Mary" rather than by his father's name is unusual; Mark leaves it uninterpreted, and so should we, beyond noticing the coldness. And 6:5, "he could do no mighty work there," must be handled honestly: this is not a battery running low. Mark himself adds "except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them," and the "could not" is commonly understood as the grammar of covenant: miracles in the Gospels are not stunts performed AT people but encounters that ordinarily seek an open door. Where unbelief bolts the door, the Lord who respects freedom will not blast it. He "marveled because of their unbelief," one of only two things Jesus marvels at in the Gospels; the other is a Gentile's faith.

Then the sending (6:7-13): two by two, with authority over unclean spirits, traveling almost absurdly light, no bread, no bag, no money. The poverty is the sermon: heralds who carry nothing demonstrate that the kingdom, not the kit, sustains them. Verse 13 deserves a full stop: "they anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them." The Catechism, following Trent, teaches that this sacrament was instituted by Christ our Lord, is alluded to by Mark in this verse, and is recommended to the faithful and promulgated by James 5:14-15, where the presbyters of the Church anoint and pray (CCC 1511). When your grandmother received Anointing before surgery, she stood in a line that begins in Mark 6.

Mark then does his sandwich move at chapter scale: between the apostles' sending and their return he inserts the death of John the Baptist (6:14-29), the only extended story in Mark not about Jesus. The placement is the meaning: this is what can happen to those who are sent. And the scene is staged as a banquet, Herod's birthday feast, with courtiers, oaths, a dance, and a girl carrying a prophet's head on a dish, set against the feast Jesus is about to host on the grass. Two kingdoms, two banquets: at one table power devours the just; at the other the Shepherd feeds the hungry. Note Herod's tragedy carefully: he feared John, "knew that he was a righteous and holy man," heard him gladly, and was "much perplexed," and then murdered him anyway, rather than lose face before dinner guests. Respect for holiness without obedience to it curdles into complicity. The forerunner has now gone before the Lord in death as in birth.

The feeding of the five thousand (6:30-44) is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels, and Mark saturates it with Scripture. The setting: Jesus sees the crowd "as sheep without a shepherd," Moses' phrase when begging God for a successor (Numbers 27:17), and Ezekiel's indictment of Israel's failed shepherds, which ends with God promising "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (Ezekiel 34:15). Then Mark, alone among the evangelists, mentions that the grass was GREEN, and makes the Shepherd's guests "lie down" on it: Psalm 23 is being staged before our eyes, and readers have long heard it here: the LORD is my shepherd, he makes me lie down in green pastures, he prepares a table. The organization "by hundreds and by fifties" echoes Moses' ordering of Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 18:21). The closest prophetic precedent is Elisha feeding a hundred men with twenty loaves (2 Kings 4:42-44), let the group find it and feel how far Jesus exceeds it. And then the four verbs: "taking the five loaves... he blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them", the exact liturgical sequence of the Last Supper (14:22) and of every Mass since. Twelve baskets of fragments remain, a number long read as one per tribe: Israel's Shepherd feeds Israel with bread to spare.

The walking on the sea (6:45-52) is not a rescue story with special effects; it is a theophany. Mark says the strangest thing: "He meant to pass by them." In Scripture, "passing by" is technical vocabulary: God makes his glory PASS BY Moses in the cleft of the rock (Exodus 33:19-22), and the LORD PASSES BY Elijah at Horeb (1 Kings 19:11). Job says God "alone stretched out the heavens, and trampled the waves of the sea... he passes by me, and I see him not" (Job 9:8, 11). Jesus treading the waves and meaning to pass by evokes, for readers steeped in the Torah, what Moses and Elijah were shown. And his word to them, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear," carries in Greek, for many readers, the undertone of the divine name: *ego eimi*, I AM (Exodus 3:14). Then Mark's stunning diagnosis of their terror: "they did not understand ABOUT THE LOAVES, but their hearts were hardened." Understand the loaves rightly, Mark implies, and you understand who walks the sea. The bread is an identity revelation, and it has only begun.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Numbers 27:16-17 and Ezekiel 34:5, 15, 23.** "Sheep without a shepherd" is Moses' prayer for a successor and Ezekiel's indictment of Israel's leaders, resolved by God's double promise: "I myself will be the shepherd," and "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David." On the green grass both promises stand in one person.
- **Psalm 23.** Green pastures, reclining flocks, a prepared table, goodness and mercy: Mark's uniquely green grass tells us which psalm is being staged.
- **2 Kings 4:42-44.** Elisha feeds a hundred men with twenty barley loaves, over his servant's protest, "and had some left." The template scene, exceeded by orders of magnitude: five loaves, five thousand men, twelve baskets over.
- **Exodus 16 (manna), Exodus 18:21 (hundreds and fifties), Exodus 33:19-22, 1 Kings 19:11, Job 9:8, Exodus 3:14.** The wilderness feeding, the Mosaic ordering of the people, and the "passing by" and I AM of the sea-walking: the whole Exodus is being recapitulated around Jesus, bread in the wilderness and the divine Name at the sea.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Tractates on the Gospel of John, on the feeding of the five thousand)

St. Augustine teaches that the multiplication of the loaves is not a violation of nature but its unveiling: the same God who every year multiplies a few grains sown in the earth into whole harvests did in his hands, swiftly and visibly, what he does in creation slowly and unseen. The miracle is a word as well as a work: it was done so that we would ask what it means, and seek the

Bread that does not perish.

Voices of the Church: St. Ambrose of Milan (On the Duties of the Clergy, on Herod's oath)

St. Ambrose holds up Herod's banquet as the proof that a wicked promise must be broken, not kept: it is sometimes contrary to duty to fulfill an oath, and Herod's keeping of his rash vow, beheading a prophet to avoid embarrassing himself before dinner guests, made the oath the lesser sin and the keeping of it the greater. No one is bound by a promise to do evil; the shame Herod feared was innocence compared to the shame he chose.

Voices of the Church: St. Bede the Venerable (Commentary on Mark, on the compassion of the Shepherd)

St. Bede sees the whole Gospel in the sequence of 6:34: the Lord sees the crowd, is moved with compassion, and responds first by TEACHING them many things, and only afterward by feeding them. So Christ still deals with his flock, Bede says: the sheep without a shepherd are gathered first by the word and then nourished at the table, doctrine and bread; the Church has long spoken, in the same spirit, of the two tables of Word and Sacrament from which she feeds her children.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1335:** The miracles of the multiplication of loaves, in which the Lord blessed, broke, and distributed the loaves through his disciples, prefigure the superabundance of the unique bread of his Eucharist.
- **CCC 1511:** The Church believes and confesses that among the seven sacraments there is one especially intended to strengthen those who are being tried by illness, the Anointing of the Sick; it was instituted by Christ our Lord, is alluded to by Mark (6:13), and is recommended to the faithful and promulgated by James (5:14-15).
- **CCC 548-549:** Jesus' miracles are signs that attest he is the Son of God, invitations to believe, not attempts to satisfy curiosity or magic-hunger; some people are scandalized by them anyway.
- **CCC 1506-1509:** Christ invites his disciples to share his ministry of compassion and healing; the Church continues it in her sacraments and care of the sick.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Bread: OFFICIALLY PLANTED, at last. The four verbs (took, blessed, broke, gave), the twelve baskets, and above all Mark's editorial key at 6:52: "they did not understand about the loaves." From here forward, bread is never just bread in this Gospel. Do NOT connect it to the Last Supper for the group yet; let the verbs do their slow work. Recall privately how the David-and-showbread scene (2:25-26) now glows in retrospect.

The Messianic Secret: Deepening in a new key: the theophany on the sea (*ego eimi*, the passing by) is shown to the Twelve alone, and even they do not understand. The Secret is no longer only

Jesus silencing others; it is hardened hearts failing to read what is shown.

The Way: Background hum: the Twelve are sent out on the road with nothing, the lifestyle of the Way before the word becomes a theme.

Torn: Dormant. Sealed-guess watch: still no human confession.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain 6:5 ("could do no mighty work") without embarrassment: the covenant grammar of miracles and faith.
2. Participants can identify Mark 6:13 and James 5:14-15 as the biblical roots of the Anointing of the Sick.
3. Participants can read the two-banquets contrast and articulate Herod's tragedy of admiration without obedience.
4. Participants discover the shepherd texts, Psalm 23's green grass, and the Elisha template, and can recite the four Eucharistic verbs.
5. Participants can explain "he meant to pass by them" and ego eimi as language widely read as theophany, and answer the naturalistic "sharing miracle" theory.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress question 2 (the sending) into a leader summary keeping only the 6:13 anointing point, and shorten the Herod discussion to the two-banquets contrast. Do not cut the feeding sequence, the sea-walking, or the steelman.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, Good Shepherd, you see crowds where others see interruptions, and you feed where others calculate. Gather us tonight on the green grass of your word, teach us many things, and give us bread we did not earn. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Has anyone ever underestimated you because they knew you "back when"? What is it like to be reduced to your resume or your family?
2. Describe the best meal you have ever been served, not the best food, the best MEAL. What made it that?

Leader bridge: Tonight, one chapter, two banquets. At one of them, a king serves death on a platter. At the other, a Shepherd seats five thousand on green grass. Watch which kingdom you would rather eat in, and count the verbs at the second table.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 6:1-13 aloud.

1. **Nazareth (6:1-6): "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?... And they took offense at him." Then the verse skeptics love: "he COULD do no mighty work there." Is Jesus' power failing? Read verses 5-6 carefully and untangle it.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Read the whole sentence: "he could do no mighty work there, EXCEPT that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them", a strange power failure that still heals the sick. The "could not" is not a dead battery; it is commonly understood as the grammar of covenant. Miracles in the Gospels are not stunts performed AT spectators; they are encounters of faith, signs given to invite belief (CCC 548), and where unbelief bolts the door, the Lord who respects freedom will not blast through it. Nazareth's problem is the deadliest kind: not hostility but familiarity, "we know his trade, we know his family, so we know him." He "marveled because of their unbelief." The warning for church-raised people in this room is direct: you can know everything ABOUT Jesus and still keep the door shut.

2. **The sending (6:7-13): two by two, authority over unclean spirits, and a packing list of nearly nothing. Why the enforced poverty? And read verse 13 slowly: what are the Twelve doing with OIL, and where does the Church say that practice ends up?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The poverty is the credential: heralds who carry no bread, bag, or money are walking proof that the kingdom sustains its messengers; their dependence preaches before they open their mouths. Two by two supplies witness (Deuteronomy 19:15) and communion, mission is never solo in this Gospel. And verse 13: "they anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them." The Church cites this very verse as alluding to the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, instituted by Christ and commended to the Church's practice in James 5:14-15 (CCC 1511): "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the presbyters of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." When a priest anoints a sick person today, he is doing what the Twelve began in

Galilee: the Church recognizes in his ministry its flowering.

Read Mark 6:14-29 aloud.

3. **Herod's banquet (6:14-29).** Mark places John's death between the apostles' sending and their return, and stages it as a feast. First: inventory Herod's feelings about John in verses 19-20. He feared him, protected him, "heard him gladly." So how does THIS man end up serving a prophet's head on a platter, and what is the two-banquets contrast Mark is building?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Herod's tragedy is the tragedy of admiration without obedience. He knew John was "a righteous and holy man," kept him safe, enjoyed listening, and was "much perplexed", a man circling conversion for months. But he never obeyed the message, and unrepented sin kept its hooks in him (Herodias). Then one rash oath before dinner guests, and he murders the man he admired rather than lose face, "sorry" the whole time (6:26). Sorrow that will not act is complicity with a sad expression. St. Ambrose's verdict stands: a wicked oath must be broken, not kept; keeping it was the greater sin. The placement preaches too: sandwiched inside the apostles' mission, John's death shows the sent ones what witness can cost, the forerunner goes before the Lord in death as in birth. And hold the image: a royal banquet where power devours the just, set immediately against the banquet Jesus is about to host, where the Shepherd feeds the hungry for free. Two kingdoms, two tables. The whole Gospel asks which one you will eat at.

Read Mark 6:30-44 aloud.

4. **The feeding, part one: the setting.** Verse 34: Jesus sees the crowd "as sheep without a shepherd." **DISCOVERY:** half look up Numbers 27:16-17, half look up Ezekiel 34:5 and 34:15. Whose words is Mark quoting, and what do both passages promise?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Numbers 27: Moses, about to die, begs God to appoint a successor "that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep which have no shepherd", and God gives Joshua (Hebrew Yehoshua, the name that later yields Yeshua, Jesus). Ezekiel 34: God indicts Israel's failed shepherd-kings who fed themselves and scattered the flock, and makes a double promise: "I MYSELF will be the shepherd of my sheep" (34:15) and "I will set up over them ONE SHEPHERD, my servant David" (34:23). Both promises, God shepherding in person, and a new David shepherding, converge on the man standing in front of this crowd. And notice his first act of compassion is not the food: "he began to TEACH them many things." Word first, then bread, the two tables (see St. Bede on your Take-Home).

5. **The feeding, part two: the details.** Mark alone tells us the grass was GREEN and the crowd reclined on it in ordered groups "by hundreds and by fifties." **DISCOVERY:** someone read Psalm 23:1-5 aloud, and someone else 2 Kings 4:42-44. What is being staged on that hillside, and how does the Elisha story measure it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The scene reads like Psalm 23 staged line by line: the LORD is my shepherd; he makes me LIE DOWN in GREEN pastures; you prepare a TABLE before me. Mark's green grass is not weather trivia; it invites you to hear which psalm you are standing inside, and to ask who, therefore, the Shepherd hosting this table must be. The hundreds and fifties echo Moses' ordering of Israel in the

wilderness (Exodus 18:21): this crowd is being constituted as a people. And Elisha is the measuring stick: the greatest feeding miracle of the prophets was a hundred men from twenty loaves, with the same skeptical objection from a servant ("How am I to set this before a hundred men?") and the same surplus. Jesus: five thousand men, five loaves, twelve baskets of fragments, long read as one per tribe of Israel. The prophets' greatest work is his rounding error.

6. **The feeding, part three: the verbs. Read 6:41 aloud slowly and list the four things Jesus does with the loaves. Write them on something. Where will you hear those four verbs again, in that order, and who distributes the bread?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Took, blessed, broke, gave. Do not explain further; just make sure every person in the room has said the four verbs out loud and knows Mass well enough to feel the floor tilt. If someone makes the Last Supper connection aloud, smile and say "hold that thought; this Gospel is not done with bread." Note the delivery system as well: Jesus gives the bread "to the disciples to set before the people", the Shepherd feeds the flock through the Twelve, a pattern with a very long future. And the fragments are gathered, twelve baskets: in God's economy, superabundance, and nothing wasted (CCC 1335 makes the Church's reading explicit for you as leader, but let the group discover rather than be told).

Read Mark 6:45-56 aloud.

7. **The sea-walking (6:45-52) contains the strangest clause in Mark: "He meant to PASS BY them." That sounds like he was going to walk past his struggling friends. DISCOVERY: someone look up Exodus 33:19-22, someone 1 Kings 19:11, and someone Job 9:8. What does "passing by" mean in those scenes, and what is Jesus' greeting in verse 50 hiding in plain sight?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Passing by" is theophany vocabulary, the technical language of God showing his glory to a human being: God makes all his goodness PASS BY Moses in the cleft of the rock; the LORD PASSES BY Elijah at Horeb in wind, earthquake, and fire; and Job says God "alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea... he passes by me, and I see him not." Mark is telling us what kind of scene the language invites us to read: the Twelve being shown what Moses and Elijah were shown. Treading the sea is God's signature (Job 9:8), and the greeting, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear," is in Greek *ego eimi*, on the surface a friend saying "it's me", and, in this theophanic setting, carrying for many readers the unmistakable undertone of the divine I AM (Exodus 3:14). Underneath, the divine Name spoken over the waters. Then Mark's devastating editorial verdict on the Twelve: "they were utterly astounded, for THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE LOAVES, but their hearts were hardened." Mark links their blindness on the sea to the bread on the grass: read the loaves rightly and you know who walks the water. The bread is an identity revelation, and the disciples flunked the first exam. Keep your eye on that thread.

8. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. A popular modern reading says: "The real miracle was sharing. Moved by the boy's example, everyone brought out the food they had hidden in their cloaks, and there was enough for all. Beautiful, and no physics were harmed." Build the case at its best: it preserves a moral lesson, avoids credulity, and appeals to people who respect science. Then test it against Mark's actual text and the shape of the chapter.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Give the theory its due: sharing IS beautiful, the reading is motivated by honest discomfort with miracles, and Christians should never sneer at that discomfort. Now the text. Mark's account runs on counted specifics: two hundred denarii would not suffice (the disciples did the math), exactly five loaves and two fish located after a search, five thousand men counted in ordered groups, and TWELVE BASKETS of fragments collected, an audited surplus. "And all ate and were satisfied" from what Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave: the narrative grammar makes the loaves in his hands the source. The sharing theory has to be smuggled in; no evangelist hints at hidden lunches, no ancient reader, friendly or hostile, is on record proposing it; it enters the commentaries with nineteenth-century rationalism (H.E.G. Paulus) and later liberal preaching. And Mark forecloses it himself at 6:52 and 8:17-21, where Jesus treats the loaves as a revelation the disciples failed to understand, and quizzes them on the numbers. Nobody is mystified by a potluck. Deeper still: the theory quietly assumes the thing in question, that the man who (in this same chapter) treads the sea as only God does could not multiply bread. If Mark 1:1 is true, the feeding is not a physics problem; it is the Creator doing openly what he does in every wheat field (St. Augustine's point). And the stakes are higher than one miracle: these four verbs are headed to an upper room, where "this is my body" will demand the same choice between a comfortable reduction and taking him at his word.

Dig Deeper

Verse 53-56 quietly closes the loop of last session: at Gennesaret the sick beg to touch "even the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well." What one desperate woman risked alone in chapter 5 has become the confident practice of whole villages. Grace through contact, now at scale, and a picture of what the Church's sacramental life is: what she risked once, the Church, by Christ's own institution, now offers to all: his healing touch through appointed signs.

Send (15 minutes)

1. Herod admired, protected, and gladly heard the man he ended up killing, because admiration never became obedience. Where in your life are you a fan of Jesus rather than a follower, agreeing warmly, obeying never? Name one concrete step from admiration to obedience.
2. The disciples answered a crowd's hunger with a budget ("two hundred denarii would not be enough") and Jesus answered it with what was in his hands. Where are you currently telling God a need is mathematically impossible, and what five loaves are actually in your hands?

Live It This Week

- At Mass this week, listen for the four verbs, took, blessed, broke, gave, and when you hear them, silently pray: "Lord, I want to understand about the loaves."
- Answer one impossible need with your actual loaves: give the small thing you have (an hour, a meal, a skill) to a need that dwarfs it, and let him do the multiplication.
- If someone you love is seriously ill or facing a serious operation, tell them about the Anointing of the Sick this week: it is not reserved to the dying (CCC 1514-1515).

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, Shepherd of the green grass, you teach before you feed and you feed beyond our arithmetic. Walk to us across whatever we are straining against tonight, say "Take heart, it is I," and do not let our hearts stay hard about the loaves. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"Take heart, it is I; have no fear." (Mark 6:50, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 6

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 6:1-6 (rejection at Nazareth)
- Mark 6:7-13 (the sending; anointing with oil)
- James 5:14-15 (anointing fulfilled in the Church)
- Deuteronomy 19:15 (two witnesses, leader background)
- Mark 6:14-29 (Herod's banquet; death of John)
- Mark 6:30-44 (feeding of the five thousand)
- Numbers 27:16-17 (sheep without a shepherd)
- Ezekiel 34:5, 15, 23 (God the Shepherd; the new David)
- Psalm 23 (green pastures, the table)
- Exodus 18:21 (hundreds and fifties)
- 2 Kings 4:42-44 (Elisha's feeding, the template)
- Exodus 16 (manna, leader background)
- Mark 6:45-52 (walking on the sea; ego eimi)
- Exodus 33:19-22; 1 Kings 19:11 (God passes by)
- Job 9:8, 11 (trampling the waves; passing by)
- Exodus 3:14 (I AM)
- Mark 6:53-56 (the fringe of his garment)
- Mark 8:17-21 (leader background for the steelman)
- CCC 548-549, 1335, 1506-1509, 1511
- Memory verse: Mark 6:50

Session 7

Crumbs for the Children

Mark 7:1-8:26 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the section where the bread crosses the border: a fight over human traditions that void God's word, a Gentile mother who wins an argument with Jesus by asking for crumbs, a deaf man opened with a word the Church still uses at Baptism, a second feeding, this time for the nations, and a blind man healed in two stages, Mark's enacted parable for everything about to happen at Caesarea Philippi.

Catholic Touchstone: Tradition rightly understood. This is the session to distinguish, with full honesty, the "traditions of men" Jesus condemns from the apostolic Tradition St. Paul commands us to hold fast, the living transmission by which the Gospel, and the Bible itself, reached us (CCC 80-83).

What You Need to Know

The controversy of 7:1-13 must be read precisely, because it contains the single most common objection to Catholicism, and the answer, in the same breath. Pharisees ask why Jesus' disciples eat with unwashed hands, "the tradition of the elders," and Jesus answers with Isaiah 29:13 ("in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men") and an unsparing charge: "You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men." His case study is Corban: a legal device by which a man could declare his assets "given to God" and thereby dodge the fourth commandment's duty to support his parents, "thus making void the word of God through your tradition." Read the target carefully: Jesus condemns human traditions that NULLIFY God's word. He does not condemn transmission as such; he himself worshiped in synagogues (a post-biblical institution) and was present in the Temple for the feast of the Dedication (John 10:22), and will command his apostles to teach everything he handed them. The steelman question is whether Catholic Tradition is the thing Jesus attacked, and the honest answer requires the distinction the New Testament itself makes.

Then 7:14-23, the interiority teaching: nothing outside a man defiles him; defilement flows from the heart, and the vice list of 7:21-22 is Jesus' anatomy of it. Mark adds his famous editorial aside: "Thus he declared all foods clean" (7:19). Two treasures here. First, the moral revolution: purity relocated from the kitchen to the heart, the whole Catholic moral tradition of interior conversion begins in this paragraph. Second, a delicious Petrine detail for a Gospel built on Peter's preaching: the narrator's aside about clean foods is the exact lesson Peter himself had to learn three times over on a rooftop in Joppa (Acts 10:9-16, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common"). Mark's parenthesis reads like Peter's own hard-won footnote.

The Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30) is the scene leaders fear and should not. A Gentile mother begs for her daughter, and Jesus answers with what sounds like an insult: "Let the children FIRST be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Handle it honestly, in steps. The word is *kynaria*, the little dogs of the household, under the table at the family meal, softer than the street-dog slur, but still a test with edges. The word "first" is the hidden door: it concedes a sequence, children first, then others, the order of salvation history (to the Jew first, Romans 1:16). And she is the only person in this entire Gospel who wins a verbal exchange with Jesus, because she takes his metaphor and turns it: "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." She does not dispute Israel's priority; she finds the overflow inside it. Jesus grants everything: "For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter", the only exorcism in Mark performed at a distance, on the strength of a mother's wit and faith. And note what she asked for:

crumbs. Of BREAD. She has walked into the Bread thread from the Gentile side, and Mark is about to show what her crumbs become.

Ephphatha (7:31-37): back in the Decapolis (remember who has been evangelizing there since chapter 5), a deaf man with a speech impediment. Watch the method: fingers into ears, spittle, touch, a groan, an Aramaic word, *Ephphatha*, "Be opened." Christ heals through his body and through matter, the sacramental principle in miniature, and the Church has never forgotten it: the Rite of Baptism preserves an optional Ephphatha rite, the celebrant touching the ears and mouth of the newly baptized (CCC 1236); St. Ambrose was already explaining an Ephphatha opening rite to Milan's newly baptized in the fourth century, in his day touching ears and nostrils. The crowd's verdict carries two scriptural resonances at once: "He has done all things well" echoes Genesis 1:31 (God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good), creation happening again, and "he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak" is Isaiah 35:5-6, the checklist of the messianic age. Let the group find Isaiah 35 themselves.

The feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10) is not a rerun; it is the payoff of the woman's crumbs. Location: the itinerary of 7:31 has carried us through the Decapolis, so the scene reads most naturally as Gentile country. This crowd has been with Jesus THREE DAYS (a number worth letting resonate quietly), and he will not send them away hungry. Seven loaves, seven baskets of fragments, and Mark even changes basket-words: the twelve baskets of chapter 6 were *kophinoi*, the wicker baskets Jews carried; the seven here are *sphyrides*, the big hampers of the Gentile world. Twelve for the tribes of Israel; seven, many hear the seven nations of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:1) or simply the number of fullness, for the nations. The children have been fed; now the little dogs get, not crumbs, but a banquet with hampers left over. Then the Pharisees demand a sign (having just missed two), Jesus warns against "the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod," and the disciples, in a boat with the Bread of both feedings sitting beside them, worry that they forgot bread, "they had only one loaf with them in the boat" (8:14). Mark's irony is surgical. Jesus' exasperated quiz (8:17-21), how many baskets? twelve; how many? seven, ends on the question the whole section exists to ask: "Do you not yet understand?"

And then the hinge: the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26), found only in Mark. Jesus heals him in TWO STAGES, first touch: "I see men, but they look like trees, walking"; second touch: sight restored. This is not a power struggling; nothing in Mark suggests strain. It is an enacted parable, positioned with a craftsman's care immediately before Caesarea Philippi: a man who goes from blindness to blurry half-sight to clarity, right before Peter goes from blindness to the right title with the wrong meaning, and will need a second touch of his own. Do NOT explain this to the group; ask the placement question and let them wonder. Next session pays it off.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 29:13 (as Mark 7:6-7 quotes its Greek form).** "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." Jesus' chosen text against the Corban maneuver: worship gutted by man-made workarounds.
- **Exodus 20:12 with Deuteronomy 5:16.** "Honor your father and your mother", the commandment Corban was engineered to evade. Note that Jesus treats the commandment as "the word of God" with binding force his opponents' legal tradition cannot override.
- **Isaiah 35:5-6.** "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped... and the tongue of the dumb sing." The prophets' checklist for the age of God's coming, being ticked off item by item in the Decapolis, and note who Isaiah says is coming when these signs occur: "Behold, your God... He will come and save you" (35:4).
- **Genesis 1:31.** "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." The crowd's "He has done all things well" is creation's verdict spoken over the Redeemer: the One repairing hearing and speech is the One who made them.

- **Deuteronomy 7:1 (leader background).** The seven nations of Canaan, one traditional key to the seven loaves and seven hampers of the Gentile feeding; others hear simply the number of completeness. Hold the symbolism lightly and let the geography (Decapolis) carry the main weight: this feeding is for the nations.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Irenaeus of Lyons (Against Heresies, Book 3)

St. Irenaeus, our second-century witness, asks what the Church would have done had the apostles left no writings at all, and answers: we would follow the order of the Tradition they handed down to those to whom they committed the churches, as in fact the barbarian nations without paper and ink did, believing through the Spirit what was preached. For Irenaeus, Scripture and apostolic Tradition are never rivals; what the Church would later call one sacred deposit is here in embryo: a public teaching, guarded openly in the churches the apostles founded, where the succession of teachers is open for all to examine.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew, on the Canaanite woman)

St. John Chrysostom cannot praise her enough: rebuffed by silence, discouraged by the disciples, and answered with a hard word, she neither despaired nor demanded, but pressed in with humility and wit, accepting the name given her and finding mercy inside it. The delay, Chrysostom insists, was never refusal: Christ withheld the answer so that her faith, hidden like treasure, might be displayed and crowned before all, a lesson for everyone whose prayers meet with silence.

Voices of the Church: St. Ambrose of Milan (On the Mysteries, on the Ephphatha)

Explaining the rites of Baptism to the newly initiated of Milan, St. Ambrose points them straight back to this scene: the opening rite of the liturgy, he says, is the mystery Christ celebrated in the Gospel when he cured the deaf and dumb man with the word Ephphatha, "Be opened": in Ambrose's rite the celebrant touched ears and nostrils, that the candidate might be opened to receive the word of God and breathe the fragrance of holiness. The Church's present rite touches ears and mouth (CCC 1236), the same mystery in a later key: what the Lord did with fingers and spittle in the Decapolis, his Church does sacramentally to this day.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 80-83:** Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture flow from the same divine wellspring and form one sacred deposit of the Word of God; Tradition here means the apostolic transmission, to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, or devotional traditions that can be retained, modified, or abandoned.
- **CCC 1852-1853:** The vice list of Mark 7:21-22 as Scripture's anatomy of sin proceeding from the heart.
- **CCC 2447 (with 2196):** The works of mercy and the honor due to parents that Corban-style piety attempted to evade: religion that dodges justice toward family is condemned by the Lord himself.

- **CCC 1151-1152:** Christ makes use of signs from creation, spittle, touch, imposition of hands, to signify and effect healing and grace; the sacraments continue this "sacramental economy."
- **CCC 1335:** The multiplications of the loaves prefigure the superabundance of the Eucharist. The Catechism speaks there of Eucharistic prefiguration, not of the nations; the Gentile setting of the second feeding is Mark's own contribution, and the two together are why this session reads the four thousand as the nations brought to the table.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Bread: DEVELOPING at full speed and crossing the border: her crumbs (7:28), the Gentile banquet with seven hampers (8:1-10), the ONE LOAF in the boat (8:14, do not explain it; if a participant gasps at "one loaf," let them say it), and the quiz ending "Do you not yet understand?" (8:21). That question is addressed to your group as much as to the Twelve. Resolution still two moves away; keep it taut.

The Messianic Secret: Note 7:36: commanded silence, zealous proclamation anyway, in the Decapolis, where chapter 5's herald was licensed. The border between silence-zone and proclamation-zone is blurring as the Gentile mission opens.

The Way / Torn: Dormant, but the two-stage healing quietly stages next session's theme: partial sight on the way to full sight. Say nothing.

Sealed-guess watch: Still no human confession of the title. One session remains before the guesses become very interesting. Do not smile too visibly.

Session Goals

1. Participants can state the Corban maneuver and Jesus' actual target: traditions that nullify the word of God.
2. Participants can make the Catholic distinction between apostolic Tradition and "traditions of men," with 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and Irenaeus in hand, after stating the Protestant objection at full strength.
3. Participants can walk the Syrophoenician exchange honestly, its edge, its hidden door ("first"), and her victory, and locate it in the Bread arc.
4. Participants discover Isaiah 35 and Genesis 1:31 behind the Ephphatha and connect the scene to the baptismal rite.
5. Participants can explain the two feedings as Israel-then-the-nations and sit with "Do you not yet understand?" without premature resolution.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** fold the sign-demand (8:11-13) into the leaven question with one leader sentence, and compress the Ephphatha discussion to the Isaiah 35 discovery plus the baptismal note. Do not cut the Tradition steelman, the Syrophoenician exchange, or the boat quiz.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you opened deaf ears with a word and fed the nations from seven loaves. Ephphatha, be opened, speak that word over us tonight: open our ears to your word, our eyes to your bread, and our hearts to everyone you intend to feed. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What is a tradition in your family that you love, and one you quietly wonder about? What makes the difference between them?
2. Tell us about a time persistence paid off when the first answer was no, or silence.

Leader bridge: Tonight the bread from last week starts traveling, across a border, under a table, into seven hamper, and Jesus has an argument about tradition that Protestants have been quoting at Catholics for five hundred years. We are going to read it more carefully than the pamphlets do.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 7:1-23 aloud.

1. **The Corban case (7:9-13). Reconstruct the maneuver: what did declaring assets "Corban" allow a man to do, and what commandment did it checkmate? DISCOVERY: someone read Isaiah 29:13 (noting that Mark 7:6-7 quotes its Greek form), Jesus' chosen weapon. What exactly is Jesus' target: tradition as such, or something more specific?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The maneuver: declare your assets a gift vowed to God, "Corban", and they become unavailable for the support of your aging parents, and the commandment stands checkmated by the vow. A pious technicality engineered to defeat "Honor your father and your mother." Jesus' verdict: "You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men... making void the word of God through your tradition." Isaiah 29:13 names the disease: lips near, hearts far, worship-as-performance built on man-made precepts. Now the precision the pamphlets skip: the target is human traditions that NULLIFY God's word. Jesus is not against transmission or received practice as such, he worshiped in synagogues (an institution nowhere commanded in the Torah), was in the Temple at the festival of the Dedication, itself a post-Mosaic feast (John 10:22), and told the crowds to observe what the scribes taught from Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2-3). The test he applies is functional: does the tradition serve the word of God or void it? Hold that test; the steelman is coming.

2. **The interiority teaching (7:14-23): "there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him," and then the vice list of 7:21-22, what comes OUT. What revolution is happening here, and what does Mark's aside, "Thus he declared all foods clean" (7:19), have to do with the man whose preaching stands behind this Gospel?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The revolution: purity relocated from the kitchen to the heart. Defilement is not an intake problem but an output problem; the contaminant is not on your hands but in your desires, and the vice list is Jesus' unsentimental anatomy of the human heart (CCC 1853 cites it). This is the foundation of the

whole Catholic moral tradition of interior conversion: examine the heart, not just the record. And the aside is one of the New Testament's best inside jokes: "thus he declared all foods clean" is precisely the lesson PETER had to be taught three times on a rooftop in Joppa before he could enter a Gentile's house, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common" (Acts 10:15). In a Gospel built on Peter's preaching, that parenthesis reads like Peter's own rueful footnote: I was there when he said it, and I still needed a vision to believe it. Which is oddly comforting: even the first pope was a slow student, and the Lord kept teaching him.

3. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. Your Protestant friend has this passage loaded: "Jesus condemned the traditions of men that void God's word, and that is exactly what Catholic Tradition is: purgatory, Marian dogmas, indulgences, none of it in the Bible, all of it elevated over Scripture. And the strongest version presses further: even granting the apostles taught orally, you cannot show that stream survived intact or identify it infallibly; Scripture alone is the identifiable, sufficient rule. Sola Scriptura is just taking Jesus' side in Mark 7." Build it at full strength; it quotes Jesus accurately and its instinct, guarding God's word from human overlay, is holy. Then answer with the distinction the New Testament itself makes. DISCOVERY: someone look up 2 Thessalonians 2:15, someone 1 Corinthians 11:2, someone 2 Timothy 2:2.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First, honor everything right in it: there ARE corrupt human traditions; churches, including Catholics in practice, can bury God's word under accretion; and the instinct to test everything against the word of God is not Protestant property, it is Jesus' own test in this chapter. Now the distinction Scripture forces. The same Paul who condemns "human tradition" (Colossians 2:8) COMMANDS tradition: "stand firm and hold to the traditions (*paradosis*) which you were taught by us, either BY WORD OF MOUTH or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15); he praises the Corinthians for maintaining "the traditions even as I have delivered them to you" (1 Corinthians 11:2); and he builds a transmission chain: "what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). So the New Testament knows two different things called tradition: the precepts of men, condemned when they void God's word, and the apostolic *paradosis*, the handing-on of the Gospel itself, commanded and Spirit-guarded. Catholic Tradition claims to be the second, not the first, and the Church applies Jesus' own test: authentic Tradition transmits and unfolds the word of God and can never contradict it; Scripture and Tradition flow "from the same divine wellspring" as one deposit (CCC 80-82). Two supporting observations. St. Irenaeus, within a century of the apostles, describes exactly this: churches founded by apostles, guarding a public teaching succession, such that even nations without writing held the true faith by Tradition. And one question every sola Scriptura Christian must eventually face: the Bible's table of contents is not in the Bible. The canon, which books belong, reached us by the discernment of the apostolic Church handing on what she received: Scripture itself is Tradition's most precious cargo, and the same public test that identified the canon, the open succession of teaching in the churches the apostles founded, guarded by the Spirit Christ promised (John 16:13), is how the Church identifies Tradition still. And keep categories clean: celibacy is a discipline the Church can change, not a dogma; the deposit is doctrine, not customs. The real dividing line, then, is not "Bible versus tradition"; both sides have both. It is: WHICH tradition, and on whose authority, a far more honest conversation, and Mark 7 gives both sides the test to conduct it: does it serve the word of God, or void it?

Read Mark 7:24-37 aloud.

4. **The Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30). Do not sand off the edge: a desperate Gentile mother begs, and Jesus answers, "Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Sit in the discomfort a moment, then work it: what is the force of "first"? What does she do with his metaphor? And what does she win, and how?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Acknowledge the edge honestly; the group will trust you more for it. "Dogs" is *kynaria*, the household's little dogs under the table at the family meal, gentler than the street-slur, but it is still a test with teeth: he states Israel's covenant priority in its bluntest form and waits to see what she does with it. The hidden door is "FIRST": children first concedes that others come second, not never, salvation's actual sequence ("to the Jew first and also to the Greek," Romans 1:16). And she walks through the door he left open, taking his own metaphor and turning it with humility and wit: "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." She disputes nothing, demands nothing, and finds the overflow inside the order: a household's dogs eat DURING the meal, from its abundance. She is the only person in this entire Gospel who turns an exchange with Jesus, and he crowns her retort: "For this saying you may go your way", the only distance-exorcism in Mark, granted to a Gentile mother's faith. St. John Chrysostom's reading of the silence and delay is pastoral gold for anyone in the room whose prayers have met silence: the withholding was never refusal; it was the setting in which a hidden faith could be displayed and crowned. Last thing, and say it slowly: what did she ask for? Crumbs. Of bread. Remember what happened to bread last week, and keep watching it.

5. **Ephphatha (7:31-37). Inventory the method: fingers, spittle, touch, a sigh, an Aramaic word. Why so physical, when a thought would do? DISCOVERY: someone read Isaiah 35:4-6 aloud, and someone else Genesis 1:31. What two verdicts is the crowd unknowingly echoing, and where does the Church still use this scene, word for word?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Why physical? Because the patient is deaf: he cannot hear reassurance, so Jesus speaks in touch, a private sign language of fingers to ears and tongue, taking him aside, sighing where he can be seen. And because this is how the incarnate God characteristically works: through his body, through matter, the sacramental principle in one scene (CCC 1151). Isaiah 35 is the prophets' checklist for the day of God's arrival, "Behold, your God... will come and save you. Then... the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped... and the tongue of the dumb sing", being ticked off in Gentile territory. And "He has done all things well" echoes Genesis 1:31, creation's own verdict now spoken over the Redeemer: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Creation's verdict, repeated where creation is being repaired: the One fixing ears made ears. The Church never let this scene go: the Rite of Baptism includes the Ephphatha, the priest touching ears and mouth, "may the Lord soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith", and St. Ambrose was explaining that rite to the newly baptized by the fourth century. When a baby is baptized in your parish, the Decapolis happens again.

Read Mark 8:1-26 aloud.

6. **The feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10). Lawyer questions: where are we, how long has this crowd been with Jesus, how many loaves, how many baskets left over? Now put it beside chapter 6: twelve baskets there, seven here, and Mark even uses different Greek words for the baskets. What is the second feeding FOR, and whose crumbs became this banquet?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Location: Mark does not restate it in chapter 8, but the itinerary of 7:31 has left us in the Decapolis, so the scene reads most naturally as Gentile country, quite possibly a crowd first stirred by one man sent home in chapter 5 to tell what the Lord had done. Mark never labels the crowd outright; the setting, the basket-words, and the placement after the Syrophoenician woman are what carry the reading. Duration: three days with him, hold that number gently; Mark's readers knew what the third day brings. The math: seven loaves, seven hampers of fragments, and the vocabulary shift is real: chapter 6's baskets are *kophinai*, the small wicker baskets associated with Jewish travelers; chapter 8's are *sphyrides*, the big hampers of the wider world (the kind Paul escaped Damascus in, Acts 9:25). Twelve baskets for the twelve tribes; seven, whether one hears the seven nations of Canaan or simply fullness, for the nations. The children have been fed (chapter 6); now the little dogs are not under the table catching crumbs, they are AT the table with hampers to spare. The Syrophoenician woman's one-liner has become a banquet: she asked for crumbs, and her people received a feeding of their own. That is how this Lord answers humble faith: exceeding, never merely granting.

7. **The boat quiz (8:14-21).** Savor Mark's irony: fresh from two miraculous feedings, the disciples are anxious because "they had only one loaf with them in the boat." Jesus warns about leaven; they conclude he is annoyed about the bread supply; and he explodes into questions, ending with "Do you not yet understand?" What are they not understanding, and, carefully now, what might Mark mean by telling us there was ONE LOAF in the boat?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Run the quiz as Jesus does, out loud: how many baskets after the five thousand? Twelve. After the four thousand? Seven. They remember every number and comprehend none of them. What they are missing is not arithmetic but identity: the feedings were not catering, they were revelation, Israel's Shepherd hosting Israel, then hosting the nations, doing what only the LORD does. "Leaven" is the spreading agent of the Pharisees' sign-demanding unbelief and Herod's worldly cynicism, and it is already at work in the boat: men with the Bread-multiplier beside them, fretting about supply. Now the one loaf: Mark, the most economical of evangelists, did not need to tell us the inventory. Let the group say it if they see it, and if someone ventures "the one loaf... is him," do not confirm or deny; say "keep reading; this Gospel finishes its bread thought in an upper room." The question "Do you not yet understand?" is left hanging on purpose, over the Twelve, and over us. It is the question your group's sealed guesses have been living inside since week one.

8. **The blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26), found only in Mark.** Jesus heals him in TWO STAGES: after the first touch, "I see men, but they look like trees, walking"; after the second, everything clear. Nothing else in the Gospels looks like this. Is Jesus' power sputtering? And, the real question, why might Mark have placed this two-stage healing HERE, immediately before the scene we read next week?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Not a sputter: the same chapter has him feeding four thousand from seven loaves; Mark shows no strain, and Jesus initiates the second touch himself, unbidden. The healing is deliberate in two movements, which makes it an enacted parable, and its PLACEMENT is the sermon. For seven sessions we have watched everyone see Jesus blurrily: crowds see a wonder-worker, Pharisees see a threat, the Twelve see... men like trees, walking, real sight, badly focused. Do not resolve it further;

assign the cliffhanger: next week Jesus stops on the road and asks the Twelve the question the whole Gospel has been building, and one of them gives an answer that is exactly right and badly out of focus, and will need a second touch. Tell the group to come back having read Mark 8:27-9:1, and to bring their memories of tonight's blurry trees with them.

Dig Deeper

A note on the sign-demand (8:11-13): the Pharisees ask for "a sign from heaven" one paragraph after four thousand people were fed from seven loaves. Jesus "sighed deeply in his spirit" and refuses: "no sign shall be given to this generation." Signs are invitations, not compulsions (CCC 548): to the open, a feeding is a window into God; to the closed, no demonstration would ever be enough, because the demand for one more proof is how a heart avoids the proof it already has. The refusal is itself a mercy: Jesus declines to feed an appetite that grows by eating.

Send (15 minutes)

1. Run Jesus' Mark 7 test on your own practice of the faith: is there a devotion, habit, or family religious custom in your life that has drifted from serving God's word, and one that clearly carries it? What would reordering look like?
2. The Syrophoenician woman met silence and a hard word, and pressed in with humility instead of walking away. Where in your life are you currently getting silence from God, and what would her kind of persistence, humble, witty, undeterred, look like there this week?

Live It This Week

- Pray the vice list examen once this week: read Mark 7:21-22 slowly and let the Holy Spirit put his finger on the one item that is currently yours. Take it to Confession if it belongs there.
- Persist through one silence: pick the prayer you have quietly given up on and pray it daily this week with the woman's own words as your close: "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."
- If you can attend a Baptism, or watch for the next one at your parish, listen for the Ephphatha and pray it over yourself: Lord, open my ears to your word and my mouth to profess it.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you fed the children and did not forget the ones under the table. Ephphatha, open our ears, that your word may get past our traditions to our hearts; open our eyes, that we may see you clearly and not as trees walking; and keep us hungry for the one Loaf in the boat. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak." (Mark 7:37, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 7:1-8:26

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 7:1-13 (tradition of the elders; Corban)
- Isaiah 29:13 (lips near, hearts far)
- Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16 (honor father and mother)
- Mark 7:14-23 (interiority; the vice list; all foods clean)
- Acts 10:9-16 (Peter's rooftop lesson, leader background)
- 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Timothy 2:2 (apostolic Tradition, steelman chain)
- Colossians 2:8; Matthew 23:2-3; John 10:22 (steelman support, leader background)
- Mark 7:24-30 (the Syrophoenician woman)
- Romans 1:16 (to the Jew first, leader background)
- Mark 7:31-37 (Ephphatha)
- Isaiah 35:4-6 (the messianic checklist)
- Genesis 1:31 (he has done all things well)
- Mark 8:1-10 (feeding of the four thousand)
- Deuteronomy 7:1 (seven nations, leader background)
- Acts 9:25 (sphyris, leader background)
- Mark 8:11-13 (the sign demanded)
- Mark 8:14-21 (leaven; the one loaf; the quiz)
- Mark 8:22-26 (the blind man of Bethsaida, two stages)
- CCC 80-83, 548, 1151-1152, 1335, 1852-1853, 2196, 2447
- Memory verse: Mark 7:37

Session 8

The Hinge: Who Do You Say That I Am?

Mark 8:27-9:1 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the Gospel's hinge: on the road at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks the question the whole book has been building, Peter answers with the right title, and then everything turns: the first passion prediction, spoken plainly; Peter's rebuke and the most shocking sentence Jesus ever says to a friend; and the terms of discipleship, a cross before a crown, for the Master and for everyone who follows him. Last week's blurry trees come into focus: right title, wrong meaning, and a second touch still needed.

Catholic Touchstone: The confession of Peter and the necessity of the cross. The Catechism reads this scene exactly as Mark builds it: Jesus accepted Peter's profession of faith and announced the coming Passion, for the meaning of his kingship is revealed in the light of his Passion and Resurrection (CCC 440, 601, 618).

What You Need to Know

Location is theology. Caesarea Philippi sits far north of Galilee at the foot of Mount Hermon: a pagan district built around a grotto sacred to the god Pan, crowned with a gleaming temple to Caesar. The district's famous shrines, the grotto of Pan, the temple to Caesar, make a suggestive historical backdrop for the question. Mark also tells us it happened "on the way" (*en te hodo*, 8:27): the Way vocabulary from 1:2-3 now attaches to the road to Jerusalem, and the great discipleship teachings cluster "on the way" (8:27; 9:33-34; 10:32, 46, 52).

The two questions are a funnel: "Who do MEN say that I am?" collects the crowd's options, John the Baptist back from the dead, Elijah, one of the prophets, all of them large, all of them too small, all of them safely dead men returned rather than something new. Then the question that will not stay in the first century: "But who do YOU say that I am?" Peter: "You are the Christ." After seven sessions of demons gagged and titles deflected, a human being finally speaks a true title out loud. Two precision points for you as leader. First, in Mark, Peter says "the Christ", not "the Son of God." Matthew records the fuller confession ("the Son of the living God") and the blessing and the keys; Mark, which tradition receives as Peter's preaching, characteristically strips Peter's honors and keeps his failures. Watch your group's sealed guesses: some will think this scene resolves them. Point them, without any hint of the future, to the exact wording of their question: the first human to say "Son of God" has not spoken yet. Second, Jesus' response to the correct answer is neither yes nor no: "he CHARGED them to tell no one about him", the Secret at maximum, at the very moment of breakthrough. Why silence a true confession? Because of what happens next.

Verse 31 is the continental divide of this Gospel: "the Son of man MUST suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." And "he said this PLAINLY." Two words carry the freight. "Must" (*dei*): divine necessity, not tragic accident; the cross is the plan, written in the Scriptures (Isaiah 53 above all, as the Church has always heard it). "Plainly" (*parresia*): the era of veiled speech is ending; about the cross, there are no parables. This is the answer to the Secret the group has been circling for seven weeks: the title "Christ" could not be preached because, without the cross, it would be heard as politics and glory. Now that the cross is on the table, plain speech begins, and the title is still embargoed until the meaning catches up.

Peter's rebuke and Jesus' counter-rebuke must be given full, uncomfortable weight: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men." The disciple who just spoke the truth becomes, one sentence later, the voice of the tempter, because a Messiah without a cross is, as the fuller temptation accounts of Matthew and Luke let us name it, Satan's own proposal, resumed here in a friend's loving voice, its most dangerous form. Here last week's cliffhanger pays off: the two-stage healing at Bethsaida reads as the parable, and Peter as its meaning. He sees, really sees, but "men like trees, walking": right title, catastrophically wrong content. He will need a second touch, and the Gospel will show it being administered the hard way. Note the tenderness inside the severity: "Get BEHIND me" is not "get away from me"; behind the Master is the disciple's place (the wording is kin to "follow me": disciples walk behind). Peter is not expelled; he is re-positioned.

Then Jesus widens the circle to the crowd (8:34-38): deny self, take up the cross, follow. Do not let the word "cross" stay religious wallpaper: in occupied Palestine it meant one thing, the condemned man carrying his own execution beam through jeering streets. Jesus is describing discipleship as a death march that turns out to be the only road to life: "whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." The paradox is the Gospel's deepest economics, and 8:38 raises the stakes to eternity. Finally 9:1, a famously hard verse: "there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power." Be honest about the difficulty and unbothered by it: a longstanding and common reading in the Church, supported by Mark's own arrangement, hears the first installment six days later on the mountain of the Transfiguration (next session, and note Mark's pointed time-stamp, "after six days," welding 9:1 to what follows), and many readers find further fulfillments in the Resurrection, Pentecost, and the kingdom's explosive spread within that generation. Read this way the verse is a promise with layered fulfillments, not a failed prediction.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 53:3-5, 10-12.** "Despised and REJECTED by men... wounded for our transgressions... it was the will of the LORD to bruise him." The vocabulary of the first passion prediction (suffer, be rejected, be killed) is Isaiah's. The "must" of 8:31 has an address: the Servant Songs.
- **Deuteronomy 21:23.** "A hanged man is accursed by God." Load this text for the steelman: Peter's horror at a crucified Messiah was not weak faith but strong Bible; a Messiah on a tree looked like a contradiction in terms. Keep Galatians 3:13 in your pocket as the resolution: he became the curse to exhaust it.
- **Psalms 118:22 (leader background).** "The stone which the builders REJECTED has become the head of the corner." The same verb as 8:31; Jesus will quote it himself at 12:10. Rejection by the builders was in the blueprints.
- **1 Kings 19 and Malachi 4:5 (leader background).** The crowd's guesses (Elijah, a prophet) are the old categories straining to hold something new: they reach for the greatest returning figures they know, and all of them are too small.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Justin Martyr (Dialogue with Trypho 89-96)

In the mid-second century, St. Justin debated Trypho the Jew, who pressed the very objection Peter felt: the Scriptures may foretell a suffering Messiah, but a CRUCIFIED one is impossible, for the Law says the man hanged on a tree is cursed by God. Justin's answer became the Church's: read Isaiah 53 whole, the Servant despised, wounded, and led like a lamb, and you will see that the Christ was to enter his glory precisely through suffering; the curse he bore was ours, taken willingly, and the scandal of the cross is the shape of the rescue. What Peter could not yet see at Caesarea Philippi, the Church was defending with chapter and verse within living memory.

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermon 4, on the faith of Peter)

St. Leo teaches that Peter's confession came from a revelation of the Father and became the rock-solid foundation on which Christ builds his Church, a strength given to Peter, not generated by him. Leo is equally clear-eyed about Peter the man: the strength is Christ's, communicated to the office, so that the Church's stability never depended on the steadiness of Peter's nerves, which the Gospels are honest enough to show failing. The rock is what grace made of him, not what fear could unmake.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew, Homily 55)

Preaching on "let him deny himself and take up his cross," St. John Chrysostom refuses to let the words soften: to deny oneself is to treat the old self as a stranger whose claims we no longer recognize, and to take up the cross is to live ready for death daily, carrying it not as punishment but as trophy. And yet, he insists, Christ asks nothing he does not repay absurdly: lose a life that was always leaking away, and receive one that cannot be taken.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 440:** Jesus accepted Peter's profession of faith that he is the Messiah and announced the coming Passion of the Son of Man: the true meaning of his kingship revealed in the light of the Passion and Resurrection.
- **CCC 601:** The Scriptures had foretold this divine plan of salvation through the death of the righteous Servant; Jesus' redemptive death fulfills Isaiah's prophecy.
- **CCC 618:** Christ calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him; the cross is the unique sacrifice in which all are invited to share.
- **CCC 890-891 (steelman support):** What infallibility is, a charism protecting the Church's definitive teaching on faith and morals, and, by its precise limits, what it is not: a claim about the personal virtue or judgment of the men who hold the office.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Messianic Secret: THE LOGIC REVEALED. The group finally gets the why: the title without the cross is a lie waiting to happen, so confession is embargoed until the meaning arrives. The Secret is not resolved, no human has yet said "Son of God," but its purpose is now visible. Guard the sealed guesses: Peter said "the Christ." If anyone claims their guess is fulfilled, reread their question's wording with them and say only: "keep watching."

The Way (*hodos*): ACTIVATED as the frame: the question is asked "on the way" (8:27), and from here through chapter 10 discipleship happens on the road to Jerusalem. Following him now has a direction and a destination.

The Bread / Torn: Dormant. (Privately: the two-stage healing served its hinge purpose tonight; you may quietly enjoy how well Mark builds.)

Session Goals

1. Participants can narrate the hinge structure: confession, silence command, passion prediction spoken plainly, rebuke, counter-rebuke, terms of discipleship.
2. Participants can explain WHY the Secret existed, from the text: the title is embargoed until the cross defines it.
3. Participants can connect the Bethsaida two-stage healing to Peter's half-sight.
4. Participants can state the "first pope called Satan" objection at full strength and answer it with the office/impeccability distinction and Luke 22:31-32.
5. Each participant answers "Who do you say that I am?" in one written sentence and takes 8:34 personally: names one concrete self-denial.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress question 1 (the crowd's guesses) to a leader summary and fold the 9:1 discussion (question 8) into a two-sentence leader note pointing to next week. Do not cut the confession sequence, the Satan rebuke, or the steelman.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, tonight you ask us to our faces the question you asked on the road. Give us Peter's courage to answer, and the humility to let you correct what we mean by our answer. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Think of a time you were completely right and completely wrong at the same time, right about the fact, wrong about what it meant. What happened?
2. If a stranger asked the people who know you best, "Who is he? Who is she?", what would they say, and would any of it surprise you?

Leader bridge: Last week ended with a man seeing people like trees walking, and I told you Mark put that story where he put it on purpose. Tonight you find out why. This is the hinge of the entire Gospel: everything before it climbs to a question; everything after it descends toward Jerusalem. And this session only works if the question lands on you.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 8:27-9:1 aloud, slowly. It is short. Let it be heavy.

1. **Setting first: Caesarea Philippi, a pagan district built around a grotto of the god Pan, under a temple to Caesar, and Mark says the question came "on the way" (8:27). Why might Jesus choose THIS backdrop and THIS moment, eight chapters in, to ask? And inventory the crowd's answers in verse 28: what do John-raised, Elijah, and "one of the prophets" have in common, and what is missing from all of them?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The district was famous for its shrines, a lineup of rival lords, and against that backdrop Jesus poses the question of his identity: choose your king. The timing: only now, after the loaves, the sea, the crumbs, the opened ears, is there enough evidence on the table for the question to be fair. The crowd's answers are all compliments and all evasions: each one makes Jesus a great RETURNING figure, a rerun of something Israel already had categories for. Notice what every option shares: dead men come back. It is the largest thing the crowd can imagine, and it is too small. People still do this, "great moral teacher," "prophet," "my personal guru": categories that honor him precisely in order to avoid him.

2. **"But who do YOU say that I am?" Peter: "You are the Christ." After seven weeks of silenced demons and deflected titles, a human being finally says a true title out loud. Now the strange part: Jesus' response in verse 30 is neither "yes" nor "well done." What is it, and, given everything your group has theorized about the Secret, why NOW, at the moment of breakthrough?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"He charged them to tell no one about him": the Secret at maximum intensity at the exact moment of maximum truth. And verse 31 is the reason, do not let the group miss that verses 30 and 31 are one thought: he silences the title AND begins teaching the cross, because the title without the cross

is a lie waiting to happen. "Christ" in the streets of first-century Israel meant warrior-king, Roman-exPELLER, throne in Jerusalem; preach that word now and you recruit an army for the wrong war. The title is true and embargoed until its meaning arrives. This is the answer your sealed guesses have been circling, or part of it. And one precision your group needs: check the wording. Peter said "the Christ." He did not say the other title, the one from 1:1 and 1:11, the one the demons kept shouting. In this Gospel, no human being has said it yet. If anyone's guess named Peter at Caesarea Philippi, tell them only this: keep watching.

3. **Verse 31: "the Son of Man MUST suffer many things, and be rejected... and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this PLAINLY." Two words to weigh: "must" and "plainly." DISCOVERY: someone read Isaiah 53:3-5 and 10-12 aloud. Where does the "must" come from, and what has changed about HOW Jesus is speaking?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Must" (*dei*) is the grammar of divine plan: not fate, not bad luck in Jerusalem, but the script of the Scriptures, and Isaiah 53 is the script: despised and REJECTED by men, wounded for our transgressions, an offering for sin, bearing the sin of MANY. The rejection, the death, and the vindication ("he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul") are all there. The cross is not what interrupts the plan; it IS the plan (CCC 601). And "plainly" (*parresia*) marks the change of era: the parables, the riddles, the veiled titles, all of that ends where the cross begins. About suffering, Jesus does not do mystery. Note the detail everyone skips on first reading: "and after three days rise again." He never once predicts the Passion without the Resurrection. The disciples will hear the dying and miss the rising, every single time.

4. **Peter takes him aside and rebukes him, and receives the most shocking sentence Jesus ever speaks to a friend: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men" (8:33). How does the man of the great confession become "Satan" in one paragraph? And now cash last week's cliffhanger: why did Mark put the two-stage healing of the blind man immediately before this scene?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because a Messiah without a cross is, in the light of the fuller temptation accounts, Satan's own proposal: the kingdoms without the obedience, the crown without the thorns, the wilderness temptation resumed, and this time delivered through a loving friend's voice, which is its most dangerous packaging. Peter's theology of glory is not malice; it is affection (Matthew preserves his words: "God forbid, Lord!", 16:22), and that is exactly why it must be named for what it carries. Note the surgical mercy in the rebuke: "Get BEHIND me" is not "get away from me." Behind the Master is the disciple's position; the phrase is nearly identical to "follow me." Peter is not expelled; he is re-positioned, from in front of Jesus, blocking the road to Jerusalem, to behind him, walking it. And the blind man of Bethsaida: first touch, "I see men, but they look like trees, walking"; second touch, clarity. Mark's placement invites us to read it as the parable, and Peter as its meaning. Right title, blurred content: real sight, badly focused. He has had the first touch. The second is coming, and this Gospel will show how much it costs.

5. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. A sharp Protestant friend says: "You Catholics build the papacy on Peter the rock, and in the very same scene Jesus calls him SATAN. Mark, Peter's own Gospel, does not even include the rock saying or the keys; it keeps only the failure. A man this fallible, who will shortly deny Christ three times, cannot be the infallible foundation of**

a church. The papacy is refuted by its own first holder." Build it at full strength, every fact in it is accurate. Then answer. DISCOVERY: someone look up Luke 22:31-32.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Concede the facts cheerfully; they are the Gospel's own. Peter is impulsive, wrong about the cross, and headed for a triple denial, and Mark, preaching Peter's memories, keeps every failure and drops the honors. Now the distinctions the objection collapses. First, infallibility is not IMPECCABILITY: the Catholic claim was never that Peter or his successors are sinless, wise, or brave, but that a specific charism protects the Church's definitive teaching on faith and morals from error (CCC 890-891), a promise about the deposit of faith, not about the man's character. Notice the scene itself makes the distinction: when Peter speaks what "flesh and blood" did not reveal, he is the rock of confession; when he speaks "as men," he is corrected on the spot. The office transmits Christ's truth; it does not upgrade Peter's personality. Second, look up Luke 22:31-32 and watch the grammar: "Satan demanded to have YOU" (plural, all of you) "that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for YOU" (singular, Simon alone) "that YOUR faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." Jesus, knowing the denial in advance, singles Peter out for a protecting prayer and a commission on the far side of failure. The papacy's foundation is not Peter's nerve; it is Christ's prayer. Third, turn the objection around: Mark's brutal honesty about Peter is itself evidence. What institution, inventing its own legitimacy, writes its founder this way? The Gospel of Peter's failures, preached by Peter, preserved by his interpreter, is the papacy's most disarming credential: an office whose first holder's résumé is a warning is an office that never claimed to run on human excellence. The rock was always what grace made of him (St. Leo's point), which is exactly why weak men have never managed to sink it.

6. **Now Jesus turns to the crowd, and to us (8:34-37): "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." In occupied Palestine, "take up your cross" was not a metaphor for inconveniences. What did those words picture, and how does the paradox of verse 35 ("whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it") actually work?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The picture: a condemned man carrying his own execution beam through jeering streets to the place of death, no appeals left, no return trip. Jesus recruits with the worst image his world had. Deny yourself: not skipping dessert, but revoking the self's claim to be the center, treating the old me, St. John Chrysostom says, as a stranger whose demands I no longer recognize. And the paradox is not poetry; it is economics. The life you "save" by self-protection is a leaking asset, you will lose it anyway, to time if nothing else, so clutching it is the one guaranteed losing trade. The life spent for Christ and the Gospel is the only life placed beyond loss. "What does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" is a genuine accounting question, and verse 38 extends the ledger to eternity: what you do with a crucified Messiah now, he will do with you "when he comes in the glory of his Father." The cross is not the fee for discipleship; it is the shape of it, and it is the same road he is walking in front of us. He never sends us anywhere he is not already ahead.

7. **The hard verse (9:1): "there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power." Two thousand years later, how is this not a failed prediction? Be honest, then look at what Mark places immediately after it.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Be honest first: skeptics quote this verse, and pretending it is easy convinces no one. Now read like Mark: the very next sentence is "and after six days," a rare and pointed time-stamp welding 9:1 to the Transfiguration, where exactly "some standing here" (Peter, James, John) see the Son radiant in power before tasting death. That is a longstanding and common reading in the Church, and Mark's own arrangement argues it. And many extend the promise's reach beyond the mountain: the Resurrection, Pentecost, and the kingdom's spread across the empire within that generation, all "with power," all witnessed by men then standing there. What the verse does NOT mean is that Jesus mispredicted the end of the world: he will say plainly in this same Gospel that of that day "no one knows... not even the Son, but only the Father" (13:32), a saying every failed-prediction theory must reckon with. The verse is a promise with a down payment six days out. Come back next week to watch it get paid.

Dig Deeper

The quiet question inside this session: WHY must he suffer, why is "must" the word? Not because the Father delights in pain, and not because God is trapped by a rule bigger than himself. The "must" is the shape love takes in a world like ours: sin is not waved away but borne away, and the Servant of Isaiah 53 carries it willingly, "he makes himself an offering." We named this endpoint back in Session 1 (the beloved Son moving toward the offering of himself, CCC 606, 613), and in two weeks Jesus will state it as his own mission statement in a single sentence that this study is named after. The "must" of Caesarea Philippi is on its way to a definition.

Send (15 minutes)

1. Before anything else: take two minutes of silence and write one sentence, your own answer, tonight, to "Who do you say that I am?" Not the catechism's sentence, yours. (Leaders: invite, do not force, a few to read theirs aloud.)
2. Where are you currently doing what Peter did, following Jesus while quietly editing his plan into one you would have chosen? What would "get behind me," taking the disciple's position instead of the planner's, mean there?

Live It This Week

- Carry your sentence: put your one-line answer to "Who do you say that I am?" somewhere you will see it daily (mirror, phone lock screen), and let it interrogate your week.
- Choose one concrete self-denial for seven days, not for self-improvement, but "for my sake and the gospel's": a comfort surrendered, and the freed time or money given to God or neighbor.
- Pray for the Pope by name this week, the successor of the man who got it right, got it wrong, and was prayed for by Christ himself. If the papacy has ever confused or angered you, pray Luke 22:32 for him.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you are the Christ, and we barely know what we mean when we say it. Take our half-sight and touch it again. Put us behind you, where disciples walk, and teach us the arithmetic of the cross: that everything we lose for you is saved, and everything we clutch is already leaking. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 8:27-9:1

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 8:27-30 (the two questions; the confession; the charge of silence)
- Mark 8:31-32a (first passion prediction, spoken plainly)
- Isaiah 53:3-5, 10-12 (the suffering Servant)
- Psalm 118:22 (the rejected stone, leader background)
- Mark 8:32b-33 (Peter's rebuke; Get behind me, Satan)
- Mark 8:22-26 (the two-stage healing, paid off from last session)
- Deuteronomy 21:23 with Galatians 3:13 (steelman background: the curse borne)
- Luke 22:31-32 (steelman chain: Christ's prayer for Peter)
- Mark 8:34-38 (the terms of discipleship)
- Mark 9:1 (the kingdom come with power)
- Mark 13:32 (leader background for 9:1 honesty)
- CCC 440, 601, 606, 613, 618, 890-891
- Memory verse: Mark 8:34

Session 9

Listen to Him

Mark 9 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the mountain and the valley: on the heights, the Transfiguration, where the Father speaks for the second time in this Gospel and adds a command, "listen to him", and in the valley below, failed disciples, a desperate father's perfect prayer ("I believe; help my unbelief!"), an argument about greatness answered with a child, and warnings about sin and Gehenna that only love could utter.

Catholic Touchstone: The Transfiguration as the down payment on 9:1 and the strengthening for the scandal of the cross (CCC 554-556): for a moment the veil lifts, Law and Prophets stand witness, and the Father commands the one thing disciples on a hard road most need to do: listen to him.

What You Need to Know

"And after six days" (9:2): Mark almost never time-stamps, so when he does, look for the reason. Exodus 24 supplies it: the cloud of glory covered Sinai SIX DAYS, and on the seventh God called Moses, who entered the cloud (Exodus 24:18). Mark is setting a Sinai scene: a high mountain, a select few, a transfigured figure, an overshadowing cloud, a divine voice. But the differences preach louder than the parallels: Moses' face shone with a reflected glory (Exodus 34:29-35), which St. Paul reads as fading (2 Corinthians 3:7-13); Jesus RADIATES his own, "his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them," Peter's homely eyewitness comparison. Moses and Elijah appear, the Law and the Prophets in person, the two who met God on Horeb, whose earthly ends were shrouded in mystery, and they are talking WITH Jesus, the whole Old Testament in conversation with its fulfillment.

Peter's offer to build three booths is lovably wrong twice over: it puts Jesus in a row with Moses and Elijah as one of three greats, and it tries to bottle the moment, camp on the summit, and skip Jerusalem (Mark adds the merciful excuse: "he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid"). The Father's correction is a cloud and a sentence. The cloud "overshadowed" them: the *shekinah*, the glory-cloud that filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35), and the voice speaks the Gospel's second divine declaration: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." Compare 1:11 carefully with the group: at the baptism the voice spoke TO Jesus ("YOU are my beloved Son"); here it speaks TO THE DISCIPLES ("THIS IS my beloved Son"), and it adds the command that answers Peter's babbling: not build, LISTEN. "Listen to him" is loaded language: Deuteronomy 18:15 promised a prophet like Moses, "him you shall heed," and the Father, with Moses standing right there, points the fulfillment at his Son. And when the cloud passes, "they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only": the Law and the Prophets have testified and withdrawn; the Word remains.

The descent (9:9-13) contains a thread-changing sentence: "he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, UNTIL the Son of Man should have risen from the dead." For the first time, the Secret has an expiration date. Every silence command since 1:25 has been open-ended; this one has an "until." The embargo is not permanent policy but Passion-keyed: after the Resurrection, when the cross has defined every title, tell everyone. Let your group feel the click of that piece; it confirms all their best theories. (They kept the matter to themselves, "questioning what the rising from the dead meant", not resurrection in general, which Pharisees believed, but HIS, now, in the middle of history.)

The valley (9:14-29) is the deliberate anti-mountain: while three disciples saw glory, nine could not cast out one spirit, and Jesus descends into an argument, a crowd, and a father at the end of his rope. The dialogue is the treasure: "if you can do anything, have pity on us." Jesus turns the man's "if" around, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes", and the father cries out the prayer the Church has never stopped borrowing: "I believe; help my unbelief!" Faith and its own insufficiency in one breath, offered to the only One who can supply both, and Jesus treats it as enough. Afterward, privately: "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer." (Many manuscripts add "and fasting," and the Church's tradition has warmly kept the pairing; the RSV2CE notes the variant. Either way the point stands: some battles are won only from the knees.)

The rest of the chapter is discipleship in the shadow of the second passion prediction (9:30-32, which they fail to understand "and were afraid to ask"). On the road, *on the way*, they argue about who is the greatest, the Way thread's bitterest irony so far: walking behind a man going to a cross, debating rank. Jesus' answer is a child in the arms, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all", and a startling widening: "he that is not against us is for us" (9:38-41), against John's attempt to shut down an unauthorized exorcist. Then the hard sayings (9:42-50): millstones for those who scandalize little ones, and the fierce hyperbole of hand, foot, and eye, better maimed than in Gehenna. Handle hell with the Church's balance (CCC 1033-1037): the warnings are real and they are Jesus' own, more than anyone else in Scripture, he is the source of this language; hell is not God's cruelty but freedom's last ratification, "definitive self-exclusion from communion with God"; God predestines no one to it; and the very ferocity of the warnings is love's tone of voice, no one screams "fire" in a building they do not care about. Gehenna itself is geography turned theology: the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, site of child sacrifice (Jeremiah 7:31; the Molech connection at 32:35), later a smoldering image of everything God finally refuses.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Exodus 24:15-18.** The cloud covered Sinai six days; on the seventh God called Moses, who entered it (v. 18). Mark's "after six days" is the key that opens the whole scene: a new Sinai, with a greater-than-Moses at its summit.
- **Exodus 34:29-35 and Exodus 40:34-35.** Moses' face shone with a reflected glory and had to be veiled; St. Paul reads that glory as fading (2 Corinthians 3:7-13). The glory-cloud filled the tabernacle so that Moses could not enter. On the mountain, the Son's glory is his own, and the cloud now overshadows disciples who are invited, terrified, into its shade.
- **Deuteronomy 18:15.** "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you... HIM YOU SHALL HEED." With Moses himself standing witness, the Father quotes the promise and points it: listen to HIM.
- **1 Kings 19 and 2 Kings 2 (leader background).** Elijah met God at Horeb and was taken up without ordinary burial; Moses died with God alone as undertaker (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). The two mysterious ends of the two great mediators, both now standing in ordinary conversation with the One their whole lives pointed toward.
- **Jeremiah 7:31 (leader background).** The Valley of Hinnom, where children were burned in sacrifice (the Molech connection at Jeremiah 32:35): the history behind the word Gehenna, and the reason it became Israel's image for what God utterly and finally rejects.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermon 51, on the Transfiguration)

St. Leo teaches that the great purpose of the Transfiguration was to remove the scandal of the cross from the hearts of the disciples: the excellence of his hidden dignity was revealed in advance so that

the humiliation of his freely chosen Passion, so near now, would not shake their faith. The mountain was mercy aimed at Good Friday: they were shown the glory once, so they could survive watching it veiled.

Voices of the Church: St. John Henry Newman (Apologia Pro Vita Sua)

St. John Henry Newman drew the distinction that rescues the father of Mark 9 and half the people in your group: "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt." As his maxim is commonly unpacked: a difficulty is a question the mind is still working; a doubt is a verdict already rendered. The man who cries "I believe; help my unbelief!" is not a doubter but a believer with difficulties, and he brings them to exactly the right place: not to a debate, but to the person of Christ, who counts the prayer as faith and answers it.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew, Homily 58)

On the child set in the midst, St. John Chrysostom observes that Christ did not merely praise children but installed their condition as the entrance requirement of the kingdom: free of the love of rank, innocent of grudges, unimpressed by status, a child simply receives. The disease of "who is the greatest," he preaches, breeds division among Christians, and its one cure is the deliberate choice of the lowest place, after the pattern of the Master who took the lowest place of all.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 554-556:** The Transfiguration gives a foretaste of Christ's glorious coming, strengthens the disciples for the Passion, and shows that the whole Trinity appeared: the Father in the voice, the Son in the man, the Spirit in the shining cloud.
- **CCC 516:** Christ's whole earthly life is revelation of the Father; "listen to him" points the disciple to that living Word.
- **CCC 2610:** Christ's call to bold, faith-filled prayer, "all things are possible to him who believes", which the father's cry answers perfectly.
- **CCC 1033-1037:** Hell: definitive self-exclusion from communion with God, freely chosen; God predestines no one to it; the Church's warnings are a call to responsibility and conversion.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Messianic Secret: THE EXPIRATION DATE (9:9): "tell no one... UNTIL the Son of Man should have risen from the dead." The embargo is officially temporary and Passion-keyed. Let the group catch the "until" themselves; it vindicates seven weeks of their theorizing. Sealed-guess status: the Father has now said "beloved Son" twice, but a voice from heaven is not a human being. The guesses hold.

The Way (*hodos*): DEVELOPING through irony: "What were you discussing on the way?" (9:33-

34), they were ranking themselves, on the road to a cross. The Way is becoming a mirror.

Torn: Dormant, but note privately the bookend forming: heavens torn, voice, "beloved Son" (1:10-11); cloud, voice, "beloved Son" (9:7). One more voice-and-declaration remains in this Gospel, and no cloud will soften it.

The Bread: Dormant this session.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover the Sinai template (six days, cloud, voice) and can contrast borrowed and native glory.
2. Participants can explain "listen to him" via Deuteronomy 18:15 and the shift of address between 1:11 and 9:7.
3. Participants can identify 9:9 as the Secret's expiration date and articulate why the Resurrection is the release condition.
4. Participants adopt "I believe; help my unbelief!" as a usable prayer and can distinguish difficulty from doubt.
5. Participants can present the Church's teaching on hell with both full seriousness and full fidelity: freedom's ratification, warned against by Love himself.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** fold the Elijah discussion (9:11-13) into a leader sentence (John the Baptist was the Elijah-figure, and they did to him what they pleased), and compress question 7 (the outside exorcist) into the greatness discussion. Do not cut the Transfiguration sequence, the father's prayer, or the hell question.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, on the mountain you told us everything discipleship is: This is my beloved Son; listen to him. Quiet every other voice in us tonight, ambition, fear, distraction, and give us the ears you gave the deaf man: opened. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Describe a mountaintop moment in your life, spiritual or otherwise, and what happened when you had to come back down. Did the descent undo it, or seal it?
2. Who in your life do you actually LISTEN to, not just hear, but let their words change your decisions? What earned them that?

Leader bridge: Last week ended with a promise: some standing here will see the kingdom come with power. Mark's very next words are "and after six days." Tonight we climb the mountain where the down payment gets made, and then we walk down into the valley where the rest of us live.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 9:2-13 aloud.

1. "And after six days", Mark almost never gives time-stamps, so this one is a key. **DISCOVERY:** someone read Exodus 24:15-18 aloud. What scene is Mark rebuilding on this mountain, and, comparing Exodus 34:29-35, what is the decisive difference between Moses' shining and Jesus' shining? (Keep 2 Corinthians 3:7-13 in reach.)

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Exodus 24: the glory-cloud covered Sinai SIX DAYS, and on the seventh God called Moses into it (24:18), so Mark's time-stamp tells us we are climbing a new Sinai: high mountain, chosen few, cloud, voice. But the difference is the theology: Moses' face shone with reflected glory and was veiled (Exodus 34); St. Paul reads that glory as fading (2 Corinthians 3:7-13). Jesus is not reflecting anything: "his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them", Peter's wonderfully homely eyewitness detail, whiter than any laundry could manage. The glory is native. It streams from the inside out. For one moment on that mountain, the disciples are seeing not something given TO Jesus but something true OF him, the veil of his ordinary appearance pulled back (CCC 555: the whole Trinity appears, Father in the voice, Son in the man, Spirit in the shining cloud). And Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets in person, the two who met God on Horeb, stand there talking WITH him: the entire Old Testament in conversation with the One it was about.

2. Peter's offer (9:5-6): "let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." Mark kindly adds, "he did not know what to say." What is wrong with the offer, in two different ways? And how does the Father's response, the cloud and the sentence, correct both errors at once? **DISCOVERY:** someone read Deuteronomy 18:15.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Error one: three matching booths puts Jesus in a row with Moses and Elijah, first among peers, one more great man of God. Error two: booths are for staying; Peter wants to bottle the moment and

camp on the summit, which, given last week, is Caesarea Philippi's glory-without-a-cross wish in architectural form. The cloud answers error two: it is the *shekinah*, the tabernacle glory of Exodus 40, and you do not build tents for God; he brings his own. The voice answers error one: "THIS is my beloved Son", not one of three, and when the cloud lifts, Moses and Elijah are gone: "they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only." The witnesses testified and withdrew; the Word remains. And weigh the command, the only imperative God the Father speaks in this entire Gospel: "LISTEN TO HIM." Deuteronomy 18:15 promised a prophet like Moses, "him you shall heed", and the Father, with Moses standing right there as witness, points the ancient promise at his Son. Also mark the change of address from the baptism: at 1:11 the voice spoke TO Jesus ("YOU are my beloved Son"); here it speaks to the DISCIPLES ("THIS IS..."). The first declaration was for the Son; the second is for us. And listening to him, this week of all weeks, means listening to a man who keeps saying he will be killed and rise. Which is exactly what nobody wants to hear.

3. **The descent (9:9-10): "he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, UNTIL the Son of Man should have risen from the dead." Your group has spent eight weeks theorizing about the silence commands. What is brand new in this one, and what does it confirm?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The word UNTIL. Every silence command since 1:25 has been open-ended; this one has an expiration date, and the date is the Resurrection. The Secret is officially temporary and Passion-keyed: the titles and the glory cannot be preached until the cross has defined them, and once the Son of Man has risen, the embargo lifts and the lamp goes on the stand (remember 4:21-22: hidden ONLY in order to be revealed). This confirms the group's best theories and sharpens the plot: something must happen at the cross and the empty tomb that makes the truth finally sayable, safely, correctly, out loud. If your sealed guessers are getting restless, they should be. Note the disciples' response with sympathy: they kept it, "questioning what the rising from the dead meant", not doubting resurrection in general (most Jews expected one, at the end of time) but baffled by HIS, in the middle of history. They have the vocabulary and not yet the grammar.

Read Mark 9:14-29 aloud.

4. **The valley (9:14-29): while three saw glory, nine could not cast out one spirit, and a father is at the end of his rope: "if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." Trace the exchange: what does Jesus do with the man's "if," and what do you make of the prayer that results, "I believe; help my unbelief!"? Be honest about whether you have ever prayed it.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Jesus picks the "if" up and hands it back: "IF you can! All things are possible to him who believes", not a rebuke so much as a re-aiming: the question was never Jesus' capacity but the man's trust, and the man rises to it with the most honest prayer in Scripture: "I believe; help my unbelief!" Faith and its own insufficiency in one breath, both offered to Christ, and, this is the Gospel, JESUS TREATS IT AS ENOUGH. He does not send the man away to firm up his faith and reapply; he heals the boy on the strength of a faith that is asking for help being faith. This prayer is usable equipment for everyone in your group: St. John Henry Newman's distinction is the key, ten thousand DIFFICULTIES do not make one DOUBT; as the maxim is commonly unpacked, a difficulty is a question still being worked, a doubt a verdict already rendered, and the father is a believer with difficulties who brings them to the right address. So can we (CCC 2610). And the private epilogue: "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer", many manuscripts add "and fasting," and

the Church has warmly kept the pairing, because the nine had apparently been attempting by technique what is only given through dependence. Some battles are won exclusively from the knees.

Read Mark 9:30-50 aloud.

5. **Second passion prediction (9:30-32), and then Mark's bitter little scene: "What were you discussing on the way?" Silence, "for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest." Sit in that irony. Then Jesus' answer: last of all, servant of all, and a child placed in the midst. Why a CHILD, in that culture, and what exactly is he installing as the kingdom's measure of greatness?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The irony first: walking behind a man who has just said, again, that he will be delivered up and killed, they are ranking themselves. The Way is becoming a mirror, and nobody likes the reflection; hence the embarrassed silence when he asks. The child: in the ancient world children held low status: loved, but without leverage, achievements, or anything to offer a patron. That is precisely the point. Jesus does not say children are innocent or humble by nature (any parent can testify); he installs the child's POSITION, the one who can only receive, who confers no advantage on you for welcoming him, as the kingdom's unit of greatness: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me." Greatness is measured at the bottom: last of all, servant of all, welcoming those who bring no advantage (an emphasis Luke 14:12-14 makes explicit) (St. John Chrysostom: the itch to be greatest is the mother of nearly every division among Christians, and its cure is the deliberate choice of the lowest place). Note too the widening at 9:38-41: John wants to shut down an exorcist "because he was not following US", not "not following you", and Jesus refuses: "he that is not against us is for us." A Church of servants can afford generosity at its edges; a Church of rivals cannot.

6. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. The hard verses (9:42-48): millstones, severed hands, and "Gehenna, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." A sincere modern friend, maybe a voice inside some of us, says: "I cannot worship a God who tortures people forever. Infinite punishment for finite sins is monstrous; a truly loving God would empty hell, or never have made it." Build that objection at full strength, it is morally serious. Then answer it, honestly, from the Church's actual teaching. And notice first: WHO is the source of the New Testament's hell language?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Honor the objection: it takes love and justice seriously, and it is usually powered by grief for particular people, treat it gently. Now the facts. First, the uncomfortable one: Jesus himself is the New Testament's principal speaker of Gehenna and its severest warnings, the most loving man who ever lived, not medieval imagination. Gehenna was real geography turned theology: the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, where children had been burned in sacrifice (Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35), Israel's permanent image of what God finally and utterly refuses. Second, the Church's actual teaching (CCC 1033-1037), which the objection rarely engages: hell is "definitive SELF-exclusion from communion with God." God sends no one; he predestines no one to it; hell is what remains possible because love, to be love, must be refusable, forever, if the refuser insists. The corrected picture is not a torturer God but a rescuer whose rescue can be declined: the door, as Christian writers have memorably put it, locked from the inside. Third, reread the ferocity of Jesus' warnings in that light: hyperbole about hands and eyes (the Church has never read it as literal surgery) is the

tone of voice love uses about mortal danger, no one screams "fire!" in a building they do not care about. The millstone saying and the amputation sayings say the same thing from two sides: sin is not a lifestyle inefficiency; it can cost you everything, so treat its occasions with wartime seriousness. A God who never warned would be the unloving one. And the final Catholic word is neither presumption nor despair but the two things the Church actually does: she warns with Jesus' own urgency, and she intercedes for the salvation of the whole world, praying in the Fatima petition that all souls be led to heaven, because "God our Savior desires all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4). Hold the warnings and the desire together and you have the Church's whole mind.

Dig Deeper

The chapter ends strangely: "every one will be salted with fire... Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" (9:49-50). A dense saying with several honest readings: salt purifies and preserves; sacrificial offerings were salted (Leviticus 2:13); and fire tests. The drift most commentators hear: the disciple's life will pass through purifying fire one way or another, the chosen fire of self-denial or the unchosen fires of trial, and disciples so seasoned keep their savor and their peace with each other. After a chapter that began with rivalry "on the way," ending on "be at peace with one another" is not an accident.

Send (15 minutes)

1. The Father's one command is "listen to him." What is the loudest competing voice in your life right now, the one you actually obey, and what would a week of deliberately listening to Christ first look like, concretely?
2. Pray the father's prayer right now, silently, over the area of your life where belief runs thinnest: "I believe; help my unbelief." What difficulty (not doubt, difficulty) would you name there, and who could you talk to about it this week?

Live It This Week

- Make "I believe; help my unbelief!" your morning prayer for seven days, especially on the days you least feel like praying it. It was counted as faith once; it still is.
- Listen to him, mechanically: pick one Gospel command you have been treating as optional (forgive him, tell the truth there, rest on Sunday) and obey it this week, as your response to 9:7.
- Take the lowest place once, deliberately and secretly: the worst chore, the last serving, the seat no one wants, and offer it for the person in your life most obsessed with rank (it may be you).

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, you opened the cloud and gave us one command: listen to him. Lord Jesus, we believe; help our unbelief. Holy Spirit, walk us down this mountain into our ordinary valleys with our ears open, our rank surrendered, and our salt intact. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 9

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 9:2-8 (the Transfiguration)
- Exodus 24:15-16 (six days, the cloud on Sinai)
- Exodus 34:29-35 (Moses' veiled, reflected glory; St. Paul reads it as fading, 2 Corinthians 3:7-13)
- Exodus 40:34-35 (the glory-cloud and the tabernacle)
- Deuteronomy 18:15 (the prophet like Moses: him you shall heed)
- Mark 9:9-13 (the Secret's expiration date; the Elijah question)
- Deuteronomy 34:5-6; 2 Kings 2 (the ends of Moses and Elijah, leader background)
- Mark 9:14-29 (the boy; I believe, help my unbelief)
- Mark 9:30-32 (second passion prediction)
- Mark 9:33-41 (greatness; the child; the outside exorcist)
- Mark 9:42-50 (millstone; Gehenna; salted with fire)
- Jeremiah 7:31 (the Valley of Hinnom)
- Leviticus 2:13 (salt of the offering, leader background)
- 1 Timothy 2:4 (God desires all to be saved)
- CCC 516, 554-556, 1033-1037, 2610
- Memory verse: Mark 9:24

Session 10

On the Way

Mark 10 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the discipleship chapter, marriage, children, money, ambition, all reframed on the road to Jerusalem, and then the sentence this entire study is named for: "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). The chapter, and the Way thread, close with blind Bartimaeus rising from BESIDE the way to follow Jesus ON the way.

Catholic Touchstone: Christ the Servant-Redeemer, who "came to give his life as a ransom for many," in fulfillment of the Suffering Servant who makes himself an offering for sin (CCC 601, 605, 608), and the vocation teachings, marriage "from the beginning," the child's receptivity, poverty of heart, that flow from following such a Lord.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 10 is a travel narrative with a syllabus: as Jesus moves through Judea toward Jerusalem, the topics are the exact places where discipleship gets expensive: marriage, children, money, and power. The frame word is "the way" (*hodos*): the chapter happens on the road, the third passion prediction happens "on the way" (10:32), and the chapter's final word on discipleship is a healed blind man following him "on the way" (10:52).

Marriage (10:1-12): the Pharisees' question is a trap, divorce was politically radioactive (it had just cost John the Baptist his head), and the rabbinic schools were split over the grounds. Jesus refuses the casuistry and goes over Moses' head to Moses' own book: "from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female... the two shall become one flesh." Deuteronomy's divorce provision was a CONCESSION "for your hardness of heart," damage control within a fallen situation, never the design. The design is Genesis: one man, one woman, one flesh, for life, "what therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." Two pastoral necessities for you as leader. First, someone in your group is divorced, or is the child of divorce; teach the truth with the tenderness Christ has for the wounded, and be precise: divorced Catholics are NOT excommunicated and are called to full life in the Church; the remarriage question is where the hard teaching bites, and it bites because Jesus taught it with striking clarity, and applied it reciprocally to men and women alike (10:11-12). Second, know what an annulment actually is, because the steelman will raise it: not "Catholic divorce" dissolving a real marriage, but a finding, after examination, that something required for validity, true consent, freedom from impediment, canonical form, was missing FROM THE START, so that the bond never validly formed. The Church's tribunals can be misused, and Christ's standard cannot be annulled; the distinction is real and defensible.

The rich man (10:17-31) is unique in Mark for one verb: "Jesus LOOKING UPON HIM LOVED HIM", the only individual in this Gospel explicitly said to be loved by Jesus, and the only person in the Gospels who is recorded walking away sad from a direct, personal call. Both facts must be held together: the call to sell everything came from love, and love let him refuse. Note the opening exchange honestly, because skeptics use it: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" is not Jesus denying divinity; it is Jesus refusing flattery-on-autopilot and making the man weigh his own word, if you call me good, and only God is good, what exactly are you saying, and will you act like it? The camel and the needle's eye should be left at full absurd strength (resist the medieval legend of a small gate in Jerusalem; there is no ancient evidence for it, and it domesticates the saying): salvation

for the rich, for anyone, is humanly IMPOSSIBLE, "but not with God; for all things are possible with God." Peter's "we have left everything" receives an outrageous promise: a hundredfold now, houses, family, lands, "WITH PERSECUTIONS", the most honest recruitment poster ever printed, and eternal life in the age to come.

James and John (10:35-45): fresh from the third and most detailed passion prediction (mocking, spitting, scourging, killing, rising, 10:33-34), the sons of Zebedee request the thrones flanking Jesus "in your glory." Jesus' answer runs through two images that are about to become literal: the CUP (in the prophets, the cup of God's wrath drunk down, Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15, and, at Gethsemane, the cup he will beg to pass) and the BAPTISM (a submersion into death; recall where this Gospel began). "The cup that I drink you will drink": James is the first apostle martyred (Acts 12:2); John, tradition holds, endures exile and long suffering (Revelation 1:9). But the seats: "to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." Leader's eyes only, and say nothing now: the next time Mark places anyone at Jesus' right and left, it will be at 15:27, "and with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left." The throne is a cross; the glory is Golgotha; the seats were prepared for others. When the group reaches Session 13, let them find it.

Then the summit sentence, 10:42-45. Gentile rulers lord it over; "it shall not be so among you": greatness is service, primacy is slavery to all, and the reason is Christological: "For the Son of Man ALSO came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a RANSOM FOR MANY." Every word is loaded. Ransom (*lytron*): the price that frees slaves and captives, his life, deliberately given, as the liberating payment. "For many" (*anti pollon*): straight out of Isaiah 53 ("he bore the sin of MANY... make MANY to be accounted righteous"), and it will return, note it now, keep it for later, in an upper room over a cup: "poured out for MANY" (14:24). ("Many" is Isaiah's Hebrew idiom for the countless multitude, not a restriction; the Church confesses he died for all, CCC 605.) One honest theological note: to WHOM is the ransom paid? The Fathers wondered, and some early theories (a payment owed to the devil) the Church declined to follow; St. Gregory Nazianzen famously rejected the devil-payment idea outright and warned against crude pictures of the Father demanding blood, the mystery is that the Son's self-offering in love is received by the Father and destroys our captivity, without God owing Satan anything or delighting in suffering as such. The Church has defined the FACT of redemption through Christ's sacrificial death, not a single mechanism; teach the fact with awe and hold the theories with humility.

Bartimaeus (10:46-52) is the chapter's and the section's finale, and Mark has built him a doorway. He sits "BESIDE the way" (*para ten hodon*), blind, begging, and he shouts the boldest public title yet: "Jesus, SON OF DAVID, have mercy on me!", the first uncensored messianic title in the Gospel, and notice: Jesus does not silence him. Jerusalem is days away; the embargo is dissolving on schedule. The crowd tries to hush him (the world will always shush beggars); he shouts louder. Jesus stops, and asks him the EXACT question he asked James and John: "What do you want me to do for you?", same question, opposite answer: they asked for thrones; he asks for sight. He throws off his cloak (a beggar's cloak plausibly served as coat, coin-catcher, and bed; this is Peter's nets all over again), receives his sight, "and FOLLOWED HIM ON THE WAY (*en te hodo*)." From beside the way to on the way: the Way thread resolves in one verse, and the healed-blindness frame that opened at Bethsaida (8:22) closes: the whole central section of Mark is bracketed by two blind men, because the whole section was about learning to see. The next verse is Palm Sunday.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.** "Male and female he created them"; "the two shall become one flesh." Jesus' marriage teaching is not innovation but restoration: he appeals past the concession to the creation, and grace makes the original design livable again.
- **Isaiah 53:10-12.** "He makes himself an offering for sin... he bore the sin of MANY, and made intercession for the transgressors." The vocabulary of 10:45, life given, ransom, "for many", is the Servant Song cashing out as a mission statement.

- **Isaiah 51:17 and Jeremiah 25:15.** "The cup of his wrath": the cup James and John blithely volunteer for is the prophets' image of judgment absorbed. He will drink it so that the "many" do not.
- **Exodus 6:6 and Deuteronomy 7:8 (leader background).** The LORD as Israel's *go'el*, the kinsman-REDEEMER who ransoms his people from slavery "with an outstretched arm." "Ransom" is Exodus language: 10:45 announces a new and greater Exodus, purchased at a new and greater cost.
- **2 Samuel 7:12-16 (leader background).** The promise to David of an everlasting son and throne: "Son of David," Bartimaeus' shout, is the covenant title, now spoken in the open as the true David approaches his city.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Gregory Nazianzen (Oration 45, the Second Oration on Easter)

Asking to whom the ransom of Christ's blood was paid, St. Gregory dismantles the crude answers: not to the devil, God forbid that the robber should receive God himself as payment; and if we say to the Father, we must not imagine a Father who delighted in his Son's blood or demanded it as a hostage-price. Rather, the Father accepts the Son's offering not because he required it but because man had to be sanctified by the humanity of God, and the sacrifice, given in love and received in love, honors the whole economy of our rescue. The fact of redemption is certain; the mystery of its inner workings, Gregory teaches us to adore rather than to flatten.

Voices of the Church: St. John Paul II (Theology of the Body)

St. John Paul II built his great catechesis on marriage precisely on this scene: when the Pharisees ask about divorce, Christ twice appeals to "the beginning," and the Pope takes the Lord's method as his own, returning to Genesis to recover what the human body and the spousal union meant before hardness of heart. Marriage as God designed it, total, faithful, fruitful self-gift, is not an ideal for the few but the original truth of the human person, wounded by sin and made newly livable by grace. Christ, appealing to the beginning, does not lay a burden; he restores an inheritance.

Voices of the Church: St. Clement of Alexandria (Who Is the Rich Man That Is Saved?)

In the Church's first extended homily on the rich young man, St. Clement teaches that the Lord's command strikes not at possessions as such but at the passion of possession: wealth is an instrument, damning when it owns the soul, sanctifying when the soul, detached, wields it for the needy. What must be renounced without remainder is the ATTACHMENT, the anxious, hoarding heart; and the Gospel scene itself shows that for some, like this man, the call includes the goods. The rich man went away sorrowful because he was asked for the one thing he had never considered selling: his grip.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 605:** Jesus affirms he came "to give his life as a ransom for many"; "many" is not restrictive: the Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all without exception.

- **CCC 601, 608:** The Suffering Servant background of the redemption: the Lamb who bears the sin of the world, foretold and freely self-offered.
- **CCC 1614-1615:** Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman as the Creator willed it from the beginning; the Mosaic permission was a concession to hardness of heart; following Christ, in the grace of the sacrament, makes the indissoluble bond livable.
- **CCC 2382 (with 1629):** The Church's fidelity to the indissolubility of marriage, and what a declaration of nullity actually is: a judgment that no valid marriage existed, for defect of consent, impediment, or want of canonical form, not the dissolution of a valid bond.
- **CCC 2544-2547:** Jesus enjoins on his disciples poverty of heart: preference for him over everything and everyone, and abandonment to providence, the beatitude of the poor in spirit.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Way (*hodos*): RESOLVES. Beside the way (10:46), blind and begging; on the way (10:52), seeing and following. Let the group find both phrases themselves; the payoff is theirs. The section framed by two blind men (8:22 and 10:46) closes tonight.

The Ransom: The TITLE VERSE lands (10:45). Make sure every participant says it aloud. Do not yet connect "for many" to 14:24; plant the phrase and let the upper room detonate it in Session 13.

The Messianic Secret: DISSOLVING on schedule: Bartimaeus shouts "Son of David" publicly, twice, and Jesus does not silence him, first title allowed to stand in the open. The embargo's expiration (9:9) is beginning. Sealed-guess status: "Son of David" is not "Son of God." Still no human confession. One more leader note: 10:37's "right and left in your glory" has an answer at 15:27. Say nothing.

The Bread / Torn: Dormant; the cup at 10:38-39 whispers toward both Gethsemane and the chalice. Next session: Jerusalem.

Session Goals

1. Participants can present the marriage teaching as restoration of "the beginning," with pastoral precision about divorce and the true meaning of nullity.
2. Participants can narrate the rich man scene holding both verbs: loved, and went away; and can state Clement's distinction between possessions and possession.
3. Participants can unpack 10:45 word by word: Son of Man, serve, ransom, for many, and locate it in Isaiah 53.
4. Participants catch the Bartimaeus resolution of the Way thread and the two-blind-men frame around 8:22-10:52.
5. Each participant answers Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you?", in writing, honestly.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress the children scene (10:13-16) into the leader bridge before the rich man, and fold the third passion prediction into the James and John question. Do not cut the marriage steelman, 10:45, or Bartimaeus.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, Son of David, you stopped on the road for a beggar the whole crowd was shushing. Stop for us tonight. Ask us what you asked him, and give us the honesty to answer, and the freedom to throw off the cloak and follow you on the way. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What is the most valuable thing you have ever given away or walked away from, and what made it possible?
2. If Jesus stood in front of you tonight and asked, with complete sincerity, "What do you want me to do for you?", what is the first answer that rises, before you edit it?

Leader bridge: Hold on to your unedited answer; that exact question gets asked twice tonight, and the two answers it receives could not be more different. Tonight is also the night this study's title comes due: one sentence, spoken on the road, that the Church has never finished unpacking.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 10:1-16 aloud.

1. **The divorce question (10:1-12) is a trap: it had just cost John the Baptist his head, and the rabbis were split on the grounds. Watch Jesus' method: they cite Deuteronomy; he goes further back. DISCOVERY: someone read Genesis 1:27, someone Genesis 2:24. What is Jesus doing by appealing to "the beginning of creation," and what does that make of the Mosaic divorce provision?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He refuses to play grounds-for-divorce casuistry and relocates the whole question: not "what may we get away with?" but "what was marriage MADE to be?" The Mosaic certificate was a CONCESSION, "for your hardness of heart", damage control inside a fallen situation, the way a field hospital is not the design for the human body. The design is Genesis: male and female, leaving and cleaving, one flesh, joined by GOD ("what therefore GOD has joined together"); a ratified and consummated sacramental marriage no power on earth can dissolve (the Church's law knows the Pauline and Petrine privileges only for certain non-sacramental bonds). St. John Paul II built his entire Theology of the Body on Jesus' method here: go back to the beginning, recover what the body and the union meant before sin, and receive it again as grace makes it livable. Two things to say plainly and gently. This teaching has wounded people in this room, or their parents, and Christ's hard sayings come with Christ's heart: divorced Catholics are not excommunicated, are not second-class, and are called to full life in the Church. And Jesus is doing something FOR women here that moderns miss: in a world where a man could dismiss a wife to poverty over burnt dinner (one rabbinic school allowed nearly that), "let not man put asunder" is protection, not oppression.

2. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. A thoughtful Protestant friend says: "Even Jesus allowed an exception, Matthew 19:9, 'except for unchastity.' The Catholic ban on remarriage after divorce is stricter than Christ. And your annulment system is just Catholic divorce with paperwork: tribunals dissolving marriages while pretending not to." Build it at full strength, it cites a real verse and a real scandal. Then answer from Mark, Paul, and the actual definition of nullity. DISCOVERY: someone look up 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Take the verse seriously: Matthew does record an exception clause, and any honest answer must account for it. Now assemble the whole witness. Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18 record the teaching with NO exception, absolute, and Mark is likely writing for Rome, where an escape clause would have been very useful to include if it existed. Paul, writing earlier than any Gospel, gives it as a command "not I but the Lord": "the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled)... and the husband should not divorce his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11), Paul knows separation happens and knows of no right to remarry. So what is Matthew's *porneia* clause? One important Catholic reading, with ancient roots: not adultery in general (Matthew has a standard word for that, *moicheia*, and does not use it here) but unlawful unions, incestuous marriages within the forbidden degrees of Leviticus 18, a usage many hear in the apostolic decree of Acts 15:20. Such "marriages" were never valid, so dismissing them breaks no bond, which is precisely the Catholic category of NULLITY. And that answers the second charge: an annulment is not the dissolution of a real marriage but a finding, after evidence, that something required for validity was absent FROM THE START: a defect of consent (freedom, knowledge, intention of permanence, fidelity, openness to children, capacity), an impediment, or a failure of canonical form. Can tribunals be abused? Yes, and reform is fair game. But the distinction is not a dodge; it is the difference between a death certificate and a finding that the patient never existed. The deep point for your Protestant friend: the dominant witness of the early Church, which could read Matthew perfectly well, upheld indissolubility and excluded remarriage while a spouse lived, because they took Jesus at his hardest word, and took his grace as sufficient to live it.

3. **The children (10:13-16): the disciples run crowd control; Jesus is "indignant," a strong word Mark rarely uses of him. "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." What can a child do that adults find nearly impossible, and what does that make of every spirituality of earning?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A child can RECEIVE. No portfolio, no leverage, no repayment plan, a child takes a gift as a gift, which adults find almost unbearable; we want to deserve, contribute, keep the ledger balanced. But the kingdom is not a wage (remember the voice at the baptism: "beloved" BEFORE any accomplishment). "Receive... like a child" makes receptivity the entrance condition and quietly indicts every spirituality of earning. The Church has always heard a whisper here toward her practice of baptizing infants: if the kingdom must be received as sheer gift by those who can contribute nothing, then the one who can contribute nothing is not the exception but the model. And Jesus does not merely tolerate the children; "he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them", the Gospel's tenderest sentence, spoken with Jerusalem days away.

Read Mark 10:17-31 aloud.

4. **The rich man (10:17-31). Three moments to weigh: the opening exchange ("Why do you call me good?"), the verb Mark gives us in verse 21, and the ending Mark refuses to soften. Walk all three, and keep the camel at full size.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The opening: not a denial of divinity (this Gospel opened by calling him Son of God and has shown him doing what only God does); it is Jesus refusing drive-by flattery and making the man weigh his

own word: if only God is good, and you call me good, what are you saying, and will you live like you mean it? The verb: "Jesus looking upon him LOVED him", the only individual in Mark explicitly loved, and the command to sell everything comes FROM that love: the Lord's eyes found the one possession that possessed him. St. Clement of Alexandria's classic reading: the target is not property but the PASSION of property, the grip; wealth is an instrument, damning when it owns you, sanctifying when, detached, you wield it for the needy. And the Gospel scene itself shows that for this man the call included the goods: the Lord's eyes found the one thing he had never considered letting go. The ending: "his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful", the only person in the Gospels recorded refusing a direct personal call, and love let him go. Leave the camel enormous: there was no "needle gate" in Jerusalem (a medieval legend with no ancient evidence); the saying means what the disciples heard it mean, "Then who can be saved?", and Jesus confirms: for men IMPOSSIBLE, "but not with God; for all things are possible with God." Salvation, for the rich and for everyone, is a miracle, not an achievement. And Peter's "we have left everything" gets the most honest promise in Scripture: a hundredfold now, in the Church's vast family of houses and mothers and brothers, "WITH PERSECUTIONS", and in the age to come eternal life.

Read Mark 10:32-45 aloud.

5. **Straight after the third and most brutal passion prediction (10:33-34: mocked, spit upon, scourged, killed), James and John ask for the thrones at his right and left "in your glory." Jesus answers with a CUP and a BAPTISM. DISCOVERY: someone read Isaiah 51:17. What are they actually volunteering for, and what does Jesus promise and withhold?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The tone-deafness is almost comic: he says "scourged and killed," they hear "glory" and call dibs on the cabinet seats. The cup, in the prophets, is the cup of God's wrath, judgment poured out and drunk down (Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15); the baptism is a submersion, and not in water. He is asking: can you go under what I am about to go under? Their breezy "we are able" is answered with terrible tenderness: "the cup that I drink you WILL drink", and history keeps the receipt: James is the first apostle martyred (Acts 12:2); John, tradition holds, endures exile and long suffering (Revelation 1:9). But the seats "at my right hand or at my left" are "not mine to grant; it is for those for whom it has been prepared." Leave that clause hanging in the room, unexplained. Tell the group only: Mark answers it, later, with an exactness that will take your breath, and when you find it, you will understand what his "glory" is. (Say no more.)

6. **The title verse (10:42-45). The ten are indignant (mostly that James and John asked first), and Jesus defines greatness once and for all, sealing it with the sentence this study is named for. Read verse 45 aloud together, twice. Then take it apart word by word: "came" ... "not to be served but to serve" ... "to give his life" ... "a ransom" ... "for many." DISCOVERY: someone read Isaiah 53:10-12.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Came": mission and purpose in one syllable, which the Church's full confession hears as the pre-existent Son's deliberate descent. "Not to be served but to serve": the Son of Man of Daniel 7, the figure whom all peoples SERVE, announces he has inverted his own throne room; and the verb is *diakoneo*, the word we watched Simon's mother-in-law live out in chapter 1. "To give his life": no one takes it; it is a gift, active, deliberate. "A ransom" (*lytron*): the price that buys slaves and captives free, Exodus vocabulary, the LORD who redeemed Israel from Egypt now pays a new

Exodus's price in person, and the price is himself. "FOR MANY": an unmistakable echo of Isaiah 53, "he bore the sin of many... make many to be accounted righteous", the Servant's mission statement adopted as his own; and "many," far from restricting, is heard by the Church against Isaiah's horizon of the multitude: he died for ALL without exception (CCC 605). One reverent honesty, because sharp minds will ask: ransom paid to WHOM? The Fathers wrestled; St. Gregory Nazianzen rejected the crude answers, not to the devil (God owes the robber nothing) and not to a Father who craved blood, and taught the Church to adore the fact without flattening the mechanism: the Son's self-offering, given in love and received in love, breaks our captivity. The FACT is defined; the diagrams are theology's homework. Last: file the phrase "for many" somewhere safe. You will hear it again in this Gospel, over a cup, and when you do, everything will connect.

Read Mark 10:46-52 aloud.

7. **Bartimaeus. Mark gives you locations like a stage director: where is he sitting in verse 46, and where is he by verse 52? What title does he shout, and, given eight chapters of silencing, what is astonishing about Jesus' non-response? And why is the question of verse 51 the perfect final exam for this whole section?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Verse 46: "beside the way" (*para ten hodon*), blind, begging, parked on the shoulder of the road of discipleship. Verse 52: "and followed him ON THE WAY" (*en te hodo*). The Way thread your group has been tracking since "prepare the way of the Lord" resolves in one verse: the Gospel's picture of conversion is a man moving from beside the road to on it. The title: "Jesus, SON OF DAVID, have mercy on me!", the first unrebutted public human acclamation of a messianic title in this Gospel, shouted twice, and Jesus does NOT silence him: Jerusalem is days away, the cross is close enough to define everything, and the embargo announced at 9:9 is dissolving on schedule. The crowd shushes the beggar; Jesus stops the procession for him, and asks the exact question he asked James and John an hour earlier: "What do you want me to do for you?" Same question, opposite answers: they asked for thrones; the blind man asks to SEE, and only one of those requests gets granted on the spot. Note the cloak: a beggar's cloak plausibly served as coat, coin-catcher, and bed in one, and he THROWS IT OFF to come to Jesus, the rich man's test passed by the poorest man in the chapter. And step back for the frame: this central section opened with a blind man healed in two stages (8:22) and closes with a blind man healed in one word, because the section in between was the disciples', and our, slow schooling in sight. Bartimaeus sees instantly what the Twelve have squinted at for three chapters: who Jesus is (Son of David), what to ask him for (mercy, sight), and what to do next (follow, on the way). The next verse of this Gospel is Palm Sunday. The beggar walks into Jerusalem behind him.

Dig Deeper

"What do you want me to do for you?" is one of the most important questions in your spiritual life, and Jesus asks it sincerely. But notice that the chapter trains the answer: James and John show that you can ask Christ for the wrong thing (self-promotion dressed as devotion); Bartimaeus shows the right shape of asking: mercy first, sight second, and then the gift immediately spent on following. Before Send, have everyone write their unedited Win-question answer next to Bartimaeus' answer and compare honestly. There is no shame in finding some James and John in it; there is only an invitation to edit toward the beggar.

Send (15 minutes)

1. The rich man was LOVED and still walked away; Bartimaeus threw off his cloak and followed. Name your cloak or your "great possessions", the one grip Jesus' eyes keep finding, and what would it cost, this month, to open the hand?
2. Answer him in writing, one sentence, edited by tonight: "What do you want me to do for you?" Then pray it, exactly as written, every day this week.

Live It This Week

- Memorize 10:45 cold, the study's title verse, and pray it once each morning: "Lord, you came to serve and to ransom; make my day look like your sentence."
- Serve invisibly once this week, in a way that cannot be repaid or noticed: greatness by his metric, not the Gentiles'.
- Pray for one marriage by name daily this week, your own, your parents', or a struggling one you know, asking Christ who restored "the beginning" to restore it.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, Son of David, Son of Man, you came not to be served but to serve, and to give your life as a ransom for many. We were the many. Teach us the beggar's prayer, mercy, then sight, then the road, and make us servants in a world of throne-seekers. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 10

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 10:1-12 (marriage and divorce; the beginning)
- Genesis 1:27; 2:24 (the creation design)
- Matthew 19:9; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 (steelman chain)
- Leviticus 18 with Acts 15:20 (porneia as unlawful unions, leader background)
- Mark 10:13-16 (the children; receiving the kingdom)
- Mark 10:17-31 (the rich man; the camel; the hundredfold)
- Mark 10:32-34 (third passion prediction)
- Mark 10:35-40 (James and John; the cup and the baptism)
- Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15 (the cup of wrath)
- Acts 12:2 (James' martyrdom, leader background)
- Mark 10:41-45 (greatness as service; the ransom for many)
- Isaiah 53:10-12 (the Servant's offering for many)
- Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 7:8 (the LORD who ransoms, leader background)
- Mark 10:46-52 (Bartimaeus; beside the way to on the way)
- 2 Samuel 7:12-16 (Son of David, leader background)
- Mark 15:27 (leader background ONLY: the right and the left)
- CCC 601, 605, 608, 1614-1615, 2382, 2544-2547
- Memory verse: Mark 10:45

Session 11

The Lord Comes to His Temple

Mark 11-12 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the Son of David entering his city on a colt the prophets ordered in advance, and then the shock: the Lord comes to his temple (Malachi 3:1) not to endorse it but to judge it, with a withered fig tree wrapped around the cleansing of the temple. Through five Jerusalem debates and one widow's two coins, they will watch Jesus out-argue every party in Israel, tell salvation history as a parable with himself as the murdered son, and define the whole law as love.

Catholic Touchstone: Christ and the Temple (CCC 583-586): Jesus reveres his Father's house, purges it in prophetic zeal, foretells its end, and identifies his own body as the true and definitive Temple, and the Church, built on the rejected-stone-become-cornerstone, is his Body and a temple of living stones (CCC 756, 797).

What You Need to Know

The entry (11:1-11) is staged prophecy. Jesus, who has walked everywhere in this Gospel, suddenly requisitions a colt "on which no one has ever sat", because Zechariah 9:9 had ordered the vehicle five centuries early: the king who comes to Zion triumphant yet humble, riding on the colt of an ass. The crowd answers with Psalm 118, the great pilgrim Hallel: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!", and adds their own gloss, "Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!" They are half right, which is the most dangerous amount: right that the Son of David is entering his city, wrong about what his enthronement will look like. Watch Mark's deliberate anticlimax in 11:11: Jesus enters the temple, "looked round at everything," and leaves. It is an inspection. Malachi's messenger text that opened this Gospel (Mark 1:2 draws on Malachi 3:1 within its composite citation) now delivers its sequel: "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple" (3:1), and "who can endure the day of his coming?" (3:2). Tomorrow answers that question.

Then Mark's most famous sandwich (11:12-25): fig tree cursed, temple cleansed, fig tree found withered. The intercalation is the interpretation: the fig tree is Israel's stock prophetic symbol (Jeremiah 8:13, Hosea 9:10, Micah 7:1, prophets looking for figs and finding none), and this tree is all LEAVES, impressive foliage, no fruit, exactly what Jesus finds in the temple: bustling religious activity, no justice, no prayer, no welcome for the nations. Handle 11:13's "it was not the season for figs" honestly: Jesus is not petulant about horticulture; the clause tells us this is an acted parable, not a snack run, a prophet's sign-act in the tradition of Jeremiah smashing pots. In the temple itself, note WHERE the market, by the common reconstruction, sat: the Court of the Gentiles, the only space the nations could pray in, colonized by commerce. Hence Jesus' composite citation, and Mark alone preserves the crucial phrase: "My house shall be called a house of prayer FOR ALL THE NATIONS" (Isaiah 56:7), fused with Jeremiah 7:11, "a den of robbers." A den is not where robbers rob; it is where they HIDE afterward, feeling safe, which is Jeremiah's temple-sermon point: worship as a hideout from repentance. The Gospel that fed four thousand Gentiles is now indicting the institution that crowded them out.

The five Jerusalem debates (11:27-12:37) are Jesus running the gauntlet of every party: chief priests on authority (answered with the counter-question about John), Pharisees and Herodians on taxes, Sadducees on resurrection, a scribe on the greatest commandment, and finally Jesus' own riddle from Psalm 110. Two need special preparation. The wicked tenants (12:1-12) opens by quoting Isaiah 5's vineyard song, so every hearer knows the vineyard is Israel, and then Jesus tells salvation history from inside: servants sent and beaten (the prophets),

and last of all "a BELOVED SON", the Father's word from the baptism and the mountain, placed by Jesus into his own parable, sent, killed, and thrown out of the vineyard. This is the clearest public self-revelation in the Gospel, days before the cross, and his enemies "perceived that he had told the parable against them." The capstone is Psalm 118 again, the entry crowd's own psalm: "the very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner." And note the ending they miss: the vineyard is not burned; it is "given to others." Judgment on the tenants, not the vineyard: new stewards, not no vineyard, hold that for the steelman.

The Sadducees (12:18-27) deny resurrection and bring their seven-brothers reductio. Jesus' answer has two edges: "you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God", the age to come is not this life extended (no marriage there, for none die there; the risen are "like angels" in that respect, not disembodied, but deathless), and then he beats them on their own privileged ground, the Torah of Moses: at the bush, God says "I AM the God of Abraham," present tense, centuries after Abraham's death. "He is not God of the dead, but of the living": to be covenanted to the living God is to be held in a bond death cannot dissolve. The greatest commandment exchange (12:28-34) joins the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) to Leviticus 19:18, and the friendly scribe, the only warm exchange in Jerusalem, earns the Gospel's most tantalizing verdict: "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Finally the widow (12:41-44), placed immediately after Jesus condemns scribes "who devour widows' houses": two copper coins, "her whole living", in Greek *holon ton bion*, her whole livelihood, all she had to live on. Days before Jesus gives his, Mark shows us a widow giving hers, the last person in the Gospel Jesus praises, and a living icon of 10:45.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Zechariah 9:9.** Zion's king comes to her triumphant and victorious, yet humble, riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass. The entry is choreographed fulfillment: a king, but the prophet's kind, not the war-horse kind.
- **Psalm 118:22-26.** The pilgrim psalm frames the whole section: the crowd sings verses 25-26 at the gates ("Hosanna... Blessed is he who comes"), and Jesus answers with verse 22 at the parable's climax: the rejected stone become cornerstone. Same psalm, entry and rejection, twelve verses apart.
- **Malachi 3:1-2.** "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple," and "who can endure the day of his coming?" Mark 1:2 drew on this text within its composite citation; chapters 11-12 are its sequel arriving. This Gospel keeps its promises.
- **Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.** The temple's vocation ("a house of prayer for all the nations") and its corruption ("a den of robbers", a hideout of false security). Jesus' one-sentence homily fuses vocation and indictment.
- **Isaiah 5:1-7 and Jeremiah 8:13.** The vineyard that is Israel, and the fig tree bearing no fruit: the two prophetic images Jesus deploys in Jerusalem week, both landing on the same charge: cultivated privilege, absent fruit.
- **Exodus 3:6 with Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18.** The present-tense God of the patriarchs (the resurrection argument), and the two love-commands Jesus welds into the whole law's summary.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (On Christian Teaching)

St. Augustine teaches that the whole of Scripture, every law, prophecy, and narrative, exists to build up the double love Jesus names in Mark 12: love of God for his own sake, and love of neighbor for God's sake. Whoever thinks he understands the Scriptures in a way that does not build up this twofold love, Augustine says, has not yet understood them; and whoever draws from them the love of God and neighbor has grasped their end, even where his exegesis stumbles. The two

commandments are not two items on the law's list; they are the list's reason for existing.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (preaching on almsgiving and the widow's offering)

St. John Chrysostom, the great preacher of almsgiving, draws from the widow the divine arithmetic: God weighs the gift not by what leaves the hand but by what remains behind it, and by the heart that lets it go. The rich gave out of surplus and kept their security; she gave two coins and kept nothing, and so gave more than all of them together. No one, Chrysostom insists, is too poor to be magnificent before God; the currency of heaven is trust, and she paid in full.

Voices of the Church: St. Bede the Venerable (Commentary on Mark, on the wicked tenants)

St. Bede reads the parable as the Lord's own summary of salvation history: the vineyard planted with every care, the servants, the prophets, sent generation after generation and abused, and at last the beloved Son, killed outside the vineyard as Christ suffered outside the gate. The mercy hidden in the judgment stands out in his reading: the vineyard is not destroyed but entrusted to other tenants, for God does not abandon his planting, he changes its stewards; and the rejected stone becomes, as the psalm promises, the head of the corner of a new building.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 583-586:** Jesus and the Temple: his reverence for it, his prophetic gesture of cleansing, his foretelling of its destruction, and his identification of his own body as the definitive Temple.
- **CCC 755:** The Church as the Lord's vineyard and cultivated field: the vineyard imagery of Isaiah 5 and Mark 12 carried forward into the Church's own self-understanding.
- **CCC 2055:** When asked which commandment is greatest, Jesus joins love of God and love of neighbor: the Decalogue and the whole law hang on this twofold yet single commandment of love.
- **CCC 993:** Jesus reveals resurrection faith from the Torah itself: God is "not God of the dead, but of the living," and to belong to him is to live.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Messianic Secret: NEARLY GONE: "Son of David" rang uncensored through the gates, and the tenants parable is public self-identification as the beloved Son, thinly veiled and clearly perceived (12:12). What remains embargoed is the explicit title, and it now has a price tag: every step more public is a step closer to 3:6's plot maturing. Sealed guesses: still no human confession of "Son of God"; the parable comes aching close (Jesus SAYS "beloved son" of himself in story-form). Two sessions remain. Say nothing.

The Beloved Son: The baptism and mountain declarations (1:11, 9:7) surface in Jesus' own mouth (12:6), placed inside a parable about being murdered. The bookend structure is assembling itself;

one declaration remains.

The Bread / Torn / The Way: Dormant. The widow's "whole life" (*holon ton bion*) quietly prefigures 10:45's ransom-life given; next session, the Bread thread resolves. Prepare yourself; it is the summit of the study's Eucharistic arc.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover Zechariah 9:9, Psalm 118, and Malachi 3:1 and can narrate the entry as staged fulfillment plus inspection.
2. Participants can read the fig/temple sandwich: leaves without fruit, and Isaiah 56:7's "for all the nations" as the cleansing's heart.
3. Participants can retell the tenants parable as Jesus' own salvation history and locate the rejected stone in Psalm 118.
4. Participants can answer the "Jesus versus organized religion" objection from the texts themselves.
5. Participants can state the resurrection argument from Exodus 3:6 and the twofold love command as the law's summary.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** fold the authority question (11:27-33) into the leader bridge, and compress the Caesar question (12:13-17) to its image-and-inscription point in one leader paragraph. Do not cut the sandwich, the tenants, or the widow.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, Son of David, you entered your city humble and riding on a colt, and you came to your temple looking for fruit. Enter this room the same way tonight. Find in us a house of prayer, and where you find only leaves, prune us gently and make us bear. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Tell us about a homecoming, yours or someone else's, that did not go the way anyone expected.
2. What is the difference between looking impressive and being fruitful? Where have you seen an organization, or a person, confuse the two?

Leader bridge: Bartimaeus is still following as the road crests the Mount of Olives, and Jerusalem spreads out below. Tonight the Son of David enters his city, and the Lord comes to his temple, and this Gospel, which opened by quoting half of Malachi 3:1, is about to deliver the other half. Watch for a fig tree, and remember Mark's sandwiches.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 11:1-11 aloud.

1. **The entry.** Jesus, who has walked everywhere for ten chapters, suddenly commandeers a colt with elaborate advance instructions. **DISCOVERY:** someone read Zechariah 9:9 aloud, and someone else Psalm 118:25-26. What is Jesus doing by arranging his own entrance this way, and what is the crowd getting right and wrong? Then read verse 11 slowly: what is strange about how the day ends, and what does Malachi 3:1 (someone look it up, and recall Mark 1:2) tell us is actually happening?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He is staging fulfillment: Zechariah ordered the vehicle (the king who comes humble, riding the colt), so the colt IS the claim: kingship, but the prophet's kind, demilitarized, humble, no war-horse. The crowd answers from the pilgrim playbook, Psalm 118: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!", and adds "Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming": right identification (Son of David, exactly what Bartimaeus shouted), wrong expectation (a restored political throne by Friday). Half right is the dangerous amount; by week's end Jerusalem's voice will find other words. And verse 11 is a masterpiece of menace in a minor key: he enters the temple, "looked round at EVERYTHING," and leaves. No sermon, no miracle, an inspection. Mark 1:2 drew on Malachi 3:1 within its composite citation (the messenger preparing the way); here comes the sequel (Malachi 3:1-2): "the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to HIS TEMPLE," and "who can endure the day of his coming? For he is like a refiner's fire." The owner has walked the property. He will return in the morning with the refiner's fire lit.

Read Mark 11:12-25 aloud.

2. **The sandwich: fig tree cursed (12-14), temple cleansed (15-19), fig tree withered (20-21).** First the honest problem: verse 13 says "it was not the season for figs", so is Jesus being unfair to a tree? **DISCOVERY:** someone read Jeremiah 8:13 (or Micah 7:1). What is the fig tree in the prophets, and what does the sandwich structure tell us the cursing MEANS?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The "not the season" clause is Mark tipping us off that this is not about breakfast: no one curses trees for obeying the calendar, so the act must be a SIGN, a prophet's acted parable, like Jeremiah smashing pots. And in the prophets, the fig tree is Israel: "when I would gather them, says the LORD, there are no figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered" (Jeremiah 8:13); Micah's "my soul desires the first-ripe fig" and finds none. This tree's crime is advertising: full leaves, which on a fig tree normally promise early fruit, and nothing behind them. Then Mark wraps the tree around the temple, and each interprets the other: the temple is the fig tree, magnificent foliage (courts, sacrifices, commerce, crowds) and no fruit (no justice, no prayer, no room for the nations). The withering the disciples find next morning is the acted verdict on what Jesus found inside. Mark's sandwiches never waste bread.

3. **Inside the temple: Jesus drives out sellers and money-changers and preaches a one-sentence homily fusing two texts. DISCOVERY: half read Isaiah 56:6-7, half read Jeremiah 7:8-11. Note: Mark alone keeps Isaiah's final phrase. WHERE in the temple was this market, what is a "den" of robbers actually for, and what precisely is Jesus' charge?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Location is the indictment: the market, by the common reconstruction, sat in the Court of the Gentiles, the ONLY space where the nations could come and pray, paved over with livestock and currency exchange. Hence the phrase Mark alone preserves: "a house of prayer FOR ALL THE NATIONS", Isaiah's vision of foreigners streaming to a temple with room for them, and this Gospel has spent three chapters feeding, healing, and opening the ears of those very nations. Their one courtyard had become a food court. And Jeremiah's "den of robbers" is more precise than it sounds: a den is not where robbers rob; it is where they HIDE afterward, feeling safe. Jeremiah's temple sermon (read verses 8-10) indicts people who oppress, then stand in the temple saying "We are delivered!", worship as a hideout from repentance. So the charge is double: crowding out the nations, and using sacred activity as moral cover. Note what the charge is NOT: it is not that the temple is worthless, "MY house," Jesus says, quoting his Father's own possessive. You only cleanse what you love. Hold that thought; it is the hinge of the steelman.

Read Mark 11:27-12:12 aloud.

4. **The tenants (12:1-12). DISCOVERY: someone read Isaiah 5:1-2, 7 first, so we hear the parable the way the chief priests heard it. Now walk Jesus' version: who are the servants, who is the "beloved son" (where have we heard that exact phrase in this Gospel?), what do the tenants do, and, the detail most people miss, what happens to the VINEYARD at the end? Finish with the stone (Psalm 118:22): what building project is being announced?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Isaiah 5 hands every hearer the decoder ring: the vineyard is Israel, planted and cherished. Jesus then tells the rest of the story from inside it: servants sent and beaten, wounded, killed, the prophets' resume in one sentence, and "he had still one other, a BELOVED SON," the Father's own words at the baptism (1:11) and the mountain (9:7), now placed by Jesus into his own parable, sent last, killed, thrown out. Days before the cross, this is the clearest public self-identification in the Gospel: he is telling his murderers their plot, inside a story, to their faces, and "they perceived that he had told the parable against them." Now the missed detail: the vineyard is NOT destroyed. "He

will destroy the tenants, and GIVE THE VINEYARD TO OTHERS." Judgment falls on stewards, not on the planting: new tenants, not no vineyard, God does not abandon what he planted; he re-staffs it (St. Bede's point). And the capstone: "the very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner", Psalm 118, the SAME psalm the crowds sang at the gates. The rejected son is not the end of the building project; he is its cornerstone. Something is going to be built ON the rejection. Remember that when we stand in front of a torn curtain.

5. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. A friend, maybe half the people your age, says: "This is exactly why I am spiritual but not religious. Jesus' fiercest anger was for organized religion: he trashed the temple market, cursed its fig tree, predicted the whole thing's demolition, and it was the religious institution that killed him. Jesus came to free us FROM institutional religion, priests, buildings, hierarchies, all of it." Build it at full strength; every fact in it is in tonight's text. Then answer, from tonight's text.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Concede the facts: the anger is real, the corruption was real, and institutions, including Catholic ones, in every century, really do the things Jesus condemned; anyone wounded by churchmen deserves that admission before any rebuttal. Now read the same texts again. First: Jesus cleanses the temple in zeal for its VOCATION, "MY house shall be called a house of prayer", even as he announces judgment on its corrupted order (13:2); the vocation he loves does not die with the building, it passes to the temple of his body and the living stones. His quarrel is with the temple's corruption of its vocation (prayer, for all nations), not with the vocation. Second: the tenants parable ends with the vineyard GIVEN TO OTHERS, new stewards, not no vineyard, and Jesus has spent this whole Gospel constructing the replacement staff: twelve men, deliberately echoing twelve tribes, with delegated authority (3:14-15, 6:7), one of them surnamed Rock. A man dismantling institutional religion does not spend three years building an institution. Third: the rejected stone becomes "the head of the corner", cornerstones exist for BUILDINGS, and the apostles took the hint: Christ the living stone, and we "like living stones... built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:4-5, written by the fisherman who watched this scene). Fourth, gently: "spiritual but not religious" usually means keeping the parts of God that never inconvenience us, but a Lord who cannot challenge you through anything outside your own head is suspiciously identical to yourself. Jesus' actual program is more demanding than either option: religion CLEANSED, not religion cancelled, a temple of living stones, with room for all the nations, bearing fruit or facing the gardener. The remedy for bad religion, as this week of all weeks shows, was never no religion; it was Good Friday.

Read Mark 12:13-34 aloud.

6. **Two duels, one delight. First, the Sadducees' seven-brothers puzzle (12:18-27): what TWO mistakes does Jesus name, and how does his proof from Exodus 3:6, "I AM the God of Abraham", establish resurrection from the present tense of a verb? Then the friendly scribe (12:28-34): what does Jesus join together, and what do you make of his verdict, "You are not far from the kingdom of God"?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The two mistakes: "you know neither the SCRIPTURES nor the POWER of God." Power: the age to come is not this life photocopied, no marrying there because no dying there; resurrection is transformation, not resumption. Scriptures: he meets the Sadducees inside the Torah, the ground

they privileged above all others, and detonates a tense: at the bush, centuries after the patriarchs died, God says "I AM the God of Abraham", present tense. "He is not God of the dead, but of the living": God does not introduce himself by his dead friends; to be covenanted to the living God is to be held in a grip death cannot pry open (CCC 993). The greatest-commandment exchange then welds Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (the Shema: love God with all heart, soul, mind, strength) to Leviticus 19:18 (love neighbor as self), two texts from opposite ends of the Torah, fused into one answer: the whole law is love, vertically and horizontally, St. Augustine's twofold love that all Scripture exists to build. And the verdict on the warm-hearted scribe is exquisitely calibrated: "not far", closer than every opponent tonight, and not yet in, because the kingdom is not an opinion to hold but a King to follow, and the King is standing in front of him. The kindest sentence in Jerusalem week is also its most suspenseful; Mark never tells us what the scribe did next. Perhaps because the sentence is addressed to some of us.

7. **The widow (12:41-44), read WITH the verses just before her (12:38-40, scribes "who devour widows' houses"). Jesus watches the treasury, sees rich gifts and two copper coins, and calls the disciples over for a mathematics lesson. What is the divine arithmetic, what is the dark edge Mark's placement gives the scene, and why might Mark want THIS to be the last thing we see before the end-times discourse and the Passion?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The arithmetic: God counts not what leaves the hand but what remains behind it (St. John Chrysostom). The rich gave "out of their abundance", real gifts, zero risk; she gave two lepta, the smallest coins that existed, "her whole living," and Mark's Greek is weighty: *holon ton bion*, her whole livelihood, everything she had to live on, which the Church has always heard as the icon of a whole life given. The dark edge: Jesus has just condemned scribes who "devour widows' houses", so many readers hear grief in the scene as well: a system consuming the last coins of the poorest, more fig leaves. But Jesus does not pity her as a victim only; he canonizes her as the Gospel's final exhibit of discipleship: while rich men donate, a widow entrusts her entire life to God, which is precisely the definition of faith this Gospel has been building since the fishermen dropped their nets. And the placement is the sermon: she is the last person Jesus praises before his Passion, because she is his icon: in a few days, another gift will be given whole, "not to be served but to serve, and to give his LIFE." The widow is 10:45 with two coins. Mark shows us the small rehearsal so we will recognize the performance.

Dig Deeper

The Caesar coin (12:13-17), briefly, since its one line built a civilization's worth of debate: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." The trap was perfect (say pay: lose the crowd; say don't: sedition), and the escape is more than clever: whose IMAGE and inscription is on the coin? Caesar's; give the stamped metal back to its mint. But the question detonates upward: what bears GOD'S image and inscription? You do (Genesis 1:27). Caesar may have the coin; he may not have the person. Taxes, yes (see Romans 13:7); the soul, never, and every state that has demanded it since has heard the Church answer with this verse and, when necessary, with martyrs. And Psalm 110 (12:35-37): Jesus' own riddle, how is the Christ merely David's son if David calls him "my Lord"? , plants the question his enemies cannot answer and the next chapters will: the Son of David is also David's Lord. File it; it returns under oath in Session 13.

Send (15 minutes)

1. If Jesus walked into the temple of your life tonight and "looked round at everything", your schedule, your accounts, your browser, your relationships, where would he find leaves without fruit, and what table would he flip first?
2. The widow gave from her poverty; the rich gave from their surplus. In your giving, of money, time, and attention, which are you, honestly? What would one act of widow-style trust look like this month?

Live It This Week

- Do a temple inspection with him: fifteen minutes, walk mentally through your "courts" (time, money, media, relationships) and ask him what is crowding out the space where prayer, and other people, should live. Flip one table.
- Give one widow's gift this week: an amount of money or time that actually costs you security, not surplus, and tell no one.
- Pray the Shema each morning as Jesus quoted it (Mark 12:29-30), slowly, and let "all" (heart, soul, mind, strength) audit the day ahead.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you came to your temple looking for fruit and found leaves; come to us anyway. Make us a house of prayer with room for every nation, build us on the stone the builders rejected, and teach us the widow's arithmetic: that nothing given whole to you is ever lost. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"[A]nd you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 11-12

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 11:1-11 (the entry; the inspection)
- Zechariah 9:9 (the king on a colt)
- Psalm 118:22-26 (Hosanna; the rejected stone)
- Malachi 3:1 (the Lord comes to his temple; cf. Mark 1:2)
- Mark 11:12-25 (fig tree / temple / fig tree sandwich)
- Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1 (the fig tree as Israel)
- Isaiah 56:6-7 (a house of prayer for all the nations)
- Jeremiah 7:8-11 (the den of robbers)
- Mark 11:27-33 (the authority question)
- Mark 12:1-12 (the wicked tenants)
- Isaiah 5:1-7 (the vineyard song)
- 1 Peter 2:4-7 (living stones, steelman chain)
- Mark 12:13-17 (Caesar's coin; Genesis 1:27; Romans 13:7 leader background)
- Mark 12:18-27 (the Sadducees; Exodus 3:6)
- Mark 12:28-34 (the greatest commandment; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18)
- Mark 12:35-37 (Psalm 110: David's son and Lord)
- Mark 12:38-44 (the scribes; the widow's whole living)
- CCC 583-586, 755, 756, 797, 993, 2055
- Memory verse: Mark 12:30

Session 12

The Olivet Discourse

Mark 13 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover Jesus' longest discourse in Mark, spoken on the Mount of Olives facing the temple whose doom he has just sealed, and learn to read it with Catholic eyes: two horizons woven together (the destruction of Jerusalem within a generation, and the coming of the Son of Man at the end), prophetic imagery decoded from the prophets themselves, and a fourfold command, "Watch", that the very next chapter will test and the disciples will fail.

Catholic Touchstone: Christian hope without timelines (CCC 668-677, 1040): the Lord will return in glory; the hour is known to no one; the Church's posture is neither panic nor prediction but watchful fidelity, sacraments, duty, and love, until he comes.

What You Need to Know

The setting frames everything: a disciple gawks at the temple's megaliths ("what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!", and Herod's stones were genuinely staggering), and Jesus answers with demolition: "There will not be left here one stone upon another." Then, seated on the Mount of Olives OPPOSITE THE TEMPLE (Zechariah 14:4 places the LORD's feet on that mountain on the day of judgment; Ezekiel watched the glory depart eastward to "the mountain on the east side of the city" (11:23), traditionally identified with Olivet), the inner four ask the question that generates the discourse: "WHEN will this be, and what will be the SIGN?" Read their question carefully: they are asking about the TEMPLE'S destruction. Jesus' answer telescopes two horizons, the fall of Jerusalem (which happened in A.D. 70, within that generation, exactly as promised) and the final coming of the Son of Man, because the first is a sacrament of the second: the end of the temple-world was, for Israel, the end of A world, and it previews the end of THE world. Much confusion, and most end-times hysteria, comes from flattening the two horizons into one.

The discourse's first movement (13:5-13) is explicitly ANTI-panic. Wars, earthquakes, famines, false messiahs: "do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet"; what follows is only "the beginning" of the birth-pangs (*odinon*). Every generation that has read its own headlines as the countdown has ignored the plain instruction of the text. What Jesus does promise his disciples is not escape but persecution, councils, beatings, governors, "and the gospel must first be preached to all nations", with one jewel embedded: "say whatever is given you in that hour... it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (13:11), a promise the martyrs' trial transcripts have been cashing for twenty centuries.

The "desolating sacrilege" (13:14, from Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11, where it first meant Antiochus Epiphanes profaning the altar in 167 B.C.) is flagged by Mark himself as a riddle: "let the reader understand." Its first-horizon referents cluster around the temple's last years: threats and profanations culminating in Roman standards in the sanctuary; the Church has not defined a single identification, so hold candidates loosely. What matters is the instruction attached: FLEE, do not fight, do not loot the house on the way out, and early Christian memory (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5) records the Jerusalem church withdrawing to Pella before the war, a tradition long associated with obedience to this very warning. Then the cosmic verses (13:24-25): sun darkened, moon failing, stars falling. Resist the planetarium reading long enough to check the prophets: Isaiah 13:10 uses precisely this language for the fall of BABYLON to the Medes; Isaiah 34:4 for the fall of EDOM; Ezekiel

32:7 for EGYPT. It is Israel's stock idiom for the collapse of a world-order, the lights going out on a kingdom, which fits the fall of the temple-world perfectly, while remaining open, at the second horizon, to a literal consummation. Let the group discover Isaiah 13 themselves; it is the interpretive key that disarms a century of chart-making.

"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (13:26) is Daniel 7:13 again, and note Daniel's geometry: the son of man comes WITH CLOUDS TO the Ancient of Days, to be enthroned and vindicated, a coronation scene as much as a descent. At the first horizon, the temple's fall IS the public vindication of the Son of Man's words (this claim returns at his trial, 14:62, before men who lived to see it); at the second horizon, it is the Parousia the Creed confesses: "he will come again in glory." Both/and, not either/or. Then the two sayings that demand honest handling. "This generation will not pass away before all these things take place" (13:30): at the first horizon, as the Church's interpreters have long read it, this holds: Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70, roughly forty years out, within that generation, with the "all these things" of the temple-question fulfilled to the stone. And 13:32: "of that DAY or that HOUR no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, NOR THE SON, but only the Father." Do not flinch: the eternal Son, in his divine nature, knows all things; but the Word truly assumed a human mind, and in the economy of his mission, the revelation of that day was not part of what he came to disclose (CCC 472-474: his human knowledge, expressed within the historical conditions of his existence, was full in everything pertaining to his mission; and what he admitted to not knowing in this area, the Catechism says with care, he elsewhere declared himself not sent to reveal). The verse that embarrasses lazy Christology is also the verse that forbids the entire date-setting industry: if the Son, as man and messenger, does not announce the day, every Christian who sells you a date is claiming to out-know the incarnate Lord.

The discourse ends with a doorkeeper parable and a fourfold command: "Watch... for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the EVENING, or at MIDNIGHT, or at COCKCROW, or in the MORNING" (13:35). Leader's eyes only, and this is one of Mark's finest constructions: those four watches of the night map onto the next two chapters with uncanny fit. The Master's "coming" happens in the EVENING of the Last Supper (14:17), the deep night of Gethsemane where he comes three times and finds them SLEEPING (14:37-41, the very failure this parable warns against, in the very vocabulary; Mark gives no clock, but the pattern is hard to miss), the COCKCROW of Peter's denial (14:72), and the MORNING of the verdict (15:1). On this reading, Mark has laced the end-times discourse into the Passion narrative: the judgment of the world and the testing of disciples begin, not at history's far edge, but tomorrow night. Say nothing to the group; Session 13 will let them find it, and it lands like thunder.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Daniel 7:13-14 with Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11.** The Son of Man coming with clouds to the Ancient of Days (enthronement and vindication), and the "abomination that makes desolate" (first fulfilled under Antiochus, prototype for the temple's final profanations). Mark 13 is Daniel's book preached from a hillside.
- **Isaiah 13:9-10 (with Isaiah 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7).** Sun darkened, moon withholding light, stars falling: the prophets' standard imagery for the fall of Babylon, Edom, and Egypt, political catastrophe in cosmic dress. The single most liberating discovery of the session: Scripture teaches you how to read Scripture's own idiom.
- **Zechariah 14:4 and Ezekiel 11:23.** The Mount of Olives as the stage of the LORD's judgment, and the mountain to which the glory withdrew when it abandoned the first temple. Jesus seated there, "opposite the temple," is location as verdict.
- **Genesis 7:21-23 (leader background, for parallels).** In the flood, the ones "taken" were the wicked, swept away, and the ones LEFT were Noah's saved family: worth remembering when rapture readings invert the math.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Letter to Hesychius, on the end of the world)

Asked by a bishop whether the signs showed the end was near, St. Augustine wrote the Church's permanent answer: the Lord willed the day to remain hidden so that every day would be watched. Among those who ask, one says the Lord comes soon, another says not soon, and a third confesses he does not know: Augustine sides with the third, and adds that the true lover of Christ's appearing is not the one who insists it is near, nor the one who insists it is far, but the one who waits for it, whether near or far, with sincere faith, firm hope, and burning love. Calculation is not watchfulness; love is.

Voices of the Church: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Catechetical Lecture 15, on the Second Coming)

Instructing candidates for Baptism, St. Cyril devoted an entire lecture to the article "he shall come again in glory": we preach not one coming only but a second, far more glorious than the first, the first veiled in a manger, the second attended by angels and unmistakable to every eye. Therefore, he tells the catechumens, be sober: do not chase those who whisper that the Christ has appeared in secret here or there, for his return will need no rumor; and let the certainty of judgment make you diligent, not the guessing of its date.

Voices of the Church: Pope St. Gregory the Great (Homilies on the Gospels, Homily 1)

Preaching on the Lord's end-times discourse to a Rome battered by plague and invasion, St. Gregory refused both despair and denial: the world, he said, shows us its own aging, and its tribulations are messengers sent ahead, not to terrify the friends of God but to loosen their grip on what is passing. If the world we love is ending, love instead what does not end; the ruins themselves preach, telling us not to set our hearts on what even stones cannot hold up.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 668-674:** Christ already reigns; we await the glorious return; the Parousia could be at any moment, though "delayed" in ways not ours to know, and is preceded by Israel's recognition of the Messiah in God's time.
- **CCC 675-677:** Before Christ's coming the Church must pass through a final trial: a persecution and a deception (the "mystery of iniquity"), through which the Church follows her Lord in his death and Resurrection, not by triumphalist timeline but by fidelity.
- **CCC 472-474:** The Son's true human knowledge: limited in its historical mode, full in everything pertaining to his mission; what he says of not knowing the day belongs to what he came, and did not come, to reveal.
- **CCC 1040 and 2612:** The hour of judgment is known to the Father alone; therefore the disciple's posture is vigilance in prayer: "Watch."

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Four Watches (leader-only gold): 13:35 names EVENING, MIDNIGHT, COCKCROW, MORNING. Mark 14-15 will run through those same four names: supper in the evening (14:17), the sleeping watchmen of Gethsemane in the deep night (14:37-41; Mark gives no hour here, but it is the very failure this parable warns against, in the very vocabulary), Peter's cockcrow (14:72), the verdict "as soon as it was morning" (15:1). Do NOT reveal this; next session's discussion is built to let the group discover it, and it is one of the study's great payoffs.

The Messianic Secret: Quiet this session (private teaching to four disciples), but 13:26's "Son of Man coming in clouds" is loading the claim Jesus will make UNDER OATH at his trial (14:62), where the same Daniel 7 cloud imagery returns fused with Psalm 110's right hand of Power. The next time this verse is spoken, it will cost him his life.

The Bread: Next session. RESOLUTION. Prepare your own heart before you prepare the lesson; leaders should not first meet the upper room in front of their group.

Torn / Sealed guesses: Dormant and intact, respectively. Remind participants (without explanation) to BRING THEIR SEALED GUESSES to the final two sessions.

Session Goals

1. Participants can state the two-horizons structure and why flattening it produces end-times hysteria.
2. Participants discover Isaiah 13 and can decode prophetic cosmic imagery from Scripture's own usage.
3. Participants can handle 13:30 and 13:32 honestly: the generation that saw the temple fall, and the Son's human knowledge (CCC 474).
4. Participants can answer the rapture-timeline reading charitably and biblically, and articulate the Catholic posture: watchfulness without prediction.
5. Each participant translates "Watch" into one concrete practice of readiness (sacramental, moral, or practical).

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress the persecution verses (13:9-13) into the leader bridge, keeping only the 13:11 promise, and fold the fig-tree lesson (13:28-29) into the "this generation" question. Do not cut the Isaiah 13 discovery, the 13:32 honesty, or the steelman.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you told us the truth: heaven and earth will pass away, but your words will not pass away. Teach us tonight to read your words without panic and without slumber, to watch without calculating, and to love your appearing, whether it is near or far. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Have you ever known someone caught up in end-times prediction, or been fascinated yourself? What did it do to their (or your) daily faith?
2. What is the difference between being READY for something and being ANXIOUS about it? Give an example from ordinary life.

Leader bridge: Tonight is Jesus' longest speech in Mark, given on a hillside facing the temple he has just judged, answering the question "when?" It has launched a thousand bad paperback prophecies. We are going to read it the way the Church always has, with Daniel and Isaiah open beside it, and it turns out to be a discourse against panic. Keep one word in your pocket all night: WATCH. And bring your sealed guesses next week; you will want them handy for the last two sessions.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 13:1-13 aloud.

1. **The setup (13:1-4): a disciple marvels at the stones; Jesus predicts total demolition; and four disciples ask "WHEN will this be, and what will be the sign?" First: what exactly are they asking about? Second: Jesus is sitting "on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple", DISCOVERY: someone glance at Zechariah 14:4 and Ezekiel 11:23. Why is the seating chart theology?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

They are asking about the TEMPLE, when the stones come down, and keeping that in view untangles half the chapter: Jesus' answer addresses their question (Jerusalem's fall, which came in A.D. 70, within that generation) while opening through it onto the farther horizon of his final coming, because the end of the temple-world was a true preview of the end of the world. Two horizons, woven; flatten them into one and you get every prophecy-chart panic of the last two centuries. The seating: Zechariah puts the LORD's feet "on the Mount of Olives" on the day he comes in judgment, and Ezekiel watched the glory of God abandon the corrupt first temple and stop on "the mountain on the east side," traditionally identified with this mountain. Jesus seated on Olives, facing the temple, is a tableau any prophet-literate Jew could read: the glory is outside the building again, and judgment is in session. Herod's stones were colossal (some surviving ones weigh hundreds of tons); the disciple's awe was reasonable. So was the demolition: in A.D. 70 Rome destroyed it utterly.

2. **Verses 5-13: wars, earthquakes, famines, false christs, and Jesus' repeated instruction about them. Find his actual commands in verses 5, 7, 9, 11. Is this passage written to make disciples anxious or calm? And what one promise in verse 11 has twenty centuries of receipts?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The commands: "Take heed that no one leads you astray"; "do not be ALARMED"; "take heed to yourselves"; "do not be anxious beforehand." The discourse is explicitly ANTI-panic: wars and disasters "must take place, but the end is not yet"; they are but the beginning of the birth-pangs (*odinon*). Every generation that reads its own headlines as the countdown is disobeying the plain text it quotes. What Jesus promises is not escape but witness under pressure, councils, beatings, governors and kings, families divided, "and the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (an absurdity when spoken to four fishermen, whose worldwide reach since is itself a sign, its completion known to God). The jewel: "say whatever is given you in that hour... it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit." The martyrs' trial transcripts, from Perpetua to the twentieth century, read like that verse's receipts: unlettered people answering proconsuls with sentences the Church still quotes. Birth-pangs is the controlling image: real pain, ordered toward delivery, not doom.

Read Mark 13:14-27 aloud.

3. **The cosmic verses (13:24-25): sun darkened, moon failing, stars falling from heaven. Before anyone books the planetarium: DISCOVERY, someone read Isaiah 13:1, 9-10 aloud, noting verse 1's title, and someone else skim Isaiah 34:4-5. What historical events is Isaiah describing in this exact language, and what does that teach us about reading Mark 13, at both horizons?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Isaiah 13 is titled "the oracle concerning BABYLON," and its darkened sun and unlit moon describe Babylon's fall to the Medes, a sixth-century-B.C. geopolitical event. Isaiah 34 uses the dissolving heavens for the fall of EDOM; Ezekiel 32 does it for EGYPT. This is Israel's stock prophetic idiom for the collapse of a world-order: when a kingdom falls, its sky falls, the lights go out on a cosmos. So at the first horizon, Mark 13:24-25 is exactly the right language for A.D. 70: for Israel, the temple WAS the meeting-point of heaven and earth, and its destruction was the end of a world, sun-goes-dark language fully earned. And the idiom remains open at the second horizon to the real consummation, when the Lord "will come again in glory" and creation itself is transformed. The liberation in this discovery: Scripture teaches you to read Scripture. The prophets' imagery has a grammar, and once you learn it from Isaiah, a century of newspaper-exegesis (every eclipse and comet a countdown) simply dissolves. God's word is not a code to crack; it is a language to learn, and the Old Testament is the immersion course.

4. **Verse 26: "they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." DISCOVERY: read Daniel 7:13-14 once more, carefully, and note the DIRECTION of travel: the son of man comes with clouds TO whom? What two things can this verse mean, and, file this away, where will Jesus sound this same Daniel 7 claim next, and to whom?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

In Daniel, the one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven TO THE ANCIENT OF DAYS, into the throne room, to be presented, enthroned, and given everlasting dominion: it is a coronation and vindication scene at least as much as a descent. So the verse carries both horizons: at the first, the fall of the temple within that generation was the public, historical vindication of the Son of Man, the visible proof, to the very men who condemned him, that the authority had passed to the One they rejected; at the second, it is the Parousia of the Creed, "he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead," visible, unmistakable, needing no rumor (St. Cyril's point: a coming that must be whispered about is not his). And the filing instruction: the next time this Daniel 7 claim sounds in Mark, it will be from Jesus at his trial, to the high priest, "you WILL SEE the Son of Man..."

coming with the clouds of heaven" (14:62), and it will be the sentence that gets him condemned. The claim of Daniel 7, spoken from the dock. Next session you will hear it land.

Read Mark 13:28-37 aloud.

5. **The two honesty verses. First, 13:30: "this generation will not pass away before all these things take place", two thousand years later, how is that not simply false? Second, 13:32: "of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, NOR THE SON, but only the Father", how can the Son of God not know something? Take them one at a time, with full honesty.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

13:30, read at the first horizon as the Church's interpreters have long read it, holds: the temple fell in A.D. 70, about forty years after these words, within that generation, and "all these things" answers the question the disciples actually asked in verse 4, the temple's destruction and its signs. The verse is an embarrassment only to readings that ignore what question was on the table. 13:32 deserves reverent precision rather than a dodge. The eternal Son, in his divine nature, knows all that the Father knows; but the Word truly became flesh, with a real human mind, and the Catechism walks the line the Councils drew (CCC 472-474): his human knowledge, though united to divine wisdom and full in everything pertaining to his mission, expressed itself in a human mode, and and, in the Catechism's careful phrase, what he admitted to not knowing in this area, he elsewhere declared himself not sent to reveal (CCC 474). He is honest enough to say so, which is itself evidence of the Gospel's authenticity (no church inventing sayings gives its Lord this one). And notice what the verse does: it forbids, forever, the entire date-setting industry. If the incarnate Son does not announce the day, then every pamphleteer with a countdown is claiming to out-know Christ. St. Augustine's three answerers settle it: not "soon," not "late," but "I do not know, and I am watching with love." That is the only orthodox eschatology calendar.

6. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. A devout Evangelical friend, raised on Left Behind, says: "Prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes. The rapture could happen any second, believers vanish, the seven-year tribulation begins, the Antichrist signs the treaty, you can map the timeline from Scripture, and Mark 13 is part of the map. Catholics ignore prophecy; we take it seriously." Build it at full strength, its instincts (Scripture matters, Christ really returns, readiness is urgent) are genuinely admirable. Then answer, from tonight's text and the Church's reading.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Honor what is right first, and mean it: your friend believes Christ is truly coming back, takes the Bible with total seriousness, and lives with an urgency many Catholics have lost; on those three points, the Church says amen (CCC 673: the Parousia could be at any moment). Now the differences, gently. First, the secret rapture, believers vanishing years before Christ's visible return, appears nowhere in this discourse or in the ancient Church; it is a system assembled in the 1830s (Darby) and popularized by a study Bible and a novel series. The classic proof-text ("one is taken, one is left," Matthew's parallel) sits right after the flood comparison, where the flood **TOOK** the wicked and **LEFT** Noah's family standing, a context that mounts a serious argument that "left behind" is the good outcome. Second, 1 Thessalonians 4's "caught up to meet the Lord in the air" uses a Greek word (*apantesis*) familiar from a city's delegation going out to meet an arriving dignitary and escort him in, a resonance many scholars hear here: it suggests the Church meeting Christ at his one, visible, glorious return, not an evacuation seven years early. Third, tonight's text itself resists the

timeline habit twice: "the end is NOT yet" (against reading headlines as countdowns) and "of that day or that hour NO ONE knows" (against the whole genre; every failed date from the Millerites to the paperback era is this verse's casualty list). The Catholic alternative is not ignoring prophecy but reading it the way we practiced tonight, two horizons, prophetic idiom, Daniel and Isaiah as the decoder, and it yields the Creed's calm sentence: he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. One coming. Unmistakable. Date unknown. Readiness, therefore, is not chart-making but the doorkeeper's job: found at your post, lamps lit, sins confessed, love in motion. Your friend wants to be ready; the Church's answer is that the ready-room has always been open, and it looks like a confessional and an altar.

7. **The ending (13:33-37): a man on a journey, servants each with work, a doorkeeper commanded to watch, "for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the EVENING, or at MIDNIGHT, or at COCKCROW, or in the MORNING." Jesus' last word of public teaching in this Gospel: "And what I say to you I say to all: WATCH." What does watching consist of, given the parable, and what is it explicitly NOT? (And underline those four times of night in your Bibles. Just underline them. Trust me.)**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Watching, per the parable, is neither stargazing nor calculating: the servants are not posted at telescopes; "each has his WORK," and the doorkeeper's vigilance is simply being found at his post, doing his duty, whenever the door opens. Readiness is a way of living, not a body of predictions: sins confessed tonight rather than someday, love not postponed, the day's work done as if the Master might walk in on it, because he might. That is why the Church's eschatology has always smelled of candle wax rather than newsprint: her watching is the vigil lamp by the tabernacle, the Advent wreath, the "we await the blessed hope" spoken at every single Mass between the Our Father and the sign of peace. Note that Jesus universalizes the command, "what I say to you I say to ALL: Watch", his final word of teaching in this Gospel, and note the strange specificity of the schedule: evening, midnight, cockcrow, morning, the four Roman watches of the night. You underlined them? Good. Bring your Bibles, and your sealed guesses, next week. The night those four watches describe begins in the very next verse of this Gospel, and you are going to find out who fell asleep on duty.

Dig Deeper

A pastoral word for anyone this chapter has ever frightened: notice who Jesus says these things TO, and why. Not to enemies as a threat, but to friends, "take heed, I have told you all things BEFOREHAND" (13:23), the way you brief people you love before a hard journey, so that nothing that happens can make them feel abandoned. The discourse's deepest promise is not information but presence: the Spirit speaking in you before governors (13:11), the elect gathered from the four winds (13:27), his words outlasting heaven and earth (13:31). The end of all things, for the disciple, is not a horror movie; it is the Master of the house finally home. The only tragedy the chapter fears is being found asleep, and even that, as next week will show with terrible tenderness, is a failure his mercy knows how to meet.

Send (15 minutes)

1. If the Master of the house came tonight, in the evening, or at midnight, what in your life would you most want to have already put right? What is stopping you from putting it right this week?

2. Watchfulness is duty done, not dates guessed. What is the "work" the Master has actually assigned you in this season, and where have you drifted from your post?

Live It This Week

- Get watch-ready the Catholic way: go to Confession this week, not someday, and receive Communion in a state of grace, so that any hour the door opens is a good hour.
- At every Mass this week, catch the embolism after the Our Father, "as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ", and pray it like you mean it: the Church watching out loud.
- Retire one anxiety: pick the headline or fear you have been treating as a countdown, write Mark 13:31 over it ("my words will not pass away"), and hand it to the only One who knows the day.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, you alone know the day and the hour, and you have told us everything we need beforehand. Keep us at our posts with lamps lit: sins confessed, work done, love in motion. And when the Master of the house comes, in the evening or at midnight, at cockcrow or in the morning, let him find us watching. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (Mark 13:31, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 13

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 13:1-4 (the stones; the question; the Mount of Olives)
- Zechariah 14:4; Ezekiel 11:23 (the mountain of judgment; the departed glory)
- Mark 13:5-13 (birth-pangs; do not be alarmed; the Spirit speaking)
- Mark 13:14-23 (the desolating sacrilege; flee)
- Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 (the abomination of desolation)
- Mark 13:24-27 (cosmic imagery; the Son of Man in clouds)
- Isaiah 13:1, 9-10; Isaiah 34:4-5; Ezekiel 32:7 (prophetic idiom for fallen kingdoms)
- Daniel 7:13-14 (coming with clouds TO the Ancient of Days)
- Mark 13:28-32 (the fig tree; this generation; nor the Son)
- Mark 13:33-37 (the doorkeeper; the four watches; Watch)
- Genesis 7:21-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; Matthew 24:37-41 (steelman chain, leader background)
- Mark 14:17, 37-41, 72; 15:1 (leader-only: the four watches enacted, for next session)
- CCC 472-474, 668-677, 1040, 2612
- Memory verse: Mark 13:31

Session 13

The Cup and the Cross

Mark 14:1-15:15 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the night the whole Gospel has been leading: an anointing for burial, the Bread of Life resolving in an upper room ("Take; this is my body... poured out for MANY"), the cup of Gethsemane, the Secret ending from Jesus' own mouth before the high priest, at the cost of his life, Peter's cockcrow, and the morning verdict. And they will find, hidden in plain sight, that the whole night runs on the four watches Jesus named in last week's final parable.

Catholic Touchstone: The institution of the Most Holy Eucharist (CCC 1339-1340) and Gethsemane's "not what I will, but what you will" (CCC 612): the sacrifice of the new covenant, offered first under signs at the table, then in agony in the garden, then in blood on the cross, one single offering.

What You Need to Know

Bethany first (14:3-9): an unnamed woman breaks an alabaster flask of pure nard, a year's wages, over Jesus' head. The objectors do math ("three hundred denarii... given to the poor"); Jesus does theology: "She has done a beautiful thing... she has anointed my body beforehand for burying." Savor the irony Mark has built for thirteen chapters: "Messiah" and "Christ" mean THE ANOINTED ONE, and in this entire Gospel, the only anointing Jesus ever receives is this one, for burial. A woman with a broken jar enacts what Peter at Caesarea Philippi could not accept: whether or not she understood all she did, her gesture honors a Messiah who is going to die, and Jesus himself names its meaning. Hence the staggering promise, which Matthew also preserves (26:13): "wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her", a promise being kept in your room tonight. (On "the poor you always have with you": Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 15:11, whose very next clause COMMANDS open-handedness to the poor; it is a verse about perpetual obligation, not permission to neglect, and the Church reads it so.)

The Supper (14:12-25) is the summit of the study's Eucharistic arc, and your group has been trained for thirteen weeks to hear it. The four verbs of the green grass return in exact sequence: "he TOOK bread, and BLESSED, and BROKE it, and GAVE it to them" (6:41; the Decapolis feeding echoes them with "gave thanks," *eucharistesas*, 8:6, the very verb that named the Eucharist), and then the words of feeding contained: "Take; THIS IS MY BODY." The one loaf in the boat (8:14) is finally explained. Over the cup: "This is my BLOOD OF THE COVENANT, which is poured out for MANY." Every phrase detonates something planted: "blood of the covenant" lifts the covenant phrase of Exodus 24:8, Moses dashing sacrificial blood on the people at Sinai, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you", except that covenant blood was splashed on bodies, and this covenant blood is given to DRINK, interiorized, the new covenant Jeremiah promised, written on hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-33). And "for many" is 10:45's ransom-saying completing itself: the Servant of Isaiah 53 who bears the sin of MANY now hands his companions the chalice of the offering. Let the group assemble these connections themselves; thirteen weeks of planted evidence makes this the night the study pays compound interest.

One more upper-room jewel, offered with a light hand: Jesus vows, "I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (14:25), and Mark then records the party singing the hymn (the Passover Hallel) and leaving, by the usual reckoning, before the ritual's final cup. Some fine Catholic scholars (Scott Hahn has made the case famous) propose that the Passover liturgy Jesus deliberately left

suspended is completed on the cross: offered wine refused at 15:23, and then, in John's account, "I thirst," the sour wine taken, and "It is finished." On that reading, the Supper and the cross are one continuous liturgy, table to Calvary, a single Passover of the Lamb. The Church has not defined this reconstruction; present it as a proposal many find luminous, and note that the doctrinal core it illustrates IS defined: the Eucharist and the cross are one sacrifice (CCC 1367).

Gethsemane (14:32-42): the cup James and John volunteered for (10:38-39) arrives; his followers will share its sufferings (10:39), but its sin-bearing fullness only he can drink. Mark's portrait is the rawest in the Gospels: "greatly distressed and troubled... My soul is very sorrowful, even to death," and the prayer that carries the Church's whole Christology: "ABBA, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will." A real human will, genuinely recoiling from death, freely handed over to the Father's will: St. Maximus the Confessor built the Church's doctrine of Christ's two wills on this sentence, and the Sixth Ecumenical Council canonized his reading (CCC 475). The agony is not theater and not weakness; it is the human will of God the Son doing, in darkness, what Adam refused to do in a garden of light. Meanwhile the three disciples, EXPLICITLY commanded "watch" (14:34, the very verb of 13:37), sleep three times. The doorkeeper parable is failing its first test in real time, and the clock of 13:35 seems to be running: supper in the EVENING (14:17), the garden deep in the night, and two watches to come.

The trial (14:53-65) is where the Messianic Secret dies, by Jesus' own hand. False witnesses collapse; the high priest rises and asks the question of the entire Gospel: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus, silent until now, answers with a plain 'I AM' that many readers hear as an echo of the burning bush, joined to the explicit vision of Daniel: "I AM (*ego eimi*); and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven", Psalm 110 and Daniel 7:13, the two texts he planted in the temple debates and the Olivet discourse, now spoken to the one man in Israel authorized to demand an answer (Matthew adds that he put Jesus under oath), at the moment when saying it means death. This is the most compelling reading of why the Secret held so long: the title could not safely be spoken until it could scarcely be understood any other way, and now, bound and hours from crucifixion, no one can mistake him for a warlord. He unveils himself at the precise moment it costs everything. The verdict is instant: "You have heard his blasphemy... And they all condemned him as deserving death." A careful note for your sealed-guess shepherding: the high priest SPEAKS the title as an accusation, and Jesus affirms his own identity, but the guess asked who would be the first human being to CALL Jesus the Son of God, a free confession about him. A sneering prosecutor and the defendant's own "I AM" are not that. One scene remains. Next week, bring the envelopes.

Peter's denials (14:66-72) run in deliberate parallel montage with the trial: inside, Jesus confesses and is condemned; outside, Peter is interrogated by a servant girl and collapses, three denials, escalating to curses, and then the COCKCROW, the third watch of 13:35, and "he broke down and wept." Remember whose preaching ancient tradition associates with this Gospel: Peter kept this story in his own preaching, in full and uncushioned. The second touch (8:25) has begun, and it begins, as it usually does, with tears. Morning (15:1, the fourth watch: "as soon as it was morning") brings Pilate, the "King of the Jews" exchange, and Barabbas, whose name means "son of the father": the crowd is offered the true Son of the Father and a counterfeit, and chooses the murderer. The scourging, the sentence, and the handing over close the session at the threshold of Golgotha.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Exodus 24:8.** "Behold the blood of the covenant": Moses' words at Sinai, quoted by Jesus over the cup with one devastating upgrade, the blood is no longer splashed on the people but given INTO them. Sinai's covenant sealed in animal blood; the new covenant sealed in his own.
- **Exodus 12:1-14 (leader background).** The Passover frame of the whole night: a lamb without blemish, its blood delivering from death, and the command that the lamb be EATEN. No Israelite was saved by admiring the lamb.

- **Jeremiah 31:31-33.** "Behold, the days are coming... when I will make a NEW covenant... I will write it upon their hearts." The upper room is the appointment Jeremiah made.
- **Isaiah 53:11-12 with Mark 10:45.** "He poured out his soul to death... he bore the sin of MANY." The cup-word "poured out for many" is the Servant Song and the ransom-saying arriving at the same table.
- **Zechariah 13:7.** "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered": quoted by Jesus himself on the way to Gethsemane (14:27), with a promise attached that everyone misses: "But AFTER I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (14:28). Even predicting their desertion, he schedules the reunion.
- **Psalms 110:1 and Daniel 7:13.** "Sit at my right hand" and "coming with the clouds": the two enthronement texts fused in Jesus' answer at his trial, the full claim, at the full price.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Ignatius of Antioch (Letter to the Smyrnaeans)

Within living memory of the apostles, on the road to his own martyrdom, St. Ignatius names the test of true faith: the heterodox "abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist IS the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father in his goodness raised up." For the generation taught by the apostles themselves, the realism of "this is my body" was not one interpretation among several; it was the dividing line.

Voices of the Church: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Mystagogical Catecheses, on the Eucharist)

Teaching the newly baptized of Jerusalem, yards from Calvary, St. Cyril reasons with devastating simplicity: since Christ himself has declared of the bread, "This is my body," who shall ever dare to doubt it? And since he has affirmed of the cup, "This is my blood," who shall waver and say it is not his blood? He once changed water into wine at Cana by his will alone, Cyril reminds them; is he not worthy of belief when he changes wine into blood? Judge not the matter by taste, he counsels, but be fully assured by faith in the Lord's own word.

Voices of the Church: St. Maximus the Confessor (on the prayer of Gethsemane)

St. Maximus, who gave his tongue and right hand rather than deny it, taught the Church to hear in "not what I will, but what you will" the proof that Christ possesses a true HUMAN will, really recoiling from death as human nature must, and freely, perfectly surrendered to the Father. The agony is not the divine will arguing with itself, nor a fake struggle staged for our benefit: it is our own human willing, assumed by the Son, healed at the exact point where Adam's broke. As St. Gregory Nazianzen had taught, what is not assumed is not healed; and in the garden, our own willing was taken up and taught to say Father.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1339-1340:** The institution: Jesus chose Passover to give his Body and Blood, fulfilling the ancient feast and anticipating his Passover to the Father; the Eucharist is its memorial.

- **CCC 1362-1367:** The Eucharist as memorial (*anamnesis*) in Scripture's sense: not mere recollection but the making-present of the one sacrifice; the Mass and the cross are ONE single sacrifice, the manner of offering alone differing (Trent's language, "truly propitiatory").
- **CCC 1376:** Trent's summary: by the consecration a change is brought about of the whole substance of bread into the Body and of wine into the Blood, fittingly called transubstantiation.
- **CCC 612 and 475:** The cup of Gethsemane: the Son's human will freely accepting the Father's redeeming plan; the Sixth Ecumenical Council's confession of Christ's two wills, the human will unresisting, indeed subject, to his divine and almighty will.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Bread: RESOLVES. Took, blessed, broke, gave, then "this is my body." The feedings, the crumbs, the one loaf, the quiz ("do you not yet understand?"), all of it lands here. Let the group make every connection; resist making any for them until they have tried. This is the study's Eucharistic summit; end the discussion of it in a moment of silence.

The Messianic Secret: ENDS, at 14:62, from Jesus' own mouth, before the high priest, at the cost of his life, with *ego eimi* and Daniel 7. The embargo's logic is now fully visible: he spoke when the cross made misunderstanding impossible. SEALED-GUESS PRECISION: the high priest speaks "Son of the Blessed" as an accusation; Jesus affirms his own identity. The guess asked for the first human to CALL him the Son of God, a free confession. That has still not happened. Tell the group to bring the sealed envelopes next week, and say nothing else.

The Four Watches: ENACTED in literary outline, let them find it: EVENING 14:17, the deep of night in Gethsemane (where "watch" is commanded, 14:34, and sleep wins three times), COCKCROW 14:72, MORNING 15:1. Mark names no hour in the garden; the pattern is the point. The doorkeeper parable was the Passion's timetable. Question 6 is built to trigger this discovery.

The Cup: From 10:38 through Gethsemane, poured at the table, accepted in the garden. Torn: NEXT WEEK. Everything resolves next week. Prepare accordingly, and prayerfully.

Session Goals

1. Participants can read the Bethany anointing as the Gospel's only messianic anointing, for burial, and can see her gesture, whether or not she grasped all of it, as the first act in this Gospel to honor a Messiah who is going to die.
2. Participants assemble the Bread thread's resolution themselves: verbs, Exodus 24:8, Jeremiah 31, "for many," and can articulate the Real Presence with the steelman answered.
3. Participants can pray Gethsemane's prayer and state what it reveals: a true human will, freely surrendered (CCC 475).
4. Participants discover the four-watches structure and 14:62 as the Secret's ending, and can explain WHY Jesus speaks now.
5. Participants hold Peter's fall with Mark's own mercy: full honesty, and 14:28's pre-scheduled reunion.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress the Judas verses and the Pilate/Barabbas scene into the leader bridges (keeping the "son of the father" irony as one sentence). Do not cut Bethany, the Supper, Gethsemane, the trial, or the cockcrow; if the session must run long tonight, let it.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, tonight we enter the night you were betrayed, the night you took bread. Give us the woman's extravagance, keep us awake one hour, and when your words are spoken over bread and cup, give us the faith of the centuries: to take you at your word. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What is the most extravagant, "wasteful" act of love you have ever witnessed or received, something no accountant would approve? What did it communicate that a sensible gift could not?
2. Words spoken at a deathbed or a departure carry a weight ordinary words never do. Why? What do we instinctively understand about last words?

Leader bridge: Did everyone underline evening, midnight, cockcrow, and morning last week? Keep a finger there. Tonight the Gospel enters its final night, and everything this study has planted, the four verbs, the one loaf, "for many," the cup, the silence commands, comes due. Watch the clock, watch the bread, and listen for two words at the trial that we last heard on the sea.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 14:1-11 aloud.

1. **Bethany (14:3-9). A year's wages in perfume, broken open in one gesture, and two audits of it: the objectors' ("why this waste?") and Jesus' ("she has done a beautiful thing... anointed my body beforehand for burying"). Now the irony thirteen chapters deep: what do "Messiah" and "Christ" literally MEAN, and when else in this entire Gospel is Jesus anointed? What has this woman understood that Peter, at Caesarea Philippi, could not?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek) mean THE ANOINTED ONE, we learned it in Session 1 (CCC 436), kings, priests, and prophets anointed with oil for their mission. And in Mark's whole Gospel, this is the ONLY anointing Jesus receives: not in a coronation, not in the temple, but at a dinner table, from an unnamed woman, FOR BURIAL. The Anointed One's anointing is a funeral rite in advance; Mark could not say "the Messiah's mission is to die" more eloquently. And here is the contrast with Peter: he confessed the Christ and rebuked the cross; her gesture, whether or not she saw its full meaning, pours everything over a Christ who is going to die, honoring, ADORNING the very thing Peter called unthinkable, and Jesus himself gives the act its name: anointing for burial. Hence a promise given to no one else in this Gospel: "wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her", being fulfilled at this table tonight, note it. One guardrail: "the poor you always have with you" quotes Deuteronomy 15:11, whose next clause COMMANDS open-handed care for the poor; Jesus is invoking perpetual obligation, not granting an exemption, and the Church that adores him in the Eucharist is the same Church commanded to find him in the poor. Extravagance toward God and justice toward the poor are one love, not rivals.

Read Mark 14:12-31 aloud. Read verses 22-25 twice, slowly.

2. **The Supper (14:22-25). Group work, and take your time: (a) List the four verbs of verse 22 in order. Where, exactly, has this Gospel used that sequence before? (b) DISCOVERY: someone read Exodus 24:8 aloud, and someone Jeremiah 31:31-33. What is Jesus quoting over the cup, and what**

is he changing? (c) "Poured out for MANY", where has this Gospel planted that phrase? (d) And the one loaf in the boat (8:14), with "do you not yet understand?" (8:21): do you understand now? Assemble everything. This is the final exam thirteen weeks have prepared you for.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(a) TOOK, BLESSED, BROKE, GAVE: the exact sequence of the green grass (6:41), echoed at the Decapolis with one glorious variation, "gave thanks," *eucharistesas* (8:6), the verb that gave the sacrament its name. The feedings were rehearsals; the group has been watching the priest practice the liturgy for seven chapters. But the feedings never contained these words: "Take; THIS IS MY BODY." Not "this represents," not "this is like": the verb the Church has guarded with councils and martyrs. (b) "This is my BLOOD OF THE COVENANT" takes up the covenant phrase of Exodus 24:8, Moses at Sinai dashing sacrificial blood on the people: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you." Jesus stands where Moses stood and upgrades everything: the blood is his own, and it is not splashed ON the people but given INTO them, drunk, interiorized, which is exactly Jeremiah's promised NEW covenant, no longer external like Sinai's but "written upon their hearts." The upper room is the appointment Jeremiah 31 made six centuries early. (c) "For many" is Mark 10:45 completing itself, "a ransom for MANY", and behind both, Isaiah 53: "he poured out his soul to death... he bore the sin of MANY." The Servant's offering, announced on the road, is being distributed at the table; and "many," remember, is Isaiah's idiom for the numberless multitude, he died for all (CCC 605). (d) The one loaf in the boat: the disciples fretted about bread supply while the Bread himself sat beside them. Now he says so, in four words. The whole Bread thread, two feedings, twelve baskets and seven, a Gentile mother's crumbs, one loaf, "do you not yet understand?", was never about catering. It was catechesis: he was teaching them, and us, what he would put into our hands. Leaders: when the assembly is done, before moving on, take thirty seconds of full silence. Some things should not be talked past.

3. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. A sincere Protestant friend says: "It is obviously a metaphor. Jesus also said 'I am the door' and 'I am the vine'; nobody checks him for hinges. He was bodily present holding the bread, so it could not literally be his body. It is a memorial: 'do this in remembrance of me.' Catholics literalize a beautiful symbol." And the stronger Protestant accounts go past bare symbol: the Reformed confess a true spiritual feeding on Christ by faith; Lutherans a sacramental union of Christ's body "in, with, and under" the bread. Build it all at full strength, it is reasonable and reverent. Then answer from tonight's text, this Gospel's architecture, Paul, and the men taught by the apostles. DISCOVERY: someone look up 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Honor its strengths: Jesus does use metaphors of himself, the objection reveres him, and Catholics agree the Eucharist is a memorial, the dispute is what "memorial" and "is" carry. Now the answer, in layers. TEXT: "I am the door" comes with zero ritual apparatus; nobody is handed a plank and told "take, eat." Here Jesus attaches the words to an ACTION and a COMMAND at Passover, whose lamb, note it, had to be EATEN to save anyone (Exodus 12:8-11); admiring the lamb delivered no one. And "blood of the covenant" is sacrificial language: Exodus 24's blood was not a metaphor; covenants are cut in real blood, and he says the cup IS his. ARCHITECTURE: this Gospel has spent seven chapters training realism, two literal multiplications of literal bread by the four verbs, a rebuke ("do you not yet understand?") for treating the loaves as mere logistics, and one loaf in the boat. Mark's narrative theology has no room for "and then the payoff was a figure of speech." PAUL, writing before any Gospel: "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy

manner will be GUILTY OF PROFANING THE BODY AND BLOOD of the Lord... For any one who eats and drinks without DISCERNING THE BODY eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). You cannot profane a symbol into judgment; Paul's warning only computes if the Body is there to discern. And "remembrance" (*anamnesis*) is Passover vocabulary: the Jewish memorial (*zikkaron*) does not merely recall an event but makes its participants present to it, "in every generation a man must regard himself as having come out of Egypt." THE EARLY WITNESSES: St. Ignatius of Antioch, within living memory of the apostles, defines the heterodox precisely as those who "do not confess that the Eucharist IS the flesh of our Savior"; St. Cyril of Jerusalem asks the question that ends the debate for anyone who trusts Christ's competence with words: "Since he himself has declared, This is my body, who shall dare to doubt?" Bare-symbol readings have no clear champion before the Reformation era; the memorial-only reading is the newcomer. And honor the stronger Protestant accounts: Reformed and Lutheran Christians confess far more than symbol, and the remaining Catholic difference is precise: whether the bread and wine themselves become, in substance, the Body and Blood (so that what rests on the altar is rightly adored), and whether the Eucharist makes present the one sacrifice. On those two points the Church cannot yield what she received. Last, gently, the deepest point: on the night before he died, a man does not speak in riddles. These are last words, chosen with a dying man's economy, and the Church has staked everything on the assumption that he meant them.

Read Mark 14:32-52 aloud.

4. **Gethsemane. Mark shows us Jesus "greatly distressed and troubled": "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death." Then the prayer: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will." Three questions: What is "this cup" (trace it: 10:38-39, Isaiah 51:17)? Is the recoil a failure of nerve, what does the Church actually teach is happening in that sentence? And what are the three disciples doing, and why does last week's underlining suddenly matter?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The cup is the one James and John blithely claimed they could drink: in the prophets, the cup of wrath, judgment poured out and drunk down (Isaiah 51:17), and at the table an hour ago it became "my blood... poured out for many." In the garden, the metaphor arrives with its full weight, and only one man on earth can drink it. The recoil is not weakness, and the Church staked a council on saying so: Christ has a TRUE human will (CCC 475; the Sixth Ecumenical Council, following St. Maximus, who gave his tongue and hand for this doctrine), and a true human will genuinely shrinks from torture and death, it would be inhuman not to. What we are watching is that real human will, OURS, assumed, freely subordinating itself: "not what I will, but what you will", Adam's garden rebellion replayed and reversed in a garden at night. He is not overriding his humanity; he is healing it at the exact joint where it broke. And note the word he teaches us: ABBA, Father, intimate, trusting, spoken INTO the darkness, not after it lifts. Meanwhile: the three were commanded "WATCH" (14:34, the precise verb of 13:37), and three times he comes and finds them SLEEPING, the doorkeeper parable failing its first test within twenty-four hours of being told. Check your underlining: supper in the EVENING (14:17), the garden in the dead of night, and the Master of the house keeps coming and finding them asleep. Two watches remain on the clock (the pattern is literary, Mark names no hour in the garden, and it is hard to miss). "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" is not an excuse; it is a diagnosis, and the prescription was the thing they were not doing: watch AND PRAY.

Read Mark 14:53-72 aloud.

5. **The trial (14:53-65). False witnesses collapse; Jesus is silent; then the high priest asks THE question: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus answers: "I AM; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." After thirteen weeks of silence commands, weigh every element: the two words he opens with (where did we hear them on the sea?), the two Scriptures he fuses (you have met both), and the timing. WHY does he say it NOW, and what does it cost? What was the Secret for, in the end?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The two words: *ego eimi*, "I am," a plain affirmative on its surface, last heard on the sea (6:50), carrying for many readers the undertone of the burning bush (Exodus 3:14), now spoken to the high priest's direct, official demand (Matthew records the oath). The two Scriptures: Psalm 110:1 ("sit at my right hand", his own riddle from the temple, 12:35-37) and Daniel 7:13 ("coming with the clouds", from last week's discourse, 13:26), fused into a single claim: you will see me enthroned and vindicated. The timing crowns the group's best theory, and one compelling way the Church's readers have long understood the Secret: he speaks NOW because NOW the title can scarcely be misunderstood. Bound, condemned, hours from a cross, no one can mistake him for a warlord; the confession and the crucifixion arrive together. On this reading, the Secret was never shame or strategy for its own sake: it was quality control on the meaning of "Christ," held until the cross could define it, and he releases it himself, at the one moment it costs everything, to the one man authorized to demand it. The price is immediate: "You have heard his blasphemy... they all condemned him as deserving death." He is condemned, in the end, for telling the truth about himself, the truth Mark told US in verse one. Sealed-guess shepherds, a precision: the high priest UTTERS "Son of the Blessed" as an accusation, and Jesus affirms his own identity. But your envelope asked who would be the first human being to CALL Jesus the Son of God, a free confession about him, and a prosecutor's sneer plus the defendant's "I AM" is not that. Bring the envelopes next week. One scene remains.

6. **Peter (14:66-72), running in split-screen with the trial: inside, Jesus confesses and is condemned; outside, Peter is questioned by a servant girl, and denies, three times, escalating to invoking curses, "and immediately the cock crowed a second time." Check your underlining again: which watch just struck? Then: "he broke down and wept." Remember whose preaching this Gospel is. What does it mean that PETER kept this story in his sermon for thirty years, and what had Jesus already scheduled at 14:27-28?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

COCKCROW: the third watch of 13:35, striking on schedule. The contrast Mark builds by intercutting is unbearable and deliberate: the prisoner, facing death, tells the truth; the free man, facing a servant girl, lies three times, the man who swore "if I must die with you, I will not deny you" (14:31), undone not by torture but by embarrassment around a charcoal fire. And then the sound, and the remembering, and "he broke down and wept": the second touch (8:25) beginning the only way it could, with the collapse of every illusion Peter had about his own steadiness. Now the astonishing fact of this Gospel's existence, on the tradition the Church received: Mark writes Peter's preaching, which, on the tradition's account, means Peter told this story at his own expense in his own preaching. The first pope's résumé, as preached by the first pope, leads with his worst hour, because the point of his story was never Peter's strength; it was the mercy that met him (recall Session 8: infallibility was never impeccability, and the office runs on Christ's prayer, Luke

22:32, not Peter's nerve). And the mercy was pre-scheduled: at 14:27-28, quoting Zechariah's struck shepherd and scattered sheep, Jesus attached a promise nobody heard: "But AFTER I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Before they even fell, he booked the reunion. Hold that verse; it has one more appointment to keep, next week, from an unexpected mouth. For everyone in your group who has ever wept at their own cockcrow: this Gospel exists because the man who failed worst was retrieved, and could not stop talking about it.

Dig Deeper

Morning (15:1, and there is your FOURTH watch: "as soon as it was morning", the clock of 13:35 complete in outline: evening, the deep of night, cockcrow, morning; the end-times discourse reads as the Passion's timetable, and the Church has long heard in that night the judgment of the world). Before Pilate, the "King of the Jews" exchange, and then Barabbas: Mark tells us the crowd chose a murderer over the Messiah, and the name is the theology: BAR-ABBAS means "son of the father." Offered the true Son of the Father and a counterfeit, the world freed the counterfeit and condemned the true, and the release vividly images substitution: Barabbas could say, in a way all his own, "Jesus died and I went free," and he stands, unnamed and unnumbered, for the rest of us. A quiet detail for the fourth-cup watchers: at 15:23 Jesus REFUSES the offered wine mixed with myrrh. He has a vow running (14:25). Some fine scholars propose the Passover he left suspended in the upper room is completed on the cross itself; hold it lightly, as the Church does, but hold it, the doctrinal core it illustrates is certain: the table and the cross are ONE sacrifice (CCC 1367).

Send (15 minutes)

1. The woman broke the flask; the disciples audited it. When you examine your own devotion honestly, which are you: measuring what is reasonable to give God, or breaking the jar? What would breaking the jar look like in your actual circumstances?
2. "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation": Jesus diagnosed willing spirits and weak flesh, and prescribed one hour. Where is your Gethsemane right now, the cup you are asking God to remove, and can you give him one literal hour with it this week?

Live It This Week

- Keep the hour he asked for: one Holy Hour this week, before the tabernacle if at all possible, with Mark 14 open. If you fall asleep, you are in apostolic company; come back the second and third time, as he did.
- At Mass, when the priest speaks the words of institution, the words from this table, make St. Cyril's act of faith silently: "You have said, This is my body. I dare not doubt it."
- Pray Gethsemane's prayer over your hardest current thing, word for word: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup; yet not what I will, but what you will." Once daily, seven days.
- BRING YOUR SEALED GUESS to the final session. Do not open it early.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, on the night you were betrayed you took bread, and you meant every word. We adore you in the Sacrament your last night gave us. Teach us the woman's extravagance, keep us awake one hour, and when our cockcrow comes, let it break our hearts toward you and not away. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.
(Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will."
(Mark 14:36, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 14:1-15:15

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 14:1-11 (Bethany; the anointing for burial; Judas)
- Deuteronomy 15:11 (the poor with you always, obligation not exemption)
- Mark 14:12-25 (Passover; the institution of the Eucharist)
- Exodus 24:8 (the blood of the covenant)
- Exodus 12:1-14 (the lamb eaten, leader background)
- Jeremiah 31:31-33 (the new covenant)
- Isaiah 53:11-12 with Mark 10:45 (poured out for many)
- 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 (discerning the body, steelman chain)
- Mark 14:26-31 (Zechariah 13:7; the Galilee promise, 14:28)
- Mark 14:32-42 (Gethsemane; the cup; the sleeping watchmen)
- Isaiah 51:17 (the cup of wrath, from Session 10)
- Mark 14:43-52 (the arrest; the young man who fled)
- Mark 14:53-65 (the trial; ego eimi; Psalm 110:1 + Daniel 7:13)
- Mark 14:66-72 (Peter's denials; cockcrow)
- Mark 15:1-15 (morning; Pilate; Barabbas)
- Mark 13:35 with 14:17, 14:34-41, 14:72, 15:1 (the four watches enacted)
- CCC 475, 605, 612, 1339-1340, 1362-1367, 1376
- Memory verse: Mark 14:36

Session 14

Torn: The Centurion's Confession and the Empty Tomb

Mark 15:16-16:20 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the ending every thread has been waiting for: a mock coronation that Mark writes as a true one, a crucified King praying Psalm 22, and then the Gospel's two climactic sentences in immediate sequence: the temple curtain TORN (the second and final use of the word from the baptism), and a Roman centurion, looking at a dead man on a cross, becoming the first human being in this Gospel to say it: "Truly this man was the Son of God." Tonight the sealed guesses are opened. Then the empty tomb, "he is going before you to Galilee, and PETER", and an honest, faithful treatment of how Mark's Gospel ends.

Catholic Touchstone: The Paschal Mystery whole: the redeeming death in which Christ bore our estrangement without ceasing to be the beloved Son (CCC 603), the torn veil opening the new and living way (Hebrews 10:19-20), and the Resurrection, "the crowning truth of our faith in Christ" (CCC 638), attested by an empty tomb, appointed witnesses, and a Church that has not stopped talking since the women ran from the garden.

What You Need to Know

The mockery (15:16-20) must be read with Mark's irony fully on: a whole battalion, a purple cloak, a crown (of thorns), homage on bended knee, and the acclamation "Hail, King of the Jews!" Every element of a Roman imperial accession is present, and every word the soldiers speak in jest is true. Mark writes the scene so that the reader watches a real coronation performed by people who think they are joking: this IS how this King is crowned, this IS his purple, and the title Pilate nails over his head, "The King of the Jews", is the only royal inscription he will ever receive and the truest ever written. Simon of Cyrene, compelled to carry the cross behind Jesus, is 8:34 made flesh (and Mark names his sons, Alexander and Rufus, as men his first readers evidently knew, this Gospel has living footnotes).

At Golgotha, keep three details in focus. First, Jesus REFUSES the wine mixed with myrrh (15:23), the customary narcotic: he has a vow running (14:25) and will drink this cup undulled. Second, "with him they crucified two robbers, ONE ON HIS RIGHT AND ONE ON HIS LEFT" (15:27), and here is the payoff you have carried since Session 10: James and John asked for exactly those positions "in your glory" (10:37), and Jesus said the places were "for those for whom it has been prepared." Mark has now shown us the throne room: his glory is the cross, his court is two criminals, and the seats the apostles wanted were already assigned. Let the group find this; do not hand it to them. Third, the mockers' taunt, "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (15:31), is the Gospel's deepest accidental theology: they mean it as scorn, and love makes it true: he WILL not save himself at the cost of the many; the ransom (10:45) is either paid or kept. "Come down from the cross, that we may see and believe" is the last temptation, glory without the cross, Caesarea Philippi's Satan-whisper with a crowd's voice, and the proof that seeing was never the problem: they will be given a sign greater than coming down, and most will not believe that either.

The cry of dereliction (15:34), "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?", requires your most careful preparation. It is the opening line of Psalm 22, and, as many interpreters note, citing a psalm's opening naturally evokes the whole. So first, walk the group through what Psalm 22 actually contains: verse 1, the dereliction; verses 7-8, mockers wagging their heads and taunting his trust in God (enacted across Mark 15:29-32; Matthew preserves the taunt verbatim, 27:43); verse 18, "they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots"

(happening at Jesus' feet, Mark 15:24); and then the turn: verses 22-31, vindication, "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD... they shall proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn." Jesus on the cross is PRAYING, praying the psalm that is simultaneously being enacted around him, a psalm that begins in abandonment and ends in worldwide worship and a message for the unborn (that is us). Second, the doctrine, held with precision (CCC 603): the Father did not cease to love the Son, and the Trinity did not crack; rather, the Son truly assumed us in our estrangement, genuinely experiencing, in his human soul, the full weight and darkness of sin's alienation, without himself being abandoned in fact or knowing sin. He is not despairing; he is descending, taking the "My God, why?" that belongs to every sufferer and praying it from the inside, so that no human darkness would ever again be Godless. The cry is not the wheels coming off the Trinity; it is the Shepherd going all the way down the ravine.

Then 15:37-39, the two sentences this study is built around, and they must be taught in sequence. "And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. AND THE CURTAIN OF THE TEMPLE WAS TORN IN TWO, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM." The verb is *eschisthe*, from *schizo*, and this is its SECOND and final appearance in Mark: at 1:10 the heavens were TORN at the baptism, and a voice declared "my beloved Son"; at 15:38 the veil is TORN at the death, and a human voice declares "Son of God." The *inclusio* your group was told about in Session 1, without being told what it was, closes here. Torn from TOP to bottom: God's side, not man's; sixty feet of barrier opened by the only hands tall enough. (Whether the outer veil or the inner sanctuary veil, ancient readers and modern scholars discuss both; either way the theology is Hebrews 10:19-20, planted in your Session 1 leader notes: a "new and living way" opened "through the curtain," and the curtain, Hebrews dares to say, is his flesh: one mystery, held in a single afternoon.) And THEN: "when the centurion, who stood facing him, SAW THAT HE THUS BREATHED HIS LAST, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God!" Weigh every element with the group. WHO: a Gentile, a Roman, the officer supervising the execution, the last person in the story anyone would nominate. WHAT he saw: not the Transfiguration, not a miracle, not the resurrection, he saw "that he THUS breathed his last": the manner of the dying. WHERE he stood: "facing him," the posture of the whole Gospel's question. This is the first human being in Mark to call Jesus the Son of God, and Mark has withheld that confession through sixteen chapters so that when it finally comes, it comes from a Gentile, at the cross, ABOUT the crucified. That is the Messianic Secret's final answer: you cannot know who Jesus is apart from the cross, and once you know him there, you cannot be silenced, and the "house of prayer for all the nations" has its firstfruits in Roman armor. OPEN THE SEALED GUESSES HERE. Structure the moment: read 15:39 aloud, let it land, then have everyone open their envelope from Session 1 and share what they guessed. Celebrate near-misses and direct hits alike; the point was never trivia but attention, and they have just watched a fourteen-week question resolve exactly where the Gospel always intended.

The burial (15:42-47) matters apologetically and tenderly: Joseph of Arimathea "took courage" (it cost something), Pilate double-checks the death WITH THE CENTURION (Rome's professional verdict: dead, a standing answer to every swoon theory), and the women watch where he is laid, the same women named at 15:40, including "Mary the mother of James and Joses," whom your group met in Session 4 as the OTHER Mary, the mothers are accounted for; the witnesses are continuous from cross to tomb to Easter. Then 16:1-8: the women come with spices to anoint a body (love's errand, faith's absence, they expect a corpse), worry about the stone, and find it rolled back; a young man in white: "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. HE HAS RISEN, he is not here; see the place where they laid him." And then the sentence that pays off 14:28 and completes the second touch: "But go, tell his disciples AND PETER that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." AND PETER: named separately, the denier singled out, not for censure but for retrieval, St. Gregory the Great's reading has anchored the Church's: had the angel not named him, the man who denied would never have dared to come. Mercy calls the worst failure BY NAME. And "to Galilee": the reunion Jesus booked before anyone fell (14:27-28), kept to the letter.

Finally, the ending, and be as honest here as this study has been everywhere: the two oldest complete manuscripts end at 16:8, "they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid," and verses 9-20 (the appearances,

the commission, the Ascension) have a different feel and a debated history, though they were known very early (St. Irenaeus quotes 16:19 in the second century). The Catholic position holds both truths without strain: textually, 16:9-20 may be an early, inspired supplement rather than Mark's own pen, and the Church has NOT defined its authorship; canonically, the Council of Trent received these verses as canonical Scripture, so Catholics read them as the inspired Word of God, full stop. And if 16:8 was where Mark laid down his pen, the abruptness is not failure but genius: the women "said nothing to any one", yet you, reader, know the story, so SOMEONE spoke, and the Gospel ends by handing you the pen. The reader is the ending. Either way, the longer ending's content seals the study's arcs: "he was taken up into heaven, and SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" (16:19), Psalm 110, the temple riddle and the trial claim, cashed, and "they went forth and preached everywhere": the embargo of the Secret fully lifted, the lamp on the stand, the Decapolis man's commission gone worldwide. The Gospel's last picture is the Church doing what your group is now equipped to do.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Psalm 22 (whole).** The Passion's script: the cry (v. 1), the wagging heads and the taunt (vv. 7-8 = Mark 15:29-31), the divided garments and lots (v. 18 = Mark 15:24), and the ending nobody quotes at the cross but everybody lives in: the ends of the earth turning to the LORD, and deliverance proclaimed "to a people yet unborn."
- **Amos 8:9.** "I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight": the prophets' sign of the day of the LORD, and Mark's darkness "from the sixth hour... until the ninth hour", noon to three.
- **Psalm 69:21.** "For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink": the sour wine on the reed (15:36).
- **Genesis 22 (leader background, full circle).** The beloved son, the wood carried up the hill, and God providing the lamb: Session 1's third thread of the Father's voice, now fully unfolded on another hill outside the same city.
- **Hebrews 10:19-20 with Exodus 26:31-33 (leader background).** The veil that walled the Holy of Holies, and the apostolic reading of its tearing: "the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh." Planted in Session 1; harvested tonight.
- **Psalm 110:1.** "Sit at my right hand": the temple riddle (12:36) and the claim at trial (14:62), fulfilled in the longer ending's own words: "he sat down at the right hand of God" (16:19).

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermons on the Passion of the Lord)

In his Passion sermons, St. Leo hears creation itself confessing what the priests denied: the sun withdrawing, the earth trembling, and the temple's veil torn asunder as the old covenant's shadows ceased and the reality they had guarded stepped into the open. The mysteries once hidden behind the curtain, Leo teaches, passed at that hour from the Temple to the Church, from figure to fulfillment: what was veiled for one nation was torn open for all. And the Church has loved to add: the centurion's confession is the nations already walking through the breach.

Voices of the Church: Pope St. Gregory the Great (Homilies on the Gospels, Homily 21)

St. Gregory asks why the angel, sending word to the disciples, adds two words: "and Peter." Because Peter had denied, Gregory answers, and had he not been summoned by name, the man who remembered the cockcrow would never have dared to come among the disciples again. He is called

expressly, lest he despair; mercy does not merely leave the door open for the one who failed worst, it goes out and calls him by name. So the Church learned, from her Lord's first Easter message, how to treat her own deniers: by name, and toward Galilee.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Expositions of the Psalms, Psalm 120)

St. Augustine observes that it is no great thing to believe that Christ died; pagans and enemies believe that much, for the whole world concedes it. The faith of Christians is the RESURRECTION of Christ: this is the article that divides, the claim on which everything stands, and the thing we hold precious. And Christ risen, Augustine adds, is the head whose resurrection is the pledge of the body's: what happened to him on the third day is what he intends for everyone the Father has given him.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 603:** The cry of dereliction: Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he had sinned, but he assumed us in the depth of our estrangement from God, so truly that he could pray our darkest psalm from the inside, in the unity of an unbroken love.
- **CCC 638-640:** The Resurrection as the crowning truth of our faith; the empty tomb as its first step and essential sign, not proof by itself, but the opening of the door the appearances walk through.
- **CCC 641-644:** The witnesses: the women first (Mary Magdalene at their head), then Peter, then the Twelve, then more than five hundred; and the honest record that the disciples themselves doubted, so far were they from hallucinating what they hoped.
- **CCC 648, 651-655:** The Resurrection as the Father's power through the Spirit, confirming everything Christ did and taught, and opening for us justification and adoption: he rose as the first-born of many brethren.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

Torn (*schizo*): RESOLVES 1:10 heavens torn, voice: "my beloved Son." 15:38 veil torn, human voice: "Son of God." Two tears, two declarations, one Gospel-length inclusio. Let the group find the verb themselves (question 4 is built for it), then give them the top-to-bottom detail and Hebrews 10:19-20.

The Messianic Secret / SEALED GUESSES: RESOLVES at 15:39. First human confession: a Gentile centurion, at the cross, looking at the dying. OPEN THE ENVELOPES immediately after question 5 lands. The Secret's whole logic stands revealed: the title waited for the one place it could not be misread.

The Right and the Left: RESOLVES at 15:27, the seats "in your glory" (10:37-40) were crosses. Question 2 lets them find it.

The Way / The Bread / The Ransom: Already resolved (10:52; 14:22-25; 10:45 at the table); tonight gather them in the wrap-up (question 8) so the group sees the whole architecture at once. "And Peter" completes the second-touch arc from 8:25. The Gospel's final state: every lamp on the

stand.

Session Goals

1. Participants can read the mockery as Mark's true coronation and 15:27 as the answer to 10:37-40.
2. Participants can teach Psalm 22 as the cross's script and state CCC 603's precision on the cry of dereliction.
3. Participants discover the schizo inclusio and can articulate 15:38-39 as the resolution of Torn and the Secret together.
4. Sealed guesses are opened in a well-led moment, and each participant can say why the FIRST confession comes from a Gentile at the cross.
5. Participants can give the Church's honest, two-level account of Mark's ending, and answer the legendary-development objection with 1 Corinthians 15.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 10 min | Build 55 min | Guess-opening ceremony 10 min | Send 10 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress the burial question into a leader bridge (keeping the centurion-verification apologetic in one sentence) and shorten the Win to one question. Do not cut Psalm 22, the torn veil and confession, the guess-opening, or the ending discussion. This is the night the study was built for; protect it.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, fourteen weeks ago you tore the heavens open over the Jordan and named your beloved Son. Tonight we stand where the tearing finishes. Give us the centurion's eyes: to look at the Crucified and say the truth out loud. We ask this through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Win (10 minutes)

1. Fourteen weeks ago you wrote a guess and sealed it. Without opening it or revealing it: do you remember what you wrote? How confident are you tonight?
2. Has anyone ever seen you at your absolute worst and stayed? What did that do to you?

Leader bridge: Envelopes on the table, unopened. Everything this Gospel has planted, a torn sky, a silenced title, two requested thrones, four verbs, one loaf, resolves in the next ninety minutes. Bibles open, hearts open. Let's finish.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 15:16-32 aloud.

1. **The mockery (15:16-20): battalion assembled, purple cloak, a crown, kneeling homage, the acclamation "Hail, King of the Jews!" List the elements of a Roman imperial coronation, and then say what Mark is doing with this scene. Is anything the soldiers say false?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Every element of an accession is present: the gathered cohort, the royal purple, the crown, the homage, the acclamation, and every word spoken in mockery is TRUE. Mark's irony is total: the soldiers stage a fake coronation and perform a real one, crowning the true King with the only crown this world had for him. The inscription Pilate will nail up, "The King of the Jews," is the one royal title Jesus ever receives in writing, and it is accurate. The Gospel has trained us for fourteen weeks to hear truth from unlikely mouths (demons, prosecutors, and now executioners); the world keeps telling the truth about Jesus by accident. Watch for the scene's crescendo: one more soldier is going to speak before the day ends, and he will not be joking.

2. **Golgotha (15:22-32). Three details: (a) he refuses the myrrhed wine, why (recall 14:25)? (b) "And with him they crucified two robbers, ONE ON HIS RIGHT AND ONE ON HIS LEFT" (15:27), search your memory of Session 10: who asked for those exact positions, and what did Jesus answer? (c) "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (15:31), is the taunt true?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(a) The narcotic would dull the cup he vowed to drink undiluted: "I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day" (14:25); he will take this cup awake, whole, and willing. (b) James and John: "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, IN YOUR GLORY" (10:37), and Jesus answered that those places were "for those for whom it has been prepared." Mark has now shown us the prepared seating: his glory is the cross, his enthronement is Golgotha, and the positions of honor flank him as two crucified criminals. The brothers did not know what they were asking, and now we know exactly what they were asking for. Let this land in silence for a moment:

every ambition in the room just got re-priced. (c) The taunt is the truest theology spoken at the crucifixion, once its verb is corrected: he WILL not save himself at the cost of the many; omnipotence is not the question, love is. The ransom (10:45) is either paid or pocketed; love that saves itself saves no one else. "Come down from the cross, that we may see and believe" is Satan's Caesarea Philippi offer with a crowd's voice, glory without the cross, and it fails for the last time. They will shortly receive a sign far greater than coming down, and the demand for proof, as always (8:11-12), was never really about evidence.

3. **The cry (15:33-36). Darkness from noon to three (someone glance at Amos 8:9), and then: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?", "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This verse has troubled believers for centuries, so we will do it justice. DISCOVERY, in three teams: Team 1 read Psalm 22:1 and 7-8, then Mark 15:29-31. Team 2 read Psalm 22:18, then Mark 15:24. Team 3 read Psalm 22:22-31, the ending. Report. What is Jesus DOING on the cross, and what is he not doing?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He is PRAYING, praying Psalm 22, whose first line, as many interpreters note, evokes the whole. And the teams just proved the psalm is not only being prayed but ENACTED: the mockers wagging their heads (15:29) and the rulers' sneer that he saved others (15:31) enact Psalm 22:7-8 without knowing it (Matthew preserves the taunt verbatim, 27:43); the soldiers dividing his garments by lot are performing 22:18 to the letter. David's psalm of dereliction turns out to have been the crucifixion's script, written a millennium early. And Team 3 holds the key: the psalm Jesus chose does not end in verse 1. It ends in vindication, "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD... they shall proclaim his deliverance to A PEOPLE YET UNBORN." He is praying a psalm whose last word is worldwide worship and a message to the unborn, which is to say, to this room. Now the doctrine, precisely (CCC 603): the Father did not stop loving the Son, and the Trinity did not fracture, God cannot abandon God. What is happening is deeper and better: the Son has assumed US, all the way down, truly experiencing in his human soul the full crushing weight of sin's estrangement, the felt Godforsakenness that is sin's shadow, without ever being forsaken in fact and without despairing (you do not address despair "MY God"). He is not losing his faith; he is carrying ours through the bottom of the world. From that Friday afternoon onward, there is no human darkness, no depression, no abandonment, no death, where "My God, why?" is a Godless prayer: he prayed it first, from the inside, and wore it like the crown. The Shepherd went all the way down the ravine.

Read Mark 15:37-39 aloud. Read it twice. Then hold the silence for a moment before the next question.

4. **Verse 38: "And the curtain of the temple was TORN in two, from top to bottom." Mark chose that verb with fourteen chapters of intent. DISCOVERY: turn back to Mark 1:10 and read it. What word appears in both verses, and nowhere else in this Gospel? What was declared each time something tore? And why "from TOP to bottom"?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The verb is *schizo*, TORN, and Mark uses it exactly twice in sixteen chapters: the heavens torn open at the baptism (1:10), and the temple veil torn at the death (15:38). And each tearing is answered by a declaration of sonship: at the Jordan, the Father's voice, "You are my beloved Son"; at Golgotha, wait one verse. The whole Gospel hangs between two tearings: God ripping through the barrier from above at the beginning, and ripping through the last barrier at the end, "from top to bottom", from GOD'S side, sixty feet of woven separation opened by the only hands tall enough, and opened

irreparably (remember Session 1: a door can be shut again; something torn cannot be neatly restored). Whether Mark means the outer veil or the inner curtain of the Holy of Holies (readers ancient and modern weigh both), the tearing at the ninth hour is God's own declaration that the separation is over: the new and living way is open "through the curtain, that is, through his flesh" (Hebrews 10:19-20; the letter's bold figure lets us hold the temple's curtain and his flesh together in one mystery). Isaiah's prayer, "O that you would rend the heavens and come down" (64:1), which was answered at the Jordan, is now answered to the uttermost: he came all the way down, and tore his way back out through death itself, leaving every door open behind him.

5. **Verse 39. "And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he **THUS** breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'" Take it apart: **WHO** is speaking (his job, his nation, his religion)? **WHAT** exactly did he see, list what he did **NOT** see? **WHERE** is he standing? And the question your envelopes have been waiting fourteen weeks for: what has just happened, for the first time in this entire Gospel?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

WHO: a Roman centurion, a Gentile, a pagan, the officer commanding the execution squad, the last man in Judea anyone would nominate, professionally responsible for this death. **WHAT** he saw: not the Transfiguration, not a feeding, not the walking on the sea, not the resurrection; he saw "that he **THUS** breathed his last", the **MANNER** of the dying: the refusal of the narcotic, the prayer in the darkness, the loud cry, the way this man died. **WHERE:** "facing him", squarely in front of the cross, the posture this whole Gospel has been maneuvering every reader into. And what has just happened: the first human being in the Gospel of Mark has called Jesus the **SON OF GOD**. Not Peter at Caesarea Philippi (he said "the Christ"). Not the crowds, not the disciples, not the Twelve at the Supper. The demons knew and were gagged; the Father declared it twice from heaven; the narrator told US in verse one; the high priest sneered it as an accusation. But the first free human confession, the thing every silence command was protecting, comes from a **GENTILE, AT THE CROSS, ABOUT A CORPSE**. That is the Messianic Secret's final answer, fourteen weeks in the making: the title was embargoed until it stood in the one place it could not be misread, because you cannot know who Jesus is apart from the cross, and once you have seen him there, truly seen him, you say it out loud, even in Roman armor, even at your own execution site. And the nations' firstfruits have arrived: the house of prayer for all the nations (11:17), the mustard tree's nesting birds (4:32), the seven hampers (8:8), all of it walks through the torn veil in the person of one soldier. Mark 1:1 called this book "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"; at 15:39 the Gospel's thesis is finally spoken inside the story, and the speaker is the Church of the Gentiles, one man strong.

OPEN THE SEALED GUESSES (10 minutes)

Now. Have each person open their envelope from Session 1 and read their guess aloud: **WHO** did they predict would be the first human to call Jesus the Son of God, and **WHEN**? Celebrate everything: direct hits, near-misses (Peter and the high priest were excellent wrong answers, and the discussion of why they fall short **IS** the theology), and wild guesses. Then ask the room the summary question: knowing what you now know, why did it have to be here, and why did it have to be him? Close the ceremony with this: fourteen weeks ago, Mark told you the answer in his first verse and then dared you to watch the world catch up. Tonight you caught up. The question "who do you say that I am?" now has only one thing left to determine: whether the centurion's sentence is also yours.

Read Mark 15:40-16:8 aloud.

6. **The women, the burial, the tomb (15:40-16:8). Track the witnesses: who watches the death, who watches the burial, who comes at dawn? Then the message at the tomb: "go, tell his disciples AND PETER that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, AS HE TOLD YOU." Two payoffs are hiding in that sentence, find them (one is from 14:27-28; the other has been running since 8:25).**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The witnesses are named at every step: the three women watch the death (15:40, including Session 4's "other Mary," still accounted for), the two Marys watch the burial (15:47), and the women return with spices at dawn (16:1); the two Marys connect death, burial, and empty tomb without a gap, and note their errand: SPICES, to anoint a corpse. They expect a body; the empty tomb ambushed even love. (The burial scene also quietly retires the oldest skeptical theory: Pilate, surprised, verifies the death with THE CENTURION, Rome's professional sign-off; nobody swooned on a Roman's watch.) The message: "He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples AND PETER..." Payoff one: "to Galilee; there you will see him, AS HE TOLD YOU", 14:28 kept to the letter: before anyone fell, on the way to Gethsemane, Jesus had already scheduled the post-Resurrection reunion, "after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." The desertion was foreseen, and the mercy was pre-booked. Payoff two: AND PETER. The denier is named, singled out, not for censure but retrieval, St. Gregory the Great's reading: had the angel not named him, the man who heard the cockcrow would never have dared to come. Mercy calls the worst failure BY NAME, and the second touch that began with tears in a courtyard (14:72; remember 8:25) is completed by two words in an Easter message. Every person in your group who has ever been Peter needs to hear this slowly: the first Easter announcement in history contains a personalized invitation to the man who failed worst.

7. **The ending, with full honesty. The two oldest complete manuscripts of Mark end at 16:8: "they went out and fled from the tomb... and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid." Verses 9-20 have a debated textual history (though they are quoted as early as St. Irenaeus). Two questions: How does the Catholic Church hold this honestly, and, if 16:8 was where Mark stopped, what would that ending MEAN? Then read 16:19-20 and find two last payoffs.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The Catholic position holds two truths without strain, and this study has practiced that honesty all along (the Abiathar note, Mark 1:1's variant, "nor the Son"). Textually: yes, the oldest complete manuscripts end at 16:8, verses 9-20 read like an early summary of the appearances known from the other Gospels, and the Church has never defined that Mark's own hand wrote them. Canonically: the Council of Trent received Mark 16:9-20 as canonical Scripture, so Catholics read these verses as the inspired Word of God, whoever the Spirit's human instrument was, inspiration attaches to the text the Church received, not to a byline. Now the beautiful possibility: if 16:8 was Mark's deliberate last line, the abruptness is genius, not accident. The Gospel ends with silence, "they said nothing to any one", and yet you are holding the story, which means someone spoke; the silence was broken, and the Gospel ends by handing YOU the pen. Fourteen chapters of "tell no one" resolve into an ending that asks: now that the embargo is lifted and you know everything, what will YOU say? The reader is the ending. And the longer ending, as canonical Scripture, seals the arcs regardless: "the Lord Jesus... was taken up into heaven, and SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" (16:19), Psalm 110:1, the temple riddle (12:36) and the claim at trial (14:62), cashed in full: the

Son of David is David's Lord, enthroned. "And they went forth and preached EVERYWHERE" (16:20): the Secret's final state, every lamp on the stand (4:21-22), the Decapolis man's one-sentence commission gone global, and the mustard seed a tree with your group nesting in its branches.

8. **STEELMAN, one last time, build it strong before you answer it. A skeptical friend says: "Mark proves the resurrection legend grew over time. The earliest Gospel originally had NO appearances, just an empty tomb, frightened women, and silence. Then Matthew and Luke add appearances, John adds more, and someone even patched an ending onto Mark. That is exactly what legendary development looks like." Build it at full strength; it uses real textual facts. Then answer. DISCOVERY: someone read 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 aloud, and note when Paul says he RECEIVED this.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Grant the facts: the manuscript history is as stated, and the objection reasons from real data, respect that. Now the answer, and it turns on chronology the objection has backwards. First, the earliest detailed resurrection tradition, with its named appearance list, is not in any Gospel: it is 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (and 1 Thessalonians, earlier still, already professes the risen Jesus, 1:10), written in the 50s, in which Paul recites a formula he says he RECEIVED, creedal tradition he was handed, which many scholars date within a few years of the crucifixion: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures... he was raised on the third day... he APPEARED to Cephas, then to the twelve... then to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive." Appearances, named witnesses, a public dare to check, decades BEFORE Mark wrote. The highest claims are the EARLIEST; legend requires the opposite slope. Second, Mark at 16:8 does not lack resurrection faith, he presupposes appearances in the text everyone agrees he wrote: "he is going before you to Galilee; THERE YOU WILL SEE HIM" (16:7). The seeing is announced; Mark's abruptness is a literary choice, not an evidential gap. Third, the criterion of embarrassment, twice: the first witnesses in every Gospel are WOMEN, whose testimony carried little weight in that world (no inventor chooses them), and the disciples are portrayed as doubting, fleeing, and denying, a church fabricating its origin story writes itself braver. Fourth, geography: the movement exploded in JERUSALEM, walking distance from a checkable tomb, against every incentive of the authorities; and the apologetic inference has always pressed: producing a body would have ended it, and nothing in the record suggests one ever was. Fifth, the witnesses: men who fled a courtyard's questioning went on to suffer for this claim, several to attested martyrdoms, and none, so far as any record shows, ever recanted, for a claim they were positioned to know was true or false; people die for beliefs, but not for inventions they themselves authored. The resurrection is not the soft spot in the Gospel; it is, as St. Augustine says, the precise thing that makes the faith the faith: anyone will grant that Christ died; "the resurrection of Christ is the faith of Christians." And it is the reason a study of a Roman execution ends in hope: the centurion's sentence was spoken over a dead man, and God's answer, three days later, was to agree with him, publicly, permanently, and in person.

Dig Deeper

The study's whole architecture, gathered (walk it with the group as a closing recap): the WAY, from "prepare the way of the Lord" to Bartimaeus following on it (1:2-3 to 10:52). The BREAD, from green grass through crumbs and one loaf to "this is my body" (6:41 to 14:22). The RANSOM, from the road-sentence to the cup "poured out for many" (10:45 to 14:24). TORN, heavens to veil, declaration to declaration (1:10-11 to 15:38-39). The SECRET, from "be silent" to "they went forth and preached everywhere" (1:25 to 16:20), with its logic revealed at the hinge (8:31) and its expiration at the

mountain (9:9). The SEATS, requested in ambition, filled by robbers (10:37 to 15:27). The FOUR WATCHES, prophesied and struck (13:35 through 15:1). And PETER: confession, collapse, cockcrow, and a name spoken at an empty tomb (8:29, 14:72, 16:7), the two-stage healing of every disciple who has ever seen men like trees walking. Mark wasted nothing. Neither, this Gospel insists, does the God who wrote your story.

Send (10 minutes)

1. The centurion looked at the Crucified and said the truth out loud. You have spent fourteen weeks looking. Say your version of his sentence, out loud, to the group, right now: who is Jesus of Nazareth? (Leaders: go first.)
2. "Go, tell his disciples and Peter": the first Easter message retrieves a failure by name and points him to a reunion. Who in your life is standing where Peter stood, certain they have disqualified themselves, and how will you carry "and Peter" to them this month, by name?

Live It This Week (and After)

- Finish Mark's sentence: if 16:8 hands the reader the pen, take it. This week, tell one person, plainly, what you found in this Gospel, the Decapolis commission ("how much the Lord has done for you") is still the whole job description.
- Read the Gospel of Mark whole, in one sitting, this month, ninety minutes, the length of one session. You will hear the threads you now know: the tearing, the bread, the way, the watches. It will feel like rereading a letter from someone you have since come to love.
- Take the centurion's post once this week: fifteen minutes before a crucifix, "facing him," saying nothing but his sentence: "Truly this man is the Son of God." Let the torn veil mean what it means: nothing now stands between you.
- And Peter: if there is a cockcrow in your past that still keeps you from the room, hear yourself named in 16:7, and go to Confession this week. Galilee is scheduled. He got there first.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, you tore the heavens at the Jordan and the veil at the ninth hour, and nothing now stands between us and you. Lord Jesus, Son of God, you came not to be served but to serve, and to give your life as a ransom for many, and we were the many. Holy Spirit, put the centurion's sentence on our lips and Peter's retrieval in our hearts, and send us out like the women from the tomb, except talking. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father, and, if your group is willing, the Creed, the long form of the centurion's sentence, which the Church has been expanding on ever since.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 15:16-16:20

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 15:16-20 (the mock coronation)
- Mark 15:21 (Simon of Cyrene; cf. Mark 8:34)
- Mark 15:22-32 (Golgotha; the refused wine; the right and the left; the taunts)
- Mark 10:37-40 (the requested seats, paid off at 15:27)
- Mark 15:33-36 (the darkness; the cry; the sour wine)
- Amos 8:9 (sun down at noon)
- Psalm 22:1, 7-8, 18, 22-31 (the Passion's script and its ending)
- Psalm 69:21 (the vinegar)
- Mark 15:37-39 (the tearing; the confession)
- Mark 1:10-11 (the first tearing, the inclusio)
- Isaiah 64:1 (rend the heavens, from Session 1)
- Hebrews 10:19-20 with Exodus 26:31-33 (the veil and the new way)
- Mark 15:40-47 (the women; Joseph; the verified death)
- Mark 16:1-8 (the empty tomb; and Peter; Galilee)
- Mark 14:27-28 (the pre-booked reunion)
- Mark 16:9-20 (the longer ending; the right hand of God; preached everywhere)
- Psalm 110:1 (sat down at the right hand, paid off at 16:19)
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (the earliest resurrection creed, steelman chain)
- CCC 603, 638-644, 648, 651-655
- Memory verse: Mark 15:39