

Sent Out and Pushed Back

Matthew 10–12 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that the King who taught and healed now shares his mission: he names twelve apostles, clothes them with his own authority, and binds himself to them so tightly that receiving them is receiving him. They watch opposition gather through chapters 11–12, hear Jesus' astonishing self-revelation ("no one knows the Father except the Son"), and learn what he actually meant in the scene Protestants most often quote against Catholic love for Mary.

Catholic Touchstone. The apostolic office: Christ sends men who stand in his person, the seed of everything the Church means by apostolic succession, and Simon is listed "first." Also an honest, textual answer on "who is my mother?"

What You Need to Know

Chapter 10 is the second of Matthew's five great discourses. Jesus summons twelve disciples, the number is not accidental, Israel had twelve tribes and the New Israel is being given twelve foundations, and gives them his own authority over unclean spirits and disease. Matthew calls them *apostoloi*, "sent ones," the only time he uses the word. Many scholars hear behind it the Jewish institution of the shaliach, the commissioned agent, whose principle is preserved in later rabbinic writings: a man's shaliach is as the man himself, so that dealing with the agent is dealing with the sender. Whether or not the formal institution was already fixed in Jesus' day, he voices the same principle at the discourse's climax: "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (10:40). The apostle is not a messenger boy; he is Christ's commissioned representative, bearing an authority not his own. Everything the Church means by the apostolic office grows from this seed.

One detail in the list of the Twelve (10:2–4) deserves a quiet mental note: Matthew writes "first, Simon, who is called Peter." No one else in the list gets a number. "First" cannot mean merely first-called, since Andrew was called at the same moment. Say nothing to the group tonight beyond letting them notice it; the word is a planted seed that flowers in two weeks.

The discourse is bracingly honest about cost: sheep among wolves, floggings, betrayal within families, hatred "for my name's sake," not peace but a sword. The sword saying (10:34) does not mean Christ desires violence; it means the Prince of Peace is so decisive a figure that households divide over him, as Micah 7:6 (which Jesus quotes) foresaw. Loyalty to Jesus outranks even the closest human bonds, and the discourse ends with the whole Gospel in miniature: whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Chapter 11 opens with John the Baptist's question from prison: "Are you he who is to come?" Jesus answers by pointing to his works in the language of Isaiah 35 and 61, then turns to honor John as more than a prophet, the promised messenger of Malachi 3:1, and, "if you are willing to accept it," Elijah who is to come (11:14), confirming the identification the group glimpsed in Session 2. Then the woes on unrepentant cities, and then the thunderbolt of 11:25–27: the Son thanks the Father, Lord of heaven and

earth, and declares that no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. This mutual, exclusive knowing between Father and Son is the highest Christology in the Synoptic Gospels; scholars sometimes call it a Johannine thunderbolt fallen into Matthew. It flows immediately into the tenderest invitation in Scripture: come to me, all who labor, and I will give you rest, for my yoke is easy.

Chapter 12 gathers the storm. Two Sabbath controversies, in which Jesus claims to be greater than the temple and Lord of the Sabbath, two claims only God can survive making. Matthew then quotes Isaiah 42:1–4 at length, his longest Old Testament citation: the chosen Servant who will not break a bruised reed, proclaiming justice to the Gentiles. The Beelzebul accusation follows, with Jesus' answer about the divided kingdom and the strong man, and the solemn warning about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Handle that verse pastorally; see the Dig Deeper box. The scribes then demand a sign, and Jesus promises only “the sign of the prophet Jonah”: as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth. Plant it and leave it; the group should feel it is a promissory note not yet cashed.

The chapter ends with the scene the steelman engages: Jesus' mother and brethren stand outside asking for him, and he answers, “Who is my mother?... whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Read badly, it sounds like a demotion of Mary. Read carefully, it defines the family she belongs to first of all.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 35:5–6 and 61:1.** The works Jesus lists for John's messengers: eyes opened, the lame walking, the poor hearing good news. The answer to “are you he” is Isaiah happening.
- **Malachi 3:1.** The messenger sent before the Lord's face, applied by Jesus to John at 11:10.
- **Micah 7:6.** Households divided, quoted at 10:35–36: the Messiah forces a decision that runs through families.
- **Isaiah 42:1–4.** The gentle Servant, Matthew's longest citation (12:18–21): justice for the nations without breaking the bruised reed.
- **Jonah 1:17.** Three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, the only sign this generation will be given.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Clement of Rome (Letter to the Corinthians)

Writing near the end of the first century, within living memory of the apostles, Clement traces the chain plainly: Christ was sent from God, the apostles from Christ, and the apostles in turn appointed their first converts, tested by the Spirit, to succeed them. The pattern of sent men sending men is as old as the Gospel itself.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (On Holy Virginity)

Augustine answers tonight's hard scene directly: Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving his flesh. Her nearness as mother would have profited her nothing had

she not borne Christ more happily in her heart than in her flesh. Far from demoting Mary, the Lord's words crown her twice.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On the easy yoke, Chrysostom says the Lord does not remove the yoke but changes its nature: what makes labor light is love. To those frightened by the Gospel's demands he answers that Christ himself is yoked alongside, and what is carried with him ceases to crush.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 858–860.** Jesus is the Father's emissary; the apostles are his emissaries, so that “he who receives you receives me.” In them Christ continues his own mission, and their office is permanent, provided for through successors.
- **CCC 552.** Simon Peter holds the first place in the college of the Twelve; Jesus entrusted a unique mission to him. Tonight only the word “first” is on the table; the mission arrives in two sessions.
- **CCC 1864.** Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: God's mercy has no limits, but whoever deliberately refuses to accept it by repenting rejects the forgiveness of sins; such hardness of heart, final impenitence, is the only sin that “cannot be forgiven” because it refuses forgiveness itself.

Thread Watch

- **Peter thread (plant, silently).** “First, Simon, who is called Peter.” Underline nothing; if a participant notices, smile and say “hold that thought for two weeks.”
- **Emmanuel thread (develop, loudly).** “Something greater than the temple is here” (12:6). The temple was where God's presence dwelt on earth. Let the group say aloud what must be standing in that grainfield.
- **Sign of Jonah (plant).** Three days and nights in the heart of the earth: a promissory note. It is cashed at the end of the study.
- **Son of David thread (develop).** After the healing of 12:22, the crowds ask, “Can this be the Son of David?” The title is spreading from the blind to the crowds. Keep the running list.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain the shaliach principle and why “he who receives you receives me” grounds the apostolic office.
2. Participants notice “first, Simon” and file it without resolution.
3. Participants can state the claims of 11:27 and 12:6–8 and why they are either true or blasphemous, with no third option.
4. Participants hear the strongest Protestant use of “who is my mother” and can answer it from the text and St. Augustine.

5. Participants receive 11:28–30 personally and identify the burden they will bring under the easy yoke this week.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the Dig Deeper box on blasphemy against the Spirit and cover its content in one spoken sentence (saves about 5 minutes), then compress Build question 2 on the cost sayings into a read-and-comment (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the shaliach discovery or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 6 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sent Out and Pushed Back

Matthew 10–12 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you did not keep your mission to yourself: you called twelve unlikely men, breathed your authority into their sending, and promised that whoever received them received you. Thank you for the unbroken chain of sent ones that carried the Gospel from your lips to our town. Give us tonight the honesty of John's question and the rest of your easy yoke. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Have you ever had to represent someone else, sign for them, speak for them, act in their name? What did that responsibility feel like?
2. What is the most worn out you have ever been, body or soul, and what actually gave you rest?

Build (55 minutes)

Twelve Sent Men

1. Read Matthew 10:1–5a. What does Jesus give the twelve before he gives them instructions? Why twelve, of all numbers, for the New Israel we have watched him embody? And read the list slowly: does anything about how Simon is introduced catch your eye?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He gives them his own authority over unclean spirits and disease before a word of instructions: the mission runs on his power, not their talent. Twelve matches the twelve tribes; the New Israel is being given twelve foundations. And Matthew writes “first, Simon, who is called Peter”: no one else in the list receives a number, and “first” cannot just mean first-called, since his brother Andrew was called in the same moment. If the group notices, congratulate them and say only: hold that thought for two weeks.

2. Skim the hard middle of the discourse: read 10:16–22 and 10:34–39. What does Jesus promise his messengers, and what does he emphatically not promise? What does the “sword” of verse 34 cut through, according to verses 35–36?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He promises wolves, councils, floggings, betrayal, and hatred for his name's sake, together with the Spirit's help in the hour of trial; he does not promise safety or ease. The sword is not a call to violence: quoting Micah 7:6, Jesus says decision about him will divide even households. He is too decisive a figure for neutrality, and loyalty to him outranks every other bond. Then the paradox that seals the discourse: whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

3. Live discovery. Read Matthew 10:40. In Jewish practice, preserved in later rabbinic law, a commissioned agent, a shaliach, stood in the sender's place: dealing with the agent was dealing with the man. Given that background, spell out what Jesus is claiming in this verse, link by link. Where does the chain start and end? What does that make an apostle?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Receives you, receives me; receives me, receives him who sent me. The chain runs from the Father through Christ into the twelve: the apostle carries Christ's own presence and authority to whoever receives him. An apostle is not a fan or a messenger boy but a commissioned representative, and everything the Church means by the apostolic office and its succession grows from this verse. St. Clement of Rome, writing in the first century, already describes the chain continuing: God sent Christ, Christ sent the apostles, the apostles appointed successors.

Are You He Who Is to Come?

4. Read Matthew 11:2–6. John, who baptized Jesus, now asks from prison whether Jesus is the one. **Live discovery:** Jesus answers in borrowed words; have someone find Isaiah 35:5–6 and read verses 3–6. Why answer a yes-or-no question with a list of works? And what do you make of the beatitude Jesus adds in verse 6?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Jesus answers by pointing at Isaiah happening: eyes opened, legs restored, lepers cleansed, the dead raised, the poor hearing good news. It is a stronger answer than “yes,” because it invites John to recognize the promised age arriving in the evidence. The added beatitude, blessed is he who takes no offense at me, acknowledges that Jesus is not the kind of Messiah anyone scripted, John included, and gently blesses everyone whose expectations he breaks. Jesus then honors John as Malachi's messenger and, if we are willing to accept it, the Elijah who was to come, confirming the hint we caught in his clothing back in Session 2.

The Thunderbolt and the Yoke

5. Read Matthew 11:25–30 aloud, slowly; it may be the most staggering paragraph in the Gospel so far. In verse 27, what does Jesus claim about the knowledge between the Father and the Son? Who can know the Father at all, and on whose decision? Then feel the turn at verse 28: what does this exclusive Son immediately do with his privilege?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

All things have been delivered to him; no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. That is a claim to a mutual, exclusive, divine knowing: not a prophet's acquaintance with God but the Son's own interiority with the Father. And the very next breath, the One holding that privilege throws the door open: come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden. The most exclusive claim in the Synoptic Gospels becomes the widest invitation in Scripture. His yoke is easy because, as St. John Chrysostom says, he is yoked alongside; what is carried with him ceases to crush.

6. Read Matthew 12:1–8. In the grainfield argument, Jesus makes two claims that no mere teacher could survive making. Find them both. Given what the temple was for Israel, what is he actually saying in verse 6, and what does it do to our Emmanuel thread?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

“Something greater than the temple is here” (12:6) and “the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath” (12:8). The temple was the one place on earth where God’s presence dwelt among his people; the Sabbath was God’s own institution from creation. To be greater than the temple is to be, in person, what the temple only housed: the presence of God with us. The Emmanuel thread just stepped into the open. Either these claims are true or they are blasphemy, which is exactly the alternative his enemies see; what no one can honestly call them is modest.

Dig Deeper: The Sin That Cannot Be Forgiven

Matthew 12:31–32 frightens tender consciences, so say this plainly: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not a word that slips out, and no one who fears having committed it has committed it. It names the final, deliberate refusal of the Spirit’s work, calling grace evil and rejecting forgiveness itself. God’s mercy has no limit; a heart can close itself to mercy, and that closure, persisted in to the end, is the one sin that cannot be forgiven because it will not be (CCC 1864). The worried should hear: your worry is the Spirit still at work in you.

Build Then Press: “Who Is My Mother?”

7. Read Matthew 12:46–50 before the steelman, exactly as written.

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Here, many Protestants argue, Jesus himself puts Marian devotion in its place. His mother stands outside asking for him, and rather than privileging her he gestures at his disciples: whoever does the will of my Father is my brother and sister and mother. Physical motherhood, on this reading, gives Mary no special standing in the kingdom; discipleship is the only family that counts, and it is open equally to all. Catholics who exalt Mary above other believers are honoring exactly the tie Jesus here declines to honor. This reading has real force: Jesus truly is relativizing biological kinship, and he really does define his family by obedience to the Father. Let it land before answering.

8. Now press with one question the objection forgets to ask: by Jesus’ own criterion, doing the will of the Father, where does Mary rank? Consider everything Scripture shows of her, from her consent to God’s plan through her standing at the cross. Does Jesus’ definition of family exclude his mother, or describe her?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Jesus is genuinely relativizing biological kinship: bloodline alone saves no one, and his family is

defined by doing the Father's will. But run Mary through his own test. Her whole recorded life is consent to the will of God, from her yes at the Annunciation to her place at the foot of the cross when the twelve had scattered. By the very criterion of 12:50, she is not demoted; she is the family's charter member. St. Augustine put it exactly: Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving his flesh, and her motherhood would have profited her nothing had she not borne him more happily in her heart than in her flesh.

So the Catholic conclusion is the opposite of a concession: the Church honors Mary first of all as the perfect disciple, blessed twice over, in body and in faith. Jesus' words do not lower Mary to the level of ordinary discipleship; they reveal that her true greatness was always her discipleship, which her divine motherhood crowned rather than replaced.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Christ still comes to people through his sent ones, and through us. Who receives Christ when they receive you: your family, your coworkers, your parish? What are they receiving lately?
2. Name the burden you have been carrying alone. What would it mean, concretely, to bring it under the easy yoke this week rather than out from under every yoke?

Live It This Week

- Pray Matthew 11:28–30 each evening this week, naming your actual burden out loud before the Lord.
- Do one act this week as Christ's representative on purpose: a visit, an apology carried, a mercy delivered in his name.
- Read Matthew 13 before next session: seven short parables. Note which one you understand least.

Closing Prayer

Father, Lord of heaven and earth, you have hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to little ones. Make us little enough to see. Lord Jesus, greater than the temple, gentle and lowly in heart, take our burdens under your yoke and teach us your rest. Send us as you were sent, and let everyone who receives us receive something of you. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 11:28 (RSV2CE): *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 6 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

Sent Out and Pushed Back · Matthew 10–12

Primary Text

• Matthew 10:1–5a · Matthew 10:16–22 · Matthew 10:34–39 · Matthew 10:40 · Matthew 11:2–6 · Matthew 11:25–30 · Matthew 12:1–8 · Matthew 12:31–32 · Matthew 12:46–50

Live Discovery Passages

• Isaiah 35:3–6 (the works of the coming age)

Background Passages

• Micah 7:6 (households divided, quoted at 10:35–36) · Malachi 3:1 (the messenger, quoted at 11:10) · Matthew 11:14 with 2 Kings 1:8 (Elijah) · Isaiah 42:1–4 (quoted at 12:18–21) · Jonah 1:17 (the sign of Jonah, 12:39–40) · Matthew 12:22–23 (“Can this be the Son of David?”)

Catechism

• CCC 858–860 · CCC 552 · CCC 1864

Memory Verse

• Matthew 11:28