

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

Session 6 · After the Order of Melchizedek · Hebrews 7

LEADER'S GUIDE · NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Part 1 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The file opens. The group reads the three verses of Genesis the sermon has been circling for five weeks and discovers with their own eyes what the priest-king of Salem brought out to bless Abraham: bread and wine. The sealed guesses are opened and honored, the logic of chapter 7 is walked (greater than Levi, priest by indestructible life, guarantor by oath), and the night's crown lands: "he always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25), and the Church has named Melchizedek at the altar in the Roman Rite's most ancient Eucharistic Prayer for as long as she has prayed it.

Catholic Touchstone. The Eucharistic prefigurement and the priesthood of Christ. Melchizedek's bread and wine, offered by a priest-king of Salem (Jerusalem before Jerusalem), read by the Fathers from St. Cyprian onward as the figure of the sacrifice Christ instituted; the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I) still asks the Father to accept our offering as he accepted "the offering of your high priest Melchizedek." Tonight also carries a steelman on the ministerial priesthood, answered with St. Thomas' precision: only Christ is the true priest; ours are his ministers (CCC 1545).

What You Need to Know

Run the night in two movements. Movement one: the Unsealing (roughly the first forty minutes): Genesis 14 read live, the discoveries assembled, the guesses opened and celebrated. Movement two: chapter 7's argument, which is the sermon's densest and most exhilarating logic. Do not let the celebration eat the argument or the argument flatten the celebration; the night needs both, and the Time Note pre-plans the cuts.

The three verses (Genesis 14:17–20). Abraham returns from rescuing Lot; the king of Sodom comes out to meet him, and then, unannounced: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him." Abraham gives him a tenth of everything, and Melchizedek vanishes from the narrative forever. Everything the group needs is in the verses: his name (melek + tsedeq, king of righteousness), his city (Salem, shalom, peace: the city that will become Jerusalem), his office (priest of God Most High: a legitimate priest of the true God, centuries before Aaron's line exists), his offering (bread and wine, where the Levitical priesthood to come will center its atoning worship on blood), his superiority (he blesses Abraham, and "the inferior is blessed by the superior," 7:7), and his tithe (the father of the chosen people pays him a tenth). Let the group find each item; resist announcing any of it.

The argument from silence (7:3). “He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life”: the sermon is not claiming Melchizedek was an angel or a pre-incarnate apparition (some ancients speculated; the Church has defined nothing, and the simplest reading is a real Canaanite priest-king). The preacher is reading the silence of Scripture as designed: in Genesis, where every figure of consequence arrives trailing genealogy, this priest appears from nowhere, holds his office from no ancestry, and never dies on the page. The Holy Spirit intended in that silence depths the human author may not have fully grasped: a portrait, drawn in omissions, of a priesthood that does not run on pedigree or end in death: “resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever.” Levi’s priests qualified by birth certificate and retired by death certificate; the order of Melchizedek knows neither document.

The logic of supersession within the Testament. Chapter 7’s central syllogism: Psalm 110:4 was written centuries after the law of Moses established the Levitical priesthood; if perfection had come through Levi, why would God announce, by oath, another priest from another order (7:11)? The psalm itself testifies that the Levitical arrangement was provisional: “when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well” (7:12). And Jesus, from Judah, a tribe with no altar rights (7:13–14), is exactly the lawful impossibility Psalm 110 demanded: a priest not by “legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life” (7:16), confirmed by the only ordination oath in Scripture (7:20–21). Note the Better Tally’s harvest: a better hope (7:19), the guarantor of a better covenant (7:22), and 7:7’s “the inferior is blessed by the superior” rides alongside.

7:25–28, the crown. “He holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever.

Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” Present tense, right now: the priesthood did not retire at the Ascension; it is the Ascension’s occupation. Keep the ephapax precision at hand for 7:27 (“he did this once for all when he offered up himself”): the offering is once for all; the intercession presenting it is unceasing; participation, never repetition (CCC 1085, 1366–1367). This distinction is tonight’s seed and Session 8’s harvest; plant it cleanly and do not develop the Mass debate tonight.

The Roman Canon reveal. After the guesses are opened and the argument walked, the night’s last discovery: the Church has been saying this name at the altar all along. In Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon, the priest asks the Father to look with favor on our offering and accept it “as once you accepted... the offering of your high priest Melchizedek, a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim.” Members of your group have heard his name at Mass their whole lives without hearing it. Bring a missal or print the text; let someone read it aloud and watch the room.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 14:17–20. The whole file: name, city, office, bread and wine, blessing, tithe, silence. The night’s central live discovery, read with the ceremony it has earned.

Psalm 110, whole, one more time. Now the group hears the psalm as the preacher does: David, knowing Genesis 14, prophesies a future king-priest of Melchizedek’s order, by God’s own oath. One thousand years of waiting between the psalm and the Priest.

Numbers 18:21–24 and the tithe’s logic. Israel tithed to Levi; but Levi, “still in the loins of his ancestor” Abraham, tithed to Melchizedek (7:9–10). The sermon’s genealogical arithmetic: the collector

of Israel's tithes paid tithes, in Abraham, to the greater order. Leader background; deploy only if the group enjoys the move.

Voices of the Church

St. Cyprian of Carthage *Letter 63*

In the Church's earliest surviving treatise on the Eucharist, St. Cyprian teaches that Melchizedek prefigured the mystery of the sacrifice of the Lord: bread and wine offered by a priest of God Most High, fulfilled when Christ offered bread and wine, his own body and blood. Who is more a priest of the most high God, Cyprian asks, than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered the very thing Melchizedek had offered, and blessed those who received it?

St. Ambrose of Milan *On the Sacraments*

Catechizing the newly baptized on the Mass, St. Ambrose points them to Melchizedek: the sacraments Christians receive are older in figure than the synagogue's, for the bread and wine came forth from Salem's priest-king while Abraham still wandered. What the Church sets on the altar, Ambrose teaches, was foreshadowed before the Law existed, which is why the order of Melchizedek outranks the order that came later.

St. Thomas Aquinas *Commentary on Hebrews*

The Angelic Doctor gives the Church her precision on tonight's chapter: only Christ is the true priest; the others are his ministers. The priesthood of the new covenant is one man's possession, held permanently by his indestructible life, and every ordained priest acts not beside him but in his person, the one priesthood made present in every age. The Catechism enshrines Thomas' sentence at CCC 1545 and develops the in-persona-Christi teaching at CCC 1548.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1333. At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine; the Church sees in the gesture of the priest-king Melchizedek, who brought out bread and wine, a prefiguring of her own offering. The Catechism reads Genesis 14 exactly as tonight's discovery does.

CCC 1544. Everything the priesthood of the Old Covenant prefigured finds fulfillment in Christ Jesus, the one mediator; Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, is a prefiguration of the priesthood of Christ, the unique high priest after his order.

CCC 1545. The sacrifice of Christ is unique, accomplished once for all, yet made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice; the one priesthood is made present through the ministerial priesthood without diminishing its uniqueness: only Christ is the true priest, the others being only his ministers. The steelman's whole answer in one paragraph.

CCC 519. Christ, risen and ascended, is our advocate with the Father, who lives always to make intercession for us: 7:25 as the Church confesses it, in the present tense.

Thread Watch

THE SEALED GUESS · OPENS TONIGHT

Bring every slip. They open after the Genesis 14 discovery and the group's own assembly of it (Question 4), never before: the guesses gain their glory from being read against the truth just found. Read each aloud with honor; celebrate near-misses and bullseyes alike; return the slips as keepsakes.

THREAD 1 · PSALM 110 · RESOLVES TONIGHT

The psalm's file closes tonight in glory: verse 1 (Session 1), verse 4 (Session 4), and now the Genesis referent and the oath's logic. From here forward the psalm belongs to the group in the open.

THREAD 2 · THE BETTER TALLY (PUBLIC: HARVEST NIGHT)

Three entries tonight: a better hope (7:19), guarantor of a better covenant (7:22), and let the group argue whether 7:7's "the inferior is blessed by the superior" counts (it is the same root; award it if they catch it). Board runs to four or five. The flood has begun.

THREAD 3 · THE WE-HAVE INVENTORY (LEADER ONLY)

No new first-person entry tonight (7:26, "it was fitting that we should have such a high priest," is close; log it as an echo if you like). The list still reads: a great high priest; an anchor. Patience; next session opens with the biggest one yet.

Session Goals

1. The Genesis 14 discovery is assembled by the group's own hands: name, city, office, bread and wine, blessing, tithe.
2. The sealed guesses are opened, read, and honored.
3. The argument of chapter 7 is walked: the psalm's late date, the changed priesthood, the indestructible life, the oath.
4. 7:25 lands in the present tense: the intercession is happening now.
5. The Roman Canon reveal fires, and the ministerial priesthood steelman is answered with Aquinas' precision.

Time Note

Built for 90 minutes; protect the full evening if you can. If forced, compress the tithe arithmetic (Question 6) and the Dig Deeper, in that order. The Unsealing (Questions 3 and 4), the indestructible-life argument (Question 7), 7:25 (Question 8), and the Roman Canon reveal (Question 10) are untouchable. Cap the steelman (Question 9) at fifteen minutes. No ANSWER box is a script.

Part 2 · Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

God Most High, maker of heaven and earth: five weeks ago you set a name before us and sealed our lips. Tonight, open the Scriptures as you opened them on the Emmaus road, and let us find what you hid in three verses of Genesis for four thousand years: the priest, the bread, the wine, the blessing. Blessed be God Most High, who has delivered us. Through Christ our Lord, priest for ever. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. What is the longest you have ever waited for an answer, a reveal, or a payoff: a diagnosis, an acceptance letter, a finale? What did the waiting do to how the answer landed?

W2. Without breaking any seals: how confident are you, one to ten, in the guess you wrote five weeks ago? Any last-minute regrets you are forbidden to fix?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 7:1–3

1. The sermon finally talks. Before we open Genesis: what does the preacher tell us this man's name and city mean, and what does verse 3 claim about his family tree and his lifespan? Hold your skepticism about verse 3 for a moment; just get the claims on the table.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Melchizedek: king of righteousness (melek, king; tsedeq, righteousness). King of Salem: king of peace (shalom), the city that will one day be called Jeru-salem. And verse 3's astonishing résumé: without father, without mother, without genealogy, neither beginning of days nor end of life, resembling the Son of God, a priest for ever. Righteousness, peace, an unpedigreed and unending priesthood: the sermon has drawn a silhouette. Now we go see whose.

THE UNSEALING, MOVEMENT ONE: Ask your best reader to stand and read Genesis 14:17–20, slowly. Then ask them to read it again.

2. Set the scene first: Abraham is returning from rescuing his nephew Lot, and two kings come out to meet him. Ignore the king of Sodom; watch the other one. List everything the text tells us about him: his name, his city, his office, and, above all, what he brings out. What will the atoning sacrifices of Israel's coming priesthood center on, and what does this one carry?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High: a legitimate priest of the true God, centuries before Aaron is born, before Israel exists, before the Law. And he brings out bread and wine. The priesthood Israel will come to know centers its atonement on blood; the first priest in the Bible, the one whose order the psalm swears Christ into, comes bearing bread and wine, blesses Abraham, and receives a tenth of everything. Let the room say what the bread and wine made them think of.

Do not say it first. Someone will whisper it; let them.

3. Now verse 3's strange résumé makes sense as a way of reading. In Genesis, where every important figure arrives trailing a genealogy (chapter after chapter of begats), this priest appears from nowhere, no father, no mother, no line, no death recorded, and vanishes. The preacher reads Scripture's silence as deliberate. What portrait do the omissions paint, and of whose priesthood is it a sketch? And honestly: was Melchizedek some heavenly being, or a real man?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The omissions sketch a priesthood that does not qualify by pedigree and does not end in death: exactly the two documents (birth certificate, death certificate) that governed every Levitical priest. Scripture presents him without beginning or end so that he “resembles the Son of God”: the Holy Spirit intended in that silence depths the human author may not have fully grasped. As for what he was: the simplest and most common reading is a real Canaanite priest-king of the true God (like Jethro or Job, God's people outside the chosen line); some ancients speculated about an apparition of the Son or an angel, and the Church has defined nothing. The sermon's argument never depends on his biology, only on his portrait: the way Scripture tells him is the prophecy.

THE UNSEALING, MOVEMENT TWO: Bring out the sealed slips. Break the seals and read every guess aloud, one at a time, with full honors.

4. Five weeks ago you answered: who was he, and why would he matter more to Jesus' story than Aaron and all the priests of Israel? Now that Genesis is open, grade the room's prophetic powers together: what did we circle, what did we nail, and what did none of us see coming?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Celebrate everything: the near-misses prove the sermon was teaching them before it explained anything; the bullseyes get applause; the wild guesses get affection. Then gather the answer the night has built: he matters more than Aaron because his order is older than Aaron's, greater than Aaron's (Abraham himself, with Levi in his loins, paid him tithes and received his blessing, and the inferior is blessed by the superior, 7:7), and shaped like eternity: kingship and priesthood in one person, righteousness and peace in one name, bread and wine in his hands. Aaron's order could tell you what a priest does; only Melchizedek's order could tell you what this Priest is. Return the slips as keepsakes.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 7:11–19

5. Now the argument, and it turns on a date. Psalm 110 was written centuries after the Law of Moses set up the Levitical priesthood. The preacher asks the question that follows (7:11): if perfection came through Levi, why would God later announce, on oath, another priest from another order? What does the psalm's very existence prove about the Levitical system, and what falls with it (7:12, 18–19)?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The psalm is God's own memo that Levi was provisional: you do not announce a replacement for a system that is working. If a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" is still coming in David's day, then Aaron's order was scaffolding, and "when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well": the whole covenant administration built around that altar changes with the altar. The former commandment is set aside "because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect)"; and what replaces it is not a tighter rule but "a better hope... through which we draw near to God" (7:19: the Tally scores). The Law was a tutor pointing past itself; the psalm was the tutor saying so out loud.

6. Follow the sermon's boldest reasoning (7:13–17): Jesus descended from Judah, "and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests." By Levitical rules, Jesus is disqualified from any altar in Israel. So on what basis is he a priest at all? Find the phrase in 7:16 that answers, and weigh it against the phrase it replaces.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life." The old priesthood ran on genealogy: right blood, in; wrong blood, out; and death retired everyone eventually. The new priesthood runs on resurrection: he is a priest because death tried him and failed. His ordination certificate is the empty tomb. That is why the order had to be Melchizedek's, the order Scripture drew without beginning of days or end of life: no other order in the Bible had a vacancy shaped like an immortal.

7. 7:20–24 adds the oath and its consequence. Aaron's sons were ordained by ritual; this priest by God swearing ("The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind"). And 7:23–24: the old priests were many in number; why? And this one holds his priesthood how? What do the oath and the permanence together make Jesus, according to 7:22?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The old priests were many "because they were prevented by death from continuing in office": mortality was the priesthood's staffing problem; Israel needed a supply chain of priests because the grave kept emptying the office. This priest "holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever": *aparabatos*, untransferable, non-passing. And the oath makes him "the surety (guarantor) of a better covenant" (7:22: Tally again): God has sworn, so the covenant's reliability is now anchored in God's own oath and a priest who cannot die out of the job. The anchor of Session 5 has a name and a job title.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 7:25–28, slowly.

8. The crown of the chapter: "he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Two questions. What tense is that verb, and what is Jesus doing right now, tonight, at the Father's right hand? And 7:27: what did he do "once for all," and how do the once-for-all and the always fit together?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Present tense, ongoing: he always lives to intercede. The Ascension was not a retirement party; it was a priest entering his sanctuary to begin the eternal shift. Right now, with wounds for credentials, he is presenting you to the Father by name: prayer, on this verse, is not shouting at a distant heaven but joining an intercession already in progress. And the fit: the offering was made once for all (ephapax) when he offered up himself: never to be repeated, never needing to be; the intercession is that one offering, eternally alive and eternally presented. Once for all does not mean once and finished; it means once and forever operative. Hold that pairing carefully in your pocket. In two sessions it will decide the biggest argument in this study.

SPOILER GUARD: Plant the once-for-all and always pairing and stop. Do not open the Mass debate tonight; Session 8 is built for it, at full strength. If someone raises it, smile: “Two weeks. Bring that exact question.”

9. Tonight's steelman, honestly put, because it follows naturally from this glorious chapter: if Christ's priesthood is untransferable (7:24), permanent, and perfect, then hasn't the Catholic Church committed exactly the error this chapter buries by ordaining thousands of priests: rebuilding a priestly supply chain the indestructible life made obsolete? Isn't every believer a priest now (1 Peter 2:9), and no one else? Give it full strength. Then press: when a Catholic priest absolves or offers, whose priesthood is operating, and what did we learn in Session 4 about who can appoint a priest?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The objection guards this chapter's treasure and deserves gratitude for it: there is one priest, his office is untransferable, and any theology that made ordained men priests beside him or after him would deserve the objection's full force. But that is not the claim. The Church's own precision, from St. Thomas' commentary on this very chapter: only Christ is the true priest; the others are his ministers (CCC 1545): the ordained man does not receive a priesthood parallel to Christ's; he is taken into Christ's, acting in his person, so that the one untransferable priesthood becomes present and audible in every generation: one priesthood, many ministers, exactly as one sun lights many rooms. And the two priesthoods the objection collapses are both real and both biblical: the baptismal priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9, offering the sacrifice of praise and their very lives) and the ministerial priesthood that serves it (John 20:21–23, the appointment we read in Session 4: never self-taken, always conferred, 5:4). Notice, finally, what the Church does at every Mass: the priest does not say “this is his body” but “this is my body”: the grammar itself confesses that Someone Else is speaking. The supply chain is not rebuilt. The one Priest simply refuses to leave any century without his voice.

THE LAST DISCOVERY: Bring out the missal or the printed text of Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon. Ask someone to read aloud the paragraph that begins “Be pleased to look upon these offerings...”

10. Listen for tonight's name: “...as once you were pleased to accept the gifts of your servant Abel the just, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the offering of your high priest

Melchizedek, a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim.” How long has the Church been saying this name at the altar, and what does it mean that you have heard it at Mass, perhaps hundreds of times, without hearing it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Roman Canon is the most ancient Eucharistic Prayer of the Roman Rite, its core reaching back to the fourth century: for some sixteen centuries, at the offering of bread and wine become the Body and Blood, the Church has named the priest-king who brought out bread and wine while Abraham still wandered. The Church answered tonight's sealed question before any of us asked it, out loud, at the altar, every day, for over a thousand years. Some of you have heard the name at every Mass of your life. Now you will never not hear it: when Eucharistic Prayer I is prayed, Genesis 14 stands at your parish altar, and the order of Melchizedek is serving bread and wine again.

DIG DEEPER

7:26: “it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens.” The old high priest sacrificed first for his own sins, then for the people's (7:27); this one has no first step. If the group has one more breath: what does it change that the one interceding for you right now has no case file of his own pending, and never did?

SEND • TAKING IT OUT THE DOOR

S1. “He always lives to make intercession for them.” Someone is praying for you by name, right now, with wounds for credentials. What would change this week if you actually believed that at 2 a.m.?

S2. You have carried a sealed question for five weeks and tonight it paid off. What question about your own life have you refused to carry, demanding the answer up front? What would sealing it and walking look like?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray Hebrews 7:25 nightly, inserting your own name: “he always lives to make intercession for ____.” Fall asleep mid-intercession; it will not stop when you do.
2. If you can find a Mass this week using Eucharistic Prayer I (many parishes use it on Sundays and solemnities), go, and listen for the name. If not, read the Canon's text slowly once, as prayer.
3. Read Hebrews 8 before next session. It is short, and it contains the longest Old Testament quotation in the entire New Testament. Find it, and note who is quoted, and what God promises to do with the law, with knowledge of himself, and with sins.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

HEBREWS 7:25 (RSV2CE)

“Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he

always lives to make intercession for them.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek: King of righteousness, King of peace, bearer of bread and wine: you hold your priesthood permanently, and you are holding us in it tonight. Thank you for a question worth sealing and an answer worth the wait. Intercede for every name in this room, and for the names we carry, until we draw near for good. Blessed be God Most High. Amen.

Part 3 • Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or assigned in Session 6, in order of appearance.

PRIMARY TEXT

Hebrews 7:1–3 • 7:4–10 • 7:11–19 • 7:20–24 • 7:25–28

LIVE DISCOVERY PASSAGES

Genesis 14:17–20 (the file, read twice) • Psalm 110, whole • Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon (“the offering of your high priest Melchizedek”)

STEELMAN PASSAGES (QUESTION 9)

Hebrews 7:24 and 1 Peter 2:9 (the objection) • CCC 1544–1545 with St. Thomas (the answer) • John 20:21–23 and Hebrews 5:4 (appointment, from Session 4)

ASSEMBLY MATERIALS

The sealed guess slips • a missal or printed Roman Canon text

LEADER BACKGROUND

Numbers 18:21–24 (the tithe) • Genesis 14:1–16 (the rescue, for scene-setting) • CCC 1085 (the once-for-all, for the planted pairing)

CATECHISM

CCC 1333 • CCC 1544–1545 • CCC 519

MEMORY VERSE

Hebrews 7:25

NEXT SESSION

Session 7 covers Hebrews 8: the better covenant, and Jeremiah's great oracle quoted at full length. The We-Have inventory opens next session with its grandest entry.