

The Blood of the Covenant

Matthew 26–27 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the night and the day toward which every thread has been running: the four verbs of the feedings return at a Passover table and the bread thread resolves in the institution of the Eucharist; the cup Jesus asked the Zebedees about is accepted in Gethsemane; Daniel 7 is quoted under oath at the trial at the cost of his life; Psalm 22 turns out to hold the whole crucifixion, dereliction and vindication both; and at the moment of death the temple curtain tears and a Gentile centurion completes the Gospel's confession.

Catholic Touchstone. The institution of the Eucharist as the sacrifice of the new covenant, engaged with the strongest symbolic-reading objection; the propitiatory character of Christ's offering; and Peter's fall and tears held honestly beside his office.

Tone note for the leader. This session should feel different, and you should say so at the start. Keep the room quieter, the transitions slower, and the discussion reverent. Consider candles and a crucifix on the table. The session ends in silence rather than conversation, and the closing prayer instructions reflect that. If your parish schedule allows, ending the night with a visit to the tabernacle or a few minutes of adoration is the perfect coda.

What You Need to Know

Matthew sets the Last Supper explicitly at Passover, the night Israel remembered the lamb whose blood turned death aside and the meal that made a people. Into that loaded liturgy Jesus speaks new words over old elements. Watch the four verbs of 26:26: he took bread, blessed, broke, and gave, the exact sequence the group filed away at the feeding of the five thousand. The bread thread resolves here, and the resolution is the sentence at the center of Christian history: Take, eat; this is my body.

Over the cup he says: this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Every phrase is loaded. "Blood of the covenant" quotes Exodus 24:8, which the group discovers live: Moses threw sacrificial blood on the people to seal the Sinai covenant, saying "behold the blood of the covenant." Jesus claims that role for his own blood: a new covenant sealed in a better blood, as Jeremiah 31:31 promised. "Poured out" is sacrificial language; "for many" is Isaiah 53's Servant vocabulary, continuous with the ransom saying of 20:28; "for the forgiveness of sins" states the offering's efficacy, and it is worth noticing that Matthew alone among the evangelists records that phrase here, the same evangelist whose first chapter said Jesus would save his people from their sins. The Church's teaching that the Mass makes present this one sacrifice, truly propitiatory, offered once for all and never repeated but re-presented, stands on this table (CCC 1365-1367).

Gethsemane resolves the cup thread with terrible beauty: the One who asked the Zebedees "are you able to drink the cup" now falls on his face before it: my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. The prophets' cup of wrath (Isaiah 51:17) is accepted by the

only one able to drink it, in the prayer that fulfills his own Our Father: your will be done. He finds the three asleep, and his word to Peter, the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak, is diagnosis and mercy at once.

At the Sanhedrin trial, the high priest puts Jesus under oath by the living God: tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus answers, and then spends his life on a Scripture quotation: hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven. He has fused Psalm 110 (the session 11 riddle: sit at my right hand) with Daniel 7 (the session 12 discovery: coming on clouds to receive dominion). The high priest tears his robes and cries blasphemy, because he understands the claim perfectly. The group armed with both texts will understand it too, and understand that Jesus died on oath for the claim this study has watched him build for thirteen weeks.

Hold Peter and Judas side by side, as Matthew does. Both fail catastrophically in the same night; the difference is not the size of the sin but what each does next. Peter, who swore he would die first, denies three times before a servant girl, and the Gospel's most human verse follows: he went out and wept bitterly. Judas repents in the older sense, returns the silver, despairs, and destroys himself. Peter's tears water the office he will still hold; Judas's sorrow collapses inward, and Matthew never shows him carrying it back to the One he betrayed, though mercy was still on offer. The Church has never pronounced on his final fate; she holds the two men side by side as the anatomy of repentance and the anatomy of despair. The Church has never needed her first pope to be sinless; she has needed him to weep and be restored, which is exactly what happened.

At the crucifixion, Matthew writes with Psalm 22 open, and tonight the group reads it whole: the mockers wagging heads (Ps 22:7), "he trusts in God; let God deliver him" (22:8), the divided garments and cast lots (22:18), and the cry from the cross itself, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, which is the psalm's first line. A dying rabbi quoting a psalm's opening line can summon the whole psalm, and Matthew's own weave of Psalm 22 through the scene (verses 7, 8, and 18) shows he means us to read it whole; and Psalm 22 does not end in dereliction: it turns, and ends in vindication, proclamation to the nations, and a feast for the afflicted: "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD." The cry of abandonment is real, Christ truly tasting the far country of sin (CCC 603), and it is simultaneously the first line of a psalm that ends in resurrection-shaped triumph. Both are true; neither cancels the other.

At the moment of death, Matthew reports a cascade of signs: the temple curtain torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shaken and the rocks split, the tombs opened and the bodies of sleeping saints raised (Matthew alone records this, and their appearances wait until after his resurrection, 27:53), and then, in response to it all, the centurion's confession. The curtain guarded the Holy of Holies, the chamber of the Presence; torn from top to bottom, as if by hands from above, it preaches the Emmanuel thread's penultimate note: the Presence is no longer curtained, the forsaken house of 23:38 gives way to access thrown open by the blood of the covenant. And the confession, truly this was the Son of God, comes from a Roman centurion and his men: a Gentile soldier completes the arc his countryman began in chapter 8, and the sons of Abraham promise edges toward its final scene.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Exodus 24:3–8.** Behold the blood of the covenant: Moses seals Sinai with sacrificial blood; Jesus seals the new covenant with his own, discovered live tonight.

- **Jeremiah 31:31–34.** The promised new covenant with forgiveness at its heart: the same chapter that wept with Rachel in Session 1 now keeps its greatest promise.
- **Isaiah 53:11–12 and 51:17.** Poured out for many; the cup of wrath: the Servant and the cup converge at the table and in the garden.
- **Zechariah 13:7.** Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered: quoted by Jesus at 26:31 on the way to the Mount of Olives.
- **Psalms 22.** The whole crucifixion in one psalm: dereliction, mockery, pierced hands, divided garments, and the turn to vindication and the nations, read whole tonight.
- **Psalms 110:1 with Daniel 7:13.** Fused in Jesus' answer under oath: seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Ignatius of Antioch (Letter to the Smyrnaeans)

Within living memory of the apostles, Ignatius names as the mark of false teachers that they abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess that it is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father raised. The Church's realism about the Lord's words is as old as her martyrs.

Voices of the Church: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Mystagogical Catecheses)

Instructing the newly baptized, Cyril tells them not to judge by taste but to be fully assured by faith: since Christ himself declared of the bread, this is my body, who shall dare to doubt? What seems bread is not bread, though it tastes so, but the Body of Christ; he who changed water to wine at Cana is worthy of our trust when he speaks over bread and wine.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Expositions on the Psalms)

Augustine hears Psalm 22 prayed by the whole Christ: the Head cries out in the words of our darkness, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me, taking the voice of sinful humanity into his own mouth, and the same psalm runs on to the feast of the poor and the turning of all nations, because the cross he describes is the cross that conquers.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 610–611.** At the supper Jesus anticipated the free offering of his life and transformed the Last Supper into the memorial of his sacrifice; the institution of the Eucharist made the apostles priests of the new covenant.
- **CCC 1339.** Jesus chose the time of Passover to fulfill what he had announced at Capernaum: giving his disciples his Body and his Blood.

- CCC 1365-1367. Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice: the sacrifice of the cross made present, its memory perpetuated, its saving power applied; the Council of Trent teaches this one sacrifice is truly propitiatory.

- **CCC 603.** Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he had sinned, but in the redeeming love that united him to the Father, he assumed us in our estrangement from God, so that he could say in our name: my God, my God, why have you forsaken me.

Thread Watch

- **Bread thread (RESOLVE).** Took, blessed, broke, gave: filed silently in Session 8, cashed at the table. Let a participant notice the four verbs before you point at them; ask, if needed, “where have we heard these four verbs in this order?”

- **Cup thread (RESOLVE).** From “are you able to drink the cup” to “let this cup pass... nevertheless, your will be done.” The Our Father of Session 4 is prayed by its author at the worst moment in history.

- **Daniel 7 and Psalm 110 (converge).** Both discovered in prior sessions, both quoted by Jesus under oath. The study's preparation makes the trial scene land with full force; let the group experience recognizing the texts themselves.

- **Emmanuel thread (penultimate note).** The curtain torn from top to bottom: the Presence uncurtained. One note remains, next week, in the Gospel's last sentence.

- **Sign of Jonah (about to cash).** Three days. Say nothing; next week the note comes due.

Session Goals

1. Participants recognize the four verbs and discover Exodus 24 inside the words of institution.
2. Participants hear the strongest symbolic reading of “this is my body” and can answer it from the Passover context, the covenant blood, St. Paul, and the earliest Church.
3. Participants connect the trial answer to Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 and can state what Jesus died claiming.
4. Participants read Psalm 22 whole and can hold real dereliction and real vindication together.
5. Participants contrast Peter and Judas and can articulate why tears, not sinlessness, mark the difference.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 10 min · Build 60 min · Send 8 min · Closing silence and prayer 12 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: compress the Peter and Judas comparison into a read of 26:69–75 with one question (saves about 6 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on Barabbas (saves about 4 minutes). Do not cut the institution sequence, the steelman, the trial scene, or Psalm 22.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 13 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Blood of the Covenant

Matthew 26–27 · 90 Minutes

A Word Before You Begin

Tell the group plainly: tonight is different. We are standing at the table, in the garden, and at the cross. Keep phones away, let silences sit, and do not rush anything. The session ends in silence on purpose.

Opening Prayer

Father, on the night he was betrayed, your Son took bread. Bring us to that table tonight with unshod hearts. Let us watch with him one hour, hear his words over the bread and the cup, and stand near the cross without looking away. We ask it through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Win (10 minutes)

1. What is the most meaningful meal you have ever been part of, and what made it more than food?
2. When have last words, of a parent, a friend, anyone, carried more weight than a thousand earlier conversations?

Build (60 minutes)

The Table

1. Read Matthew 26:17–19 and 26:26–29. What feast frames this meal, and what did that night mean to every Jew at the table? Read verse 26 slowly and list the four verbs over the bread, in order. Where has this study heard exactly that sequence?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Passover: the lamb whose blood turned death aside, the meal that made Israel a people, kept every year as a living memorial. The four verbs: he took, blessed, broke, and gave, the precise sequence we filed away at the feeding of the five thousand. The wilderness feedings were rehearsals; this is the performance. And over that bread, at that feast, he says the sentence at the center of Christian history: Take, eat; this is my body.

2. **Live discovery.** Now the cup. Read verse 28 phrase by phrase, then have someone find Exodus 24:3–8 and read it aloud. What did Moses do with the blood, and what did he say? Then a second finder: Jeremiah 31:31–34. What did God promise, and what sits at that covenant's heart? Assemble what Jesus is claiming at this table.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

At Sinai, Moses threw the blood of sacrifice on the people and said: behold the blood of the

covenant which the LORD has made with you. Jeremiah promised a new covenant, not like the old, with sins forgiven and remembered no more. Jesus takes both in his hands: THIS is MY blood of THE covenant, poured out (sacrificial language) for many (Isaiah 53's Servant, our ransom verse of Session 10) for the forgiveness of sins, the very mission his name announced in chapter 1. He is sealing the new covenant Jeremiah promised, in a better blood than Sinai's, at the table before the altar of the cross. This is why the Church calls the Mass a sacrifice: not a new death, but this one offering made present until he comes.

Build Then Press: Did He Mean It Literally?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Many Evangelical Christians read the words of institution as vivid metaphor, and their case deserves its full weight. Jesus said "I am the door" and "I am the vine" without becoming lumber or a plant; "this is my body" can be the same figure. He was bodily present at the table, holding the bread in his hands: how could the bread be the body that held it? Passover itself was a memorial meal, and Jesus says "do this in remembrance of me": remembrance, not re-offering. On this reading the Supper is a precious symbol and proclamation of the cross, and the Catholic claim of a real change asks the words to bear more than table language can carry. This objection is sincere, textually argued, and made by people who love the Lord's Supper. Let it stand at full height.

3. Now press. First, context: at a Passover, was the lamb on the table a symbol of a lamb? Second, the cup word: can "blood of the covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins" live as pure metaphor, given what covenant blood did at Sinai? Third, the apostles' own reading: **Live discovery**: have someone read 1 Corinthians 11:27–29. What does St. Paul say an unworthy communicant is guilty of, and what must be discerned? Finally, weigh the earliest witnesses outside the New Testament, in tonight's Voices.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

"I am the door" has no context of doors; no one at the table reached for a hinge. But "this is my body" is spoken at Passover, over the elements of a sacrificial meal, where the lamb was not a symbol of a lamb but the sacrifice itself, eaten. The cup word will not shrink to metaphor: covenant blood, from Sinai forward, is real blood that really seals, and "poured out for the forgiveness of sins" claims an efficacy no figure of speech performs. St. Paul, our earliest written witness, reads the words with unnerving realism: whoever eats and drinks unworthily is guilty of profaning THE BODY AND BLOOD of the Lord, and eats judgment by not discerning the body: language without meaning if the bread is only bread. And the men taught by the apostles say it plainly: St. Ignatius, within living memory of John, defines heretics as those who deny the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior.

Now the honest concessions. Yes, the Supper is a memorial, and the Church says so in every Mass, because the biblical memorial (the Passover's own category) does not merely recall an event but makes its power present to a new generation: remembrance and reality are allies, not rivals. And yes, how bread becomes his Body while he sat holding it is mystery past our physics; the Church has never claimed to explain the how, only to trust the who. St. Cyril's counsel to the newly baptized

remains the Catholic posture: do not judge by taste; the one who turned water to wine has told you what this is. At every Mass, the four verbs sound again, and the words are his, not ours.

The Cup Accepted

4. Read Matthew 26:36–46. What does Jesus pray about “this cup,” and where has this study met that cup? Listen for a prayer inside his prayer: what petition from Session 4 does he pray at the worst moment in history? And what is his word to the sleeping Peter?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The cup he asked the Zebedees about, the prophets' cup of wrath, now stands before him, and he asks, if possible, that it pass, sorrowful even to death: the dread is real, and it is our dread, assumed. Then he prays his own prayer: not as I will, but as you will; your will be done, the Our Father's third petition, prayed by its author face-down in a garden. The cup thread resolves not in heroics but in obedience. To Peter: watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak, diagnosis and mercy in one sentence, and the last coaching Peter gets before his own test.

On Oath

5. Read Matthew 26:57–68. The high priest puts Jesus under oath by the living God. Jesus' answer spends two Scriptures this study has already discovered: name them both from memory if you can (Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13). What exactly is he claiming, why does the high priest tear his robes, and what does it mean that Jesus says this HERE, under oath, with his life in the balance?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Seated at the right hand of Power: Psalm 110, David's Lord enthroned beside God, the riddle no one could answer in the temple. Coming on the clouds of heaven: Daniel 7, the Son of man receiving everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days. Fused, under oath, before the high priest of Israel: you will see me vindicated, enthroned, and given the kingdom. The high priest understands perfectly, which is why he tears his robes and cries blasphemy: this is a claim to sit where God sits. Jesus is silent at false testimony and speaks only to state, on oath, at the cost of his life, the identity this study has watched him build for thirteen weeks. Men die for many things; men do not usually die on oath for a metaphor.

Peter's Tears

6. Read Matthew 26:69–75, then glance at 27:3–5. Peter and Judas both fail catastrophically in the same night. What is the same, and what is utterly different? Why does the Church need her first pope's story to include this chapter?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Both betray; both are named in advance; both are loved to the end. Peter breaks before a servant girl after swearing he would die first, and then the cock crows, he remembers, and he goes out and

weeps bitterly: sorrow that turns back toward the One denied. Judas is seized by remorse, returns the silver, and despairs: sorrow that turns inward, never shown turning back toward the One betrayed, though mercy was still on offer. The difference is not the size of the sin but the direction of the sorrow. The Church has never needed her first pope to be sinless; she has needed him to weep and be restored, and the risen Lord will see to the restoration. If your own worst night is somewhere in this scene, note which man wept toward Jesus.

The Psalm of the Cross

7. Live discovery, done as one act. Read Matthew 27:33–50 aloud, slowly. Then have one strong reader read Psalm 22, the WHOLE psalm, verses 1 through 31, while everyone else follows in Matthew. Mark every collision. Then answer: is the cry of verse 46 despair? What does quoting a psalm's first line invoke, and where does this psalm end?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The collisions: wagging heads (Ps 22:7 / Mt 27:39), “he trusts in God; let God deliver him” (22:8 / 27:43), divided garments and lots (22:18 / 27:35), and the cry itself, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, the psalm's first line in Jesus' own mouth. The dereliction is real: he has assumed our estrangement, tasting the far country of sin in our name (CCC 603); do not explain the darkness away. And a first line can summon a whole psalm; Matthew has already woven verses 7, 8, and 18 into the scene, so we are meant to read it whole, and the psalm turns: the afflicted one is heard, the poor eat and are satisfied, and all the ends of the earth remember and turn to the LORD. The cross is dereliction and victory in one act; Psalm 22 holds both, and so must we.

8. Read Matthew 27:50–54. What does Matthew report happening at the moment of death? Name every sign, and notice what the centurion's words are a response to. What did the curtain guard, and what does “from top to bottom” suggest? And listen to who says “Truly this was the Son of God”: what arc does that voice complete?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The temple curtain torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shaken and the rocks split, the tombs opened and the bodies of the saints raised (a preview, Matthew notes, that waits for his resurrection, 27:53), and then the centurion's confession, the human response all these signs demand. The curtain sealed the Holy of Holies, the chamber of the Presence, and torn from the TOP, as by hands from above, it preaches what the blood of the covenant has purchased: the Presence is uncurtained, the forsaken house of 23:38 answered by access thrown open. And the confession comes from a Roman centurion and his men: a Gentile soldier completes what a Gentile centurion began in chapter 8, and Abraham's all-nations promise stands at the foot of the cross. Hold the Emmanuel note; the Gospel has one sentence left to say about presence, and we hear it next week.

Send (8 minutes)

1. You will hear the four verbs and the cup words at Mass this Sunday. What will be different about how you hear them?

2. In silence, not aloud: where are you in this story tonight, at the table, asleep in the garden, by the fire, at the foot of the cross? Tell him.

Live It This Week

- Attend Mass this week with tonight in your hands: at the words of institution, hear Exodus 24, Jeremiah 31, and the upper room.
- Pray Psalm 22 once, whole, beginning to end, for someone in dereliction right now.
- If it has been long since confession, let Peter's tears lead you there before this study ends: weep toward him, not away.

Closing: Silence, Then Prayer

Keep two full minutes of silence, by the clock, before praying. Then, quietly: Lord Jesus Christ, at the table you gave us your Body and Blood; in the garden you drank the cup; on the cross you prayed our psalm into the darkness and tore the curtain from top to bottom. We have no words tonight that are better than silence, except these: truly you are the Son of God. Stay with us. Amen. If possible, end the night before the tabernacle.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 26:28 (RSV2CE): *"...for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 13 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Blood of the Covenant · Matthew 26–27

Primary Text

• Matthew 26:17–19, 26–29 · Matthew 26:36–46 · Matthew 26:57–68 · Matthew 26:69–75 with 27:3–5 · Matthew 27:33–50 · Matthew 27:50–54

Live Discovery Passages

• Exodus 24:3–8 (blood of the covenant) · Jeremiah 31:31–34 (the new covenant) · 1 Corinthians 11:27–29 (discerning the body) · Psalm 22 entire (read against Matthew 27)

Background Passages

• Isaiah 53:11–12 and 51:17 (for many; the cup) · Zechariah 13:7 (quoted at 26:31) · Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 (the answer on oath) · Matthew 14:19 (the four verbs) · CCC 1365–1367 text at hand for the steelman landing

Catechism

• CCC 610–611 · CCC 1339 · CCC 1365–1367 · CCC 603

Memory Verse

• Matthew 26:28

Do Not Forget

• Tone: quieter room, slower transitions, two timed minutes of silence before the closing prayer, tabernacle visit if possible. Next week: bring BOTH versions of your guess (the Session 1 sheet with the Session 8 rewrite on its back).