

Session 5: Once for All

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Tonight the group reads Hebrews 7 and experiences something rare: Scripture agreeing with them. Every argument the letter makes about Melchizedek (greater than Levi through the tithe and the blessing, priest without genealogy, established by oath, priest for ever, holding his priesthood permanently because he lives) is an argument the group already built with their own hands in Session 3. Then Hebrews 9 and 10 answer Session 2's "once in the year" with the New Testament's great adverb: once for all, *ephapax*. And then the group faces the hardest steelman in the entire study: if once for all, what is the Mass? Tonight's answer, drawn from Hebrews itself, from Revelation, and from Malachi, is that the one sacrifice is not locked in the past; it is eternally present, and the prophets foresaw it offered among the nations perpetually. How the Church enters that offering is next week's discovery, and you will say so out loud.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: the victim is one and the same, and only the manner of offering is different; the Mass does not add to the Cross or multiply it, but makes it present (CCC 1364, 1366 to 1367). It also teaches that Christ's Paschal mystery, unlike other historical events, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is and did participates in the divine eternity and so transcends all times (CCC 1085). Tonight is the session where the study earns the right to those paragraphs from the text.

What You Need to Know

Hebrews 7 is the summit of the letter's Melchizedek argument, and your group owns the terrain. Walk it with them and let recognition do the teaching. Verses 1 to 3: the silence of Genesis (no father, no mother, no genealogy, no birth, no death) is read as a designed portrait, "resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever." Verses 4 to 10: the tithe and the blessing prove greatness, and even Levi, "still in the loins of his ancestor," tithed to Melchizedek through Abraham; the group made this exact argument in Session 3, Question 2. Verses 11 to 19: if perfection came through Levi, why does Psalm 110 promise ANOTHER priest, after a different order? The psalm's existence is itself the proof that the Levitical system was provisional. Verses 20 to 22: the oath, their memory verse, quoted in full. Verses 23 to 25: the many priests died; this one "holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever," and therefore "he always lives to make intercession" for those who draw near through him. Note what Hebrews never mentions in all of chapter 7: the bread and the wine. The one detail of Genesis 14:18 the letter leaves untouched is the one detail still sealed in your group's envelopes. Enjoy that privately; say nothing.

Hebrews 9 and 10 then close the loop opened in Session 2. The earthly sanctuary was "a copy and shadow"; Christ entered "once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (9:12). The word is *ephapax*, once-for-all, and the letter hammers it at 7:27, 9:12, and 10:10, with its sister word *hapax*, once, at 9:26 and 9:28. Then 10:11 to 14 paints the contrast your group can feel in their bones: "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." Standing versus seated. Repetition versus completion. "It is finished."

Which sets the table for the steelman, and do not soften it: a Catholic altar has a priest standing at daily service, offering what Catholics themselves call a sacrifice. Is that not the exact photograph of the obsolete that Hebrews 10:11 develops? Worse: if Calvary was once for all, is the Mass not either redundant (Calvary sufficed) or blasphemous (re-crucifying)? Give the objection everything; some of your group has heard it from people they love, and half-strength answers insult everyone involved.

The answer tonight comes in three textual moves, and it deliberately stops short of the mechanism. Move one: the one sacrifice is not sealed in the past. Hebrews itself says the risen priest "always lives to make intercession" (7:25) and "entered... into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (9:24): present tense ministry, now, on the strength of the one offering. And when John is shown heaven, he sees "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Revelation 5:6): the sacrifice, perpetually present at the center of heaven's worship. The Mass does not reach back to repeat a past event; the Church is drawn up into a sacrifice that never stopped being present to God. Move two: Malachi. The last prophet of the Old Testament, disgusted by the polluted sacrifices of a corrupt priesthood, foresees the astonishing thing: "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" (Malachi 1:11). A pure offering, offered in every place, among the Gentiles: read from where Malachi stands, the oracle looks past the corrupt present to the nations, and the Church's ancient reading heard it as worldwide and perpetual. Early Christians (the Didache, an early church manual commonly dated to the late first or early second century) applied that oracle to the Eucharist without blushing. Move three: honesty about what remains. HOW the Church participates in the one sacrifice, by what words and by whose command, is precisely the Last Supper, and it is next week. Tell the group: tonight establishes that the one sacrifice is eternally present and that a perpetual pure offering was foretold; next week Jesus himself hands it over.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight is fulfillment in the strict sense: Hebrews 7 harvests Genesis 14 and Psalm 110, the group's Sessions 1 and 3; Hebrews 9 and 10 harvest Leviticus 16, their Session 2. The one new Old Testament root planted tonight is Malachi 1:6 to 11, discovered live, and it will bear fruit next week and again in Session 11. The study's architecture is now fully visible to the group; let them enjoy the view.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Chrysostom

Preaching on Hebrews, Chrysostom faces tonight's question head-on: "Do we not offer every day? We offer indeed, but making a remembrance of his death... We do not offer another sacrifice, as the high priest of old, but always the same." For Chrysostom there is no tension between once-for-all and the daily altar, because the altar offers nothing new: one victim, one offering, made present. Sixteen centuries before your group asked tonight's question, the Church's greatest preacher answered it in these words.

Homilies on Hebrews, Homily 17

VOICE OF THE CHURCH The Didache

The Didache, an early church manual commonly dated to the late first or early second century, instructs Christians to gather on the Lord's day, break bread, and give thanks, first confessing their sins "so that your sacrifice may be pure," and it invokes Malachi's pure-offering oracle (adapting 1:11 and 1:14) of that assembly. The earliest Christians we can hear called their Eucharist a sacrifice, and they reached for Malachi to explain it. (The Didache is an early Church document, not a single saint's writing.)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Paul II

St. John Paul II teaches, in substance, that the Mass makes sacramentally present the one sacrifice of the Cross: it does not add to that sacrifice and does not multiply it; what is repeated is the memorial celebration, while the sacrifice itself remains the one sacrifice of Christ, embracing every generation. Writing at the start of the third millennium, he is saying what Chrysostom said in the fourth century: same victim, same offering, made present. (A summary of his teaching in his encyclical on the Eucharist.)

Ecclesia de Eucharistia

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 transcends all times.
- CCC 1364: in the liturgy the memorial is not merely recollection; the sacrifice Christ offered once for all remains ever present.
- CCC 1366 to 1367: the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are ONE SINGLE sacrifice; the victim is one and the same; only the manner of offering is different.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD A (sealed guess): final approach. Hebrews 7 expounds everything about Genesis 14 except the bread and wine; if anyone notices that silence, beam at them and say "one more week." The Take-Home tells everyone to BRING their sealed sheet next session, unopened.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): "he always lives to make intercession" (7:25) is the guard-thread in glory: the priest who keeps his people forever. One sentence.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): resting.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): resting, but Malachi's "in every place... among the nations" quietly widens the map for Sessions 8 and 12.

Session Goals

1. The group recognizes their own Session 3 arguments inside Hebrews 7 and can name at least three of them.
2. The group traces ephapax (once for all) through Hebrews 9 and 10 and states the standing-versus-seated contrast of 10:11 to 14 in their own words.
3. The Mass steelman is stated at maximum strength, including the "photograph of the obsolete" charge.
4. The group discovers Revelation 5:6 (the Lamb standing as slain) and Malachi 1:11 (the perpetual pure offering) and can articulate the three-move answer: eternally present sacrifice, foretold perpetual offering, mechanism deferred to next week.
5. No one leaves thinking the Catholic answer is "Hebrews does not really mean once for all." It means it. That is the point.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)

- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: Hebrews 7, the recognition (25 min)
- 0:40 Build II: Once for all, Hebrews 9 to 10 (15 min)
- 0:55 Build III: The steelman and the three moves (25 min)
- 1:20 Send (5 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: compress Build I by assigning Hebrews 7:1 to 10 as a silent read with one question instead of two, and drop the Dig Deeper. Never cut any part of Build III; the steelman is the session.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, your Son offered himself once for all, and he lives for ever to intercede for us. As we read tonight, give us minds sharp enough for hard questions and hearts humble enough for large answers. Through Christ our Lord, a priest for ever. Amen.

Win

1. Have you ever finished something completely, paid off a debt, submitted the thesis, crossed the finish line? What did "finished" feel like in your body?
2. Is there a moment from your past, good or hard, that is somehow still present to you, that you do not merely remember but almost re-enter? What makes some moments work that way?

Build I: The Recognition

Read Hebrews 7:1 to 10 aloud, divided around the room. Tell the group to interrupt you, out loud, every time the letter makes an argument this study has already made.

Q1. List the interruptions. Which of tonight's arguments did this group already build with its own hands, and in which session?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

At minimum: the loaded silence of Genesis (no genealogy, no birth, no death) read as a portrait "resembling the Son of God" (their Session 3, Question 1); greatness proven by the blessing and the tithe, "the inferior is blessed by the superior" (Session 3, Question 2); and even Levi, in Abraham's loins, bowing toward this priesthood (their own parking-lot thought from Session 3). Say it plainly: nobody smuggled you here. You did the exegesis first; the New Testament just agreed with you.

Read Hebrews 7:11 to 25.

Q2. Verse 11 asks a question about Psalm 110. What is the letter's argument from the psalm's mere EXISTENCE? And what do verses 23 to 25 say this undying priest is doing right now?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

If the Levitical priesthood could perfect anyone, why would Israel's own psalter, sung inside the Levitical system, promise ANOTHER priest after a different order? The psalm's existence proves the system knew itself provisional. And the priest who "continues for ever... always lives to make intercession" for those who draw near through him: present tense, right now, permanently. His priesthood did not end at the cross; it passed through death alive. Hold that present tense; it is tonight's hinge. (Also: notice what chapter 7 never mentions from Genesis 14. If someone spots it, congratulate them and say: one more week.)

Build II: Once for All

Read Hebrews 9:11 to 12 and 9:24 to 26 aloud. Then read 10:11 to 14 slowly, and have the group physically notice the two postures in it.

Q3. What are the two postures in 10:11 to 14, whose are they, and what does each posture mean? And what is the word Hebrews keeps repeating about Christ's offering (9:12 and 10:10, with the kindred hapax, once, at 9:26)?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Levitical priest STANDS, daily, because his work never finishes; Christ, having offered a single sacrifice for sins, SAT DOWN at the right hand of God, because his work is complete. The drumbeat word is "once for all" (Greek ephapax). This is the New Testament's answer to Session 2's "once in the year": the repetition problem is over. Do not rush past this or blunt it. The Catholic Church confesses ephapax without reservation: the Cross is complete, unrepeatable, and sufficient. Whatever the Mass is, it is not a repair.

Build III: Then What Is the Mass?

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength, no flinching: "Your Protestant friend opens to Hebrews 10:11 and reads it slowly: every priest stands DAILY at his service, offering REPEATEDLY the same sacrifices. Then he looks up and says: describe a Catholic parish to me. A priest, standing at an altar, daily, offering what your own catechism calls a sacrifice. Hebrews drew a photograph of the obsolete, and Rome framed it. And it is worse than redundant: if Calvary was once for all, then calling the Mass a sacrifice either adds to a finished work or crucifies Christ again. Once for all means once. For. All." Let the room be uncomfortable. Some of them have carried this exact speech home from a dorm room argument.

Q4. Before any answer: what does this objection get RIGHT that a Catholic must never deny?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

That the Cross is once for all, finished, sufficient, unrepeatable; that nothing can add to it; and that any account of the Mass which quietly treats Calvary as insufficient is not Catholic. Grant every word of that with joy. The Church's own teaching states it: the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice, and the Mass adds nothing to the Cross and multiplies nothing. The disagreement is not about whether Calvary is complete; it is about where Calvary is now.

LIVE DISCOVERY ONE. Say: "Hebrews said the risen priest always lives to make intercession, and appears in the presence of God NOW on our behalf. So: when heaven's door opens in Revelation chapter 5, and John sees the center of all heavenly worship, look at verse 6. How does the sacrificed one appear?" Give them the moment.

Q5. What does John see, and what does that image do to the idea that the sacrifice of Christ is locked in the past?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"A Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." Not a Lamb who was once slain and has moved on: the marks of the sacrifice are eternally present, at the center of heaven's liturgy, receiving worship. The one offering of Calvary is not behind us on a timeline; it stands, alive and slain at once, before the throne for

ever. So the Catholic claim is the opposite of repetition: the Mass does not drag Calvary back from the past; the Mass is the Church being drawn up into a sacrifice that has never stopped being present to God. Same victim, same priest; only the manner of offering differs.

LIVE DISCOVERY TWO. Say: "One more witness, and he is unexpected: the last prophet of the Old Testament. In Malachi 1:6 to 11, God is disgusted with the polluted sacrifices of a corrupt priesthood, and then in verse 11 he foresees something. Read the passage and tell me: what does God say will happen, where, and among whom?"

Q6. What are the marks of the offering Malachi foresees? And here is the hard question: what offering in the history of the world actually fits that description?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A PURE offering (unlike the polluted ones in front of him), offered "in every place" (not one temple), "from the rising of the sun to its setting" (perpetually), "among the nations" (Gentiles!). Pure, offered among the nations, in every place; and the Church's ancient reading, from the Didache on, heard in it a worldwide, ongoing offering. A single sacrifice offered once at one hill outside Jerusalem does not, by itself, fit "in every place" and "from the rising of the sun to its setting"; a memorial that merely thinks about that sacrifice is not naturally called an OFFERING. But the one sacrifice of Christ, made present on altars in every place, at every hour, among every nation: that fits like a key. And this is not a modern Catholic retrofit: the Didache, an early church manual, invokes this very oracle of the Christian Eucharist and calls that Eucharist a sacrifice.

Then say, honestly and out loud: one question remains wide open tonight. By what right, by whose command, and by what words does the Church enter the one sacrifice? That question has an answer, and the answer has a date: the night before he died. Next week. Bring your sealed guesses. Unopened.

DIG DEEPER

Hebrews 13:10: "We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat." Written to Christians, present tense: WE HAVE an altar. An altar is sacrifice furniture, and eating from it is participation language. The verse is compact and its exegesis is genuinely debated (the altar as the Cross, as Christ himself, or as the Eucharistic table, and these readings are not mutually exclusive); what no reading can remove is that the letter of "once for all" felt no embarrassment saying Christians have an altar and eat from it. File it beside next week.

Send

1. "He always lives to make intercession for them." Right now, tonight, the risen Christ is praying for you by name. What would change in your week if you actually believed that sentence?
2. Where in your life are you still standing at daily service, trying to finish by repetition something Christ has already finished, in your guilt, your perfectionism, your bargaining with God? What would it mean to let him be seated?

Live It This Week

- Once this week, pray with Hebrews 7:25: name your hardest situation out loud, then say: "Jesus, you live for ever to intercede for me. I hand this to the priest who never goes off duty."
- If you attend Mass this week, at the elevation of the host, silently pray Revelation 5:6: "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." Just look, and let the two pages sit on top of each other.
- Find your sealed guess from Session 1 and put it somewhere you will not forget it. It comes with you next week. Still sealed.

Memory Verse

"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."

Hebrews 7:25 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, Lamb standing as though slain, your one offering is finished and your intercession never ends. Free us from every altar of our own making, every attempt to finish what you have finished, and draw us upward into the worship that never stops. You live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 5

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- Hebrews 7:1 to 10 (Build I, read aloud)
- Hebrews 7:11 to 25 (Build I, read aloud; memory verse source at 7:25)
- Hebrews 9:11 to 12; 9:24 to 26 (Build II, read aloud)
- Hebrews 10:11 to 14 (Build II and steelman, read slowly)
- Hebrews 10:10; 7:27 (ephapax); 9:26, 28 (hapax) (leader reference: the once-for-all drumbeat)
- Revelation 5:6 (Build III, live discovery one)
- Malachi 1:6 to 11 (Build III, live discovery two)
- Hebrews 13:10 (Dig Deeper)