

A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

A Catholic Journey Through the Letter to the Hebrews

Session 9 • Full Assurance • Hebrews 10

LEADER'S GUIDE • NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Part 1 • Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The oldest question in the study is answered: why did he sit down? The group sees the standing priests of the daily treadmill set against the seated priest of the finished offering, hears the sermon's grammar of assurance ("perfected for all time those who are sanctified," where the Greek participle is present tense: being sanctified), walks through the opened veil, and receives the three let-us exhortations, including the one the Church has always read at the root of her Sunday practice: not neglecting to meet together.

Catholic Touchstone. Assurance without presumption: the Catholic grammar of salvation in one verse (10:14: perfected, and being sanctified: both tenses, held together, CCC 2010); the Christian assembly as apostolic command (10:25; CCC 2178), the root from which the Church's Sunday obligation grew; and the second severe warning read with Session 5's hard-won precision already in hand.

What You Need to Know

The shadow's treadmill (10:1–4). The law, "having but a shadow of the good things to come," can never perfect the worshipers by "the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year." The proof is devastatingly simple: if they had worked, "would they not have ceased to be offered?" Repetition is the confession of insufficiency: and worse, the annual liturgy functioned as "a reminder of sin year after year": Yom Kippur re-read the file annually because it could not close it. "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins": the old system's own calendar testified against it.

The body prepared (10:5–10). The sermon puts Psalm 40 in the mouth of the Son entering the world: "Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me... Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God." The insight the prophets kept shouting (Samuel to Saul: to obey is better than sacrifice; Hosea: I desire mercy, not sacrifice) reaches its destination: what God always wanted on the altar was not animal blood but a human will freely given, and no fallen child of Adam could give one entire and sinless, an obedience able to redeem the race, until a body was prepared whose will was wholly the Father's. "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10): the once-for-all of Session 8, grounded one layer deeper: the sacrifice's engine was obedience, and obedience of that kind cannot be repeated because it cannot be exhausted.

The seated priest (10:11–14): the study's oldest payoff. Read the two postures aloud and let the room finish the thought planted nine weeks ago: "every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time

a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.” There were no chairs in the tabernacle's floor plan: no seat anywhere in the sanctuary, because the work was never done: priests stood because standing is the posture of unfinished business. He sat because it is finished. Bring back the Session 1 guesses (“write the question down”) and let their authors be vindicated or delighted. Then the both-tenses jewel, 10:14: “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (RSV2CE); the Greek participle is present tense, *hagiazomenous*, those who are being sanctified: perfect verb and present participle in one clause: the verdict complete, the renovation ongoing: which is precisely the Catholic grammar of justification and sanctification (CCC 2010), and tonight's compact steelman lives here.

The opened veil and the three let-us (10:19–25). “We have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and we have a great priest over the house of God”: two We-Have entries in one breath, and the veil that Session 5's anchor entered is now a doorway: torn, the Gospels add, from top to bottom at the moment of his death. Then the sermon's triple exhortation, built on faith, hope, and love before Paul's order became famous: let us draw near in full assurance of faith; let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another. The last clause is the oldest root of the Church's Sunday practice (CCC 2178 cites exactly this verse for the apostolic origin of the Christian assembly; the Sunday obligation itself is spelled out at CCC 2180-2183): assembly is not an enhancement to Christian life; on the sermon's terms it is a structural member, and skipping it was already “the habit of some” while the apostles' generation still lived.

The second warning (10:26–31), with Session 5's keys. “If we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”: the sibling of 6:4–6, and the group already owns the reading keys: the sin in view is the deliberate, persisting repudiation of the one sacrifice (spurning the Son, profaning the covenant blood, outraging the Spirit of grace, 10:29); no sacrifice remains for the one who tramples the only sacrifice there is, not because mercy ran out but because there is no second fountain behind the first; and the door of repentance stands open to every heart that stops trampling (CCC 982, standing permanently). “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”: and the sermon immediately turns (10:32–39) to warm remembrance: you endured suffering, you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property (the Better Tally scores: “a better possession and an abiding one,” 10:34), you have need of endurance: “we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls.” And the hinge to next week: “my righteous one shall live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:3–4), the sentence chapter 11 will spend forty verses illustrating.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalms 40:6–8. The Son's enlistment papers: not sacrifice but obedience: “Lo, I have come to do thy will.” Leader note: the RSV2CE Psalm reads “thou hast given me an open ear”; Hebrews 10:5 quotes the Greek Septuagint, “a body hast thou prepared for me.” The opened ear of the listening servant becomes, in the Son, a whole body given; show the group both wordings and let them watch the line grow. The live discovery grounding 10:5–10, with 1 Samuel 15:22 and Hosea 6:6 as the prophetic drumroll behind it.

The missing chair. Walk Exodus 25–30's furniture list for yourself: lampstand, table, altars, laver, ark: and no seat. The absence is the sermon's visual aid: a sanctuary designed for work that would never, under that covenant, be finished.

Habakkuk 2:3–4. “The vision awaits its time... if it seem slow, wait for it... the righteous shall live by his faith.” Quoted at 10:37–38 as the bridge into chapter 11: faith, in this sermon, is how the righteous live between the promise and its arrival.

Voices of the Church

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

On the two postures, Chrysostom is direct: standing is the sign of ministry still in progress; sitting, of completed work: the priests stood because their sacrifices accomplished nothing final, but the Christ, having offered one sacrifice, sat down, for his work was perfect. The congregation should hear the chair as the Gospel: no one sits down with work left undone.

St. Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Ephesians*

Within living memory of this sermon, writing around the year 107, the martyr-bishop urges the same medicine for the same disease: try to gather more frequently to give thanks to God, for when you assemble frequently, the powers of Satan are destroyed and his destructiveness is undone by the concord of your faith. The earliest Church heard “not neglecting to meet together” as spiritual warfare: the assembly itself is the weapon.

St. Cyprian of Carthage *On the Unity of the Church*

The African bishop's famous sentence presses the assembly's logic to its root: he cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother. Christianity privatized is Christianity dissolved; the new and living way was opened for a people, and the people's habit of gathering is not decoration but lifeline.

Catechism Connection

CCC 2010. Moved by the Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and others the graces needed for sanctification and the attainment of eternal life: the perfected-and-being-sanctified grammar of 10:14, lived forward. Justification is God's free gift; growth in holiness is that gift working.

CCC 2178. The practice of the Christian assembly dates from the beginnings of the apostolic age, and the Letter to the Hebrews is cited by name: do not neglect to meet together. The Sunday obligation's oldest root, in tonight's verse.

CCC 1817. Hope: the confident expectation of divine blessing, holding fast the confession, “for he who promised is faithful”: the Catechism's definition quotes tonight's 10:23.

CCC 982. Carried forward from Session 5 and standing guard over tonight's warning: no one, however wicked and guilty, who honestly repents is beyond forgiveness. Read it again if the room needs it; some rooms do.

Thread Watch

THE SEATED SON · RESOLVES TONIGHT

Nine weeks ago, Session 1, Question 3: after making purification, he sat down, and you took guesses and confirmed nothing. Tonight, at 10:11–12, the sermon answers. Recall the old guesses before reading the verses; let their authors have the moment. The thread retires in glory.

THREAD 2 · THE BETTER TALLY (PUBLIC)

One entry: “you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” (10:34). The board approaches double digits; the group can feel the total coming.

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

Two tonight, in one sentence: “we have confidence to enter the sanctuary” (10:19) and “we have a great priest over the house of God” (10:21). The list: a great high priest; an anchor; such a high priest, seated and serving; confidence to enter; a great priest over the house. One entry remains, and it is the study's final discovery. Three weeks.

Session Goals

1. The treadmill logic of 10:1–4 lands: repetition confesses insufficiency; the annual liturgy was a reminder, not a remover.
2. Psalm 40 lands: what God wanted on the altar was a willing human will, and a body was prepared to give it.
3. The seated Son resolves with full ceremony, and the missing chair preaches.
4. The both-tenses steelman of 10:14 is handled: assurance without presumption, the verdict and the renovation.
5. The three let-us land as a unit, and 10:25 is heard as the apostolic root of the Sunday assembly.

Time Note

Built for 75 to 90 minutes. If the night runs short, compress the warning (Question 8) by leaning on Session 5's established keys, and cut the Dig Deeper, in that order. Do not cut the seated-Son resolution (Question 4), the 10:14 grammar (Question 5), or the three let-us (Questions 6 and 7). Cap the steelman (Question 5's second half) at ten minutes. No ANSWER box is a script.

Part 2 · Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Father, your Son said, Lo, I have come to do thy will, and by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of his body, once for all. Give us tonight the full assurance of faith, the unwavering confession of hope, and the stubborn creativity of love. Let us enter where the veil was torn, and let us never face this life unassembled. Through Christ, seated at your right hand. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. What is a chore that is never actually done: laundry, dishes, email? What would it even feel like to sit down from it, permanently?

W2. Homework check: what did you notice about postures in the reading: who stands, who sits? And Session 1 veterans: does anyone remember the question we wrote down nine weeks ago and were forbidden to answer?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 10:1–4

1. The sermon offers a proof you can check on a calendar: if the annual sacrifices had worked, what would have happened to them (10:2)? And instead of removing sin, what did the yearly liturgy actually do (10:3)? What does sheer repetition confess about any remedy?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

If they had worked, they would have ceased: cleansed consciences do not need next year's appointment. Instead, the Day of Atonement functioned as "a reminder of sin year after year": the file re-read annually because it could never be closed: a liturgy that kept the diagnosis current while the cure stayed out of reach, "for it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." Repetition is the confession of insufficiency: true of medicines, resolutions, and sacrifices alike. Pocket that principle; it returns tonight with a chair.

LIVE DISCOVERY: Ask someone to find and read Psalm 40:6–8, and someone else 1 Samuel 15:22 and Hosea 6:6.

2. A drumroll runs through the whole Old Testament: what do Samuel and Hosea say God prefers to sacrifice? And Psalm 40, which Hebrews puts in the Son's mouth as he enters the world: what does God not desire? Notice your Bibles say "thou hast given me an open ear," while Hebrews, quoting the Greek Old Testament, says "a body hast thou prepared for me." What is the same in both wordings, and for what purpose does the speaker come ("Lo, I have come...")? What did God always actually want on the altar?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

To obey is better than sacrifice; I desire steadfast love, not sacrifice: the prophets kept saying that

the animal was never the point. Psalm 40 names the true offering: not sacrifices but the servant who listens in order to obey, “an open ear”; and the Septuagint that Hebrews quotes carries the thought to its body-and-soul conclusion, “a body hast thou prepared for me... Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God.” What God wanted on the altar, from Eden forward, was a human will freely and wholly given: and no merely human son of Adam, wounded by sin, could give one whole and sinless, an offering able to redeem, until a body was prepared whose will was entirely the Father's. “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (10:10): the engine of the once-for-all sacrifice is obedience, which is why it cannot be repeated: not because it is spent, but because it cannot be improved.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 10:11–14, slowly. Session 1 veterans, lean in.

3. Two postures, side by side. What does every priest do daily, in what posture, with what result (10:11)? And what did this priest do, and then what did he do with his body (10:12)? Before we solve it: why were there no chairs in the tabernacle?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Every priest stands, daily, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices “which can never take away sins”: standing is the posture of unfinished business, and the tabernacle's furniture list (Exodus 25–30) contains lampstand, table, altars, laver, ark, and not one seat: the architecture itself testified that under that covenant the work would never be done. But this priest, “when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, sat down at the right hand of God.” He sat because it is finished: the same verdict he spoke from the cross, translated into furniture.

4. Now, at last: Session 1, Question 3. Nine weeks ago we read “after making purification for sins, he sat down” and I made you write the question down. Who remembers their guess? Say them out loud. Then render the verdict: why did he sit down, and what does the chair mean for the person in this room who still relates to God as unfinished business?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Honor every remembered guess: nine weeks of patience earns its ceremony. The verdict: he sat because the offering is complete: nothing remains to be added, earned, or topped up: the seated posture is the Gospel stated in furniture, and St. John Chrysostom preached it exactly so: no one sits down with work left undone. For the participant who relates to God as a standing priest, always producing, never enough: the chair is for you. Your acceptance before God is not your unfinished project; it is his finished one. (And hold the balance for the next question: the seated priest is not an idle priest: he sits interceding, 7:25, waiting “until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet,” 10:13: Psalm 110:1 one last time, the study's oldest verse, now fully lit.)

5. The jewel with two tenses, 10:14: “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” Read it twice. Leader note: the Greek participle here is present tense, *hagiazomenous*, literally “those who are being sanctified,” and many translations print it so; both verbs are load-bearing. And here is tonight's compact steelman, honestly put: many of our Protestant brothers and sisters read 10:14 this way: by a single offering Christ has

definitively perfected the believer's standing before God, once for all; nothing can add to that verdict, no further works of satisfaction, and certainly no purification beyond this life. Growth in holiness must follow, they insist, but it contributes nothing to the believer's acceptance. It guards the finished work, and it takes sanctification seriously. What does the verse's own second half do to that reading, and how do the two tenses fit together in one Christian life?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The objection's treasure is real: the perfecting is done, by a single offering, and no Catholic doctrine adds to it; any spirituality that turns holiness into self-salvation deserves the rebuke. The real question is not whether the justified grow (both sides say they must) but what that growth is: a supplement to the offering, or the offering at work. The verse's own Greek answers: the perfected ones are, in the present participle, being sanctified; the renovation, including whatever purification remains, is not a second payment but the single offering being applied. Scripture holds both tenses without strain, and so does the Church: justification is complete gift, and the justified grow: "strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" is this very sermon, two chapters from now (12:14). The Catholic grammar (CCC 2010): the verdict is his and finished; the renovation is his and ongoing, with our freedom enlisted: the seated priest perfects; the living Spirit sanctifies; and the two are one gift in two tenses. Assurance without presumption, striving without anxiety: 10:14 is the whole balance in eleven words.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 10:19–25

6. The therefore section: we have confidence to enter the sanctuary, "by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh." Recall everything this study knows about that curtain: who went through it, how often, at what risk: and recall what the Gospels say happened to the temple veil at three in the afternoon on Good Friday. What is the veil now?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The veil was the mortal boundary: one man, one day a year, never without blood, lest he die (Leviticus 16:2): and Session 5's anchor entered behind it. At the moment Jesus died, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51): from top to bottom: torn from God's side. The veil is now a doorway, and the sermon dares to say the curtain was his flesh: his body, opened, is the way through. The room Aaron entered trembling once a year is now the baptized family's standing address: "confidence to enter," as a possession. (Leader: the We-Have inventory just took two entries in one breath: confidence to enter, 10:19, and a great priest over the house, 10:21.)

7. The three let-us of 10:22–25, and notice their skeleton: faith, hope, love. Walk them: draw near, in full assurance of faith; hold fast the confession of our hope, "for he who promised is faithful"; and consider how to stir up one another to love, "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some." Two questions: why does the love exhortation immediately become an attendance exhortation? And what do you make of the fact that skipping the assembly

was already “the habit of some” in the apostolic age?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Because the sermon's whole diagnosis has been drift, and drift is a solo sport: you cannot stir up one another from your couch, and you cannot be stirred there either. The assembly is where faith gets its fuel, hope gets its chorus, and love gets its assignments: which is why the Church has always pointed to 10:25 as the apostolic root of her Sunday assembly (CCC 2178 cites this verse for the apostolic origin of the Christian assembly), and why St. Ignatius, writing around the year 107, called frequent assembly the undoing of Satan's power. And the comfort hiding in “the habit of some”: skipping church is not a modern invention the early Church would gasp at; it is the oldest bad habit in Christianity, diagnosed on this page, with the same prescription: encourage one another, “and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” The lonelier and later the times, the less optional the gathering.

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 10:26–31

8. The second severe warning, and this group has earned its reading keys. Using everything Session 5 taught us: what sin is in view here (look at the three verbs of 10:29), where does the “no longer remains a sacrifice” logic come from, and what does this warning not say about the repentant? Then read the pivot at 10:32–34: what does the preacher immediately remind them of, and what did they once joyfully accept?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The sin is the persisting, deliberate repudiation: spurning the Son of God, profaning the blood of the covenant, outraging the Spirit of grace: apostasy in its full posture, not weakness or a bad season. “No sacrifice remains” because there is no second fountain behind the first: the one who tramples the only sacrifice has, while trampling, nowhere else to be washed: the impossibility lives in the trampling, and the door of repentance stands open the moment it stops (CCC 982, permanently in force). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God: and it is a tender thing, too, for the same sermon immediately turns to warm memory: you endured, you had compassion on the prisoners, “you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” (10:34: the Tally scores). The preacher warns like Session 5 taught us he warns: thunder, then beloved. “We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls” (10:39).

9. The chapter ends on a borrowed sentence that the next chapter will spend forty verses illustrating: “my righteous one shall live by faith” (10:38, from Habakkuk 2:3–4, a prophet told to wait for a slow vision). Given everything tonight said: the finished offering, the opened veil, the Day drawing near: what is faith for, in the meantime? Do not answer fully; next week is the answer.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Take first thoughts only: faith is how the righteous live between the promise and its arrival: the vision “awaits its time... if it seem slow, wait for it.” Then say: “Next week the sermon opens its portrait gallery: forty verses of people who lived by faith, and what it cost them, and what they were waiting for. Read chapter 11 like a family album, and notice the verbs: watch what faith does in every single frame.” Close there; the gallery deserves a fresh night.

DIG DEEPER

10:20 calls the way through the veil “new and living”: *prosphatos*, freshly opened, and living: not a corridor but a Person: I am the way. If the group has one more breath: the old way in was a room behind a curtain; the new way in is a body that was opened. Every sacrament walks that way: the door to the Holy of Holies has a heartbeat.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT THE DOOR

S1. Where in your life with God are you still a standing priest: producing, repeating, never finished? What would it mean, concretely, this week, to sit down in his finished work: and what is the difference between that rest and quitting?

S2. “Not neglecting to meet together... but encouraging one another.” Who in your circle has drifted from the assembly? You are not their judge; you might be their invitation. What does 10:24's “consider how to stir up” look like aimed at them, this month?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray 10:14 daily, both tenses, in the first person: “By a single offering he has perfected me; and I am being sanctified.” Begin from the chair, not toward it.
2. Make one concrete act of stirring: invite, encourage, or accompany one drifted person toward the assembly, this week.
3. Read Hebrews 11 before next session, the whole gallery, and underline the verb that follows every “by faith.” Bring your count, and bring your favorite portrait.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

HEBREWS 10:23 (RSV2CE)

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, seated at the right hand of God: your offering is finished and we are being made holy inside it. Give us assurance without presumption, striving without fear, and the stubborn habit of assembling that no era has ever made easy. We hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for you who promised are faithful. Amen.

Part 3 • Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or assigned in Session 9, in order of appearance.

PRIMARY TEXT

Hebrews 10:1–4 • 10:5–10 • 10:11–18 • 10:19–25 • 10:26–31 • 10:32–39

LIVE DISCOVERY PASSAGES

Psalms 40:6–8 (the open ear; Hebrews quotes the Septuagint: a body prepared) • 1 Samuel 15:22 and Hosea 6:6 (the drumroll) • Matthew 27:51 (the veil, torn from the top)

STEELMAN PASSAGES (QUESTION 5)

Hebrews 10:14, both tenses • Hebrews 12:14 (striving, previewed) • CCC 2010

LEADER BACKGROUND

Exodus 25–30 (the furniture list with no chair) • Leviticus 16:2 • Habakkuk 2:3–4 • CCC 982 (standing guard)

CATECHISM

CCC 2010 • CCC 2178 • CCC 1817 • CCC 982

MEMORY VERSE

Hebrews 10:23

NEXT SESSION

Session 10 covers Hebrews 11: the gallery of faith, verb by verb. Participants bring their by-faith counts and favorite portraits.