

Take-Home 12: Stretch Out Your Hands

The final session. Thank you for walking the whole road.

WHAT WE FOUND

We opened the old man's letter and found his whole life hiding inside his advice. "Clothe yourselves with humility": a verb that means to tie on like a servant's apron, from the man who watched God tie on a towel. "Your adversary the devil prowls like a roaring lion": from the man who was sifted like wheat. The living Stone and Psalm 118, from the Rock who never stopped turning that psalm over. "Without having seen him you love him": wonder, from the man who was asked "do you love me?" across a breakfast fire. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree": the cross preached by the man who once said "God forbid." "Let him not be ashamed": from the man once ashamed before a servant girl. And the letter's crown: "The God of all grace... will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you" (1 Peter 5:10): Luke 22:32 kept, in his own letter: he turned again, and his last words strengthen the brethren.

Then the road's end, in two honest registers. History: Peter was martyred in Rome, his death attested within living memory (1 Clement 5, c. 96 AD) and confirmed by the converging early tradition: St. Ignatius, St. Irenaeus, and the second-century monument on Vatican hill beneath the basilica's altar. The tradition, going back to Tertullian and Dionysius of Corinth, places the martyrdom under Nero. And the venerable Quo Vadis tradition, from outside Scripture but true to the man: fleeing Rome, he met Christ walking in and asked, "Lord, where are you going?": and we heard the echo ourselves: he had asked it once before, at the table, and been promised: "you shall follow afterward" (John 13:36). Afterward arrived, and he turned around. We counted the three fires: courtyard, shore, Pentecost: an echo of Zechariah's refining fire (Zechariah 13:9) traced through his story: and we built the whole way of salvation out of his own letter: born anew by mercy, through the cross, by grace, through clinging faith, in baptism, within the Church, vigilant and hoped-for to the end. Then the two words came to us: Follow me.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Clement of Rome | 1 Clement 5 (c. 96 AD)

Peter endured not one or two but many labors, and having thus borne his witness, went to the glorious place which was his due: the earliest record of the martyrdom, written from Rome within living memory.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons / *Against Heresies, Book III*

Peter and Paul preached at Rome and laid the foundations of the Church there: stated as common knowledge by a man two handshakes from the apostles.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Leo the Great / *Sermon 82*

Rome's true glory is not its empire but its martyrs: through the see of blessed Peter, a city once mistress of error became a disciple of the truth: Leo's boast for the apostles; one might say the fisherman's last catch was the capital of the world.

WHERE THE ROAD CONTINUES

1. Read 1 Peter whole, in one sitting, this week; hear the voice you now know. Read it again in a month.
2. Act on your “into the deep” sentence within seven days, before the resolve cools, and tell one person what it is.
3. Keep the twelve memory verses: one each week for the next twelve weeks, and let the arc replay in you.
4. Stay at the fire: Sunday Mass, and (if Catholic) regular Confession: the charcoal fire rebuilt for you as often as you need it. And when the group gathers for Mass together, be there: the breaking of the bread is where this study was always headed.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his

eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.”

1 Peter 5:10 (RSV2CE)

A LAST WORD

Twelve weeks ago you wrote a guess about what it would take to turn Simon into the rock. Keep that sheet, with your surrender prayer on it, somewhere you will find it in a few years. The answer it records is the one the Church has staked everything on: not the rock becoming harder, but the rock becoming His. *Duc in altum*. Put out into the deep.