

A LIVING HOPE

A Catholic Journey Through the Letters of Saint Peter

Session Three

Living Stones, Royal Priesthood

1 Peter 2:1-10

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”

1 Peter 2:9 (RSV2CE)

Saint Joseph Parish, Springfield, Nebraska

Leader Preparation Guide

For the facilitator only. Not for distribution.

Session Overview

The man Jesus renamed Rock writes tonight about stones. Peter strings together three Old Testament “stone” texts (Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 8:14) to declare Christ the living cornerstone, rejected by the builders and chosen by God, and then makes the astonishing move: come to him and you yourselves, “like living stones,” are being built into a spiritual house, to be “a holy priesthood.” The session climaxes in 2:9-10, where Israel's Sinai titles (Exodus 19:5-6) and Hosea's reversal (“not my people... my people”) are laid on the shoulders of Gentile converts. This is the ecclesiology session: what the Church is, and what every baptized person in your group is.

The Discovery Aim. Participants should be able to say: Christ is the cornerstone the builders rejected, so rejection by the world is not evidence against him or us; I am a living stone, which means I am material for something being built, not a freelance spiritual consumer; and by baptism I share in a real priesthood whose job is to offer spiritual sacrifices and declare God's deeds.

The Catholic Touchstone. The common (baptismal) priesthood of all the faithful is real, biblical, and Catholic; it coexists with, rather than abolishes, the ministerial priesthood, exactly as Israel's national

priesthood (Ex 19:6) coexisted with the Aaronic one. Tonight's steelman chain works that distinction from the text itself.

What You Need to Know

Newborn Babes and the Taste of the Lord (2:1-3)

The paragraph flows straight out of 1:23: if you have been born anew, then be what you are, “newborn babes” who crave “pure spiritual milk.” Verse 3 seals it with Psalm 34:8: “you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.” The Fathers heard Eucharistic overtones in “tasted,” since Psalm 34 (“O taste and see that the Lord is good”) was sung at Communion at least as early as the fourth century. You need not press the point in discussion, but the leader should know the Church has long heard it.

Peter's Three Stone Texts (2:4-8)

Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16 (the cornerstone laid in Zion), Psalm 118:22 (the stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner), and Isaiah 8:14 (a stone of stumbling). This is not a private anthology. Jesus himself taught Psalm 118:22 as his own autobiography at the end of the parable of the wicked tenants (Mt 21:42), with Peter listening; and Peter preached the same verse to the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:11: “This is the stone which was rejected by you builders.” Tonight your group watches an apostle reuse the exegesis he learned from Jesus' own mouth. The stone texts also carry a warning: the same stone is cornerstone to believers and stumbling stone to those who disobey. No one is neutral about Christ; you build on him or trip over him.

Living Stones and Spiritual House (2:5)

“Living stone” is nearly a contradiction: stones are dead, buildings are static. Peter's Church is neither: a growing organism with structural order, each member load-bearing. The “spiritual house” is temple language; God's dwelling is no longer a building in Jerusalem but a people. The irony of the author's own name should not be missed, though Peter himself is too humble to mention it: the man Jesus called Rock (Mt 16:18) teaches that everyone in Christ becomes stone. His singular role and their common dignity coexist in his own mind without strain, a point that pays off in Session Eight.

Royal Priesthood (2:5, 9): The Session's Center

“To be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” The title in 2:9, “royal priesthood,” is lifted from Exodus 19:5-6, God's words at Sinai before the covenant: the whole nation was to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Note carefully how Israel's national priesthood has been understood: read in its setting (“all the earth is mine,” Ex 19:5), Israel's vocation is traditionally taken as priestly toward the nations, mediating God's blessing outward, while within Israel God also instituted a ministerial priesthood (the priests of Aaron's line, assisted by the Levites) for sacrifice and worship. The two never competed. Peter quotes the national text, not the Aaronic one. The Catholic reading follows the same grammar: the common priesthood of the baptized (offering the sacrifices of prayer, work, suffering, and witness) and the ministerial priesthood (ordained to act in the person of Christ the Head) “differ essentially and not only in degree” yet are ordered to one another (CCC 1547; Lumen Gentium 10). The steelman chain in Q7-Q8 lets the group build the Reformation reading fairly and then test it against Exodus itself.

Hosea's Reversal (2:10)

“Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.” Peter compresses Hosea 1-2, where the prophet's children are named Not-My-People and Not-Pitied, and God promises to reverse the names. Paul makes the identical move in Romans 9:25-26 about the calling of the Gentiles. For converts, and for anyone who has felt like a nobody, 2:10 is the gospel in one line.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 19:3-6: Sinai's Commission

“You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Spoken before the golden calf, this is Israel's original vocation: the whole people priestly toward the world. This is tonight's inductive discovery (Q6): the group reads Exodus 19 and finds the heart of 1 Peter 2:9 already sitting there: the royal priesthood, the holy nation, and God's own possession. The remaining title, chosen race, along with the mandate to declare God's praise, comes from Isaiah 43:20-21; Peter weaves several Old Testament texts into one crown.

Psalms 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16: The Stone

Psalms 118 was sung at Passover (Jesus and the apostles likely sang it at the Last Supper, Mt 26:30); its rejected stone became Jesus' self-designation (Mt 21:42) and Peter's courtroom defense (Acts 4:11). Isaiah 28:16 adds the promise Peter quotes at 2:6: whoever believes in him “will not be put to shame.”

Hosea 1:6-10; 2:23: Names Reversed

The prophet's marriage becomes a living parable: children named for judgment, then renamed for mercy. “And I will say to Not my people, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God’” (Hos 2:23).

Voices of the Church

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St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), *The City of God*, Book XX, Chapter 10

St. Augustine teaches that all Christians are called priests because they are members of the one Priest, Christ, just as all are called anointed ones because of the mystical chrism; and yet the Church still properly calls her bishops and presbyters priests in a distinct sense. Roughly eleven centuries before the Reformation debates, the common and ministerial priesthoods stood side by side in the Church's greatest doctor without any sense of rivalry.

Voices of the Church

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), *Mystagogical Catecheses* 5

Instructing the newly baptized on the Mass, St. Cyril tells them that at Communion they hear the chanter invite them with Psalm 34: taste and see that the Lord is good. The verse Peter cites at 2:3 was already the Church's Communion song in the fourth century, and the Fathers heard "you have tasted" as more than a metaphor.

Voices of the Church

St. Bede the Venerable (673-735), Commentary on the Catholic Epistles, on 1 Peter 2

St. Bede reads the living stones as the faithful made alive by union with the living Stone, each squared and set by trials and teaching into the one temple whose foundation is Christ. A stone outside the building, he notes in substance, serves no purpose; the dignity of the stone is its place in the structure. Private, unattached Christianity is foreign to the letter's whole image.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1268. By baptism the faithful "have become living stones to be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood," sharing in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and royal offices. The Catechism quotes this very passage.

CCC 1546-1547. The whole Church is a priestly people through baptism; the ministerial priesthood differs essentially from the common priesthood while being ordered to it, because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful. Both participate, each in its own way, in the one priesthood of Christ.

CCC 782-786. The People of God: a chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, sharing Christ's offices of priest, prophet, and king.

Thread Watch

1. Royal priesthood in action. The priestly job description of 2:9 ("declare the wonderful deeds") is exercised in 3:15's defense of hope (Session Six) and 4:10-11's stewardship of gifts (Session Seven).

2. Common and ministerial. Tonight establishes the common priesthood; Session Eight (5:1-4, the elders) supplies the ordered ministry within it. Do not front-load Session Eight's material.

3. Rejection as pattern. The rejected-stone motif prepares the suffering theology of Sessions Four and Seven: if the cornerstone was rejected, the stones will be too.

Session Goals for the Leader

1. Let the group watch Peter learn his exegesis from Jesus (Mt 21:42) and reuse it (Acts 4:11).

2. Have participants discover Exodus 19:5-6 as the principal source of the titles in 2:9, noting that chosen race and the call to declare God's deeds come from Isaiah 43:20-21.
3. Run the priesthood steelman honestly: build the strongest “no ministerial priesthood” case before testing it.
4. Land the personal weight of 2:10 on anyone who has ever felt like a nobody.

Leader Note

Time frame: 75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, Q2 and the Psalm 34 Dig Deeper are the cuts; never cut the Exodus 19 discovery in Q6 or the steelman chain in Q7-Q8.

Discussion Guide

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Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, living Stone rejected by men and precious to the Father, build us tonight. Square what is crooked in us, set us where you want us in your house, and teach us the priesthood you gave us in baptism. Amen.

Win: Gathering In

- ◆ Have you ever been passed over, cut from a team, rejected from a school or job, left out, and later realized the rejection redirected you somewhere better? What did that feel like at the time?
- ◆ When you hear the word “priest,” what image comes to mind first? Where do you think that image came from?

Build: Working the Text

Leader Note

One-minute recap: identity (Session One), then holiness flowing from ransom (Session Two). Tonight: what we are together. Ask, wait, let the group work, then confirm.

Movement One: Crave the Milk (2:1-3)

Read: 1 Peter 2:1-3 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

- Q1.** Peter says to put away “all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander,” and instead to crave “pure spiritual milk” like newborns. Notice every vice on that list. What do they all have in common, and why would they be the first things to starve a newborn Church?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Every one is a sin against community: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander all poison relationships between believers. A newborn craves one thing with total honesty; a community full of guile craves appearances. Peter's growth formula is appetite plus honesty: crave the pure word the way an infant craves milk, and drop the social poisons that kill the appetite. Worth asking privately: what dulls my appetite for God is usually not doubt but one of these five.

Dig Deeper

Verse 3 quotes Psalm 34:8, “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” By the fourth century that psalm was the Church's Communion chant; St. Cyril of Jerusalem taught the newly baptized to hear it as they approached the Eucharist. Peter's audience of new converts “tasted” the Lord's kindness in word and sacrament together. Psalm 34 will return in Session Five, where Peter quotes it at length; it is quietly the psalm of this whole letter.

Movement Two: The Stone the Builders Rejected (2:4-8)

Read: 1 Peter 2:4-8 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

- Q2.** Verse 4 calls Christ “a living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious.” Peter then quotes three Old Testament stone passages in a row (2:6-8). Where did Peter learn to read the “rejected stone” as Jesus? Check Matthew 21:42 and then Acts 4:11: who taught the lesson, and where did Peter first repeat it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Jesus taught it, quoting Psalm 118:22 against the chief priests at the end of the parable of the wicked tenants, with Peter standing there (Mt 21:42). Peter repeated it under arrest, to the very court that condemned Jesus: “This is the stone which was rejected by you builders” (Acts 4:11). Tonight you are reading an apostle reuse the Bible study he got from Jesus himself. That is how Tradition works: a living hand-off of how to read the Scriptures, not a private discovery.

- Q3.** The same stone is “precious” to believers (2:7) and “a stone that will make men stumble” to those

who disobey (2:8). Same stone, opposite experiences. What does that tell you about the popular idea that Jesus can be politely ignored, neither built on nor tripped over?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The image rules out neutrality. A cornerstone in your path is either the thing you build your whole structure against or the thing you fall over; it does not move. People do not stumble over ideas they can shrug at; they stumble over claims that stand in the road. The world's rejection of Christ is therefore not evidence against him; rejection was the prophesied signature of the true cornerstone. Expect the same physics for the stones as for the Stone, which is where this letter is headed in the suffering chapters.

Q4. Verse 5: “Like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house.” Work the image. What can a stone do on its own, apart from the building? And what does it mean that the verb is passive, “be built”?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Alone, a stone is rubble; its dignity is its place in a structure, load-bearing, joined to other stones, aligned to the cornerstone. And we do not build ourselves in; we are built, by the Architect. This is Peter's answer to freelance spirituality (“spiritual but not part of anything”): the temple where God now dwells is a people, and a stone that refuses placement refuses the whole point of being stone. The Church is not an optional accessory to a personal faith; it is what the faith builds.

Movement Three: The Titles at Sinai (2:9-10)

Read: 1 Peter 2:9-10 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

Q5. Read verse 9 slowly and list the four titles Peter gives his readers. Remember who these people are: mostly Gentile ex-pagans in the backwaters of Asia Minor. What is shocking about giving these titles to them?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's own people: every one is Israel's title, forged in the Exodus. Peter hands Israel's crown jewels to Gentile converts the empire considered nobodies. The Church does not think of herself as a new religion; she is the people of God opened to all nations in the Messiah, continuous with Israel's story and vocation.

Q6. Now find the source. Turn to Exodus 19:3-6 and read it aloud. Where is God, to whom is he speaking, and which of Peter's titles do you find already there? What was the whole nation's job in that verse?

Leader Note

The discovery moment. If the group stalls: what two titles appear in Exodus 19:6, and what does a priest do that a private citizen does not?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

At Sinai, before the covenant is sealed, God tells all Israel through Moses: “you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). The whole nation was to be priestly, set apart for God in the midst of all the earth, which is his; Israel’s vocation has traditionally been understood as priestly toward the nations, mediating God’s blessing outward. Peter’s 2:9 is Sinai republished for the Church, and the explicit job description, “that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness,” is Peter’s own addition, echoing Isaiah 43:21. A priest offers sacrifice and represents God to the world; by baptism, that is now your title and your job (CCC 1268).

Building the Question: Does Everyone-a-Priest Mean No Priests?

Leader Note

Steelman chain. Build the strongest Reformation reading before pressing it. Warm tone; many of the group’s friends and families hold this sincerely, and there is real common ground: the common priesthood itself.

Q7. Many Christians argue from 2:5 and 2:9 that the New Testament knows only one shared priesthood: Christ is the one mediator whose sacrifice is once for all, the sacrifices Christians offer are spiritual, and the New Testament never calls its ordained ministers priests. On this view pastors and elders exercise a real ministry of preaching and shepherding, but there is no

separate sacrificing priesthood. Build that case as strongly as you can from tonight’s passage. What supports it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A strong case: Peter addresses the whole community as “a holy priesthood” offering “spiritual sacrifices” (2:5) with no mention of any clerical class in the passage; the sacrifices named are spiritual, not ritual; Christ is the one mediator (1 Tim 2:5), and his sacrifice is complete and unrepeatable; and the New Testament reserves the word priest for Christ and for the whole people, never for its ordained ministers as such. On this reading ordained ministry is real and God-given, but it is ministry, not a distinct sacerdotal priesthood. State it that fairly; steel, not straw.

Q8. Now press it with Peter’s own source. In Exodus 19:6 the entire nation is named “a kingdom of priests.” Did Israel therefore have no ministerial priests? What existed alongside the national priesthood, and did the Old Testament treat the two as rivals? Then look ahead one clue: whom does Peter address by office in 1 Peter 5:1-2?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Israel’s national priesthood coexisted for centuries with the ordained priesthood of Aaron’s line, with the Levites consecrated to assist it; the same Torah proclaims both, and neither cancels the other. Peter quotes the national text while himself exhorting “the elders among you... Tend the flock of God” (5:1-2),

an ordered ministry within the priestly people, which we will study in Session Eight. The Catholic grammar is the Bible's grammar: the common priesthood of all the baptized is gloriously real, and the ministerial priesthood serves it rather than competes with it; the two "differ essentially" yet are ordered to each other (CCC 1547). And the Catholic claim does not add a second sacrifice beside Christ's: the ministerial priest offers no new sacrifice but makes Christ's one sacrifice present, acting in the person of the one Priest, so the one mediator objection is answered rather than dodged. St. Augustine held both in one sentence sixteen centuries ago: all are priests as members of the one Priest, and the Church's ordained are priests in a distinct sense (City of God XX.10).

- Q9.** Verse 10, from Hosea: "Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." Hosea named his own children Not-Pitied and Not-My-People as a living prophecy of judgment, then God promised to reverse the names. Why does Peter end the Church's grandest paragraph on this note, and to whom in your life is this verse addressed?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because every title in 2:9 is mercy, not merit. The paragraph could breed pride; Hosea's reversal grounds it in grace: you were a nobody, and God renamed you. Anyone who has felt like Not-My-People, unwanted, unpitied, disqualified by their past, is precisely whom this verse targets. The Church is a nation of renamed nobodies, which is why she can never be a club of the qualified.

Send: Carrying It Out

- ◆ Your priestly job description is 2:9: "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness." What is one wonderful deed God has done in your life, and who in your world has never heard you declare it?
- ◆ What would change this week if you treated your prayer, work, and frustrations as "spiritual sacrifices" to be offered, priest-style, rather than burdens to be endured?

Live It This Week

This week: (1) Memorize 1 Peter 2:9. (2) Each morning, offer the day as a priest: one sentence placing your work, prayers, joys, and sufferings on the altar with Christ's sacrifice. (3) Declare one wonderful deed of God out loud to one person. (4) Read Hosea 2:14-23 and hear your own renaming.

Closing Prayer

Father, you called us out of darkness into your marvelous light and made us a royal priesthood in your

Son. Build us into your house, teach us to offer everything we are, and give us voices to declare your deeds. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9, RSV2CE)

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in this session

Primary text

1 Peter 2:1-10 (movements: 1-3, 4-8, 9-10)

Discovery passages (read aloud in session)

Exodus 19:3-6 (kingdom of priests; principal source of 2:9)

Matthew 21:42 and Acts 4:11 (Jesus teaches, Peter reuses, Psalm 118:22)

Leader background and Dig Deeper

Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14 (the three stone texts)

Psalm 34:8 (tasted, 2:3); Hosea 1:6-10; 2:23 (renaming, 2:10); Romans 9:25-26

Isaiah 43:20-21 (chosen race, declare his praise; background to 2:9)

Matthew 16:18 (Peter the rock); 1 Timothy 2:5 (one mediator, for the steelman)

1 Peter 5:1-2 (elders; the press in Q8, full treatment Session Eight)

Threads

Priestly job (2:9) exercised at 3:15 (Session Six) and 4:10-11 (Session Seven)

Rejected-stone pattern prepares Sessions Four and Seven; elders resolve Session Eight

Catechism

CCC 782-786; 1268; 1546-1547