In Their Midst

Exodus: From Slavery to Covenant Presence

Session 11. Holy to the Lord

Reading: Exodus 28:1-31:18

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers how priestly vestments, consecration, incense, craftsmanship, and Sabbath order Israel's worship around God's holiness.

Catholic Touchstone

This session touches the ordained priesthood, the common priesthood of the baptized, reverence in worship, sacred art, and the Sabbath fulfilled in the Lord's Day.

Israel has been redeemed and brought into covenant, but nearness to the holy God cannot be treated casually. These chapters appoint priests, clothe them for service, consecrate them through sacrifice and washing, regulate incense and sacred objects, fill artisans with the Spirit, and close with the Sabbath sign. Help the group notice that holiness is God's gift before it becomes Israel's responsibility. The Catholic fulfillment is centered on Christ, the unique High Priest, whose priesthood is shared differently by the whole baptized people and by ordained ministers.

What You Need to Know

Read the details as ordered worship

The density of these chapters can overwhelm a group. Do not attempt to explain every jewel, measurement, ingredient, or ritual action. Keep asking what each element does within the text. The repeated answers include glory and beauty, remembrance before the Lord, consecration, atonement, guarded access, and knowledge that the Lord sanctifies his people.

The priest bears Israel before God

Aaron's garments are not merely decorative. The stones on his shoulders and the names over his heart signify that he carries the tribes into his priestly service. The gold plate names him as holy to the Lord, while the bells, linen garments, and careful instructions show that approach to the sanctuary is a matter of obedient service rather than personal self-expression.

Consecration is received

Aaron and his sons do not appoint or consecrate themselves. God chooses them, Moses washes and clothes them, sacrifices are offered, blood and oil are applied, and the ordination rite continues for seven days. Their ministry is a gift and responsibility within the covenant. Their own need for sacrifice also shows that they are not the final answer to sin.

Incense, washing, anointing, and boundaries

Exodus 30 joins beauty with boundaries. Incense accompanies regular service before the Lord, priests wash before approaching the altar or tent, and the sacred oil and incense are not reduced to ordinary personal use. Holiness involves distinction without implying that material creation is evil.

The Spirit and human craftsmanship

Bezalel is the first person whom Scripture explicitly says God filled with his Spirit for craftsmanship. Genesis 41:38 had already described Joseph as a man in whom the Spirit of God dwells. The text joins divine gift, learned skill, artistic intelligence, and obedient work. Sacred craftsmanship is neither autonomous self-display nor mechanical execution. Gifted people freely exercise real skill in service of what God has commanded.

Why the Sabbath comes last

The sanctuary instructions conclude with the Sabbath rather than allowing construction of sacred space to consume every day. Even holy work remains under God's command. Israel stops because it belongs to the Lord and must receive holiness from him. For Christians, Sunday is the Lord's Day, the weekly celebration of Christ's Resurrection and the fulfillment of the Sabbath's covenantal purpose.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Aaron's consecration and Christ's priesthood

Leviticus 8 narrates the performance of the ordination commanded in Exodus 29. Aaron's priesthood is real within the old covenant, but its repeated sacrifices and succession of mortal priests point beyond themselves. Hebrews presents Jesus as the sinless and enduring High Priest who enters the true sanctuary and offers himself once for all.

Oil descending upon the priest

Psalm 133 recalls the precious oil running down Aaron's head and garments while celebrating the blessing of united covenant life. The image joins consecration from above with life shared among God's people. Christians should not force every feature into a separate prediction, but the anointed priesthood prepares biblical language for Christ, the Anointed One.

A priestly people with ordered ministry

First Peter applies priestly language to the baptized people, who offer spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ. This fulfills Israel's calling as a kingdom of priests, discovered in Session 8. The New Testament also presents appointed ministers through whom Christ serves his people. Catholic doctrine therefore neither reserves all priestly language to clergy nor collapses ordained ministry into the common priesthood.

Incense and heavenly worship

Revelation 8:3-4 associates incense with the prayers of the saints before God's throne. Exodus establishes the sanctuary pattern, while Revelation shows earthly worship opening toward heavenly worship. Incense is not magic. It is a material sign placed within prayer directed to God.

Sabbath and the Lord's Day

The Sabbath remembers creation, covenant belonging, and liberation. Jesus declares himself Lord of the Sabbath and teaches that the Sabbath was made for man. The Church celebrates Sunday because Christ rose on the first day, without discarding the Sabbath's enduring call to worship, rest, freedom, and holiness.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Gregory the Great, c. 540-604

St. Gregory teaches that a spiritual shepherd should be exemplary in conduct, pure in thought, discerning in silence, helpful in speech, compassionate toward others, and rooted in contemplation. This is a summary of the chapter's portrait of pastoral holiness.

Pastoral Rule II.1-5.

How this is cited. This is a close summary of the portrait of the pastor drawn across Pastoral Rule II.1-5, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Sacred office is not permission to seek status. It calls the minister to a life shaped by the holiness he serves.

St. Leo the Great, c. 400-461

Summary of his teaching: St. Leo teaches that all who are reborn in Christ and signed with the cross share a royal and priestly dignity through the Holy Spirit.

Sermon 4.1.

How this is cited. Summary of the sermon's teaching on the royal and priestly dignity of all the baptized, not a quotation. St. Leo does not draw the common-and-ministerial distinction in this passage; that distinction is carried by this session's Catechism references instead.

For the group. Take the common priesthood of the baptized on its own terms here. The distinction from ordained ministry is made by the Catechism entries below, not by St. Leo in this sermon.

St. John Paul II, 1920-2005

St. John Paul II explains that the Sabbath recalls not only God's work of creation but also his saving liberation of Israel. Rest becomes remembrance, praise, thanksgiving, and covenant fidelity.

Dies Domini 16.

How this is cited. This is a faithful summary of Dies Domini 16 and its treatment of the Sabbath in relation to creation and the Exodus.

For the group. A holy day is more than recovery from work. It makes room to remember whose saving work gives us freedom.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 1539, 1541. God set apart the tribe of Levi for liturgical service, and the liturgy sees in Aaron's priesthood a prefiguring of ordained ministry.

CCC 1546. Christ has made the Church a kingdom of priests, so the baptized share in his priestly mission through lives of faith, worship, and charity.

CCC 1547. The ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood are ordered to one another, although they differ essentially and not merely by degree.

CCC 1562-1563. Priests are co-workers of the bishops, sent to preach the Gospel, shepherd the faithful, and celebrate divine worship.

CCC 2170-2171. The Sabbath recalls Israel's liberation from slavery and stands as a sign of the covenant between God and his people.

CCC 2175. Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish Sabbath and announces humanity's eternal rest in God.

CCC 2502. Sacred art is true and beautiful when it evokes and glorifies the mystery of God revealed in Christ and leads people toward adoration and love.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

God dwelling among his people (develop). Emphasize Exodus 29:45-46. The priesthood and daily offerings serve the larger purpose of God's dwelling among the people he brought out of Egypt.

Mediators of deliverance (develop). Aaron and his sons are chosen to bear Israel before God, but their own need for consecration and sacrifice points toward a greater, sinless High Priest.

Where is the lamb? (develop). Notice the daily lambs in Exodus 29:38-46. The Passover lamb now belongs to a larger sacrificial pattern that will be fulfilled in Christ.

Why God brings Israel out (develop). Return briefly to the opened guess from Session 8. Exodus 29:46 again says that God brought Israel out so that he might dwell among them.

Fear of God versus fear of rulers (develop). Holy fear now appears as reverent obedience in worship. Priests may not substitute personal preference for God's command.

Deliverance through water (develop). The bronze basin introduces washing before sanctuary service. Treat this as part of Scripture's developing pattern of cleansing through water, without claiming that every ritual washing is a direct prophecy of Baptism.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

Detailed rituals, vestments, and sacred objects look like human attempts to impress or control God.

In the text, Israel does not invent these practices to manipulate God. God has already rescued Israel freely and now orders its response. The rituals teach the people that God is holy, that approach is received rather than seized, and that material creation can be dedicated to truthful worship.

If Christ is the one High Priest and all Christians are priests, an ordained Catholic priesthood must be an unbiblical rival to both truths.

Catholic teaching agrees that Christ alone possesses the saving priesthood in its fullness and that all the baptized share in it. Ordained ministers do not add another sacrifice or compete with Christ. By sacramental participation, they serve the one priesthood and one sacrifice of Christ for the building up of the baptized priestly people.

Session Goals

1. Identify the purposes the text gives for vestments, consecration, sacrifice, incense, washing, craftsmanship, and Sabbath.
2. Trace how priests bear the names and needs of Israel before the Lord.
3. Recognize that holiness and ministerial service are received from God rather than self-appointed.
4. Discover how Aaron's limited priesthood points toward Christ's unique and enduring priesthood.
5. Distinguish Christ's unique priesthood, the common priesthood of the baptized, and ordained ministerial priesthood.
6. Choose one concrete way to honor God's holiness through worship, work, or Sunday observance.

Time Note

Planned for 75-90 Minutes

Allow 8 minutes for prayer and Win, 18 to 22 minutes for the assigned reading and initial observations, 38 to 45 minutes for Build, 10 minutes for Send and Live It, and 5 minutes for the closing prayer and memory verse.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper portion of question 5 first.
2. Shorten the team reports in question 1 to one observation per team.
3. Ask question 6 without its depth prompts.
4. Combine questions 7 and 11 by asking how the Sabbath governs all the preceding work.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

> **Pray together**
>
> Holy God, you brought Israel out of slavery and taught your people how to live in your presence. Send your Holy Spirit upon us as we read. Give us attentive minds, reverent hearts, and the freedom to respond faithfully to what you show us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. What clothing, object, place, or routine helps you shift from ordinary activity into focused attention?

W2. When have you seen someone's skill or craft become a genuine gift to a community?

Receive ordinary answers. The purpose is to begin with experiences of preparation and gifted work, not to test anyone's knowledge of liturgy.

Read

> **Read aloud**
>
> Divide the room into five teams. Assign Exodus 28, Exodus 29, Exodus 30:1-21, Exodus 30:22-38, and Exodus 31:1-18. Ask each team to read its section and mark repeated words, stated purposes, actions God commands, and anything connected to holiness. Each team then gives a brief report. If the group is small, assign one section to each person or pair.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

Ordered for Holiness

1. What repeated words, purposes, or patterns did your team notice? Which detail seemed most important within your section?

> **ANSWER** *(share after the discussion)*
>
> The chapters repeatedly connect worship with holiness, consecration, remembrance, atonement, obedience, regular service, and God's presence. Different sections contribute distinct elements, but none stands alone. Together they order Israel's life before the holy God.

2. Read Exodus 28:2, 9-12, 15-21, 29-30, and 36-38 closely. What are Aaron's garments meant to communicate or accomplish?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. List what appears on Aaron's shoulders, chest, and forehead.

Ground. Ask what each location suggests about his responsibility for Israel.

Depth. Explore why beauty and burden are placed on the same person.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The garments are made for glory and beauty, but their purpose is more than visual splendor. Aaron bears the names of Israel on his shoulders and over his heart as a continual remembrance before the Lord. The gold plate declares him holy to the Lord, and his service includes bearing responsibility for the people's holy offerings.

Dig Deeper

Ask what changes when the group sees the garments as signs of responsibility rather than personal prestige.

3. According to Exodus 28:1 and 29:1-9, who initiates Aaron's priesthood? What does Aaron do for himself, and what must he receive from others?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God chooses Aaron and his sons, and God gives the instructions. Moses brings, washes, clothes, anoints, and ordains them according to God's command. Aaron does not design his office or consecrate himself. His ministry is received as a gift and charge within the covenant.

4. Trace the sequence in Exodus 29:10-37. What do the washing, clothing, sacrifices, blood, oil, food, and seven days show about entering priestly service?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Consecration involves the whole person and is not instantaneous self-appointment. Cleansing, sacrifice, anointing, sacred food, and sustained obedience mark a transfer into holy service. The sacrifices also show that Aaron and his sons are sinners who need atonement. Their priesthood is real, but it is not final or self-sufficient.

Dig Deeper

Leviticus 8 narrates the carrying out of this command. If helpful, have the leader summarize that connection without reading the entire chapter.

5. Compare the incense altar, bronze basin, anointing oil, and sacred incense in Exodus 30. What boundaries does God establish, and what might those boundaries teach Israel?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Incense is offered regularly before the Lord, priests wash before sanctuary service, and the oil and incense are reserved for sacred use. These boundaries teach that God is not approached casually or manipulated for private purposes. Material things are good, but some are set apart for worship by God's command.

Dig Deeper

Revelation later associates incense with the prayers of the saints before God's throne. The sign serves prayer, but it is never a substitute for prayer.

Spirit-Given Work

6. What does Exodus 31:1-11 say God gives Bezalel, Oholiab, and the other craftsmen? How does the text hold together divine gift, human ability, and obedience?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Name the abilities and materials mentioned.

Ground. Ask who gives the skill and who performs the work.

Depth. Discuss the difference between using a gift faithfully and using it mainly for self-display.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God calls the craftsmen and gives wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill. Their artistry is genuinely human work, yet it is empowered by God's Spirit and directed toward God's command. Inspiration does not erase discipline or skill, and creativity does not free them to disregard the purpose of the sanctuary.

7. After so many commands to build and serve, why might Exodus 31:12-17 end the sanctuary instructions with the Sabbath? What does God say the Sabbath reveals?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Even sacred work must stop at God's command. The Sabbath is a covenant sign through which Israel knows that the Lord sanctifies the people. Israel's holiness does not arise from endless production, even production for the sanctuary. It is received from the God to whom Israel belongs.

Dig Deeper

The Sabbath also protects redeemed people from returning to a slave-like pattern in which worth is measured only by production.

Live Discovery: One High Priest and a Priestly People

Live discovery

Send half the group to Hebrews 7:23-28 and the other half to 1 Peter 2:4-10. Ask them to identify every priestly person, action, or identity in their passage, then report their findings without trying to harmonize the passages yet.

Let them find it. Hebrews 7:23-28; 1 Peter 2:4-10

8. What do these New Testament writers retain from Exodus, and what do they say has changed or reached fulfillment?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Hebrews presents Jesus as the holy and enduring High Priest who offers himself once for all and does not need sacrifice for his own sins. First Peter presents the baptized community as a holy and royal priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ. Christ's unique priesthood does not eliminate a priestly people. It creates one.

Build

9. Put Exodus 28-29 beside what you just found. What distinctions can you make among Aaron's priesthood, Christ's priesthood, and the priestly identity of the baptized?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Aaron receives a limited covenant ministry, must offer sacrifice for sin, and is succeeded by other mortal priests. Christ is the sinless, enduring High Priest whose self-offering is once for all. The baptized share in Christ's priestly life by offering themselves, their praise, their works, and their witness through him. These are related realities, but they are not interchangeable.

Press

10. How would you answer this objection while preserving every truth the objection rightly protects?

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Hebrews says that Jesus is the one enduring High Priest and that his sacrifice was offered once for all. First Peter says that the whole Christian people are a royal priesthood. Therefore, calling an ordained Christian minister a priest either competes with Christ's unique priesthood or takes away the priestly dignity of every baptized believer. The New Testament needs pastors and elders, but not a separate sacrificial priesthood.

Answering from the text. Catholic doctrine begins by affirming the objection's two central biblical truths. Christ alone is the source and fullness of the New Covenant priesthood, and all the baptized truly share in his priestly mission. The ordained priest does not offer a new sacrifice alongside Calvary or possess an independent priesthood. Through sacramental ordination, he serves in the person of Christ the Head so that Christ's one saving work may be proclaimed and sacramentally ministered to the Church. The ministerial priesthood is ordered to the flourishing of the baptized priestly people. The two forms of participation differ essentially, but neither exists apart from Christ.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Catholic answer does not choose between Christ's unique priesthood and the priesthood of all believers. It receives both. Ordained ministry is a distinct participation in Christ's one priesthood, not a rival source of sacrifice or grace. Its purpose is to serve Christ's body through the word, pastoral care, and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, which makes present rather than repeats Christ's one sacrifice.

Dig Deeper

If someone asks where appointed New Testament ministry appears, note the appointment of presbyters in Acts 14:23, the gift associated with the laying on of hands in 1 Timothy 4:14, and Paul's description of his ministry in priestly terms in Romans 15:15-16.

The Purpose

11. Read Exodus 29:38-46. What is the daily worship finally ordered toward, and how does this connect with the purpose of the Exodus discovered in Session 8?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Find the stated purpose of the daily offerings.

Ground. Ask what Exodus 29:45-46 says the whole system of worship is finally for.

Depth. Consider how ordered worship serves God's dwelling among his people rather than substituting for it.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The daily lambs, offerings, and meeting at the sanctuary are ordered toward God's meeting with Israel, sanctifying the tent and priests, and dwelling among the people. God identifies himself as the Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt so that he might dwell among them. Exodus is moving from liberation through covenant toward communion with God.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Which part of your worship, work, or weekly rhythm most needs to be reordered around God's holiness?

S2. Where might God be asking you to receive a responsibility rather than use a gift mainly for recognition?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Prepare for Sunday Mass before arriving. Read the Sunday Gospel, choose clothing before the last minute, silence your phone, and arrive at least ten minutes early for prayer.

2. Keep a concrete period of Sunday rest. Set aside at least one hour from unnecessary work, shopping, or digital noise, and use it for worship, a shared meal, mercy, friendship, or quiet gratitude.

3. Offer one skill to God in service of another person or your parish. Choose a specific task, complete it carefully, and do not seek public credit.

4. Pray once this week for a priest by name, asking Christ to make him holy, humble, courageous, and faithful in serving God's people.

Scripture Memory

Exodus 31:13

"You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you."

Exodus 31:13

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord Jesus Christ, our eternal High Priest, you offered yourself once for all and made us a priestly people. Teach us to worship the Father in spirit and truth. Sanctify the ministers of your Church, receive the work of our hands, and free us from measuring our worth by constant production. Bring every gift and every day into the service of your holy presence. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Exodus 28:1-31:18** Vestments, priestly consecration, incense, washing, sacred oil, Spirit-given craftsmanship, and Sabbath.

Old Testament roots

- **Leviticus 8:1-36** The consecration commanded in Exodus 29 is carried out.
- **Psalm 133:1-3** The oil upon Aaron and the blessing of covenant unity.

Christ and the priestly people

- **Hebrews 4:14-16** Jesus, the compassionate great High Priest.
- **Hebrews 7:23-28** Christ's enduring priesthood and once-for-all offering.
- **Hebrews 9:11-14** Christ enters the greater sanctuary by his own blood.
- **1 Peter 2:4-10** The baptized as a holy and royal priesthood.
- **Acts 14:23** Presbyters appointed in the churches.
- **1 Timothy 4:14** Ministerial gift and the laying on of hands.
- **Romans 15:15-16** Paul describes his Gospel ministry in priestly language.

Incense and Sabbath fulfillment

- **Revelation 8:3-4** Incense and the prayers of the saints before God.
- **Mark 2:27-28** The Sabbath made for man and the Son of Man as its Lord.
- **Hebrews 4:9-11** The Sabbath rest that remains for God's people.

Terms

- **kodesh la-YHWH.** holy to the LORD, the inscription placed on Aaron's gold plate
- **sabbath.** a cessation or rest established by God as a covenant sign
- **presbyteros.** elder or presbyter, a New Testament term associated with appointed Church ministry

Catechism

- CCC 1539, 1541. God set apart the tribe of Levi for liturgical service, and the liturgy sees in Aaron's priesthood a prefiguring of ordained ministry.
- CCC 1546-1547. The common and ministerial priesthoods.
- CCC 1562-1563. Priests are co-workers of the bishops, sent to preach the Gospel, shepherd the faithful, and celebrate divine worship.
- CCC 2170-2171, 2175. The Sabbath recalls Israel's liberation from Egypt, is a sign of the covenant, and finds its Christian fulfillment in the Lord's Day.
- CCC 2502. The purpose of sacred art.