

SESSION SEVEN

Peter at Pentecost

Acts 1:12-26; 2:14-42

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover Peter exercising the office in the Church's first days: standing up among the brethren to fill a vacant apostolic position that Scripture itself calls an office, and then, keys in hand, opening the kingdom to Israel with the Church's first sermon, first altar call, and first three thousand souls.

Catholic Touchstone: The apostolic Church in motion. Peter with the Eleven, teaching, governing, and gathering: the shape given at Caesarea Philippi and the beach now runs under its own power, and the vacancy of Judas shows from day one that apostolic office is the kind of thing that gets filled (CCC 731-732; 857; 861).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Acts is volume two of Luke's Gospel, and its first twelve chapters are structurally Peter's. He speaks first, acts first, answers first, is named first, and stands at the center of every founding scene. Luke is not writing a biography of Peter; he is showing the commissioned office of Luke 22:32 actually strengthening the brethren. Tonight covers the two inaugural exercises: the governance of Acts 1 and the proclamation of Acts 2.

Acts 1:15: "In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty)." Between Ascension and Pentecost, before the Spirit has even descended, someone must move first, and it is Peter, unbidden, interpreting Scripture for the community and directing its first act of corporate governance. St. John Chrysostom notices the manner: Peter acts with authority, as the one entrusted with the flock, yet puts the decision to the body; primacy and collegiality in their first joint appearance.

The business at hand is a vacancy. Judas is dead, and Peter rules that the position he abandoned must be filled, quoting the Psalms: "His office let another take" (Acts 1:20, citing Psalm 109:8). The Greek word Luke uses for office is *episkopē*, oversight, the noun whose cognate *episkopos* (overseer) gives English both bishop and episcopacy. Let the group find this with their own eyes: the first assembly of the Church treats apostleship as an *office*, and offices, when vacated, get filled by succession. Matthias is chosen, "and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles" (1:26). Nobody at that meeting thought the Twelve were

twelve irreplaceable personalities; they were twelve seats, and a seat can be filled. This single scene carries most of Session Ten's weight in advance; tonight, just make sure it is seen clearly.

One honest note for precision: the Church did not perpetually replace apostles as eyewitnesses (when James was martyred in Acts 12, no new apostle was chosen). What the Matthias episode establishes is the principle: apostolic ministry is an office capable of transmission, which is exactly how the apostles themselves proceeded when they appointed presbyters in every church (Acts 14:23) and directed men like Titus to appoint presbyters in every town, men Paul in the same breath calls overseers, *episkopoi* (Titus 1:5-7), to carry the ministry forward. The unique eyewitness role died with the Twelve; the office of oversight, *episkopē*, did not. Keep the distinction crisp and the group will be inoculated against a common objection before they ever hear it.

Acts 2: the Spirit descends, and "Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them" (2:14). The picture is the doctrine: one voice, eleven standing with him. The Church's first sermon is Peter interpreting Scripture authoritatively (Joel, Psalm 16, Psalm 110), proclaiming the resurrection, and indicting and inviting the crowd in the same breath. When they are cut to the heart, note carefully to whom the question is addressed: "they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" (2:37). And note who answers: Peter, with the Church's first altar call: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (2:38). Three thousand souls enter, and the kingdom's doors have swung on their hinges: the keys of Matthew 16, used in public, on Israel first. The Gentile door is Session Eight.

The session ends where Luke ends it, in the four marks of the newborn Church: "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2:42), doctrine, communion, Eucharist, liturgy, gathered around the apostles with Peter at their head. The parish your group attends on Sunday is this verse, still running.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Psalm 109:8. "His office let another take": the verse Peter cites to establish that Judas's vacancy must be filled. The Spirit put succession language into the Psalter centuries before the Church needed it.

Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110:1. The backbone of the Pentecost sermon: David's flesh seeing no corruption, David's Lord seated at the right hand. Peter's first official teaching act is authoritative interpretation of the Old Testament, the steward ruling on the meaning of the household's documents.

Joel 2:28-32. "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh." Peter's opening citation: the last days have begun, the Spirit is democratized, and, as Session Four's Deuteronomy discovery taught us, a Spirit-filled people still comes, by God's own design, with appointed judges and shepherds.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, Homily 3*

Chrysostom watches Peter rise in the upper room and names what he sees: Peter acts with authority in the matter, as the one to whom Christ entrusted the flock, always first to begin, the mouth of the rest. Yet Chrysostom equally admires the manner: he does everything with the common consent, nothing by imperious command, primacy exercised as service among brothers.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book III, chapters 1-4 and 12*

Drawing Book III together, Irenaeus leans on the Pentecost preaching as bedrock: Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed to Israel the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord and Christ, and this public apostolic preaching, delivered before thousands and handed down in the Church, is the standard against which every later novelty is measured. What Peter preached openly at the beginning, the Church guards to the end.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bede the Venerable *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*

Bede lingers on the election of Matthias: the office forsaken by the traitor is not abolished but filled, that the mystical number of the twelve, foundation stones of the new Israel, might stand complete. For Bede the lesson is durable: the ministry entrusted to the apostles is greater than the men who fail it, and the Lord provides for his Church's continuance.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 731-732 frames the day: at Pentecost the Trinity is fully revealed and the Church is manifested to the world; the age of the Church begins, and its first public voice is Peter's.

CCC 857 gives the three senses in which the Church is apostolic: founded on the apostles, keeping their teaching, and taught, sanctified, and guided by them through their successors, all three visibly assembling in Acts 1 and 2.

CCC 861 quotes the apostles' own arrangement: in order that the mission entrusted to them might continue after their death, they left successors their own position of teaching authority, a design whose first instance the group watches tonight in the upper room.

THREAD WATCH

The Office thread takes its biggest step. *Episkopē* in Acts 1:20 is the thread's crown jewel: Scripture itself calls apostleship an office and shows it filled by succession. Let it be discovered, name it clearly, and then bank it: Session Ten spends this capital on the successors of Peter specifically, with Clement and Irenaeus as witnesses. Do not spend it all tonight.

The Keys thread turns publicly. Pentecost is the keys opening the kingdom to Israel; Cornelius, next session, is the same keys opening it to the Gentiles. Plant the frame tonight in one sentence and let Session Eight complete it.

The Strengthened Strengthened. The coward of the courtyard preaches to thousands in the same city seven weeks later. Luke 22:32 has visibly happened: turned again, he strengthens. If the group does not notice the transformation on their own, ask what changed between the fire and the balcony.

SESSION GOALS

1.

Watch Peter rise first in Acts 1 and characterize the manner: authority exercised through and with the community, not over it.

2.

Discover *episkopē* in Acts 1:20 live: apostleship as an office, and an office as the kind of thing succession fills, with the eyewitness distinction kept honest.

3.

Read the Pentecost scene structurally: Peter standing with the Eleven, the crowd's question to Peter and the rest, Peter's answer, and the keys opening Israel's door.

4.

Land in Acts 2:42 and let the group recognize their own parish in the Church's first description.

TIME NOTE

75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, compress Build 6, the sermon's content, into a leader summary and trim the Dig Deeper. Protect Build 3, the *episkopē* discovery, and Build 7, the question-and-answer structure of 2:37-38.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit: you turned a courtyard coward into the Church's first preacher in fifty days. Fall on us as you fell on the hundred and twenty. Give us Peter's boldness, the apostles' teaching, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers, and add to our number those who are being saved. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

1.

Think of a group you have seen in the awkward gap after losing its leader or founder: a team, a parish, a family business. What did those first leaderless days feel like, and what did the group most need?

2.

What is the boldest thing you have ever done in front of a crowd, and what made it possible for you that day?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

1.

Set the scene: Jesus has ascended, the Spirit has not yet come, and a hundred and twenty believers are waiting in an upper room. Read Acts 1:15-17. In this in-between moment, what happens, who makes it happen, and what is he doing with Scripture?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"Peter stood up among the brethren." Unbidden, uncommissioned by any vote, before Pentecost itself, Peter rises, addresses the community, and interprets the Psalms authoritatively to explain Judas and direct what must be done. After days of common prayer (1:14), the Church's first deliberative act, its first act of governance, begins with Peter standing up.

St. John Chrysostom noticed both halves of the scene: Peter acts with authority, as the one entrusted with the flock, the mouth of the rest; and he does it among the brethren, proposing, grounding it in Scripture, involving the body. First time out, the office already has its style: primacy that convenes rather than commands. Luke 22:32 is running; turned again, he is strengthening.

2.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read Acts 1:20, where Peter quotes Psalm 109:8 about Judas's vacancy. Someone read the psalm verse aloud too. What word does Scripture use for what Judas held, and what does Peter conclude must happen to it?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"His office let another take." The Greek word Luke chooses is *episkopē*: oversight, the noun whose cognate *episkopos* (overseer) gives English its bishop and episcopacy. Scripture's own vocabulary, in the Church's first meeting, calls apostleship an office of oversight.

And Peter's ruling follows from the noun: offices, when vacated, get filled. Nobody in that room treats the Twelve as twelve irreplaceable personalities whose deaths shrink the number forever; they are twelve seats in the government of the new Israel, and a seat can be filled. Let the weight land: succession is not a later Catholic invention reaching backward. It is the agenda item of the Church's first recorded business meeting.

3.

Read Acts 1:21-26. What are the qualifications, how is Matthias chosen, and what happens to him at the end? Then the honest question: when the apostle James is killed in Acts 12, no replacement is chosen. So what exactly did the Matthias episode establish, and what didn't it?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The candidate must be an eyewitness of the whole ministry, from John's baptism to the Ascension; two are put forward; the community prays; the lot falls to Matthias, "and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles." The Twelve stand complete for Pentecost, the foundation stones of the new Israel at full count.

Now the precision that protects the doctrine: the unique eyewitness role could not be transmitted forever, and the Church never pretended otherwise, which is why James's death brings no second Matthias. What Acts 1 establishes is the principle: apostolic ministry is an *office* capable of transmission, and the apostles acted on that principle for the rest of their lives, appointing presbyters in every church (Acts 14:23) and instructing men like Titus to appoint more (Titus 1:5). The eyewitnesses died; the *episkopē* did not. Hold this distinction; it will carry a whole evening soon.

4.

Pentecost. Read Acts 2:14. Before a word of the sermon, look at the picture Luke paints: who lifts up his voice, and what are the others doing? Why does the staging matter?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice." One voice, eleven standing with him: the picture is the doctrine. Not Peter alone, a lone oracle detached from the college; not twelve simultaneous voices, a committee without a spokesman. The steward speaks; the officers stand with him.

It is the same architecture the study has found everywhere: the mouth of the apostles at Caesarea Philippi, the singular prayer inside the plural sifting, and now the Church's first public word to the world, delivered by Peter, with the Eleven, to Israel. Luke stages his scenes on purpose.

5.

Skim the sermon's skeleton in 2:16-36: Joel 2, Psalm 16, Psalm 110. What is Peter actually doing with these texts, and why is that itself an exercise of the office?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

He is ruling on their meaning. Joel's outpouring is happening now; David's psalm about flesh not seeing corruption cannot mean David, whose tomb is with us, and so prophesies the Christ's resurrection; David's Lord at the right hand is Jesus, "whom you crucified," now made "both Lord and Christ." This is authoritative interpretation of the household's documents, the steward's core competence, exercised before thousands.

And notice the sermon's engine is the Resurrection preached by an eyewitness: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses" (2:32). St. Irenaeus treats this public preaching as the Church's measuring rod ever after: what was proclaimed openly at the beginning judges every later novelty.

6.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read Acts 2:37-38 and watch the addresses like a lawyer. When the crowd is cut to the heart, to whom exactly is their question directed? And who answers it, with what instructions?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"They said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" The crowd, taught by the scene itself, addresses the college with Peter named at its head. And the answer comes from Peter, singular, for all: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The Church's first pastoral directive: repentance, baptism, forgiveness, the Spirit, and it is Peter who issues it. Three thousand souls enter through that door. Now name what you are watching in Matthew 16 terms: the keys, turning in public, opening the kingdom to Israel. There is one more door those keys must open, the biggest one, and it is next week's whole evening.

DIG DEEPER · Fifty days from the courtyard

Measure the distance: seven weeks earlier, in this same city, this man crumbled before a servant girl beside a charcoal fire. Now he stands before thousands, publicly indicts the city that just executed his Lord, "this Jesus, whom you crucified" (2:36), and calls it to repentance, with the authorities who arranged the crucifixion within earshot. Nothing in Peter's natural equipment changed; what changed is Pentecost. The office's boldness is the Spirit's gift, not the man's temperament, which is precisely why it could survive the man, and every man after him.

7.

Read Acts 2:41-42 and slow down on the four things the newborn Church devoted itself to. Name them one by one, translate each into its present-day form, and then answer honestly: where have you seen this verse lately?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The apostles' teaching: doctrine, the deposit, today's Magisterium and catechesis. Fellowship, *koinonia*: the common life and communion of the Church. The breaking of the bread: Luke's name for the Eucharist. The prayers: the liturgy, fixed hours, the worship of the community. Doctrine, communion, Eucharist, liturgy, gathered around the apostles with Peter at their head.

You have seen this verse every Sunday of your life: it is a description of the Mass and the Catholic parish, still running on the original four cylinders. The Church did not evolve away from Acts 2:42 into Catholicism; Acts 2:42 simply kept meeting, for twenty centuries, and three thousand joined on day one.

SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

1.

Peter's boldness was Pentecost's gift, not his personality. Where in your life are you waiting to feel brave when what you actually need is to ask for the Holy Spirit?

2.

The crowd asked "what shall we do?" and got a concrete answer. If you asked that question tonight about your own next step with God, what concrete answer do you already suspect?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Read the whole Pentecost sermon, Acts 2:14-41, out loud once this week, standing up. Notice what it feels like in the body to proclaim rather than just read.

2.

Live Acts 2:42 deliberately for seven days: one act of study (the teaching), one act of fellowship, one Mass beyond Sunday if you can (the breaking of bread), and one fixed time of daily prayer.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, as you filled Peter at Pentecost, fill his successor with boldness and your Church with three thousand more."

Closing Prayer:

Holy Spirit, you found a hundred and twenty waiting and made them the Church. Devote us to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Cut us to the heart, tell us what to do, and add to your Church daily those who are being saved.

Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42, RSV2CE)

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Seven, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text one, Builds 1-3: the upper room and the vacancy

Psalm 109:8

Live discovery, Build 2: his office let another take

Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5

Build 3: the apostles transmit the office

Acts 2:14-42

Main text two, Builds 4-8: Pentecost

Joel 2:28-32; Psalm 16:8-11; Psalm 110:1

Build 5: the sermon's Old Testament backbone

Acts 2:37-38

Live discovery, Build 6: the question and the answer

Acts 12:1-2

Build 3: James's death, the honest distinction

CCC 731-732; 857; 861

Luke 22:31-32

Matthew 16:18-19

Catechism Connection

Build 1 and Thread Watch: the strengthened strengthener

Build 6 and Thread Watch: the keys frame for Pentecost