

Take-Home: Session 10

A Kingdom of Priests · The Laying On of Hands

What We Found

We watched the ministry get handed on, on the page. The Church's first item of business was filling Judas' vacant OFFICE (Acts 1:20, the overseership word), an office that outlives its holder, a pattern this study heard alongside the steward's key of Isaiah 22. Elders were appointed "in every church" (Acts 14:23); the Ephesian elders were made overseers "to care for the church of God" (Acts 20:28); and the Pastorals gave us the ordination grammar: a GIFT, given THROUGH the laying on of hands (2 Timothy 1:6), guarded by the warning "do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Timothy 5:22). We counted four generations in one verse: Paul, to Timothy, to faithful men, to others also (2 Timothy 2:2). We conceded honestly that the New Testament never calls a Christian minister hieres (a sacrificing priest); through much of that period the Temple still stood, and the word-family had gone to Christ and, collectively, to the whole baptized people. But Paul described his own ministry as "the PRIESTLY SERVICE of the gospel of God, so that the OFFERING of the Gentiles may be acceptable" (Romans 15:16); and in the generation after the apostles (traditionally around 96), Clement of Rome described succession as the apostles' own arrangement. One delight to keep: the English word "priest" descends from presbyteros, the New Testament's own word for these men.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Clement of Rome

Writing traditionally around the year 96, St. Clement teaches in substance: Christ from God, the apostles from Christ; the apostles appointed bishops and deacons, and provided that when these men died, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. (A faithful summary of his letter.)

Letter to the Corinthians (1 Clement), chapters 42 and 44

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ignatius of Antioch

"Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is under the bishop or one to whom he has entrusted it... where the bishop is, there let the people be." Around the year 107, ordered ministry and the Eucharist are already one fabric.

Letter to the Smyrnaeans

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against secret Gnostic "traditions," St. Irenaeus teaches in substance that the Church's answer is public and checkable: we can enumerate the men appointed bishops by the apostles, and their successors, down to our own day. Succession was the second century's receipt. (A summary from his work against the heresies.)

Against Heresies, Book 3

Live It This Week

- Pray daily for your pastor and your bishop by name.
- Take one step in your own relay: teach one thing you have received to one specific person.
- If you have ever felt a pull toward priesthood or religious life, or love someone who might, say one honest prayer about it this week.

Memory Verse

"Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands."

2 Timothy 1:6 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read John 13:1 to 15 once: the Teacher and Lord with a towel around his waist, the night everything was handed over.

Catechism References

CCC 861 to 862; CCC 1578.