

A LIVING HOPE

A Catholic Journey Through the Letters of Saint Peter

Session Ten

Eyewitnesses of His Majesty

2 Peter 1:12-21

“We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty”

2 Peter 1:16 (RSV2CE)

Saint Joseph Parish, Springfield, Nebraska

Leader Preparation Guide

For the facilitator only. Not for distribution.

Session Overview

A dying man decides what to say while there is time. Peter knows “the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me” (1:14; Jn 21:18-19), and he spends his remaining ink on two anchors for the Church he will leave behind: memory and Scripture. The memory is the Transfiguration: “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty... we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain” (1:16-18). The Scripture is “the prophetic word made more sure... a lamp shining in a dark place,” with the famous rider: “no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation” (1:19-21). Tonight the group reads Luke’s Transfiguration beside Peter’s memoir of it, and then works, with steelman honesty, the question every Bible-reading Christian must face: how is this book meant to be read, and with whom?

The Discovery Aim. Participants should be able to say: the faith rests on eyewitness testimony, not myth; Peter’s account of the mountain omits his own embarrassment, and the omission is its own signature; Scripture is a lamp we are commanded to attend to; and a book that came from the Holy

Spirit through the community of the covenant is meant to be read in the Spirit within that same community.

The Catholic Touchstone. The historical, testimonial character of the Gospel (CCC 126); the Transfiguration as a foretaste of glory (CCC 554-556); the inspiration of Scripture (CCC 105-107); and interpretation within the living Tradition of the Church, Scripture's native habitat (CCC 113; 85-87).

What You Need to Know

The Testament Frame (1:12-15)

Three times in four verses Peter says his goal is remembrance: “to remind you,” “to arouse you by way of reminder,” “so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.” Note two words. “Departure” is *exodos* in Greek, and Luke uses the identical word for what Jesus discussed with Moses and Elijah on the mountain of the Transfiguration: “they spoke of his departure (*exodos*), which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Lk 9:31). Peter, remembering that mountain a paragraph later, names his own death with the mountain's own word: his martyrdom will be a little exodus following the Lord's great one. Second, 1:15's promise to enable recall “at any time” after his death is, on the earliest tradition, connected to Mark's Gospel, Peter's preaching written down (Session Eight). The apostolic answer to apostolic death is transmitted memory: in a word, Tradition (CCC 76-83).

Eyewitnesses of His Majesty (1:16-18)

“We did not follow cleverly devised myths.” The ancient world was full of divine legends and mystery cults; Peter's defense is testimony: we saw, we heard, we were with him. The event he selects is the Transfiguration: honor and glory from the Father, the voice from the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” on “the holy mountain.” Why the Transfiguration rather than a resurrection appearance? Because tonight's argument concerns “the power and coming (*parousia*) of our Lord”: the scoffers of chapter 3 deny the Second Coming, and the Transfiguration was precisely a preview of the Son's royal glory (cf. Mt 16:28-17:8: “they saw the kingdom before tasting death”). Peter answers “where is the promise of his coming?” with “I have seen it.”

What Peter Leaves Out

Set Luke 9:28-36 beside 1:16-18 (tonight's discovery, Q3) and the omissions speak. Luke records that Peter and his companions were “heavy with sleep,” that Peter blurted a plan to build three booths “not knowing what he said,” and that the disciples were afraid. Peter's own account keeps the glory, the voice, the mountain, and quietly drops his embarrassing cameo. This is not spin; it is the humility of a man who has learned which part of the story matters, and it is also a quiet mark of authenticity: an inventor of tales gives himself better lines. (The same pattern marks Mark's Gospel, Peter's preaching, which is hardest of all the Gospels on Peter.)

The Lamp and Its Reading (1:19-21)

“We have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” Eyewitness glory does not retire Scripture; it confirms it, and the confirmed word is the Church's lamp until the Parousia

dawns. Then the rider: “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” Be honest about the primary sense (the steelman in Q6-Q7 depends on it): verse 21’s “because” grounds verse 20 in origin: prophecy did not arise from the prophet’s private ideas, so it is not decoded by private ingenuity either. The principle runs forward as well as backward: what the Spirit gave through the covenant community is read rightly in the Spirit within that community. Peter’s own letter closes the loop at 3:16: the untaught and unstable “twist” the Scriptures “to their own destruction”, so twisting is possible, common, and lethal, and the letter’s remedy is apostolic remembrance (1:12-15). The Catholic claim is not that laypeople cannot read Scripture (the Church begs them to: CCC 133) but that the Bible’s native habitat is the Church that received, discerned, and canonized it, and that the Magisterium serves, not masters, the Word (CCC 85-87, 113).

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The Mountain of Glory: Sinai Echoes

The Transfiguration is saturated with Sinai: the cloud, the glory, the voice, Moses present in person, the chosen witnesses. Where Sinai’s glory made the mountain untouchable, Tabor’s glory shines from a face the disciples know. “This is my beloved Son” gathers Psalm 2:7 (the royal Son), Isaiah 42:1 (the Servant in whom God delights), and Deuteronomy 18:15 (“listen to him,” the Prophet like Moses).

The Morning Star

“Until... the morning star rises in your hearts” (1:19) draws on Numbers 24:17 (“a star shall come forth out of Jacob”), the oracle of Balaam, whose darker story dominates the next session. Revelation closes the canon with the title claimed: “I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star” (Rev 22:16).

Voices of the Church

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St. Leo the Great (d. 461), Sermon 51 on the Transfiguration

Preaching on Tabor, St. Leo teaches that the Transfiguration’s great purpose was to remove the scandal of the cross from the disciples’ hearts: the brightness of his hidden majesty was shown in advance so that the coming humiliation would not shatter their faith, and the hope of the whole body of Christ was anchored, since the members are promised a share in the glory that blazed in their Head. The Church reads this sermon in the Office of Readings each Lent; it is Peter’s 1:16-18 preached by his successor.

Voices of the Church

St. Vincent of Lérins (d. c. 445), Commonitorium 2

St. Vincent asks why, if Scripture is complete and sufficient, the Church’s interpretive tradition is needed, and answers: because Scripture’s very depth means all do not receive it in one and the same

sense; the same texts are read one way by one man and another way by another, so the line of prophetic and apostolic interpretation must be directed according to the standard of the Church's universal understanding. He is answering, in the fifth century, exactly the situation 2 Peter 1:20 and 3:16 describe.

Voices of the Church

St. Jerome (d. 420), Commentary on Isaiah, Prologue

The Church's great translator declares that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ, a line the Catechism enshrines (CCC 133) in its plea that the faithful read the Bible frequently and prayerfully. Hold St. Jerome beside St. Vincent and you have the full Catholic posture: maximal devotion to Scripture, read within the Church's living understanding, never one without the other.

Catechism Connection

CCC 554-556. The Transfiguration: a foretaste of the kingdom, the Trinity's appearance (the Father in the voice, the Son in the man, the Spirit in the cloud), given to fortify the disciples for the scandal of the cross.

CCC 105-107 and 133. God is the author of Scripture, which teaches firmly, faithfully, and without error the truth God willed for our salvation; and the Church forcefully exhorts all the faithful to frequent reading of it.

CCC 113 and 85-87. Read the Scripture within the living Tradition of the whole Church; the Magisterium is the servant of the Word of God, teaching only what has been handed on. Servant, not master: the Catholic claim in two words.

Thread Watch

1. New thread: interpretation. 1:20-21 opens the question; 3:15-16 (the twisting of Paul's letters) resolves it in Session Twelve. Plant tonight, harvest there.

2. The parousia defended. Tonight's eyewitness argument (1:16) is the first answer to the scoffers of 3:3-4; the Transfiguration previews the Coming the scoffers deny.

3. Exodus. Peter names his death with the Transfiguration's own word (1:15; Lk 9:31): martyrdom as a little exodus. The exile thread (1 Pet 1:1) is quietly becoming a homecoming; Session Twelve completes it.

Session Goals for the Leader

1. Establish the faith's testimonial ground: eyewitnesses, not myths, and let the group feel its force.

2. Run the Luke 9 discovery: what Peter keeps, what he omits, and what the omission reveals.
3. Work the interpretation steelman with full honesty about verse 20's primary sense.
4. Send everyone home more in love with Scripture, not less: St. Jerome's devotion with St. Vincent's compass.

Leader Note

Time frame: 75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, Q2 and the Dig Deeper are the cuts; never cut Q3 or the steelman chain in Q6-Q7.

Discussion Guide

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Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer

Father of the Majestic Glory, you spoke on the holy mountain: this is my beloved Son; listen to him. Give us tonight the eyewitnesses' confidence and the Church's ears. Make your word a lamp for our darkness until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. Amen.

Win: Gathering In

- ◆ If you learned you had one year left, what would you make sure the people you love could remember and hold onto after you were gone? How would you make sure?
- ◆ Has anyone ever told you the faith is just “myths people made up”? What did you say, or wish you had said?

Build: Working the Text

Leader Note

One-minute recap: our destiny is participation in the divine nature, climbed rung by rung. Tonight the

dying apostle anchors the Church he is leaving: memory and Scripture. Ask, wait, work, confirm.

Movement One: A Dying Man's Priorities (1:12-15)

Read: 2 Peter 1:12-15 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

- Q1.** Peter says he will die soon, “as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me” (1:14). Turn to John 21:18-19 and read what the risen Jesus told him on the beach, right after “Feed my sheep.” What was Peter promised, how long has he lived with it, and what has it done to him, judging by the calm of these verses?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Jesus told him that in old age he would stretch out his hands and be carried where he did not wish to go, “showing by what death he was to glorify God,” and then said: “Follow me.” Peter has carried that promise for three decades, and it has produced not dread but agenda: three times in four verses his one concern is that the flock be able to remember after he is gone. A man who knows how his story ends is free to spend the remaining pages on others. Note his word for death: “departure,” in Greek exodos, a journey out of bondage, not into extinction.

- Q2.** Verse 15: “I will see to it that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.”

An apostle's death threatens the Church's memory. What mechanisms did the apostolic Church actually use to “see to it” that the memory survived, and where do we still meet them? (Hint: one of them may be sitting behind 5:13's “my son Mark.”)

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Written Gospels (the earliest tradition says Mark wrote down Peter's preaching: Session Eight), letters like this one, and ordained successors entrusted with the deposit (“what you have heard from me... entrust to faithful men,” 2 Tim 2:2). The apostolic answer to apostolic death is transmitted memory: Scripture and Tradition, handed on in a Church with shepherds, which is why we can “recall these things at any time” twenty centuries later, tonight, in this room (CCC 76-83). Tradition is not the rival of Scripture; it is the living hand that carried it to you.

Movement Two: The Mountain Remembered (1:16-18)

Read: 2 Peter 1:16-18 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

- Q3.** Peter stakes everything on testimony: “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” Now turn to Luke 9:28-36 and read the scene he is remembering. Compare carefully: what does Peter's account keep from that night, and what does he leave out, especially about himself? What does the omission tell you?

Leader Note

The discovery moment; give it time. If they stall: what does Luke say Peter blurted out, and what editorial

comment does Luke attach to it? Does Peter mention any of that here?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He keeps the glory, the voice from heaven (“This is my beloved Son”), and the holy mountain. He omits that he was heavy with sleep, that he proposed building three booths “not knowing what he said,” and that they were terrified. The omission is humility with a signature: a fabricator gives himself better lines; an honest old man keeps the part that matters and drops his own cameo. (The same fingerprint marks Mark’s Gospel, Peter’s preaching, which is harder on Peter than any other Gospel.) And notice which event he chose: not a resurrection appearance but the Transfiguration, the preview of the Son’s royal glory, because the argument coming in chapter 3 is about the Second Coming, and Peter’s answer to “where is the promise of his coming?” is: I saw the preview with my own eyes (CCC 554-556).

Q4. “We did not follow cleverly devised myths” (1:16). The ancient world was full of divine legends and mystery

cults, and the modern world says the same thing with the word “myth” swapped for “wish fulfillment.” What separates the apostolic claim from myth, structurally? Think: names, dates, places, witnesses, and what the witnesses were willing to pay.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Myths float outside history (“once, in the age of the gods...”); the apostolic claim nails itself down: under Pontius Pilate, in Jerusalem, at Passover, witnessed by named people who could be, and were, cross-examined (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-8; Lk 1:1-4). And the witnesses accepted torture and death rather than retract, beginning with the author of this letter, who wrote these words awaiting the execution his Lord had promised him. People die for myths they believe; they do not die for testimony they know they invented. The faith invites the investigation myths cannot survive.

Movement Three: The Lamp and Its Reading (1:19-21)

Read: 2 Peter 1:19-21 *(from participants’ own Bibles)*

Q5. Verse 19: even after the mountaintop vision, Peter points the Church to “the prophetic word made more sure... a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns.” What is he saying about the place of Scripture between now and the Second Coming? What do people typically reach for in the dark instead?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Between the first coming and the parousia, Scripture is the issued lamp: attended to (“you will do well to pay attention”), it lights the path until the day itself dawns and the morning star, Christ (Rev 22:16), rises in the heart. In the dark, people reach instead for vibes, influencers, horoscopes, and anxiety. The Church’s counsel is St. Jerome’s: ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ (CCC 133); a Catholic without a Bible habit is walking a dark road with the lamp still in the box.

Q6. Verses 20-21 add the famous rider: “no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own

interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” Many Protestant readers argue this text is only about the origin of prophecy, not about who may interpret the Bible today. Build that reading as strongly as you can from the grammar itself. What supports it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

At full strength: verse 21 begins with “because,” grounding verse 20, and verse 21 is entirely about origin: prophecy never came by human impulse but from God through Spirit-moved men. So the parallel claim in verse 20 would be: prophecy did not originate in the prophet's own private explanation of things; it is God-given, not self-generated. On this reading the verse teaches inspiration, not a rule about who may interpret today, and using it as a proof text against private Bible reading overreaches. Stated that fairly, this is a genuinely strong reading, and many careful Catholic scholars agree it is the primary sense. Steel, not straw; now let the letter itself carry the principle forward.

Q7. Now press forward with three witnesses. First: if Scripture's origin is the Spirit speaking through the covenant community, what follows about the manner and company in which it is rightly read? Second: read Acts 8:30-31, Philip and the Ethiopian official reading Isaiah. What does the man say when asked if he understands? Third: keep a finger in 2 Peter 3:16, where this same letter describes what the “ignorant and unstable” do to Paul's letters and “the other scriptures.” Where does all this leave the reader who says “just me and my Bible is enough”?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First: a word that came from the Holy Spirit through the people of God is read rightly in the same Spirit, within the same people; origin sets the terms of reception (CCC 111, 113). Second: the official's answer is the honest reader's answer in every century: “How can I, unless some one guides me?”, and God's response was not “the text is enough”; it was to send him a guide, Philip, an ordained man of the apostolic Church, who “beginning with this scripture... told him the good news of Jesus.” Third: Peter himself testifies that Scripture can be twisted “to their own destruction” (3:16), so the mere possession of the true text guarantees nothing; the same Bible, read apart from a living and authoritative Tradition, has produced contradictory churches by the thousand, and not only among lone readers; serious communities with creeds, confessions, pastors, and scholars still divide over baptism, the Supper, and salvation itself, which is St. Vincent of Lérins's exact observation: because of Scripture's depth, all do not receive it in one and the same sense, so it must be read by the standard of the Church's universal understanding. The Catholic position is therefore two loves, not one restriction: read the Bible constantly (St. Jerome), and read it inside the family that received, discerned, canonized, and lives it, with a Magisterium that is the Word's servant, not its master (CCC 85-87). This thread resolves in Session Twelve, where Peter's remedy for twisted Scripture turns out to be exactly the apostolic remembrance he promised in 1:12-15.

Send: Carrying It Out

- ◆ Peter chose one memory to anchor the Church: the mountain. What is the one moment of God's reality in your own life that you would want the people after you to hold? Have you ever told it out loud?
- ◆ Honestly assess your lamp: how is your Scripture habit, and what one structure (a time, a plan, this group) would make it survivable past this study's end?

Live It This Week

This week: (1) Memorize 2 Peter 1:16. (2) Read Luke 9:28-36 once more, slowly, on your own, and then tell your Transfiguration story, the anchor moment of God's reality in your life, to one person. (3) Begin, or restart, a daily lamp habit: even ten minutes of the Gospel of Mark, Peter's own memories, would carry you through both letters' world. (4) Pray for the grace to love Scripture like St. Jerome and to read it with the Church like St. Vincent.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, beloved Son and morning star: you let your glory blaze on the mountain so the cross would not shatter your friends. Anchor us in the eyewitness word, keep our lamp burning in this dark place, and teach us to read what your Spirit wrote within the family your Spirit gathers. Amen.

Scripture Memory

"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16, RSV2CE)

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in this session

Primary text

2 Peter 1:12-21 (movements: 12-15, 16-18, 19-21)

Discovery passages (read aloud in session)

Luke 9:28-36 (the Transfiguration beside Peter's memoir); John 21:18-19 (the promised death)

Acts 8:30-31 (Philip and the Ethiopian, the press in Q7)

Leader background and Dig Deeper

Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 42:1; Deuteronomy 18:15 (the voice's sources); Numbers 24:17; Revelation 22:16 (morning star)

1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Luke 1:1-4 (testimony, not myth); 2 Timothy 2:2 (succession); 2 Peter 3:16 (twisting, Session Twelve)

Threads

NEW: interpretation (1:20-21) resolves at 3:15-16 (Session Twelve); parousia defense (1:16) answers 3:3-4

Exodos: Lk 9:31 with 1:15; martyrdom as little exodus; exile thread completes Session Twelve

Catechism

CCC 554-556; 105-107; 133; 113; 85-87; 76-83