

Session 12

Blood and Water

One of the soldiers pierced his side, and at once there came out blood and water.

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers where baptismal water ultimately comes from: the opened side of the crucified Lord. They watch John surround one spear-thrust with his most solemn witness formula, resolve the threads planted at the ark's door and Zechariah's fountain, meet the new Eve drawn from the side of the new Adam, and discover the same apostle naming the Spirit, the water, and the blood as God's abiding witnesses.

Catholic Touchstone. The Catechism teaches that the blood and water flowing from the pierced side of the crucified Jesus are types of Baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments of new life: from then on it is possible to be born of water and the Spirit (CCC 1225); and that the Church is born from the wounded side, as Eve from sleeping Adam (CCC 766). Tonight the study stands at its source.

What You Need to Know

Tonight the study arrives where every thread was always headed: Calvary. Prepare yourself first as a believer, then as a leader; this session should be led more quietly than any other. The text is John 19:31–37: the soldiers come to hasten the deaths; they find Jesus already dead; and one of them, instead of breaking his legs, pierces his side with a spear, *and at once there came out blood and water*. Then John does something he does nowhere else with such force: he steps out of the narrative to swear to it: *He who saw it has borne witness, his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth, that you also may believe*. And he seals the moment with two Scripture fulfillments: not a bone broken (the Passover lamb's rubric) and *They shall look on him whom they have pierced* (Zechariah). Solemn eyewitness testimony and a double citation for one detail: John is telling us, as loudly as an evangelist can, that the blood and water matter.

Why water from a wound? On the physical level, medical readers have long noted that a spear reaching the pericardium of the dead could release both blood and clear serous fluid; the detail is realistic, and it serves John's first purpose: against every denial that the Son of God truly died in a true body, here is a witnessed corpse with a witnessed wound. But John has spent his whole Gospel training us to hear more, and the group has read the training. In chapter 2 Jesus called his body the true temple; in Ezekiel 47, the prophet watched water issue from beneath the temple's threshold, passing the altar, deepening as it went, healing everything it touched, sweetening even the Dead Sea. In chapter 4 Jesus promised the Samaritan woman living water. In chapter 7 he stood up at the feast and cried, *If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink*, and promised rivers of living water: from his heart, on the reading the Church's tradition has cherished (the Greek can also be read of the believer): and John glossed the water himself: *this he said about the Spirit... for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*. In John's Gospel, the cross is the hour of glorification. On that venerable reading, the evangelist wrote

himself a promissory note in chapter 7: water from his heart, when he is glorified. At 19:34 the note comes due, and John testifies we can trust the payout: the side of the glorified One is opened, and the water flows. This is not later piety decorating a medical detail; it is cross-referencing the Gospel itself invites, and your group can verify every link with the pages in front of them.

The Fathers received it exactly so, and two of their readings resolve threads your group planted weeks ago. St. Augustine, whom Session 2 heard on the ark, taught that the door in the ark's side, through which every saved creature entered, signified this wound: tonight that door opens. And the Fathers read Genesis 2 beside Calvary: as God cast a deep sleep on Adam and formed Eve from his opened side, so from the opened side of the new Adam, asleep in death on the cross, God formed the new Eve, the Church, in the blood and water of her sacraments. The Church is not an institution that administers the crucifixion's benefits at a distance; she is Calvary's daughter, born from the wound, and every font is filled from her birthplace. Zechariah's fountain (Session 7) is opened; the *Vidi aquam* the Church sings through Eastertide, water flowing from the temple's right side, and all to whom it came were saved, is Ezekiel 47 sung at the Easter-time sprinkling rite.

Blood and water: the Fathers heard the Eucharist and Baptism, and the Catechism agrees (CCC 1225): the two sacraments of the Church's ongoing life, both flowing from the one sacrifice. This study is about the water, and tonight the group should at least see the blood beside it: the same wound funds the font and the altar, which is why Baptism has always been ordered toward the Eucharist. (Leader aside: the Eucharistic half of tonight's scene deserves its own study; resist compressing it into a paragraph tonight, and simply point the hungry toward the altar half of the wound.)

Tonight's steelman is the sober historian's: John records blood and water as an anti-docetic proof of real death, full stop; the sacramental reading is centuries of imagination layered onto a forensic detail, and the double-meaning method proves anything, therefore nothing. The answer does not choose between the readings; it shows John insisting on both: the oath serves the real death, and the chapter-7 promissory note, the temple identification, and the fulfillment citations serve the sacramental spring; and the group's discovery seals it from the same pen: 1 John 5:6–8, where water, blood, and Spirit are not a crucifixion detail but the Church's three abiding witnesses. The author himself kept preaching the wound's contents.

Pastoral note: this is the study's Good Friday, and your room will include the grieving, and perhaps someone facing death. Lead slowly; permit silence; do not resolve every sorrow into a point. And keep watch for one small mercy the text offers: among those handling the Lord's body at burial is Nicodemus (19:39), the night visitor of Session 10, now openly, with a hundred pounds of spices. The man who was told he must be born of water and the Spirit ends his recorded story at the opened fountain. Some conversions take exactly that long, and end exactly that well.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman

Genesis 2:21–22 (RSV2CE)

On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

Zechariah 13:1 (RSV2CE)

And at Calvary, after he had died, the fountain opens under a spear:

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.
John 19:34 (RSV2CE)

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine • *Tractates on the Gospel of John (Tractate 120)*

St. Augustine, closing the circle he opened for us at the ark, teaches in substance that here a door of life was opened in the side of the second Adam: as Eve was formed from the side of sleeping Adam, so from the side of Christ, asleep in death upon the cross, flowed the sacraments from which the Church, his bride, is formed. The door in the ark, through which the saved entered, was this wound's shadow; the wound is the door's truth.

Leader note: Session 2's plant, ten weeks in the ground, resolves here. If anyone in your group gasped at the ark's door back then and was told to hold the thought: tonight, hand it back to them and let them say it. Tractate 120 is source-verified: the opened-not-pierced observation, the gate of life from which the sacraments flow, and the door in the ark's side are all in its text.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom • *Baptismal Catecheses*

St. John Chrysostom, instructing candidates for the font, teaches in substance that the blood and water are the symbols of the Eucharist and of Baptism, and that the Church is born from both: as God formed Eve from Adam's side, so Christ from his own side formed the Church, giving her birth in the water and nourishing her with the blood. And his catechesis urges the baptized to revere the font and the chalice as gifts flowing from that side.

Leader note: The Church herself reads this catechesis at the Office of Readings on Good Friday (Baptismal Catecheses 3, 13–19): the day and the text belong together in her own prayer. Locus verified; the famous exhortation to approach the chalice as if drinking from his side circulates in his Homily 85 on John, which is why this voice keeps to what the Catecheses themselves say.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

The Church's Liturgy • *The Vidi Aquam (Eastertide)*

Throughout Eastertide, when the priest sprinkles the assembly with baptismal water, the Church sings Ezekiel's vision: I saw water flowing from the temple, from its right side, and all to whom that water came were saved. The antiphon names the temple; the Church's tradition, taught by John 2:21 (the temple of his body), hears Christ, and in the right side his opened wound: so the parish being sprinkled on an Easter Sunday stands, in the tradition's hearing, in the river from the wound.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1225 is tonight's charter, and it deliberately fuses this study's title verse with this scene: in his Passover Christ opened to all men the fountain of Baptism; he had spoken of his Passion as a baptism

with which he had to be baptized; and the blood and water that flowed from his pierced side are types of Baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments of new life: from then on it is possible to be born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God. The Catechism hangs John 3:5 on John 19:34: the sentence of Session 10 is funded by the wound of Session 12.

CCC 766 gives the ecclesial depth: the Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving, anticipated in the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross, and it hands on the ancient reading (citing St. Ambrose; the group will hear its twin from Augustine): as Eve was formed from the sleeping Adam's side, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross: the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church. When your group asks, someday, why the Church and not just me and Jesus: this paragraph is the answer's root: the wound's water is given in and through the Church born from it: the sacrament's ordinary economy, held together with God's freedom beyond it (Session 14).

Paragraphs for this session: 766, 1225

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH • LEADER ONLY

The door in the ark's side (planted Session 2 via Augustine: RESOLVED TONIGHT): the study's longest-held plant. Give the resolution to whoever gasped ten weeks ago.

A fountain opened (Zechariah 13:1, Session 7: RESOLVED TONIGHT): opened by a spear. Draw the line explicitly.

Water and wood (St. Justin's flood reading, Session 2: RESOLVED TONIGHT): saved through water and wood then; water from the wood now. One sentence.

Lifted up like the serpent (Session 10: RESOLVED TONIGHT): the conversation that began with water ended pointing here, and here we are.

Nicodemus (Session 10: COMPLETED TONIGHT): at the burial, openly, with a hundred pounds of spices. Let the room bless him.

Temple river (new tonight via Ezekiel 47 and the Vidi aquam, echoed Session 14): the river deepens as it flows; Session 14's sending will step into the current. Light touch.

Blood beside water (tonight, deliberately unexpanded): Baptism is ordered toward the Eucharist; point, do not develop.

Session Goals

1. The group can retell the scene and name the weight John gives it: solemn eyewitness testimony and two fulfillment citations for one spear-thrust.
2. The group has traced John's own promissory note: temple-body (ch. 2), living water for the thirsty (ch. 4), rivers from his heart when glorified (ch. 7, with John's Spirit gloss), paid at 19:34.
3. The threads have resolved aloud: ark door, fountain opened, water and wood, serpent lifted, Nicodemus openly.
4. The group can say what the Fathers and the Catechism hear in blood and water: Eucharist and Baptism, and the Church born from the side of the new Adam.

5. The steelman (forensic detail only) has been given at full strength and answered from John's own cross-references and 1 John 5.

Timed Plan (85 minutes)

5 min • Welcome and opening prayer

10 min • Win questions

15 min • Build: John 19:31–37, read slowly, the oath weighed; Q1-Q2

15 min • Build: the promissory note traced (John 2:19–21; 4:10–14; 7:37–39; Ezekiel 47); Q3

10 min • Build: the new Eve and the resolved threads; Q4

10 min • Live discovery: 1 John 5:6–8

10 min • Steelman: forensic detail or fountain?

10 min • Send, Live It, memory verse, closing prayer, and silence

If you must land at 75 minutes, cut: The Dig Deeper box, and Q2's medical aside can be one leader sentence. Never cut the promissory-note trace or the closing silence.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, tonight we stand where Mary and John stood, and look on him whom we have pierced. Give this room the quiet of that hill. Open our eyes at the opened side, and let everything this study has taught us flow together there, blood and water, mercy and life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win • open the room

QW1. Is there a place you have stood, a room, a grave, a shoreline, where something ended and, only much later, you understood something had also begun there? What made you finally see it?

QW2. When you look at a crucifix, what do you usually see first? What do you suspect you have been trained not to notice?

Build • into the text

Read John 19:31–37 aloud, slowly, once. Then read verses 34–35 a second time, alone, and let the room sit for a moment before the first question.

Q1. John does something at verse 35 he does nowhere else with this force: he stops the story to testify: *He who saw it has borne witness, his testimony is true... that you also may believe.* And he attaches two Scripture fulfillments to this one moment. What is the evangelist signaling about the spear-thrust and what came out of it?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

That it is not incidental. Writers spend oaths where doubt would be costliest and meaning is densest. John stakes his eyewitness credit on the blood and water and frames the moment with the Passover lamb (not a bone broken) and Zechariah's pierced one: sacrifice and fountain, in the citations themselves. Whatever we conclude tonight, we begin here: the beloved disciple, who stood close enough to see, considered this detail worth an oath, and aimed it at our believing.

Q2. On the plain level: soldiers verify a death; a spear opens the side of a dead man; blood and a clear fluid flow (medical readers have explained the mixture in various ways). Why does the real, physical death matter to John, and to us, before any deeper reading?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Because everything depends on it. If the Son of God only seemed to die, then nothing was paid, nothing conquered, and our baptism into his death (last week's whole session) joins us to a mime. John's oath guards the realism first: a true body, truly dead, truly opened, before witnesses. The deeper readings do not float above the history; they grow out of it, which is why the Church has never feared the medical plausibility of the detail: the fountain is only good news if the death was real.

Q3. Now collect John's own earlier promises, the trail he laid: John 2:19–21 (destroy this temple... he spoke of the temple of his body), Ezekiel 47:1–12 (the water from beneath the temple's threshold, deepening, healing everything it touches), John 4:10–14 (living water for the thirsty), and above all John 7:37–39 with John's own gloss. Assemble it: what did the evangelist promise would happen, from where, and when?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He promised water: living water, rivers of it: *out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water*, words the Church's tradition has read of Christ's own heart (some read the believer's; the font follows the tradition), and he told us plainly what the water is (*this he said about the Spirit*) and when it would flow (*for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*). In John, the cross is the hour of his glorification, the lifting up he foretold, the climactic center of a glory that includes his rising. So, on that venerable reading, the Gospel has carried a promissory note since chapter 7: water from his heart at his glorification: and Ezekiel had drawn the blueprint: a river from the side of the temple, and Jesus had named his body the temple. At 19:34 the note is paid in front of a witness who swears to it. This is not typology imposed from outside; it is a trail the Gospel itself lays and the Church has followed from the Fathers to the Catechism. The study's method finishes where it started in Session 3: the New Testament reads this way because its authors wrote this way.

Q4. The Fathers put one more text beside the wound: Genesis 2:21–22, Eve formed from the side of sleeping Adam. What did they see, and what long-buried thread from our Session 2 resolves inside it?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They saw the new Eve drawn from the new Adam: as the first bride was formed from the opened side of the first man in his deep sleep, so the Church, Christ's bride, was born from the opened side of the second, asleep in death: born in the blood and water, the Eucharist and Baptism that constitute her life. And Session 2's oldest plant resolves: Augustine taught us the ark's one door, set in its side, through which every saved creature entered: tonight the door it signified stands open. Every font in the world is filled from a birthplace: the Church does not merely commemorate Calvary; she was born there, and she baptizes from her own birth.

LIVE DISCOVERY

The hunt. Tell the group: the Johannine pen wrote letters too: in the Church's tradition, the same John, and in one of them he names tonight's elements again, no longer as a moment on Calvary but as something ongoing in the Church. Find **1 John 5:6–8** and read it aloud. What three witnesses does John name, and what tense are they in?

The Spirit, the water, and the blood: and these three agree: present tense, abiding witnesses. The letter names them as present-tense witnesses, joined to the Spirit; the Church has always heard her font and her altar in them. Let the group say where the Church encounters the three today.

STEELMAN • PRESS THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

Tonight's objection speaks with the sober historian's voice, at full strength: John records blood and water as evidence of real death against early deniers that Christ truly died: a forensic detail with an anti-docetic purpose, exactly why the oath is there. Everything further, fountains and Eves and sacraments, is the devotional imagination of later centuries layered onto serum and gravity. And method matters: a reading that finds Baptism in a wound, a Church in a rib, and a font in a river vision is a method that can find anything anywhere, and a method that proves everything proves nothing. Honor the text by letting it be what it is: a witnessed death, soberly recorded.

Q5. Concede first: what does the anti-docetic reading get right, and why does the Church need it to be right? Then: whose cross-references are we actually following tonight, ours or the evangelist's?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The concession is total as far as it goes: the oath does guard a real death against real deniers, and the Church needs that reading to be true more than the objector does: no real death, no real redemption, and no real baptism into it. If the sacramental reading required the forensic one to be false, we would abandon it tonight. It requires the opposite: fountains flow from facts.

But the claim that everything further is later imagination has a documentary problem: the further readings are earlier than later: they are in the book. It was John, not a medieval allegorist, who identified Christ's body as the temple; John who recorded the promise of rivers of living water from his heart; John who glossed the water as the Spirit and dated its release to the glorification; John who marked the fulfillment with his most direct eyewitness testimony and a citation of the pierced one; and John who, writing again, named the Spirit, the water, and the blood as present-tense witnesses. We did not bring a method to this text; we followed a trail the Gospel itself lays, link by checkable link, as the Church has always followed it, with the group's own hands on the pages. That is precisely what distinguishes apostolic typology from finding-anything-anywhere: Session 3's rule, kept to the end: we read figures where the inspired authors read them, and here the trail is at its plainest.

As for the centuries: they testify against the layering theory, not for it. Within the Fathers' earliest generations, the wound was already the Church's birthplace and the sacraments' spring, and the reading is no party opinion: Chrysostom catechizes Antioch with it, Augustine preaches it in Hippo, the liturgy sings it Ezekiel's river over her fonts to this day. When independent witnesses across the ancient world all read one text one way, the economical explanation is not mass imagination. It is a common inheritance, handed down in the Church's teaching and worship rather than independently invented.

DIG DEEPER • OPTIONAL

For a strong group: Ezekiel 47:3–5, the river's measurements: ankle-deep, knee-deep, waist-deep, then water to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. Ask: if the wound's river deepens as it flows through history, where is ankle-deep faith in your life, and where is God inviting you past wading depth: into what cannot be controlled, only swum? Christian tradition has often read the

deepening river as the sacramental life growing from Baptism toward the fullness of union with God.

Send • out of the room

QS1. Every font is filled from the opened side. When you next bless yourself with holy water, you now know its address. What changes when grace has a birthplace?

QS2. Nicodemus's walk from night to Calvary took the length of the Gospel. Whose slow journey have you been impatient with, including your own, and what does his hundred pounds of spices teach you about how late love is allowed to arrive?

Live It This Week

- Pray before a crucifix for ten minutes once this week, saying nothing for the first five: only looking on him whom we have pierced.
- Pray the short invocation the Church has long loved, once each day: Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
- If you can reach a Mass this week, receive the wound's other gift: and if you cannot receive, make the spiritual communion prayer at the moment of the chalice's elevation.
- Light a candle for someone who is grieving or dying, and entrust them by name to the opened heart.

Memory Verse

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.
John 19:34 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, from your opened side came blood and water, the fountain of the Church, the spring of our baptism, the cup of our salvation. Hide us in your wounds. Wash everyone we have prayed for these twelve weeks in the river that flows from your heart, and let us live as people born from your side. Who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order.

John 19:31–37 • The scene, the oath, the fulfillments; memory verse at v. 34

John 2:19–21 • His body the temple

Ezekiel 47:1–12 • The temple river; the Vidi aquam; Dig Deeper

John 4:10–14 • Living water promised to the thirsty

John 7:37–39 • Rivers from his heart; John's own gloss: the Spirit, at his glorification

Genesis 2:21–22 • Eve from Adam's side; the Church from Christ's

Zechariah 13:1 • Session 7 thread resolved: the fountain opened

1 John 5:6–8 • Live discovery: the Spirit, the water, and the blood: three abiding witnesses

John 19:38–42 • Nicodemus openly; the arc completed