

Session 14. The Domestic Church and the Marriage Supper

Movement V. The Home and the Destination

Passages: Revelation 19:6-9; Revelation 21:1-4, 9-11; Matthew 22:23-32; Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 5:31-32

Part 1. Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. That the group discovers where they have already been hearing the words of Revelation 19:9, and can say what it means that marriage is a sign which will one day give way to the thing it signifies.

Catholic Touchstone. Marriage is a sign of the union of Christ and the Church, and signs give way to what they signify. The Christian home is where that sign is lived daily, which is why the Church calls the family a domestic church (CCC 1655-1658; Lumen Gentium 11).

What You Need to Know

This is the last night. Two things have to happen: the threads have to close, and the couples have to be sent. Everything else is optional.

Plan the ending in advance rather than trusting the evening to produce one. Know exactly what your final five minutes are.

THE BIBLE ENDS WITH A WEDDING

Session 1 said it in one line and then left it alone for thirteen weeks. Tonight it pays.

Scripture opens in a garden with a marriage and closes in a city with a marriage supper. In between, God calls himself a husband, Christ calls himself the bridegroom, and St. Paul says that the Genesis verse about one flesh was about Christ and the Church all along. The last book brings it home: the marriage of the Lamb has come, his Bride has made herself ready, and blessed are those invited to the supper (Revelation 19:6-9).

THEY HAVE ALREADY HEARD VERSE 9

This is the discovery of the night and it is worth protecting carefully.

In the Roman Rite, when the priest holds up the host and says behold the Lamb of God, he continues with an invitation adapted from Revelation 19:9 about those called to the supper of the Lamb. It is an adaptation rather than the verse verbatim. Your couples have said the response to that hundreds of times. Almost none of them know where it comes from.

Do not tell them. Let them find it, and then wait for the room to react.

THE BRIDE IS A CITY, AND SHE IS PEOPLE

In Revelation 21 the imagery moves. The Bride is the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, and one of the angels says explicitly, come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb, and then shows John a city (21:9-10).

The point is that the Bride is not an individual soul and not an abstraction. She is a people, assembled, with walls and gates and a common life. Marriage is a sign of something corporate, which is exactly why a Christian marriage is not a private arrangement.

THE HARD VERSE, HANDLED HONESTLY

In Matthew 22:30 Jesus says that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven. Do not hide this and do not rush past it. It means marriage is temporary. The sacramental bond is for this life.

Say what follows and say what does not follow. What follows is that marriage is a sign, and signs are not needed once you have the thing. What does not follow is that the love is discarded or that the spouses become strangers. The Church has not defined the details of how relationships persist in the resurrection, and you should not invent them. What she holds out is the hope that nothing good is lost in God.

For a room of engaged couples this lands as both sobering and freeing. Their marriage is not the ultimate thing. It is a sign of the ultimate thing, and that is a higher status than being ultimate would give it, because a sign of the marriage supper is exactly what a wedding ring is for.

THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

The Second Vatican Council called the family a domestic church, and the Catechism takes up the phrase directly (Lumen Gentium 11; CCC 1655-1658, 2204-2205). The idea is older than the phrase: the New Testament repeatedly describes churches meeting in houses.

Give the couples something concrete, because the phrase evaporates without it.

- **Prayer with a shape.** A grace before meals, a decade in the car, night prayer together. Ordinary and repeatable beats ambitious and abandoned.
- **Sunday as an actual boundary.** Decide now what Sunday will look like, before jobs and children decide it for you.
- **Hospitality.** The first Christians broke bread in their homes (Acts 2:46), and Scripture names churches that met in houses (Romans 16:5). A married couple who feed people are doing something ecclesial, not merely social.
- **Forgiveness as a practice.** Session 13 gave the distinctions. A domestic church is a place where apologies are ordinary rather than dramatic.
- **The faith taught by parents.** The Catechism calls parents the first heralds of the faith for their children (CCC 1656) and says they bear the first responsibility for their education (CCC 2223). Not the parish. Them.

THE GOOD WINE KEPT UNTIL NOW

Close the Cana thread. The steward said the bridegroom had kept the good wine until now, which reverses how anyone runs a party. Session 13 was the empty jars. Tonight is the answer: with God the best is later, and Scripture's final vision includes a wedding feast.

Say it to a room of people planning receptions: your wedding is a rehearsal for a bigger one.

ENDING THE STUDY

Do the commissioning as written in the discussion guide, and do not extend it. Say the names of every couple aloud, with their wedding dates if you have them. Pray over them. Then stop.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Genesis 2:24. Where it started. Sixth and final appearance in this study.

- Isaiah 25:6 and Isaiah 62:5. The messianic feast, and God rejoicing over his people as a bridegroom over a bride.
- Hosea 2:19-20. The betrothal. Session 3.
- John 2:1-11. The wedding where the good wine came last. Session 5.
- Ephesians 5:31-32. The great mystery. Session 6.
- Revelation 19:6-9 and 21:1-4, 9-11. Where it arrives.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: AN EARLY CHRISTIAN DESCRIPTION OF A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Writing to his wife around the turn of the third century, Tertullian described the beauty of a marriage between two Christians: two who share one hope, one discipline, and one service, who pray together and fast together, who instruct and encourage one another, and who are found together in the church and at the table.

Note for your couples: Tertullian later left the communion of the Church, and he is quoted here as an early witness rather than as a saint. What he describes is what tonight is about, and Christians were doing it by the early third century.

Summary of To His Wife, Book II, chapter 8. Note for the leader: an early Christian author, not a canonized saint.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON THE FAMILY AS A CHURCH

The Council taught that the family is, in a sense, a domestic church, in which parents by word and example are the first heralds of the faith to their children.

The word to notice is heralds. Not supporters of the parish's efforts. First heralds. The Catechism carries the same language at CCC 1656 and says at CCC 2223 that parents bear the first responsibility for their children's education.

Lumen Gentium 11, and CCC 1655-1658. Note for the leader: a council document, not the voice of a canonized saint.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON MAKING A HOME INTO A CHURCH

Preaching to ordinary married Christians, St. John Chrysostom urged husbands and wives to make the household itself into a church, and to take up Scripture together at home rather than leaving it to the assembly.

He is a good final voice because he asks for nothing exotic. Read together, pray together, eat together, and let the house be consistent with the faith.

Summary of a theme in his preaching to married Christians, associated especially with Homily 20 on Ephesians. Note for the leader: verify the locus before quoting him, and do not attribute wording to him.

Catechism Connection

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1655-1658 treats the family as the domestic church, describes the home as the first school of Christian life, and includes a warm note about those who live alone.

CCC 2204-2206 develops the family as a communion of persons and a sign of the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

CCC 1656 and 2223 state that parents are the first and principal educators of their children in the faith.

CCC 1642 returns one last time: the grace of the sacrament sustains the spouses on the way to eternal life.

CCC 1618-1620 is worth naming tonight, since consecrated celibacy and marriage illuminate each other, and both point at the same wedding feast.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

All three threads close tonight, in this order.

One Flesh. Genesis 2:24 has appeared in Sessions 1, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12. Tonight it arrives at the union it was always pointing at.

The Bridegroom. Planted in Session 3 with the prophets, developed at Cana, named outright in Ephesians 5, and resolved tonight at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

They Have No Wine. Planted in Session 5, deepened in Sessions 10 and 11, at its lowest in Session 13, and answered tonight: the good wine was kept until now.

Do not rush the discovery moment. The recognition that they have been hearing Revelation 19:9 at every Mass since childhood is the single best moment available in this study. Let the silence after it be long.

IF A COUPLE IS IN AN IRREGULAR SITUATION (LEADER ONLY)

A couple whose wedding is far off, or whose plans have changed. Some couples finish a study like this and quietly realize they are not ready, or a wedding gets postponed. Make sure the commissioning does not exclude them: bless the couples, not the calendar.

A couple who have grown distant during the study. Occasionally fourteen weeks of honesty reveals something. Do not pretend not to notice, and do not confront them in front of the room. Follow up privately within the week and involve the priest.

A participant who is not baptized, or not Catholic. They have sat through fourteen weeks of Catholic teaching. Thank them by name tonight, sincerely, and mean it. If any of them ask what comes next, connect them with the priest rather than pressing.

Everyone else. Tell them, plainly, that the study ending is not the end of their preparation, and that you would like to hear how the weddings go. Then actually follow up. A leader who writes to each couple in the week of their wedding is doing more good than another session would have done.

Session Goals

1. The group discovers on its own where the words of Revelation 19:9 are heard at every Mass.
2. Every participant can say why the Bride in Revelation is a city and what that implies about their marriage not being private.
3. The group handles Matthew 22:30 honestly and can state what follows from it and what does not.
4. Every couple leaves with one concrete practice for the domestic church that they have named out loud.
5. All three threads are closed.
6. Every couple is prayed over by name before they leave.

Time Note and Pre-Chosen Cuts

Ninety-minute plan. Opening prayer, 4 minutes. Win questions, 10. Live discovery moment, 15. Build questions 1 through 4, 22. The steelman, 14. Domestic church material and Build questions 5 through 6, 15. Commissioning and closing prayer, 10.

Seventy-five minute plan. Cut Build question 5 and the Dig Deeper box, and shorten the Win section to one question. Never cut the discovery moment and never cut the commissioning.

Guard the last ten minutes absolutely. If you have to abandon a question mid answer to protect the commissioning, do it.

Part 2. Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

OPENING PRAYER

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord God, fourteen weeks ago we opened to the first page of the Bible and found a wedding. Tonight we come to the last page and find another one. Show us tonight what all of this has been for. Send us out to our own weddings knowing what we are doing, and keep us until the day you gather us at yours. Amen.

Win. Getting Started

Open questions. No wrong answers, no answer box. Let every couple speak once before anyone speaks twice.

- A.** What is the single thing from these fourteen weeks that you did not expect and will not forget?
- B.** Describe the home you want in ten years. Not the house. The home.

Build. Into the Text

Read Revelation 19:6-9 aloud, then Revelation 21:1-4 and 21:9-11. Do not comment yet.

LIVE DISCOVERY MOMENT

Do this before anything else, and do not hint.

The instruction: read Revelation 19:9 again, slowly. Somebody in this room has heard those words hundreds of times. Where?

Give them a full two minutes of silence before anyone speaks. Do not rescue it. If nobody has it after two minutes, ask what the priest says while holding up the host.

What they will find: in the Roman Rite, after behold the Lamb of God, the priest continues with an invitation adapted from this verse about those called to the supper of the Lamb. Point out that it is an adaptation, not the verse word for word.

Then let the room sit with it. Most of them have said the response since childhood without knowing they were being invited to a wedding.

Second instruction, eight minutes: go back through the whole study and collect every place you can remember where God or Christ was called a bridegroom, or the people were called a bride. Prophets, Gospels, Paul, Revelation.

Then ask: what has this study actually been about? Take the answers. Somebody will say it out loud, and it should be them and not you.

- 1.** In Revelation 21:9 an angel offers to show John the Bride, the wife of the Lamb, and then shows him a city. What is that telling you?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

That the Bride is a people, not an individual soul and not an idea. She has walls, gates, and a common life.

Which means marriage is a sign of something corporate. That is why the Church has insisted throughout this

study that a wedding is an ecclesial act, ordinarily public, celebrated in canonical form before the Church's witness rather than privately arranged.

Ask the room what it means for their marriage that the thing it signifies is a city full of people.

2. In Matthew 22:30, Jesus says that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage. What does that do to everything we have said for fourteen weeks?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

It tells us marriage is temporary. The bond is for this life. Do not soften this, and do not let anyone in the room pretend he did not say it.

What follows: marriage is a sign, and a sign is not needed once you have the thing it points to. That is not a demotion. A wedding ring is not diminished by the marriage it signifies.

What does not follow: that the love is discarded, that spouses become strangers, or that any of it was wasted. The Church has not defined how relationships persist in the resurrection, so do not invent an answer. What she holds out is the hope that nothing good is lost in God.

For a room of engaged couples this is freeing. Their marriage is not the ultimate thing, which means it does not have to bear a weight it was never built to carry. No spouse can be someone's final happiness, and expecting it is how marriages break.

BUILD THEN PRESS: IF IT ENDS AT DEATH, IT WAS NEVER ULTIMATE, AND SAYING SO IS CRUEL

Build it at full strength.

Build it with real sympathy. Somebody in your room has a widowed grandmother.

You have spent fourteen weeks telling us that marriage is a sacrament, indissoluble, a sign of Christ and the Church, worth ordering our entire lives around. And now you say it ends at death and there is no marriage in the resurrection. Then the whole edifice is provisional. Worse, it is a cruel thing to say to a woman who has been married for fifty years and buried her husband. Telling her that the central relationship of her life was temporary scaffolding, and that in heaven he will be no more to her than anyone else, is not consolation. It sounds like the Church taking back with one hand what she gave with the other.

Then press.

Concede that the verse says what it says, and that a careless presentation of it has genuinely wounded widows. Do not blunt the text and do not blunt the pain.

Press first on what temporary means here. A scaffold is discarded because it was never the point. A sign is fulfilled because the thing it pointed to has arrived. The Church's claim is the second, not the first. Marriage ends the way an engagement ends at a wedding: not by being cancelled.

Press second on what the Church actually says and does not say. She teaches that the sacramental bond is for this life. She has not taught that the persons forget each other, that the love is annulled, or that the years meant nothing. Anyone who says those things has gone past the doctrine, and you should say so plainly rather than defending them.

Press third on the pastoral gain, which is real. If a marriage is not ultimate, then no spouse has to be somebody's final happiness. That is a mercy for both of them. Every marriage that has tried to bear that weight has cracked under it.

Do not overclaim. Do not promise the widow that she will be married to her husband in heaven in the way she

was here, because the Church has not said that. Say that nothing good is lost in God, that what she is longing for is what marriage was pointing at all along, and that she will not be given less than she had.

THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

3. The Council calls the family a domestic church. What would have to be true of a home for that phrase to mean anything?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Push for specifics rather than sentiment. Prayer with an actual shape. Sunday treated as a real boundary. Hospitality, since the first Christians broke bread in their homes and Scripture names churches meeting in houses (Acts 2:46; Romans 16:5). Forgiveness practiced ordinarily rather than dramatically. And the faith taught by the parents themselves, since the Catechism calls them the first heralds of the faith for their children (CCC 1656) and says they bear the first responsibility for their education (CCC 2223).

Ask each couple to name one, out loud, that they will actually start. One. Then hold them to it in the Live It section.

Warn them: ordinary and repeatable beats ambitious and abandoned. A decade in the car every day for thirty years will form a family. A plan for an hour of family adoration nightly will last eleven days.

DIG DEEPER: MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY, POINTING THE SAME DIRECTION

Session 4 ended with Jesus placing the vocation of those who renounce marriage for the kingdom right beside the teaching on permanence. Tonight explains why they belong together.

Marriage is a sign of the union of Christ and the Church. Consecrated celibacy is a life lived as though that union has already arrived. One points forward and the other lives ahead of time, and both are aimed at the same wedding feast (CCC 1618-1620).

Practical version for your couples: the priest who assists at their marriage is not a spectator at somebody else's vocation. He is the other half of the same sign. And remember from Session 7 that in the Latin Church the spouses themselves are the ministers.

4. Go back to Cana one last time. The steward said the good wine had been kept until now. What does that mean for a couple standing three months out from their wedding?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

That with God the best is later. Every human party front loads the good wine because people stop noticing. God runs it the other way.

Session 13 was the empty jars, and it is honest about what marriages actually meet. Tonight is the rest of the sentence: Scripture's final vision includes a wedding feast, and the wine at that one has been aging since the beginning.

Say it plainly to a room full of people planning receptions: your wedding is a rehearsal for a bigger one.

COUPLE CONVERSATION (JUST THE TWO OF YOU, NOT THE ROOM)

The last one. Just the two of you.

Name the one practice we are actually starting, this week, that will make our home a domestic church. One, not five. Say when and where it happens.

Then say to each other, out loud, the thing you most want to be true of your marriage in fifty years.

COMMISSIONING

Guard ten minutes for this and follow it exactly.

One. Ask each couple to stand, one at a time. Say their names aloud, and their wedding date if you have it.

Two. Ask the rest of the room to extend a hand toward them while you pray a short prayer over them by name. Keep it to two or three sentences per couple.

Three. When every couple has been prayed for, pray the closing prayer below with the whole room standing.

Four. Tell them the two things they should take with them: the sealed sheet from Session 8, which goes somewhere they will find it on their first anniversary, and the Before the Altar list, which is now a checklist rather than a devotion.

Then stop. Do not add a summary of the fourteen weeks. Let the blessing be the last thing.

Send. Carrying It Out

Open questions again. No answer boxes.

- Y.** On your wedding day, when you hear the priest say behold the Lamb of God, what will you now hear that you would not have heard fourteen weeks ago?
- Z.** Who is the first person you are going to tell about the wedding you just found at the end of the Bible?

Live It This Week

- **Start the one practice this week.** The single thing you named in the Couple Conversation. This week, not after the wedding.
- **Put the sealed sheet somewhere you will find it on your first anniversary.** Both halves. Do not read it again before then.
- **Work the Before the Altar list as a checklist.** Fourteen weeks of items are now one page of things to finish before the day.
- **Invite somebody to dinner.** The first Christians broke bread in their homes, and some churches met in houses. Start before the wedding rather than after, because the habit is easier to begin than to add.
- **Go to confession together before the wedding,** and read the nuptial blessing aloud once more the week of.

Closing Prayer

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, you began the Scriptures with a wedding and you will end all things with one. You have brought these couples through fourteen weeks and you know exactly what each of them is carrying tonight.

Bring them to their wedding day free, whole, and unafraid. Give them homes where you are prayed to, where forgiveness is ordinary, and where the door is open. When their wine runs out, let them notice, and say so, and do whatever you tell them. And keep them, through every year you give them, until you seat them at the supper of the Lamb.

Our Lady, Queen of Families, pray for us. St. Joseph, pray for us. Sts. Louis and Zelie Martin, pray for us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Revelation 19:9

Part 3. Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

- Revelation 19:6-9. The marriage of the Lamb.
- Revelation 21:1-4 and 21:9-11. The Bride who is a city.
- Matthew 22:23-32, especially verse 30. Handled honestly.
- Genesis 2:24. Sixth and final appearance.
- Ephesians 5:31-32. Read alongside Revelation 19.
- John 2:9-10. The good wine kept until now.
- Acts 2:42-47, especially verse 46, on breaking bread in their homes; and Romans 16:5 for a church meeting in a house.
- Lumen Gentium 11. The family as domestic church.

Catechism Paragraphs Used

CCC 1618-1620, 1642, 1655-1658, 2204-2206, 2223.

Before Next Session

Nothing further is assigned. Go to your weddings.