

Take-Home Sheet | Session 1

The Beginning of the Gospel (Mark 1:1-13)

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

What We Found

Mark opens with a royal proclamation: "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*" The word "gospel" was herald's language, news of a king. We discovered that Mark's opening quotation weaves Malachi 3:1 into Isaiah 40:3, and that in Isaiah the way being prepared is the way of the LORD himself. John the Baptist arrives dressed as Elijah (2 Kings 1:8; Malachi 4:5), the promised forerunner, which means the LORD is next on stage, and the next one on stage is Jesus.

At the baptism, Mark's Greek says the heavens were *torn open (schizo)*, answering Isaiah's ancient prayer: "O that you would rend the heavens and come down" (Isaiah 64:1). The Father's voice braided three Scriptures into one sentence: the King of Psalm 2:7, the Servant of Isaiah 42:1, and the beloved son of Genesis 22:2. King, Servant, beloved Son bound for the altar. Then the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness for forty days, re-living Israel's forty years of testing, and where Israel failed, the beloved Son was faithful.

And we noticed the strangest thing of all: Mark told *us* who Jesus is in the very first verse. But inside the story, no human character has yet said it aloud.

My Guess (write it, seal it, do not share it)

Mark hands the reader the answer in verse 1: Jesus is the Son of God. But no human character in the story has said it out loud. Here is your sealed guess, to be opened at the end of our study:

Who do you think will be the FIRST human being in Mark's Gospel to call Jesus the Son of God, and at what moment will it happen?

My guess:

Fold this sheet, write your name on the outside, and bring it back. We will open the guesses together when we reach the answer.

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 that Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote down accurately what he remembered of the Lord's words and deeds, careful to omit nothing he had heard and to state nothing falsely. The Gospel you are reading is, by early testimony, the preaching of St. Peter preserved by his companion.

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

St. Irenaeus testifies that Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, handed down to us in writing the things Peter had preached. Its apostolic root anchors its witness; as Sacred Scripture, its authority rests on divine inspiration.

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

St. Jerome assigns the lion, one of the four living creatures of Ezekiel and Revelation, to Mark, because his Gospel opens with a voice roaring in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord." That is why the lion became the enduring symbol of St. Mark.

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.
- Read Mark 1:1-13 once more on your own, slowly, and mark every Old Testament echo you can now hear.

Scripture Memory Verse

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

Before Next Session

Read Mark 1:14-45. Watch how often Mark says "immediately," and watch what Jesus tells people not to do.

Catechism References

CCC 422, 535-537, 538-540, 1224

Take-Home Sheet | Session 2

Immediately (Mark 1:14-45)

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

What We Found

Jesus' whole message in one sentence: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel"* (1:15), Daniel's promised kingdom arriving, because the King has arrived. His first act is to gather people: four fishermen who leave their nets "immediately," with none of the farewell even Elisha was granted (1 Kings 19:19-21). His call remakes what we are: "I will make you become fishers of men."

We watched a strange pattern begin: Jesus commanding silence, to a demon who named him truly (1:24-25), and to the demons at evening "because they knew him" (1:34). Notice that he silences them even when what they say about him is true. We saw him rise long before dawn to pray (1:35) and then walk away from a town still calling his name, because mission is set in prayer, not by applause.

And we watched him touch a leper, a man whose life under the Law was isolation itself (Leviticus 13:45-46). With Jesus the contagion runs backward: holiness flows out and heals. We remembered Naaman, and the king of Israel tearing his clothes: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?" (2 Kings 5:7). Cleansing lepers is God's work. Jesus said, "I will; be clean." Then he sent the man to the priest, honoring the public, priestly verification of healing that the Law provided, a pattern worth pondering.

Voices of the Church

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

St. John Chrysostom marvels at the fishermen's obedience: nets in hand, they left everything at a word, not waiting to finish the day's catch. This is the obedience Christ asks: not to delay, not to negotiate the timing, but to follow at once.

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

Christ "prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God." When you pray this week, St. 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)

Where our touch would be defiled, Christ's touch heals: he is not rendered unclean by the contact; rather his healing power cleanses, for he is the Law's Lord, and the divine power works through his true human flesh. By sending the man to the priest, he honors the Law he gave; and the Church draws the lesson with him: do not despise her public ministry in the very moments God has healed us privately.

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.
- Pray Mark 1:15 as a nightly examen: Where did I hear the King today? Where do I need to turn? Where do I need to trust?
- The leper was healed by touch. Make contact this week with one person who is isolated, a text is fine, a visit is better.

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)

Before Next Session

Read Mark 2:1-3:6.

Catechism References

CCC 541-543, 1427-1429, 1503-1505, 2602

Take-Home Sheet | Session 3

Five Controversies (Mark 2:1-3:6)

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

What We Found

Five arguments in a row, deliberately arranged: they escalate from silent objections "in their hearts" (2:6) to an open alliance of enemies, Pharisees and Herodians, plotting "how to destroy him" (3:6). The shadow of the cross falls across this Gospel by chapter three, and it falls because of who Jesus claimed to be.

At the center: four friends, a torn-open roof, and a sentence that started everything, "My son, your sins are forgiven." The scribes' theology was correct: sin is finally against God (Psalm 51:4), so only God can forgive it. Jesus never corrected their premise; he demonstrated that he holds the prerogative, "that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins," and we found the title's home address in Daniel 7:13-14: the one who receives everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days. We traced that authority "on earth" forward: the crowds glorified God "who had given such authority to men" (Matthew 9:8), and the risen Lord breathed on his apostles: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven" (John 20:21-23). This is why the confessional exists: not a middleman, but mercy delivered out loud, so you never have to wonder.

We also met the Physician who eats with the sick (2:17), the Bridegroom, the LORD's own covenant role (Hosea 2:19-20), who will be "taken away," often heard as the first whisper of the Passion and the root of Christian fasting, and the Lord of the Sabbath, who cited David receiving the holy bread (1 Samuel 21) and restored God's day to its purpose: doing good, saving life.

Voices of the Church

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

Against those who admitted God forgives but denied the Church could absolve, St. Ambrose answers: deny the Church's power to forgive sins and you must deny Baptism itself, for there too sins are remitted through human ministers. 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)

God has given to priests a power he gave neither to angels nor archangels: what they perform on earth, God ratifies above. Chrysostom's point is not clerical pride but 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 no longer keep the Sabbath but order their lives by the Lord's day, the day on which, he says, our life also rose again through Christ and through his death (Letter to the Magnesians 9, paraphrased). Sunday is not the Sabbath's betrayal but its flowering.

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.

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)

Before Next Session

Read Mark 3:7-4:34. Watch for a mountain, a list of twelve names, and four kinds of dirt.

Catechism References

CCC 574, 796, 1441-1445, 1503, 2173

Take-Home Sheet | Session 4

The Secret of the Kingdom (Mark 3:7-4:34)

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

What We Found

As opposition hardened, Jesus founded: on the mountain, covenant geography, he appointed Twelve, the number of Israel's tribes (Exodus 24:4), refounding the covenant people around himself, with Simon Peter named first. Their job description has a non-negotiable order: "to be with him, and to be sent out." Communion before mission, always.

We handled the two hardest sayings in Mark with the Church's calm. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, read with its frame (3:28 promises ALL sins can be forgiven; 3:30 shows the scribes calling the Spirit's work demonic), is final impenitence: the fixed refusal of mercy itself. If you fear you have committed it, take heart: such fear is strong evidence the Spirit is still at work in you, for the hardened do not lose sleep; bring it to Confession, and to a good pastor if it persists. And "your mother and your brothers": Scripture's "brother" covers kinsmen broadly, Lot is Abraham's "brother" though actually his nephew (Genesis 13:8; 14:14), Mark himself shows us a different Mary as mother of "James and Joses" (15:40), and Jesus entrusting his mother to John (John 19:26-27) has always been hard to square with other living sons; the texts converge with the Church's ancient faith. Far from slighting Mary, "whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" crowns her: among his disciples, no one has answered God's will more perfectly than the woman of the fiat.

Then the parables: one seed, four soils, and the variable is never the seed but the ground it lands on. The seed growing secretly, found only in Mark, gives the farmer's whole job: sow, sleep, trust, harvest, "he knows not how" it grows. And the mustard seed becomes the prophets' great tree with birds nesting in its shade (Ezekiel 17:22-23), the nations sheltering in a kingdom that started absurdly small. We are the birds in those branches.

Voices of the Church

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

Scripture calls men "brothers" by nation, by kindred, and by affection, not only by birth from one mother: Lot, Abraham's nephew, and Laban, Jacob's uncle, each called "brother" in the idiom of Scripture. The "brothers" of Jesus are kinsmen, 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)

The blasphemy that "never has forgiveness" is final impenitence: the heart's persevering refusal, unto the end, of the forgiveness the Holy Spirit offers. 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)

The preacher casts the word, but the increase is God's, working unseen in hearts by night and by

day. The kingdom does not advance by our anxiety, and the harvest belongs to the One who alone gives growth.

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: 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.

Scripture Memory Verse

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

Before Next Session

Read Mark 4:35-5:43. Four scenes, four kinds of impossible. Watch what question the disciples ask in the boat.

Catechism References

CCC 499-501, 543-546, 551, 858-860, 1864

Take-Home Sheet | Session 5

Who Then Is This? (Mark 4:35-5:43)

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

What We Found

Four scenes, four impossibilities: chaos, evil, disease, and death, and Jesus walked through all of them and was obeyed. We found the storm scene running on Old Testament rails: stilling seas is the LORD's signature (Psalm 107:23-30; Job 38:8-11), and Jesus' "Be still" is a cognate of the muzzling word he used on a demon. The disciples' question, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?", points where only the LORD stands.

In the Decapolis we met Legion's victim, a man among the tombs, and then met him again "clothed and in his right mind," and heard something new: after chapters of "tell no one," Jesus commanded this Gentile-country man to proclaim, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." His one-sentence testimony needed no training, and neither does ours.

Then Mark's great sandwich: the hemorrhaging woman inside the raising of Jairus's daughter, twelve years of bleeding wrapped around twelve years of life. The woman's touch reversed the current: instead of uncleanness passing to him (Leviticus 15:19-27), power went out from him, and he would not let it stay anonymous: "Daughter, your faith has made you well." Faith reaching through matter to the Lord: the Catechism calls the sacraments "powers that come forth" from the Body of Christ (CCC 1116), language born in this scene. And at Jairus's house: "Do not fear, only believe," then *Talitha cumi*, a hand taken, a girl raised, and the Lord of life asking someone to get her lunch.

Voices of the Church

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

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 them. We must not choose between the sleeping man and the sea-commanding Lord: the one Christ is both, true God and true man.

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

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 and receive nothing; one touches him in faith and power goes out.

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

The Lord takes the child by the hand, restores her with his word, and commands that she be given something to eat. So Christ deals with every soul he raises from the death of sin: he does not leave it without food, the nourishment of the Word and of the Sacrament, lest it faint on the way.

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.

Scripture Memory Verse

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

Before Next Session

Read Mark 6. Two banquets are coming: notice who hosts each one.

Catechism References

CCC 994, 1116, 1503-1504, 1670-1673

Take-Home Sheet | Session 6

The Shepherd and the Bread (Mark 6)

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

What We Found

One chapter, two banquets. At Herod's birthday feast, a king who admired John, feared him, and "heard him gladly" served the prophet's head on a platter rather than lose face over a rash oath, admiration without obedience curdling into complicity. St. Ambrose's verdict: a wicked promise must be broken, not kept. On the green grass, the other banquet: Jesus saw the crowd "as sheep without a shepherd" (Moses' phrase, Numbers 27:17; Ezekiel's promise, "I myself will be the shepherd," Ezekiel 34:15), made them lie down in green pastures like Psalm 23 come to life, and fed five thousand from five loaves, exceeding Elisha's greatest feeding (2 Kings 4:42-44) by orders of magnitude. Twelve baskets remained, long read as one per tribe.

We said the four verbs out loud: took, blessed, broke, gave. Keep them; this Gospel is not done with bread. On the way we also found the biblical root of a sacrament: the Twelve "anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them" (6:13), the practice the Church's Anointing of the Sick grows from (James 5:14-15; CCC 1511).

Then the sea: Jesus came treading the waves and "meant to pass by them", the technical language of theophany, God passing by Moses in the cleft of the rock and Elijah at Horeb, and Job's God who alone "trampled the waves of the sea." His greeting hid the burning bush in plain sight: "Take heart, *it is I*; have no fear." And Mark's verdict on the Twelve: "they did not understand about the loaves." Understand the loaves, and you know who walks the sea.

Voices of the Church

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

The multiplication of the loaves is nature unveiled, not violated: the same God who yearly multiplies a few grains into 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 we would ask what it means.

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

It is sometimes contrary to duty to fulfill a promise: Herod's keeping of his rash vow, beheading a prophet to avoid embarrassment 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.

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

The Lord sees the crowd, is moved with compassion, and responds first by teaching, and only afterward by feeding. So Christ still deals with his flock: gathered first by the word, then nourished at the table. What Bede sees in the order of Mark 6, the Church would later name the one table of God's word and of Christ's body, from which she has always fed her children.

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: it is not reserved to the dying (CCC 1514-1515), and Mark 6:13 shows its apostolic root.

Scripture Memory Verse

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

Before Next Session

Read Mark 7:1-8:26. Watch where the bread travels next.

Catechism References

CCC 548-549, 1335, 1506-1509, 1511

Take-Home Sheet | Session 7

Crumbs for the Children (Mark 7:1-8:26)

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

What We Found

We read the tradition controversy more carefully than the pamphlets do. Jesus' target in Mark 7 is precise: human traditions that NULLIFY the word of God, like Corban, the pious technicality for dodging "Honor your father and mother." Isaiah 29:13 names the disease: lips near, hearts far. And the New Testament itself distinguishes those "precepts of men" from the apostolic Tradition it commands us to keep: "hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15; see 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Timothy 2:2). Scripture and authentic Tradition flow from one wellspring (CCC 80-82), and the Bible's own table of contents reached us by Tradition's hands. The honest test is Jesus' own: does a tradition serve God's word, or void it?

Then the bread crossed the border. A Gentile mother took Jesus' hard test, "the children first", and turned his own metaphor with humble wit: "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." The only person in Mark to win an exchange with Jesus, and her crumbs became a banquet: back in the Decapolis, Jesus fed four thousand from seven loaves, seven hampers left over, twelve baskets in chapter 6 and seven hampers here, long read as Israel and then the nations. In between, *Ephphatha*, "Be opened": fingers, touch, and a word that opened deaf ears, ticking Isaiah 35's checklist for the day God comes, and echoing creation's verdict, "He has done all things well" (compare Genesis 1:31). The Church still speaks that word over the newly baptized.

And two questions still hanging in the air: in a boat with "one loaf" aboard, Jesus quizzed the Twelve on every basket-number and asked, "Do you not yet understand?" And at Bethsaida he healed a blind man in two touches, the man seeing "men like trees, walking" before seeing clearly. Bring both riddles back next week.

Voices of the Church

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

Had the apostles left no writings, we would follow the order of the Tradition they handed down to those to whom they committed the churches, as nations without paper and ink in fact did. Scripture and apostolic Tradition are not rivals but one deposit, guarded publicly 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)

Rebuffed by silence and answered with a hard word, she neither despaired nor demanded, but pressed in with humility and wit, and found mercy. The delay was never refusal: Christ withheld the answer so that her hidden faith might be displayed and crowned, a lesson for everyone whose prayers meet with silence.

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

The opening rite of Baptism is the mystery Christ celebrated when he cured the deaf and dumb man with the word Ephphatha, "Be opened." In Ambrose's Milan the priest touched the ears and the nostrils, the ears opened to receive the word of God. Today's rite touches the ears and the mouth (CCC 1236), so that the newly baptized may hear God's word and profess the faith. What the Lord did in the Decapolis, his Church does sacramentally still.

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, closing with the woman's words: "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."
- At the next Baptism you attend, listen for the Ephphatha and pray it over yourself: Lord, open my ears to your word and my mouth to profess it.

Scripture Memory Verse

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

Before Next Session

Read Mark 8:27-9:1, slowly; it is short and it is the hinge of the entire Gospel. Jesus is going to ask a question on the road. Before the session, answer it yourself, in one written sentence: "But who do you say that I am?"

Catechism References

CCC 80-83, 1151-1152, 1236, 1335, 1852-1853

Take-Home Sheet | 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

What We Found

At Caesarea Philippi, under a cliff of dead gods and a temple to Caesar, Jesus asked the question the whole Gospel had been building: "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ", the first true title spoken by a human being in this Gospel (check the exact wording of your sealed guess). And then everything turned: Jesus silenced them and, for the first time, spoke plainly: the Son of man must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and after three days rise. The "must" points to the Scriptures, above all Isaiah 53, the Servant despised, rejected, wounded for our transgressions. And there was a key to eight weeks of silence commands: the title without the cross would be heard as politics and glory, so the title waits until the cross defines it.

Peter, right title in hand, rebuked the plan, and heard the hardest sentence Jesus ever spoke to a friend: "Get behind me, Satan!" A Messiah without a cross is the tempter's old offer, most dangerous in a loving friend's voice. But notice the mercy in the grammar: "get behind me" is the disciple's position, not the exile's, Peter was re-positioned, not expelled. And last week's riddle paid off: the blind man who saw "men like trees, walking" reads as the parable; Peter, right title, blurred meaning, as the man. Then Jesus widened the circle to all of us: deny yourself, take up your cross, follow, because "whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." The life we clutch is leaking anyway; the life spent for him is the only one beyond loss.

Voices of the Church

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

In the mid-second century, Justin answered the objection Peter felt: a crucified Messiah seems cursed by the Law itself. Read Isaiah 53 whole, he answered: the Servant enters glory precisely through suffering; the curse he bore was ours, taken willingly. The scandal of the cross is the shape of the rescue.

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

Peter's confession came from the Father's revelation and became the rock on which Christ builds his Church, a strength given to Peter, not generated by him. The Church's stability never depended on the steadiness of Peter's nerves; the rock is what grace made of him.

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

To deny oneself is to treat the old self as a stranger whose claims we no longer recognize; to take up the cross is to live ready daily, carrying it not as punishment but as trophy. And Christ repays absurdly: lose a life that was always leaking away, and receive one that cannot be taken.

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, and let it interrogate your week.

- Choose one concrete self-denial for seven days, "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.

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)

Before Next Session

Read Mark 9. Last week Jesus promised some standing there would see the kingdom come with power. Chapter 9 answers.

Catechism References

CCC 440, 601, 618, 890-891

Take-Home Sheet | Session 9

Listen to Him (Mark 9)

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

What We Found

"And after six days", Mark's rare time-stamp opened a new Sinai: the cloud covered the mountain six days in Exodus 24, and on this mountain the Son stood transfigured, garments whiter than any fuller on earth could bleach, a glory the Church confesses as his own, where Moses' shone reflected and, as St. Paul reads it, fading (2 Corinthians 3). Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, stood talking with him, and when Peter proposed three booths, one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, as though the three stood on a level, the cloud of glory answered: "This is my beloved Son; LISTEN TO HIM", the promise of Deuteronomy 18:15 pointed, with Moses himself as witness, at Jesus. At the baptism the voice spoke TO Jesus; on the mountain it spoke to US. And coming down, a thread snapped taut: "tell no one what you have seen, UNTIL the Son of Man should have risen from the dead." For the first time, the silence has an expiration date, and it is the Resurrection.

In the valley: nine disciples defeated, a boy convulsed, and a father who prayed the most honest prayer in Scripture, "I believe; help my unbelief!", and Jesus counted it as faith and healed his son. Some battles, he told them privately, are won only by prayer. Then, walking to Jerusalem behind a man predicting his own death, the Twelve argued about who was the greatest, and Jesus set a child in their midst: greatness is measured at the bottom: last of all, servant of all, welcoming one such child in his name, and in the child, the One who sent him. And he warned, with hyperbole only love could sharpen, that sin can cost everything: hell is real: not God's cruelty but definitive self-exclusion freely chosen (CCC 1033), the door, as Christian writers have put it, locked from the inside, warned against by the most loving voice that ever spoke.

Voices of the Church

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

The great purpose of the Transfiguration was to remove the scandal of the cross from the disciples' hearts: the excellence of his hidden dignity was revealed in advance so that the humiliation of his freely chosen Passion would not shake their faith. 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)

"Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt." As his maxim is commonly unpacked, a difficulty is a question still being worked; a doubt, a verdict already rendered. The father who cried "I believe; help my unbelief!" was a believer with difficulties who brought them to exactly the right place, and Christ counted his prayer as faith.

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

Christ installed the child's condition, free of the love of rank, simply receiving, as the entrance requirement of the kingdom. The itch to be greatest breeds division among Christians, and its one cure is the deliberate choice of the lowest place, after the pattern of the Master.

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.
- Listen to him, mechanically: pick one Gospel command you have been treating as optional and obey it this week, as your response to the Father's one instruction.
- Take the lowest place once, deliberately and secretly, and offer it for the person in your life most obsessed with rank (it may be you).

Scripture Memory Verse

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

Before Next Session

Read Mark 10. This study takes its title from one verse in this chapter; see if you can find it.

Catechism References

CCC 516, 554-556, 1033-1037, 2610

Take-Home Sheet | Session 10

On the Way (Mark 10)

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

What We Found

The road-to-Jerusalem chapter put discipleship's price tags on the table: marriage, children, money, power. On marriage, Jesus went past Moses' concession to "the beginning of creation": one flesh, joined by God, protected by "let not man put asunder", not a burden laid but an inheritance restored, made livable again by grace (Genesis 1:27; 2:24; CCC 1614-1615). On children: the kingdom is RECEIVED, like a child, never earned. On money: the rich man is the only individual in Mark whom Jesus is said to have LOVED, and the only person in the Gospels to walk away sad from a direct call; the camel stays enormous, salvation is impossible for men, "but not with God."

James and John asked for thrones and were offered a cup, the prophets' cup of wrath (Isaiah 51:17), and a baptism into death. Then the sentence this study is named for, spoken on the road: *"For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* Ransom: the price that frees captives, Exodus language, and the price is himself. "For many": Isaiah 53's Servant, who bore the sin of many, and "many," in the Church's reading, sets no limit: Christ died for all (CCC 605). File the phrase "for many" somewhere safe; this Gospel is not done with it. And the chapter closed with Bartimaeus: blind, begging BESIDE the way, shouting "Son of David" while the crowd shushed him, and Jesus, days from Jerusalem, did not silence the title. Asked "What do you want me to do for you?", he answered better than two apostles had an hour earlier: mercy, then sight, and then he threw off his cloak, plausibly his coat, coin-catcher, and bed in one, "and followed him ON the way." From beside the road to on it: that is the whole Gospel's picture of conversion.

Voices of the Church

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

To whom was the ransom paid? Not to the devil, God owes the robber nothing, and not to a Father who craved blood. The Father accepts the Son's offering not because he demanded it, but because man had to be sanctified by the humanity of God. The fact of our redemption is certain; its inner mystery we adore rather than flatten.

Voices of the Church: St. John Paul II (Theology of the Body, opening catecheses on Matthew 19, 1979)

When the Pharisees asked about divorce, Christ twice appealed to "the beginning," and the Theology of the Body takes the Lord's method as its own: returning to Genesis to recover what the body and the spousal union meant before hardness of heart. 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?)

The Lord's command strikes not at possessions but at the passion of possession: wealth damns when it owns the soul and sanctifies when a detached soul wields it for the needy. The rich man went away sorrowful, one might add with him, because he was asked for the one thing he had never

considered selling: his grip.

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.
- Pray for one marriage by name daily this week, asking Christ who restored "the beginning" to restore it.

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)

Before Next Session

Read Mark 11-12. The Son of David enters his city. The Son of David enters his city.

Catechism References

CCC 601, 605, 608, 1614-1615, 2382, 2544-2547

Take-Home Sheet | Session 11

The Lord Comes to His Temple (Mark 11-12)

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

What We Found

The Son of David entered his city on a colt Zechariah ordered five centuries early (Zechariah 9:9), to the crowd's Psalm 118 "Hosanna", and then, ominously, "looked round at everything" in the temple and left. Mark 1:2 drew on Malachi 3:1; chapters 11-12 deliver 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?" Next morning: Mark's greatest sandwich, a fig tree, all leaves and no fruit (the prophets' image of Israel, Jeremiah 8:13), wrapped around the cleansing of a temple that was all activity and no fruit, its Court of the Gentiles, the nations' one place to pray, paved over with commerce: "My house shall be called a house of prayer FOR ALL THE NATIONS" (Isaiah 56:7), not "a den of robbers", a hideout of false security (Jeremiah 7:11).

In the tenants parable, Jesus told salvation history with himself inside it: the servants (prophets) beaten, and last of all "a BELOVED SON", the Father's own word from the Jordan and the mountain, killed and cast out. Yet the vineyard is not destroyed; it is "given to others": new stewards, not no vineyard, and "the very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" (Psalm 118:22). He then out-argued every party: Caesar may have the coin that bears his image; and what bears God's image (Genesis 1:27), yourself, belongs to God, the application the Church has always drawn; the God of Abraham speaks in the present tense, "not God of the dead, but of the living"; and the whole law is summed in a double love (Matthew's parallel says it "hangs" there, 22:40): God with all heart, soul, mind, and strength, and neighbor as self. Last exhibit before the Passion: a widow's two coins, "her whole living", in Greek her whole livelihood, all she had to live on, given whole, days before another life is given whole.

Voices of the Church

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

The whole of Scripture exists to build up the double love of Mark 12: love of God for his own sake, and neighbor for God's sake. Whoever thinks he understands the Scriptures in a way that does not build up this twofold love has not yet understood them.

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

God weighs the gift not by what leaves the hand but by what remains behind it. The rich gave surplus and kept their security; she gave two coins and kept nothing, and so gave more than all of them together. No one is too poor to be magnificent before God.

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

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, refused by the builders, becomes, as the

psalm promises, the head of the corner of a new building.

Live It This Week

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

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)

Before Next Session

Read Mark 13, Jesus' longest speech in this Gospel, given facing the temple. Do not panic at it. And keep your sealed guess somewhere you can find it.

Catechism References

CCC 583-586, 755, 993, 2055

Take-Home Sheet | Session 12

The Olivet Discourse (Mark 13)

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

What We Found

Seated on the Mount of Olives "opposite the temple", the mountain where Ezekiel watched God's glory withdraw, and where Zechariah put the LORD's feet on the day of judgment, Jesus answered the disciples' question about WHEN the temple would fall. His discourse, as Catholic interpreters have long read it, weaves two horizons: the destruction of Jerusalem, which came in A.D. 70, within that generation, a fulfillment the Church's interpreters have long recognized and his own coming in glory at the end. Flatten the two into one and you get every end-times panic in history; the discourse itself is explicitly ANTI-panic: "do not be alarmed... the end is not yet... this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs."

The great discovery: the prophets taught us to read the prophets. The darkened sun and falling stars of 13:24-25 are Isaiah's own idiom for the fall of BABYLON (Isaiah 13:10) and Edom (34:4), a kingdom's collapse in cosmic dress, fitting the temple-world's end, and open, at the far horizon, to the real consummation the Creed confesses. "The Son of Man coming in clouds" is Daniel 7:13, where he comes with clouds TO the Ancient of Days, to be enthroned and vindicated. And two honesty verses: "this generation" did see the temple fall; and "of that day or that hour no one knows... nor the Son, but only the Father", what the Son admitted not knowing, he was not sent to reveal (CCC 474), which forbids, forever, every date-setting industry. The last word of Jesus' public teaching: "What I say to you I say to all: WATCH", a doorkeeper at his post, "in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning." Keep those four underlined.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Letter to Hesychius)

The Lord willed the day to remain hidden so that every day would be watched. 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.

Voices of the Church: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Catechetical Lecture 15)

We preach not one coming only but a second, far more glorious than the first. Do not chase those who whisper that the Christ has appeared in secret here or there: his return will need no rumor. 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)

The world 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.

Live It This Week

- Get watch-ready the Catholic way: go to Confession this week, not someday, so that any hour the door opens is a good hour.
- At Mass, catch the prayer 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.
- Retire one anxiety: write Mark 13:31 over the fear you have been treating as a countdown, and hand it to the only One who knows the day.

Scripture Memory Verse

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

Before Next Session

Read Mark 14:1-15:15, slowly and prayerfully; it is the night of the Passion's beginning.

Catechism References

CCC 472-474, 668-677, 1040, 2612

Take-Home Sheet | Session 13

The Cup and the Cross (Mark 14:1-15:15)

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

What We Found

At Bethany, an unnamed woman broke a year's wages over Jesus' head, and we saw the thirteen-chapter irony: "Christ" means ANOINTED ONE, and the only anointing he receives in this Gospel is hers, for burial. She accepted what Peter once rebuked: a Messiah who dies, and earned a promise kept at our own table: "wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Then the upper room, and everything planted came due. The four verbs of the green grass, took, blessed, broke, gave (echoed at the second feeding, where "gave thanks," eucharistesas, would give the sacrament its very name), and then the words the feedings never had: "*Take; this is my body.*" Over the cup, the covenant phrase of Exodus 24:8 with one staggering upgrade: "This is my BLOOD OF THE COVENANT", Sinai's covenant blood was splashed on the people; this covenant blood is given INTO them, Jeremiah's new covenant written on hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-33), "poured out for MANY", the ransom-saying of 10:45 and the Servant of Isaiah 53 completing themselves at the table. The one loaf in the boat finally made sense. Paul's warning sealed the realism: whoever eats unworthily is "guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:27), you cannot profane a mere symbol, and the early witnesses concur: "Since he himself has declared, This is my body, who shall dare to doubt?"

In Gethsemane, the cup arrived, and the Church's whole Christology stood in one sentence: "Abba, Father... remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will", a true human will, really recoiling, freely surrendered, Adam's garden reversed in a garden at night. The three commanded to WATCH slept, and the clock we underlined last week began striking: supper in the EVENING, the garden at night, Peter's COCKCROW, the verdict "as soon as it was MORNING." At the trial, the embargo of thirteen chapters ended from Jesus' own mouth: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" "I AM; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven", the full claim, at the moment it could not be misunderstood, at the price of his life. And Peter, whose preaching tradition tells us this Gospel records, kept his own worst hour in the telling wherever he preached, because before anyone fell, Jesus had already scheduled the reunion: "after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (14:28).

Voices of the Church

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

The heterodox "abstain from the Eucharist... because they do not confess that the Eucharist IS the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins." For the generation taught by the apostles, the realism of "this is my body" was the dividing line.

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

Since he himself has declared of the bread, "This is my body," who shall ever dare to doubt it? He changed water into wine at Cana by his will alone; is he not worthy of belief when he changes wine into blood? Judge not by taste, but be fully assured by faith in the Lord's own word.

Voices of the Church: St. Maximus the Confessor (Disputation with Pyrrhus; the teaching canonized at the Sixth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople III, 680-681)

"Not what I will, but what you will" proves Christ possesses a true human will, really recoiling from death as human nature must, and freely, perfectly surrendered to the Father. As St. Gregory Nazianzen taught (Letter 101, to Cledonius), what is not assumed is not healed; in the garden our own willing was assumed, healed where it broke, and taught at last to say Father.

Live It This Week

- Keep the hour he asked for: one Holy Hour this week with Mark 14 open. If you fall asleep, you are in apostolic company; come back, as he did.
- At Mass, when the words of institution are spoken, 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, once daily for seven days.
- BRING YOUR SEALED GUESS to the final session. Do not open it early.

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)

Before Next Session

Read Mark 15:16-16:20, the end, and the beginning. Read it on your knees if you can. Bring your sealed guess, unopened.

Catechism References

CCC 475, 612, 1339-1340, 1362-1367, 1376

Take-Home Sheet | 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

What We Found

The soldiers staged a fake coronation and performed a real one: purple, crown, homage, acclamation, every mocking word true. At Golgotha the seats "at his right and at his left in your glory" (10:37) were finally filled, by two crucified robbers: his glory was the cross all along. In the darkness he prayed Psalm 22, the psalm being enacted around him line by line (the wagging heads, the divided garments), the psalm that ends not in dereliction but in the ends of the earth turning to the LORD and deliverance proclaimed "to a people yet unborn", to us. The Father never stopped loving the Son (CCC 603); the Son carried our estrangement all the way down, so that whoever turns to him in any darkness is never beyond his saving presence: he has prayed our worst prayer from the inside.

Then the two sentences the whole Gospel was built toward. "The curtain of the temple was TORN in two, from top to bottom", *schizo*, the verb used exactly twice in Mark: heavens torn at the baptism, veil torn at the death, each answered by a declaration of sonship. Torn from God's side, and never to be neatly shut: the new and living way opened through the curtain, that is, through his flesh (Hebrews 10:19-20). And then a Roman centurion, a Gentile, the officer of the execution, standing FACING him, seeing only how he died, became the first human being in this Gospel to say it: "*Truly this man was the Son of God!*" The sealed guesses opened, and the Secret's logic stood complete: the title waited fourteen chapters for the one place it could not be misread. You cannot know who Jesus is apart from the cross; and once you have seen him there, you say it out loud.

At dawn: the stone rolled back, "He has risen, he is not here," and the tenderest two words in the Easter message: "go, tell his disciples AND PETER", the denier retrieved by name, the Galilee reunion Jesus booked before anyone fell (14:28) kept to the letter. We handled Mark's ending with the Church's honesty: the oldest manuscripts stop at 16:8, and the Church receives the Gospel entire, "with all its parts" as the Council of Trent declared, so the longer ending stands as canonical, inspired Scripture; and if 16:8 was Mark's last line, the women's silence hands the reader the pen, you know the story, so the ending is yours to speak. The longer ending seals it: "he sat down at the right hand of God" (Psalm 110 cashed), "and they went forth and preached everywhere." Every lamp on the stand.

Voices of the Church

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

Creation confessed what the priests denied: the sun withdrew, the earth trembled, and the veil was torn asunder as the former cultic figures found their 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)

Had the angel not summoned him 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.

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

It is no great thing to believe that Christ died; pagans and enemies believe that much. The faith of Christians is the resurrection of Christ, and Christ risen is the head whose rising 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.

Live It This Week (and After)

- Finish Mark's sentence: tell one person, plainly, what you found in this Gospel. "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, about ninety minutes. You will hear every thread you now know, and it will feel like rereading a letter from someone you have come to love.
- Take the centurion's post once this week: fifteen minutes before a crucifix, facing him, saying only his sentence. Nothing now stands between you.
- If a cockcrow in your past still keeps you from the room, hear yourself named in 16:7 and go to Confession. Galilee is scheduled; he got there first.

Scripture Memory Verse

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

Where to Go From Here

You have now walked the fastest, fiercest Gospel from the torn heavens to the torn veil. Three natural next steps: pray with the Sunday Gospels (Mark returns every Year B, and you will hear it differently forever); take up one of the longer Gospels with the same inductive eyes, watching for each evangelist's own threads; and keep the study's four verbs, took, blessed, broke, gave, as your weekly appointment: everything this Gospel taught you converges at the altar.

Catechism References

CCC 603, 638-644, 648, 651-655