

Session 9 Take-Home: The Way Back

What We Found

On Easter evening, wounds still visible, among the risen Christ's first acts was a standing ministry of forgiveness: he **breathed** on the apostles, deliberately echoing the breath that made Adam live (Gen 2:7), and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:22-23). The logic hides in plain sight: forgiving or retaining is a judgment, and no one judges a case he has not heard. Confession is not an add-on to John 20; it is the verse's natural operating logic, confirmed by the Church that received it. The foreshadowing is a thousand years older: Nathan sent by God, David's one unexcused sentence, absolution through the same human channel: "The LORD also has put away your sin" (2 Sam 12:13); and David's own report: "When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away... I acknowledged my sin to you... then you forgave" (Ps 32:3-5).

The tale of two apostles: both chosen, both warned at the same table, both fell within hours, and both felt it after; Judas even confessed aloud and returned the silver. The divide was **direction and company**: Judas took his remorse to the chief priests ("What is that to us?") and went out alone, down what the Church has always read as despair's road; Peter wept bitterly but stayed with the brethren, and Jesus, who had prayed for him in advance ("when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren," Lk 22:32), rebuilt the scene: a **charcoal fire** (Jn 21:9; the only other one in John is the fire of the denial, 18:18), three questions traditionally heard as answering three denials, each answered aloud, each met with a commission. Audible, embodied restoration, lived out by the Lord himself: the pastoral logic of confession.

"Only God forgives sins" is the Church's own first principle (CCC 1441); the question is whether the God who alone forgives has chosen instruments, and he answered it: authority "on earth" to forgive, given "to men" (Mk 2:10; Mt 9:8), delegated on Easter evening (Jn 20:23), carried as "the ministry of reconciliation" by ambassadors (2 Cor 5:18-20). The whole power of the sacrament is restoring us to God's grace and friendship; for the devout it brings peace and serenity of conscience with deep spiritual consolation (CCC 1468, in substance). If it has been years: the confession times in the bulletin are printed for you. Tell the priest it has been a long time; helping you is his happiest work. And if you forget every formula, sorrow sincerely meant can borrow the publican's prayer: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Lk 18:13). Prayed from the heart, it went home justified.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. John Chrysostom

On the Priesthood, Book 3 (4th century)

Men who dwell on earth, St. John Chrysostom marvels in substance, have been entrusted with the administration of things in heaven, and given an authority God gave neither to angels nor archangels: what priests do below, God ratifies above. If John 20:23 means what it says, the confessional is the most understated room on earth.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. John Vianney

The witness of Ars (19th century)

The facts of his life are the teaching: assigned to a village of a few hundred souls, St. John Vianney ended his life hearing confessions for a dozen and more hours a day, as pilgrims in the tens of thousands came to Ars each year for absolution. A man does not spend decades of his whole strength on a task he believes futile, and penitents do not cross France for a burden. Mercy at the door was the report of his entire ministry.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Faustina Kowalska

Diary (1930s)

St. Faustina recorded the words she understood from the Lord about confession: that the greatest miracles take place there, and that it suffices to come with faith to the feet of his representative and reveal one's misery. The tribunal of mercy is a real tribunal, and its verdict is mercy for every repentant soul that comes rightly disposed.

Live It This Week

Go. If you are conscious of grave sin, or it has simply been too long: find this week's confession times and go. Take this page with you if it helps.

Pray Psalm 32. Once, slowly, and notice verse 1 is a beatitude: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." David is describing the parking lot afterward.

Leave a light on. Reach out to one person who has been away, without agenda: a meal, a text, a seat saved. Peter stayed findable because the brethren kept him close.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1:9 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: read Psalm 121, the traveler's psalm: eight verses about the Keeper who does not sleep.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1441, 1446, 1461, 1468