

A LIVING HOPE

A Catholic Journey Through the Letters of Saint Peter

Session Two

Be Holy: Ransomed and Reborn

1 Peter 1:13-25

“You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot”

1 Peter 1:18-19 (RSV2CE)

Saint Joseph Parish, Springfield, Nebraska

Leader Preparation Guide

For the facilitator only. Not for distribution.

Session Overview

Last week Peter spent twelve verses telling his readers who they are. Tonight the letter's commands begin (the imperatives start at 1:13), and the central one is enormous: “Be holy yourselves in all your conduct” (1:15). But watch how Peter grounds it. The call to holiness rests on three facts the group will excavate: God is your Father and judge (1:17), you were ransomed at the price of Christ's blood, prefigured by the Passover lamb (1:18-19), and you have been born anew of imperishable seed (1:23). Holiness is not the entry fee to God's family; it is the family resemblance.

The Discovery Aim. Participants should be able to say: God does not grade on a curve because he adopts, and adopted children are called to look like their Father; the price of my ransom tells me my worth; and the “born anew” question from Session One just gained a second clue, because 1:23 adds “through the living and abiding word of God.”

The Catholic Touchstone. The universal call to holiness (every baptized person, not a spiritual elite); redemption as costly ransom, not legal fiction; and the Father who “judges each one impartially according to his deeds” (1:17), which sits comfortably in a Catholic account of grace. Note the Protestant

position at full strength: classic Protestantism teaches justification by faith alone with good works as its necessary fruit, and can read judgment according to deeds as judgment of that fruit. The Catholic difference is that grace-wrought deeds truly count toward final salvation, not merely as evidence of it; 1:17 invites that sharper conversation.

What You Need to Know

Gird Up Your Minds (1:13)

The image is a man gathering his long robe into his belt so he can move fast. It is Passover language: Israel ate the first Passover with “your loins girded... your staff in your hand” (Ex 12:11), dressed for departure. Peter opens the paragraph with an Exodus posture and will close it with an Exodus lamb. His converts are a people in flight from slavery, and the whole section reads holiness as travel clothing.

Be Holy, For I Am Holy (1:15-16)

Peter quotes the refrain of Leviticus (11:44-45; 19:2). *Holy* (Hebrew *qadosh*) means set apart, other, belonging to God. In Leviticus the call lands on the whole people, not only priests, and it covers food, business, sexuality, and speech, which is why Peter can say “in all your conduct.” Vatican II’s universal call to holiness (Lumen Gentium ch. 5) is this verse grown to full stature: holiness is the ordinary vocation of every baptized person, not the specialty of monks and nuns.

A Father Who Judges (1:17)

Peter joins two ideas moderns keep apart: “you invoke as Father” and “who judges each one impartially according to his deeds.” There is no tension for Peter. A good father both loves unconditionally and takes his children’s conduct seriously precisely because he loves them. Note the phrase “according to his deeds”: like Romans 2:6 and Matthew 25, judgment weighs what grace has actually produced in a life. Deeds are not the rival of grace; they are its evidence and fruit. “Conduct yourselves with fear” means reverent seriousness, not terror; Scripture elsewhere says perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn 4:18), and Peter himself will tell his readers to fear no human intimidation (3:14).

Ransomed with Precious Blood (1:18-19)

The verb *lytroō*, to ransom, is slave-market and Exodus vocabulary: God “redeemed you out of the house of bondage” (Deut 7:8). Isaiah told the exiles, “you were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money” (Is 52:3); Peter tells his exiles the price was something worth more than money: “the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” That last phrase is Exodus 12:5, the Passover regulation, and it is tonight’s inductive discovery (Q5). Notice what they are ransomed from: not first from hell, but from “the futile ways inherited from your fathers,” an empty way of life handed down like a family heirloom. Young adults recognize this instantly: inherited patterns, family wounds, cultural scripts that lead nowhere.

Born Anew of Imperishable Seed (1:22-25)

Here is the session’s link to the Session One thread. Peter repeats *anagennaō*: “born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God,” and quotes Isaiah 40:6-8 (all flesh is grass, but the word of the Lord abides). So the new birth now has two named

instruments: the resurrection of Christ (1:3) and the living word of God (1:23). Do not resolve the thread; sharpen it. The word proclaimed and the sacrament that applies the Resurrection are not competitors, and Session Six will let Peter say so himself. If a sharp participant brings up James 1:18 (“he brought us forth by the word of truth”) or Ephesians 5:26 (“the washing of water with the word”), smile: Ephesians already joins the two.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 12:1-13: The Passover Lamb

“Your lamb shall be without blemish” (Ex 12:5); its blood on the doorposts turns away death; the meal is eaten girded for departure. Peter compresses the whole scene into 1:18-19, and St. John the Baptist’s cry stands behind it: “Behold, the Lamb of God” (Jn 1:29). Let the group find the connection themselves in Q5 before you name it.

Leviticus 19: The Holiness Code

“You shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2) heads a chapter about honest scales, prompt wages, care for the poor, truthful speech, and love of neighbor (19:18). Holiness in Israel was never merely ritual; it was moral and social, which is exactly Peter’s “in all your conduct.”

Isaiah 40:6-8: Grass and the Word

The comfort chapter of the exile: every human power withers like grass, “but the word of our God will stand for ever.” Peter quotes it almost word for word at 1:24-25 (saying “the word of the Lord” where Isaiah has “the word of our God”) and adds the punchline: “That word is the good news which was preached to you.” The gospel your group heard is the imperishable thing Isaiah promised.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church

St. Clement of Rome (d. c. 99), Letter to the Corinthians 7

An early bishop of Rome in the succession from Peter (traditionally the third after him, following Linus and Anacletus), writing within a generation of this letter, urges the Corinthians to gaze intently on the blood of Christ and to know how precious it is to God the Father, since it was poured out for our salvation and won the grace of repentance for the whole world. Within a generation of this letter, the Church was already gazing at how precious that blood is to the Father. The step this study takes from there, that you are worth what was paid for you, is our pastoral application of Clement's gaze, drawn out for tonight's group.

Voices of the Church

St. Melito of Sardis (d. c. 180), On Pascha

In the oldest surviving Easter homily, St. Melito preaches Christ as the true Passover: the lamb slain in Egypt was a sketch, and Christ the reality; he was led like a lamb and slaughtered like a sheep, and by his blood death is despoiled. This is precisely Peter's move in 1:19, and it shows the lamb-typology was mainstream preaching within a century of the apostles.

Voices of the Church

St. Leo the Great (d. 461), Sermon 21 on the Nativity

"Christian, recognize your dignity." St. Leo exhorts the baptized to remember whose head and body they belong to, and never by sin to return to the old baseness they were ransomed from. The Catechism places this line at the head of its whole moral section (CCC 1691), which is Peter's logic exactly: dignity first, then conduct worthy of it.

Catechism Connection

CCC 602. The Catechism quotes 1 Peter 1:18-20 directly to teach that redemption comes at the price of Christ's blood, foreknown before the foundation of the world. Peter's verse is the Church's proof text here.

CCC 1691. "Christian, recognize your dignity." The moral life begins from identity, exactly as this letter does.

CCC 2013. “All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.” The universal call to holiness, from *Lumen Gentium* 40, is Leviticus 19:2 and 1 Peter 1:15 restated by a Council.

Thread Watch

1. Born anew, second clue. 1:23 adds “through the living and abiding word.” Word and sacrament converge at 3:21 in Session Six. Keep the question open.

2. Judged according to deeds (1:17). Returns at 4:17-19 (Session Seven), where judgment begins with the household of God.

3. Love one another earnestly (1:22). Blossoms at 4:8, “love covers a multitude of sins” (Session Seven).

Session Goals for the Leader

1. Ground the call to holiness in identity and ransom, not in performance anxiety.
2. Let the group discover the Passover lamb of Exodus 12 behind 1:19 for themselves.
3. Hold Father and Judge together in 1:17 without letting either swallow the other.
4. Sharpen, without resolving, the born-anew thread with the new “word” clue of 1:23.

Leader Note

Time frame: 75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, Q8 and the Isaiah 40 Dig Deeper are the cuts; never cut the Exodus 12 discovery in Q5.

Discussion Guide

Session Two • Be Holy: Ransomed and Reborn • 1 Peter 1:13-25

Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer

Holy Father, you ransomed us not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of your Son, the Lamb without blemish. Teach us tonight what we cost, so we may learn what we are worth. Make us holy as you are holy, not by our striving but by your grace at work in our striving. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Gathering In

- ◆ What is something you inherited from your family, a trait, a saying, a habit, that you're glad you got? Is there anything handed down that you've had to deliberately unlearn?
- ◆ How do you usually react when you hear the word “holy”? Attractive, intimidating, boring, out of reach? Be honest.

Build: Working the Text

Leader Note

Recap in one minute: last week the group found that Peter gives identity before obligation. Tonight the obligations arrive. Ask each question, wait through the silence, let the group work the text, then confirm with the Answer block.

Movement One: Dressed for Departure (1:13-16)

Read: 1 Peter 1:13-16 (from participants' own Bibles)

- Q1.** “Gird up your minds” is the posture of a man tucking his robe into his belt to move fast. Where in Israel's story were God's people commanded to eat a meal dressed exactly like that, and why? (Hint: think of a night of departure.)

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The first Passover: “your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand” (Ex 12:11), ready to leave Egypt the moment God struck. Peter opens with Exodus posture on purpose: his readers are a ransomed people mid-journey, and holiness is travel clothing, not museum dress. Sobriety and hope “set fully” on Christ's revelation are how pilgrims pack light.

- Q2.** Verse 14 says “do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,” and verse 15 answers with “be holy in all your conduct.” What does the word “all” rule out? Where do people today try to draw the boundary line of where God is allowed?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“All” rules out the compartment system: faith on Sunday, autonomy everywhere else. Peter is quoting Leviticus, and the holiness chapter he quotes (Lev 19) covers business honesty, wages, sexuality, speech, and love of neighbor. Holiness was never just ritual purity; it is a whole life set apart. The group will name modern compartments readily: dating, money, what we do online, how we talk about people who are not in the room.

Q3. Verse 16 quotes God: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” Notice the reason given. God does not say “be holy so I will love you” or “be holy or else.” What kind of logic is “because I am”? What human relationship works like that?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It is family resemblance logic. Children are called to look like their Father because they are his children, not to become his children. That is why this command could not come until after 1:3: born anew first, then the family likeness. The Church calls this the universal call to holiness (CCC 2013): every baptized person, married or single, student or salesman, is called to the same perfection of love, not a spiritual elite.

Movement Two: The Price Tag (1:17-21)

Read: 1 Peter 1:17-21 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

Q4. Verse 17 puts two titles in one sentence: the God you “invoke as Father” also “judges each one impartially according to his deeds.” Most people feel those cancel each other out. Do they? What would a father be like who never took his children’s conduct seriously?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He would be negligent, not loving. A good father’s love is unconditional and his expectations are real, precisely because he loves. Peter feels no tension, and neither does the rest of Scripture: judgment “according to deeds” appears in Jesus (Mt 16:27; Mt 25) and Paul (Rom 2:6) alike. Deeds are not the rival of grace; they are what grace produces and what judgment weighs. “Fear” here is reverent seriousness before a Father whose opinion matters infinitely, not terror before a tyrant.

Q5. Verses 18-19: you were ransomed “with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” Turn to Exodus 12:1-13 and read it aloud. Where does Peter’s phrase come from, and what did that lamb’s blood actually do on that night?

Leader Note

The discovery moment. If the group stalls, ask: what is required of the lamb in verse 5, and where does the blood go in verse 7? What happens at houses marked by it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“Your lamb shall be without blemish” (Ex 12:5). Its blood, marked on the doorposts, turned death away from Israel’s houses; that same night God broke Egypt’s grip and led Israel out of slavery. Peter’s phrase points straight to this scene, and the Church has read it this way from the beginning: Christ is the true Passover Lamb. St. Paul says it outright, “Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7). His blood does for you what the first lamb’s blood sketched: it turns away death, and God sets you free from slavery. St. John the Baptist said it in one line: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). Every Mass says it back at the altar.

- Q6.** Look carefully at what verse 18 says you were ransomed from: not first from hell, but “from the futile ways inherited from your fathers.” Why is that a startlingly precise description of what actually enslaves people? What gets handed down in families and cultures that leads nowhere?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Patterns are inherited like heirlooms: anger, addiction, anxiety about money, contempt for religion, the assumption that you are what you produce. “Futile” means empty, going nowhere. Many of Peter’s converts had inherited paganism from their parents (see 4:3); ours inherit scripts just as binding. The ransom means the inheritance is not destiny. In Christ the family line can be interrupted and a new inheritance received, the “imperishable” one of 1:4.

Dig Deeper

Price reveals worth. We appraise a thing by what someone will pay for it, and 1:18-19 says God appraised you above “perishable things such as silver or gold” and paid in the blood of his Son. The Catechism opens its entire moral teaching with St. Leo the Great’s cry, “Christian, recognize your dignity” (CCC 1691). When self-worth collapses, this is the fact to stand on: your value was set at Calvary and it does not float with the market.

Movement Three: Imperishable Seed (1:22-25)

Read: 1 Peter 1:22-25 *(from participants’ own Bibles)*

- Q7.** Verse 23 repeats Session One’s word: “born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” Add this to our open question. In 1:3 the new birth came “through the resurrection.” Now it comes “through the word.” Contradiction, or two pieces of one answer?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Two pieces. The word of the gospel is preached, awakens faith, and the Resurrection’s power is applied to a person; the question is still where and how those meet. Notice Scripture elsewhere joins word and washing in a single breath: Christ cleanses the Church “by the washing of water with the word” (Eph 5:26). Keep your Session One guess written down. Peter closes this question himself in chapter 3, and we will be there in Session Six.

- Q8.** Peter proves the word is “living and abiding” by quoting Isaiah 40:6-8: all flesh is grass, the grass withers, “but the word of the Lord abides for ever.” Then he adds: “That word is the good news which was preached to you” (1:25). What is he claiming about the sermon his readers once heard from some traveling missionary?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

That it was the imperishable thing Isaiah promised. The empires of Isaiah's day are dust; the words spoken to a handful of converts in Cappadocia are still saving people tonight in Nebraska. Every generation's preaching, catechesis, and Bible study, including this one, rides on that claim: grass withers, this word does not. It also dignifies the ordinary: an unremarkable evening Bible study is handling the one thing in the room that will outlast the room.

Q9. Verse 22 draws the practical conclusion before the theology finishes: purified souls are “for a sincere love of the brethren,” so “love one another earnestly from the heart.” Why is love of the people in this room the first assignment of holiness, rather than some heroic private discipline?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because holiness is family resemblance, and God is love. The seed is imperishable, so the love it grows should be earnest and durable, not the disposable affection of convenience. Peter will push this further in 4:8, where love “covers a multitude of sins.” For now the test is concrete: the brother or sister who annoys you is the curriculum.

Send: Carrying It Out

◆ Name one “futile way” you inherited, a pattern handed to you that you know leads nowhere. What would it mean this week to live as someone ransomed out of it?

◆ If your worth was set at the price of Christ's blood, what changes about how you talk to yourself when you fail?

Live It This Week

This week: (1) Memorize 1 Peter 1:18-19. (2) Read Leviticus 19:1-18 once and count how many commands concern ordinary life: money, speech, work, neighbors. (3) Choose one compartment you have kept from God and hand it over in a single sentence of prayer each morning. (4) Do one earnest, inconvenient act of love for someone in this group before we meet again.

Closing Prayer

Father and Judge, you paid for us in the blood of the Lamb. Free us from every futile inheritance, plant your imperishable word deep in us, and let the family resemblance grow: holy, because you are holy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory

“You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19, RSV2CE)

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in this session

Primary text

1 Peter 1:13-25 (movements: 13-16, 17-21, 22-25)

Discovery passage (read aloud in session)

Exodus 12:1-13 (the Passover lamb behind 1:19)

Leader background and Dig Deeper

Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:1-18 (the holiness code)

Isaiah 40:6-8 (quoted at 1:24-25); Isaiah 52:3; Deuteronomy 7:8 (ransom)

Exodus 12:11 (girded loins); John 1:29 (Lamb of God); Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6 (judgment by deeds)

James 1:18; Ephesians 5:26 (word and washing, if raised)

Threads

Born anew: second clue (1:23, “through the word”); resolves Session Six

Judgment by deeds (1:17) returns at 4:17 (Session Seven); earnest love (1:22) returns at 4:8

Catechism

CCC 602; 1691; 2013