

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

Session 8 • Once For All • Hebrews 9

LEADER'S GUIDE • NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Part 1 • Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group tours the tabernacle with the sermon, watches the Day of Atonement's choreography, and sees Christ enter the true Holy of Holies with his own blood, once for all. Then the study's summit steelman: the objection that once for all makes the Mass a blasphemous repetition, given at absolutely full strength and answered from Hebrews' own present-tense priesthood, the Bible's grammar of memorial, and the Church's own words at Trent: one victim, one priest, one sacrifice, made present.

Catholic Touchstone. The Eucharist as the making-present of the one sacrifice (CCC 1362–1367), the Passover grammar of *zikkaron* (memorial that makes present, Exodus 12:14), and Trent's precision: the same victim, the same priest now offering through the ministry of priests who then offered himself on the cross, the manner of offering alone being different. Everything the study has banked (7:25's always, 8:2's leitourgias, 9:24's now) is spent tonight.

What You Need to Know

Run the night in two movements. Movement one (about forty-five minutes): the chapter itself: the tour, Yom Kippur, the blood of the covenant, the entrance, the three tenses of 9:24–28. Movement two (the protected half hour): the steelman. Participants were told to bring their hardest questions about the Mass; honor that. Do not start the steelman until the chapter's own material is on the table, because the chapter's own material is the answer.

The tour and its locked door (9:1–10). The sermon walks the tabernacle: lampstand, table, bread of the Presence in the Holy Place; behind the second curtain, the Holy of Holies: golden altar of incense, the ark, the manna, Aaron's rod, the tablets, the cherubim of glory. (The sermon sighs, “of these things we cannot now speak in detail”: sympathize; neither can we.) Then the choreography's meaning: priests go continually into the outer tent, “but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood” (9:7, Leviticus 16 behind it). The Holy Spirit's lesson in the architecture (9:8): “the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened.” The old liturgy was a magnificent locked door: its daily rhythm proclaimed both that God is here and that you cannot come in: gifts and sacrifices “which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper” (9:9): they cleansed flesh, ritual status, the outside; the inside they could only signify.

The entrance (9:11–14). Christ the high priest passes “through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands)” and enters the Holy Place “taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own

blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.” Every axis of Yom Kippur inverts: another's blood becomes his own; annual becomes once for all; the copy's inner room becomes heaven itself; ritual purity becomes the purification of conscience “from dead works to serve the living God” (9:14): the old blood managed the outside; this blood reaches the one place no bull's blood ever touched: the conscience. And note 9:14's Trinitarian depth for your own prayer: he offered himself “through the eternal Spirit”: the whole Trinity is engaged at Calvary.

Covenant blood and the three tenses (9:15–28). The middle of the chapter grounds the logic: covenants are inaugurated in blood (Exodus 24:8, the live discovery: Moses' “behold the blood of the covenant”, the sentence Jesus completes at the Supper), and “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (9:22). Then the summit paragraph, and drill its tenses with the group because the steelman turns on them. Past: “he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (9:26). Present: “Christ has entered... into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (9:24); now, on our behalf: the once-offered sacrifice is being presented at this hour. Future: “he will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:28). One sacrifice, three tenses: offered once, presented always, consummated at his appearing. That grammar is the entire Catholic theology of the Mass, and the sermon wrote it.

The steelman, at genuinely full strength. State it the way its best advocates state it, because they are quoting this chapter: Christ was offered once for all (7:27; 9:26; 10:10); he does not offer himself repeatedly, “for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly” (9:25–26); the Reformers read Catholic altars, tabernacles, and the word sacrifice at every Mass and concluded the Church had rebuilt the treadmill this chapter demolishes: a re-sacrificing of Christ, daily, in a million places, as though Calvary were insufficient. People left, and were exiled, and died over this reading, and its instinct (guarding the sufficiency of the cross) is holy. The Catholic answer must therefore come from the text, in steps the group can own. Step one: the objection and the Church agree completely on the premise: the sacrifice is once for all, unrepeatable, sufficient; the Council of Trent (Session 22, chapter 2) is as emphatic as any Reformer that the Mass is no new or repeated Calvary: one and the same victim, one and the same priest, the manner of offering alone differing, and the cross's sacrifice in no way detracted from. Step two: Hebrews itself refuses to let the once-offered sacrifice be merely past: he always lives to make intercession (7:25); he ministers now in the true sanctuary (8:2); he appears now in God's presence on our behalf (9:24), as the slain-and-risen priest whose offering is eternally alive before the Father. The sacrifice is finished on earth and perpetually presented in heaven. Step three: the Supper's own grammar: “Do this in remembrance (anamnēsis) of me,” and remembrance in the Bible is not nostalgia: the Passover was a memorial (zikkaron, Exodus 12:14) in which every generation participates in the Exodus as present reality (“in every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth out of Egypt,” the ancient rule of the Passover liturgy, preserved in Mishnah Pesahim 10:5 and the Haggadah); St. Paul: “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Step four: therefore the Mass is not another sacrifice but the same one, made present: Trent's words, the same victim, the same priest, the manner alone differing; the Mass re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, it does not repeat it (CCC 1366–1367; 1085: Christ's Paschal event cannot remain in the past, since by his death he destroyed death, and all he is and did participates in divine eternity and so transcends all times while being made present in them). Step five, the pastoral crown: the Mass is 9:24 with an address: where the now-appearing priest lets his people join the presentation. Malachi's prophecy of a pure offering in every place among the nations (Malachi

1:11) was the Fathers' constant text for exactly this. Deliver all of it without one syllable of gloating: the objector's treasure (the cross's sufficiency) is the doctrine's own foundation.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Leviticus 16:2, 11–15, 34. Yom Kippur's choreography: the one man, the one day, the blood carried within the veil, for himself first and then for the people. The template every axis of which Christ inverts.

Exodus 24:8 and Exodus 12:14. “Behold the blood of the covenant”: Moses' sentence, completed by Jesus over the cup; and the Passover's own self-definition: “this day shall be for you a memorial day (zikkaron)”: the Bible's grammar of a past act made present to every generation. The steelman's two decisive discoveries.

Malachi 1:11. “From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering.” The prophets foresaw a sacrifice that is one and everywhere: the Fathers from the Didache onward read the Eucharist here. Leader's pocket text for the steelman.

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*

Preaching on this very chapter, Chrysostom asks his congregation the steelman's exact question: do we not offer every day? We do, he answers, but as a memorial of his death; and this sacrifice is one, not many: we do not offer another sacrifice, as the high priest of old, but always the same: or rather, we perform a memorial of a sacrifice. The fourth century's greatest preacher, on this text, holding both truths at once: the daily altar, and the one offering.

The Council of Trent *Session 22, on the Sacrifice of the Mass*

The Church's solemn answer, in her own voice: in the Mass the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner: the victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of priests who then offered himself on the cross, the manner of offering alone being different. Far from detracting from the cross, the Mass is that one sacrifice's fruits applied. Read this aloud in the steelman; it is the hinge.

St. Gregory the Great *Dialogues, Book 4*

The great pope teaches his deacon that at the hour of the sacrifice, the heavens open at the priest's voice and choirs of angels attend the mystery of Jesus Christ: the lowest things joined to the highest, earth united to heaven. Gregory speaks of Christ offered again for us in the mystery of the holy sacrifice: in mysterio, sacramentally: the mode the Church would later define with precision. What he beholds is what Hebrews 9:24 states: the offering, alive and present before God, with the Church gathered into it.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1085. Christ's Paschal mystery cannot remain only in the past: all that Christ is and did participates in the divine eternity and so transcends all times while being made present in them. The metaphysical key to the whole night: the cross does not need repeating because it does not recede.

CCC 1363–1364. In the biblical sense, the memorial is not merely recollection but proclamation and making-present: when the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of Christ's Passover, the sacrifice Christ offered once for all remains ever present. Zikkaron, defined.

CCC 1366–1367. The Eucharist is a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross; the victim is one and the same; only the manner of offering differs. Trent, enshrined. The steelman's formal answer.

CCC 613–614. Christ's death is the unique and definitive sacrifice, completing and surpassing all others: the premise the objection guards, confessed by the Church in full.

Thread Watch

THE SEATED SON (ONE WEEK OUT)

Tonight stays inside the sanctuary; the posture thread rests. Next session, chapter 10 sets standing priests against the seated priest, and the Session 1 question is answered. Protect it one more week.

THREAD 2 · THE BETTER TALLY (PUBLIC)

One entry: the heavenly things themselves cleansed “with better sacrifices than these” (9:23). Board climbs by one; the group may note the plural and puzzle: file the puzzle, enjoy it, and let 10:12 settle it next week.

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

No new entry tonight. The list holds: a great high priest; an anchor; such a high priest, seated and serving. Two entries remain, one next week, one at the very end.

Session Goals

1. The locked-door meaning of the old choreography lands: the way in was not yet open, and consciences stayed unreached.
2. The entrance's inversions are assembled by the group: his own blood, once, into heaven itself, reaching conscience.
3. The three tenses of 9:24–28 are drilled until the group owns them: offered once, presented now, appearing again.
4. The steelman is given at full strength and answered in the five steps, with Trent and Chrysostom read aloud and zero gloating.

5. Participants' own brought questions are heard and honored, parked where necessary, and every parker gets a follow-up plan.

Time Note

Built for 90 minutes, the fullest night of the study; do not book it short. If forced, compress the tabernacle inventory (Question 1) and cut the Dig Deeper, in that order; the three-tenses drill (Question 6) and the steelman (Questions 7 and 8) are untouchable. The steelman is capped at thirty minutes tonight, by design the study's largest allocation; if brought questions overflow it, park them visibly and schedule the follow-up. No ANSWER box is a script, and tonight least of all: this material must come through you, warmly, or not at all.

Part 2 · Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Father, your Son entered the sanctuary not made with hands, once for all, with his own blood, and he appears in your presence now, on our behalf. Purify our consciences tonight from dead works to serve you, the living God. Give us honest minds for hard questions, warm hearts for those who ask them, and the joy of finding that what we do at every altar is what he is doing at yours. Through Christ our eternal high priest. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. What is a place you were never allowed to enter as a kid: a room, an office, backstage somewhere? What did the locked door itself teach you about what was behind it?

W2. You were asked to bring your hardest question about the Mass and the words once for all: yours or one you have been asked and could not answer. Let us hear a few, no answers yet: we are putting them on the table for the second half of the night.

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 9:1–5

1. Take the tour: inventory the two rooms and their furniture. Veterans of this study's threads: which items do you recognize, and from where? (And enjoy verse 5's sigh with me: “of these things we cannot now speak in detail.”)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Holy Place: lampstand, table, bread of the Presence. Behind the second curtain, the Holy of Holies: the golden altar of incense, the ark of the covenant holding the manna, Aaron's rod, and the tablets, overshadowed by the cherubim of glory. The room recognizes the veil (Session 5's anchor entered behind it) and the Holy of Holies itself (Leviticus 16:2, logged weeks ago). The whole apparatus is the copy of Session 7, and the sermon is about to explain the copy's strangest feature: its choreography of exclusion.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 9:6–10

2. Watch the traffic pattern: priests continually into the first room; into the second, who, how often, and never without what? And 9:8 says the Holy Spirit was teaching something by this architecture. What was the floor plan preaching, and what could all those gifts and sacrifices never do (9:9)?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Only the high priest, only once a year, never without blood, for his own sins first. The Holy Spirit's sermon in the floor plan: “the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened”: the old liturgy was a magnificent locked door, proclaiming simultaneously that God dwells here and that you cannot

come in. And its limit: the sacrifices “cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper”: they cleansed flesh and ritual status, the outside of the cup; the conscience, the inner record of guilt, lay beyond every bull's blood ever shed. A system that could signify forgiveness and never quite deliver it into the heart: which is why it had to be repeated, forever.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 9:11–14

3. Now the entrance. Map Christ's Day of Atonement against Aaron's, axis by axis: whose blood, how often, into which sanctuary, securing what kind of redemption, and reaching what part of the worshiper (9:14)? Which axis moves you most?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Not goats' and calves' blood but his own; not annually but once for all; not the curtained room of the copy but through the greater tent into heaven itself; not a year's coverage but eternal redemption; and not the flesh but the conscience, purified “from dead works to serve the living God.” The last axis is the miracle the old system could only gesture at: the blood of Christ reaches the inner record, where guilt actually lives, and cleans it: not managed, not covered: purified. And note the quiet Trinitarian depth of 9:14: he offered himself through the eternal Spirit to the Father: all three Persons engaged at Calvary. Let people name their axis; the answers pastor the room.

LIVE DISCOVERY: Ask someone to find and read Exodus 24:8.

4. At Sinai, what does Moses throw on the people, and what sentence does he say over it? Hebrews 9:18–22 builds on this: why blood for covenants at all, and what is the rule of 9:22? And now: where have you heard Moses' sentence, almost word for word, from other lips, over a different cup?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Moses throws the blood of the covenant on the people: “Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you.” Covenants are inaugurated in blood because a covenant is a life pledged: the blood says, may this life be the bond. Hence 9:22: under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. And Moses' sentence was finished at the Supper: “this is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many”: Jesus deliberately quotes Sinai over the cup, announcing the new covenant's inauguration in the only blood that could carry it. Last week Jeremiah; this week Moses: the consecration is a mosaic of tonight's chapter.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 9:23–28, slowly, twice.

5. Verse 24 first: where has Christ entered, and, watch the adverb, when is he appearing, and for whom? What is he doing at this hour, tonight, while we sit here?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Into heaven itself, “now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.” Now: present tense, this hour. The once-offered sacrifice did not file itself in the past; the crucified and risen priest is in the Father's presence at this moment, appearing on our behalf, his offering eternally alive before God

(the always of 7:25, the leitourgos of 8:2, and now the now of 9:24: the study's three banked verses, all one picture). While this group meets, the presentation is in session. Hold that; it is about to decide everything.

6. Now the three tenses, and drill them, because the next half hour turns on this. Find them in 9:24–28: what did Christ do once for all (past, v. 26)? What is he doing now (present, v. 24)? What will he do (future, v. 28)? Say the three back as one sentence.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Past: he appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself: offered once, unrepeatable, “for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly” (9:25–26). Present: he appears now in the presence of God on our behalf: the one offering, presented without pause. Future: he will appear a second time, not to deal with sin (that is finished) but to save those eagerly waiting. One sentence: one sacrifice: offered once, presented always, consummated at his appearing. Make the group say it together, out loud. They have just recited the Catholic theology of the Mass; now we go prove it.

SPOILER GUARD: Movement two begins here. Protect the clock: the remaining questions are the steelman, and it deserves the full half hour. Bring the parked questions from W2 back onto the table.

7. The objection, at absolutely full strength, and let us honor it, because its advocates are quoting this chapter. It runs: Christ was offered once for all: 7:27, 9:26, and next chapter, 10:10. He does not offer himself repeatedly: 9:25 rules it out explicitly. Yet the Catholic Church calls the Mass a sacrifice and offers it daily on a million altars: therefore the Mass re-sacrifices Christ, as though Calvary were insufficient: a treadmill this chapter exists to demolish. People died holding that reading, and its instinct is to guard the sufficiency of the cross. Sit with it. Where is it strongest, and, before any answer: what does the objection and the Catholic Church actually agree on?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let the group feel its force: the once-for-all texts are real, the repetition ban is explicit, and any theology that repeated Calvary would deserve every anathema the Reformers hurled. Then establish the agreement, because it is nearly total: the Catholic Church confesses, as solemnly as any Reformer, that Christ's sacrifice is unique, definitive, sufficient, and unrepeatable (CCC 613–614), and the Council of Trent teaches that the Mass detracts nothing from the cross and adds nothing to it. If the Mass were a repetition, Rome would condemn it too. The whole question, then, is narrower and more interesting than the objection assumes: not “is the sacrifice once for all” (everyone says yes) but “what is that once-for-all sacrifice doing now, and can we be joined to it?” And we already answered that from the text, ten minutes ago. LEADER: do not resolve further here; let Question 8 assemble it.

8. Now assemble the Catholic answer in steps, from tonight's own material. Step one: the three tenses: if the sacrifice is being presented now (9:24), is it locked in the past? Step two:

the Supper's grammar: “Do this in remembrance (anamnēsis) of me”, and someone read Exodus 12:14: what kind of remembering was the Passover, in Israel's own practice? Step three: someone read 1 Corinthians 11:26: what does eating the bread and drinking the cup do, according to Paul? Step four: hear the Church's formal answer, read aloud from the Trent voice box. Put the steps together: what is the Mass, and what is it not?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Step one: the sacrifice cannot be merely past, because Hebrews says it is being presented now: the risen priest, wounds and all, appears in God's presence on our behalf at this hour: one offering, eternally alive (CCC 1085: all Christ did participates in divine eternity and so transcends all times while being made present in them). Step two: the Passover was a zikkaron, a memorial that makes present: Israel's own liturgical rule, preserved in the Mishnah (Pesachim 10:5) and the Passover Haggadah, was that in every generation each one must regard himself as having come out of Egypt himself: biblical remembrance is participation, not nostalgia: and Jesus chose that word, at that meal, for his command. Step three: Paul says the Supper proclaims the Lord's death until he comes: the past sacrifice and the future appearing meet in the present rite: Paul writes all three of tonight's tenses into one verse. Step four, Trent: the same victim, the same priest, the manner alone differing: the Mass re-presents, makes present, the one sacrifice: it does not repeat it (CCC 1366–1367). So: the Mass is not another sacrifice, a second Calvary, or a top-up of an insufficient cross: it is the once-for-all sacrifice, eternally presented in heaven per 9:24, made present at the altar so that the priest's people can be joined to the presentation. Not repetition: presence. St. John Chrysostom said it on this very chapter, sixteen centuries ago (read his box aloud): we do not offer another sacrifice, but always the same: or rather, we perform a memorial of a sacrifice. And Malachi saw the shape of it from afar: one pure offering, in every place, among the nations (1:11). The objection's treasure, the cross's total sufficiency, is not overcome by the Catholic answer; it is the Catholic answer's foundation: the Mass exists precisely because that one sacrifice is too alive to stay in the past. Close the movement with the parked questions: answer what tonight's material answers, and schedule the rest, named, for follow-up. Every parker gets a plan.

DIG DEEPER

9:27–28: “it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once...”: the sermon rhymes our once with his. If the group has one more breath: the parallel's comfort is exact: as surely as your death will not be repeated, neither will the sacrifice that covers it: and those “eagerly waiting for him” meet the second appearing not as defendants but as the saved. Ask who in the room can honestly say eagerly, and what stands between the rest of us and that adverb.

SEND · TAKING IT OUT THE DOOR

S1. Next Sunday, at the consecration, you will be standing inside 9:24: the one sacrifice, presented now, with you joined to it. What will you do differently in that minute, knowing the tense?

S2. Someone you know left the Church, or keeps their distance, over exactly tonight's

objection. You now hold the five steps. What is your first sentence to them: not to win, but to reopen?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- 1.** Memorize the three tenses as one sentence: offered once, presented always, appearing again: and pray it at the elevation this Sunday.
- 2.** Have the reopening conversation from S2, or write the message, this week, with charity as the headline.
- 3.** Read Hebrews 10:1–25 before next session, and watch the postures: who stands, who sits, and what each posture means. Session 1 veterans: bring your oldest unanswered question.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

HEBREWS 9:24 (RSV2CE)

“For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal High Priest: you entered once, with your own blood, and you appear now, on our behalf, until you appear again for those who wait. Purify our consciences from dead works. Give us reverence at every altar where your one offering is made present, patience with every honest objection, and eagerness for your appearing. Offered once, presented always, coming again: we believe; help our unbelief. Amen.

Part 3 • Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or assigned in Session 8, in order of appearance.

PRIMARY TEXT

Hebrews 9:1–5 • 9:6–10 • 9:11–14 • 9:15–22 • 9:23–28

LIVE DISCOVERY PASSAGES

Exodus 24:8 (the blood of the covenant) • Exodus 12:14 (zikkaron) • 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (the Supper's grammar)

STEELMAN MATERIALS (QUESTIONS 7–8)

Hebrews 7:27; 9:24–26; 10:10 (the objection's texts and their answer) • Trent, Session 22 (read aloud from the voice box) • St. John Chrysostom, Homily 17 on Hebrews (read aloud) • Malachi 1:11 • CCC 1085, 1363–1364, 1366–1367

LEADER BACKGROUND

Leviticus 16:2, 11–15, 34 (Yom Kippur) • Mark 14:24 (the cup quoting Sinai) • CCC 613–614

CATECHISM

CCC 1085 • CCC 1363–1364 • CCC 1366–1367 • CCC 613–614

MEMORY VERSE

Hebrews 9:24

NEXT SESSION

Session 9 covers Hebrews 10: full assurance, and the oldest question in this study finally gets its answer. Watch the postures.