

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

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

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

What We Found

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

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

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

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

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

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Hebrews*

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

St. Ambrose of Milan *Concerning Repentance*

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

St. Cyprian of Carthage *On the Lapsed*

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

Live It This Week

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

Scripture Memory Verse

HEBREWS 6:19 (RSV2CE)

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

Before Next Session

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

Catechism Connections

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

NEXT WEEK: THE SEAL COMES OFF

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