

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

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

LEADER'S GUIDE · NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Part 1 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the great descent: the Son who outranks the angels went, for a little while, below them; he shares our flesh and blood all the way into death, in order to destroy the one who holds death's power, and he is not ashamed to call the people in your living room brethren.

Catholic Touchstone. The Incarnation, and why it had to be total: what has not been assumed has not been healed. The session's steelman meets the quiet modern doubt that an omnipotent Son cannot really sympathize, and answers it from the text's own insistence on real flesh, real testing, real death. The sermon also drops its first mention of its favorite title tonight: “a merciful and faithful high priest” (2:17).

What You Need to Know

Psalm 8, read twice. The passage opens by quoting Psalm 8: what is man, made a little less than God (so the Hebrew; the Greek Old Testament that Hebrews quotes reads “lower than the angels”), crowned with glory, everything under his feet. The preacher reads it honestly (“we do not yet see everything in subjection to him”: humanity's coronation looks like a broken promise) and then reads it again: “but we see Jesus.” The psalm about mankind comes true first in one man, who took the “lower than the angels” clause literally and the crown by way of the cross. This double reading is the session's engine: Psalm 8 as humanity's job description, fulfilled by the one who became human to make it come true for the rest of us.

The vocabulary of solidarity. Count with the homework: “children share in flesh and blood; he himself likewise partook of the same nature” (2:14); “made like his brethren in every respect” (2:17); suffered, tempted, tasted death for every one. The word for pioneer, *archēgos* (2:10), means the trailblazer, the one who cuts the path others walk: salvation is not shouted down to us from above; it is walked ahead of us from inside our condition. And 2:11: “he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” The sentence deserves a full stop in the room.

“Made perfect through suffering” (2:10), precisely. The verb *teleioō* does not mean the Son was morally defective and improved; it means completed, brought to the goal, and in the Greek Old Testament it is consecration language, used for the ordination of priests. Suffering did not fix Jesus; it vested him. His human experience of obedience under suffering is what qualifies him, as man, for the office the sermon is about to spend ten chapters on. Keep this precision ready; the phrase recurs at 5:9 and 7:28.

Death's tyrant dethroned. 2:14–15 is one of Scripture's clearest statements of the Paschal strategy: he took flesh and blood precisely so he could die, and through death destroy him who has the power of death, the devil, and release those held in lifelong slavery by fear of death. The devil's leverage over the human race is fear of dying, and Christ broke the leverage by walking into death and out its far side. The ancient Church's Easter shout (trampling down death by death) is this verse sung.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalms 8:4–6. Humanity's coronation psalm, held against the visible evidence, then fulfilled in Jesus. The group works both readings in Questions 2 and 3.

Psalms 22:22. The night's hidden gem. Hebrews 2:12 puts a psalm verse in the risen Christ's mouth: "I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee." Have the group find where that verse lives: Psalm 22, the psalm of the crucifixion, whose first line Jesus prayed from the cross. The psalm that begins "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" turns, at verse 22, to praise in the midst of the brethren, and Hebrews says the singer is Jesus, leading the congregation's worship from inside it. The crucified one becomes the cantor of his brethren.

Isaiah 8:17–18. "I will put my trust in him... Here am I, and the children God has given me" (2:13): the prophet standing with his children amid a faithless generation becomes the Son standing with his. The Incarnation ends with Christ presenting a family.

Voices of the Church

St. Athanasius *On the Incarnation*

The great defender of Nicaea states the exchange at the heart of tonight's text: the Son of God became man so that we might become god, sharing by grace what he is by nature. And on death: by his death, death itself was slain; the body he took was mortal precisely so the immortal Word could meet death in it and unmake it from inside. The Catechism quotes his exchange formula word for word (CCC 460).

St. Gregory Nazianzen *Letter 101, to Cledonius*

Against those who trimmed the Incarnation, the Theologian coined the rule the Church has kept ever since: what has not been assumed has not been healed. If the Son took only part of our condition, only that part is saved. Hebrews 2's "in every respect" is the scriptural spine of his rule: the totality of the assumption is the totality of the cure.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies*

The Word of God became what we are, that he might bring us to be what he himself is (Book 5, Preface). Elsewhere in the same work (Book 2) St. Irenaeus teaches that Christ passed through every stage of human life, sanctifying each age he touched; the Church calls this recapitulation, Christ gathering up our whole story healed. The trailblazer of Hebrews 2:10 cutting the path, in second-century words.

Catechism Connection

CCC 456–460. Why the Word became flesh: to save us, that we might know God's love, to be our model, and, in the Fathers' astonishing summary, to make us partakers of the divine nature. Paragraph 460 quotes St. Athanasius directly.

CCC 635. The Catechism's Holy Saturday paragraph quotes the ancient homily: Christ has gone to free the prisoners, holding the weapons that won the victory. Hebrews 2:14–15 is its scriptural charter: death's tyrant disarmed from inside death.

CCC 609. Jesus embraced in his human heart the Father's love and offered himself freely: the human obedience through which the trailblazer was consecrated.

CCC 2602. Jesus includes all humanity in his prayer, for in his Incarnation he assumed all: the cantor of Psalm 22:22, praying in the midst of the congregation.

Thread Watch

THE HIGH PRIEST TITLE (PLANTS TONIGHT, LEADER ONLY)

2:17 drops the sermon's favorite title for the first time: “a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.” Point at it, let the group feel its novelty (no Gospel calls Jesus a priest outright), and explain nothing: the sermon will spend its whole central act on this title. Say only: “Write it down. That word is the rest of the study.”

THREAD 1 · PSALM 110 (DORMANT)

Nothing surfaces tonight. Keep the seal on the psalm; collect any outstanding My Guess slips from Take-Home 1 and store them.

THREAD 2 · THE BETTER TALLY (PUBLIC)

No new entries in this passage; the board stands at one. Bring it anyway and let the group confirm the empty week: the discipline of checking is the game.

Session Goals

1. The double reading of Psalm 8 lands: humanity's broken coronation, fulfilled first in Jesus.
2. The homework count pays off: the group feels the text's relentless insistence on real flesh and blood.
3. The Psalm 22:22 discovery fires: the crucified one sings in the midst of the congregation.
4. The sympathy steelman is answered from the text: omnipotence did not fake the temptations.
5. The high priest title is planted and left gleaming.

Time Note

Built for 75 to 90 minutes. If the night runs short, compress Question 4 (Isaiah 8) into a reading with one observation and cut the Dig Deeper box, in that order. Do not cut the Psalm 8 double reading (Questions 2 and 3), the Psalm 22 discovery (Question 5), or the steelman (Question 8). Cap the steelman at fifteen minutes, and remember: no ANSWER box is a script.

Part 2 · Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Father, your Son was not ashamed to call us brethren. He took our flesh and blood, our temptations, our fear, and our death, and carried them through the grave to glory. Tonight let us see Jesus: crowned because he suffered, merciful because he was tested, ours because he chose to be. Free every heart here still enslaved by the fear of death, through the trailblazer of our salvation. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Who is someone that earned the right to speak into your life by going through something with you, not just talking at you? What did their solidarity change?

W2. Homework check: what was your flesh-and-blood count? How many times does this passage insist Jesus shared our actual condition, and which line surprised you most?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 2:5–9

LIVE DISCOVERY: Ask someone to find and read Psalm 8:4–6.

1. What does Psalm 8 say human beings were made for: what rank, what crown, what dominion? And then look out any window at the actual human race. Verse 8 admits the problem out loud: what do we “not yet see”?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A note the leader needs first: in your Bibles, Psalm 8:5 reads “little less than God”; Hebrews quotes the Greek Old Testament, which renders it “a little lower than the angels,” and the preacher builds his argument on that wording. Either way the psalm sets man just beneath the heavenly court: crowned with glory and honor, everything under our feet, humanity’s coronation psalm, the Genesis 1 dominion set to music. And the honest admission: “we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.” Look at history, look at the news, look inward: the crown is the most obviously unfulfilled promise in Scripture. The preacher refuses to pretend otherwise, which is why what he says next lands.

2. “But we see Jesus” (2:9). Reread the psalm’s phrases as verse 9 reuses them: who was made “for a little while lower than the angels,” and how was he “crowned with glory and honor”? What has the preacher discovered inside Psalm 8?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The psalm about mankind comes true first in one man. The Son, higher than the angels (all of Session 1), stooped for a little while beneath them: that is the Incarnation in one clause. And the crowning came “because of the suffering of death”: the path to the promised crown ran through the cross, and he tasted death “for every one.” Psalm 8 was humanity’s job description; Jesus took the

job. The rest of us are crowned in him or not at all: he fulfills the psalm as the first of many, not instead of them.

3. 2:10 says it was fitting that God should make “the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Two puzzles: what is a pioneer (archēgos, a trailblazer), and how can the sinless Son be “made perfect”? What did suffering give him that he did not have before?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A trailblazer cuts the path he then leads others down: salvation is not shouted from a safe distance but walked ahead of us from inside our condition, through suffering and death and out. And “made perfect” (teleioō) is not moral repair: in the Greek Old Testament it is consecration language, the word for ordaining priests. Suffering did not fix Jesus; it vested him. As man, he was completed for an office by actually undergoing what those he serves undergo. File that: the sermon has just whispered where it is going.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 2:10–13

4. “He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (2:11). Sit with the phrasing: what would he have every reason to be ashamed of, and what does his refusal of shame mean for the person in this room who is quietly ashamed of themselves?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He knows exactly what we are: the sanctifier calling the being-sanctified his siblings, with full knowledge of our records. Shame is the instinct to hide from association; Jesus, with every fact in hand, publicly claims the association. For the participant carrying secret shame, this is the passage's pastoral center: the verdict of the only one qualified to be ashamed of you is that he is not. Give this a real pause; someone needs it.

LIVE DISCOVERY: Verse 12 quotes a psalm: “I will proclaim thy name to my brethren.” Ask someone to hunt down where it comes from, and read that psalm's first line aloud.

5. The quotation is Psalm 22:22. What is the first line of Psalm 22, who prayed it, and where? So who is singing at verse 22 of that psalm, according to Hebrews, and to whom, standing where?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me”: the psalm Jesus prayed from the cross. Psalm 22 descends into the crucifixion's darkness and then turns, at verse 22, to praise “in the midst of the congregation.” Hebrews puts the whole turn in Christ's mouth: the crucified one comes through death singing, and he sings the Father's praise from the middle of his brethren, inside the assembly, as its cantor. When your congregation sings on Sunday, this verse says who is leading. The Holy Spirit intended in that psalm depths its human author did not fully grasp, and Hebrews harvests them.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 2:14–16

6. Walk the strategy of 2:14–15 step by step: why did he take flesh and blood, what did he do with them, whom did he destroy, and whom did he release? What exactly was the devil's leverage over the human race?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He took flesh and blood in order to be able to die; through death he destroyed the one who has the power of death, the devil; and he released those “who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.” The devil holds the power of death (2:14), but his leverage over human lives is the fear of it (2:15): fear of death drives grasping, hoarding, cowardice, cruelty, every idolatry that promises safety. Christ broke the leverage by walking into the thing feared and emptying it. The ancient Easter proclamation sings this verse: trampling down death by death. A Christian can still die; a Christian can no longer be blackmailed.

7. Verse 16: “it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham.” After a whole session on angels last week, what is the sermon underlining, and why is it astonishing?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Son passed the angels by. The higher natures were not assumed; ours was. When God chose a nature to wear forever, he reached below the angels and took flesh from a daughter of Abraham. There is a human body at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and there always will be. The angels of Session 1, who serve the heirs of salvation, now also marvel at them.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 2:17–18

8. Now the honest modern doubt, at full strength, because half your friends hold it and some nights you do too: Jesus was God; he knew he would rise; his omnipotence was one thought away. So how were his temptations real, and how can his “sympathy” mean anything to me, who has no such escape hatch? And press it one step harder, because the Church herself hands the objector his best card: she teaches that Christ could not sin. If the outcome was never in doubt, was the test ever real? Give the doubt its full weight. Then bring the text: “made like his brethren in every respect,” “he himself has suffered and been tempted” (2:17–18), and hold it with what we will meet later, “tempted as we are, yet without sin.” What does the doubt get wrong?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The doubt deserves respect: it is guarding the divinity. But it quietly assumes the divinity swallowed the humanity, and the Church condemned exactly that trimming: what has not been assumed has not been healed (St. Gregory Nazianzen's rule). The Son assumed a complete human nature: real nerves, real hunger, real dread in Gethsemane, a will that had to choose obedience under agony. His temptations were not staged; they were suffered (the text's own verb: “he himself has suffered and been tempted”). And here is a reversal worth the whole evening, one Christian teachers have long pressed: sinlessness makes his experience of temptation greater, not less. The one who yields at hour two never learns what the temptation's full weight was; the one who

withstands to the end bears everything it has. On that reckoning he knows temptation's full load from inside, which is why "he is able to help those who are tempted." Your escape-hatch objection has it backwards: he had one, and refused to pull it, all the way through death. That refusal is what mercy with scars looks like. And the hardest form, impeccability: he could not sin, so was the test real? Yes, because what temptation tests is not whether the outcome is open but whether a real human will feels the full pull and pays the full price of obedience. His human will was complete and free, and resisting cost him agony in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44). A bridge that cannot collapse still bears the entire weight of the train; the weight is no less real because the collapse is impossible. That he could not sin flows from who he is; it did not anesthetize what he felt. He truly suffered being tempted, and he never once sinned.

9. Last line of the chapter, first note of the sermon's great theme: "a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people" (2:17). No Gospel calls Jesus a priest in so many words. Why might becoming like his brethren in every respect be exactly what the job requires? Do not answer fully; just open the question.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Take first impressions only and confirm nothing beyond the obvious: a priest represents men to God, so he must be one of the men he represents; and a merciful priest must know from inside what mercy costs and covers. Then say: "Write the title down: merciful and faithful high priest. The sermon just told us where it is going, and it will take ten chapters to get there. We will not rush it."

SPOILER GUARD: Plant the high priest title and stop. Do not preview Melchizedek, the Day of Atonement, or any later priestly material tonight. The title gleams best undeveloped.

DIG DEEPER

"He had to be made like his brethren in every respect": the Church eventually had to defend even the unglamorous details, condemning the claim that Christ lacked a human mind or a human will. He has both, forever (the Third Council of Constantinople defined the two wills). If the group wants one more step: which part of your humanity do you secretly assume he skipped: the boredom, the grief, the loneliness, the anger rightly felt? Whichever you name, 2:17 says he took the whole humanity that feels it: a real human mind, will, and heart. The Gospels show him grieving, angry, and abandoned; and Nazianzen's rule says that because nothing human was left unassumed, nothing human in you is beyond his healing.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT THE DOOR

S1. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." What is the one thing about yourself you assume disqualifies you from that sentence? Say it to him this week, and let 2:11 answer.

S2. Fear of death, and its little cousins (fear of loss, of failure, of being forgotten), still runs much of the world. Where does that fear still hold leverage on a decision you are facing right now, and what does 2:14–15 do to it?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray Psalm 22 once this week, whole: the descent and the turn, remembering who prays it with you.
2. Once this week, bring a real temptation to him mid-struggle (not after), with 2:18 in hand: “you have suffered this; help me now.”
3. Read Hebrews 3:1–4:13 before next session, and note which Old Testament story dominates it. If you pray any part of the Liturgy of the Hours, keep your ears open this week; something in the reading will sound very familiar.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

HEBREWS 2:18 (RSV2CE)

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

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, trailblazer of our salvation: you were crowned through suffering, consecrated through obedience, and you are not ashamed of us. Sing your Father's praise in the midst of this congregation, break the old fear's leverage on our choices, and be for each of us what the sermon calls you: a merciful and faithful high priest. We follow on the path you cut. Amen.

Part 3 · Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or assigned in Session 2, in order of appearance.

PRIMARY TEXT

Hebrews 2:5–9 · 2:10–13 · 2:14–16 · 2:17–18

LIVE DISCOVERY PASSAGES

Psalm 8:4–6 (the coronation) · Psalm 22:1 and 22:22 (the cantor of the brethren)

STEELMAN PASSAGES (QUESTION 8)

Hebrews 2:14, 17–18 · Hebrews 4:15 (previewed lightly) · Luke 22:44 (leader background)

LEADER BACKGROUND

Isaiah 8:17–18 (quoted at 2:13) · Genesis 1:26–28 (behind Psalm 8) · 1 Corinthians 15:25–27 (Psalm 8 elsewhere)

CATECHISM

CCC 456–460 · CCC 635 · CCC 609 · CCC 2602

MEMORY VERSE

Hebrews 2:18

NEXT SESSION

Session 3 covers Hebrews 3:1–4:13: Today, if you hear his voice. The wilderness generation, and a psalm the Church prays every single morning.