

Session Nine · Christ and His Church

The Good Shepherd · The Sheepfold · The True Vine · The Bridegroom & the Bride

WHAT WE FOUND

Tonight Jesus taught about himself, and the images are his boldest claims. Shepherd and Bridegroom were images Israel's prophets used for God himself; the vine was Israel, and Israel had failed to bear fruit (Isaiah 5, Psalm 80). When Jesus says "I am the good shepherd," he takes up the identity Israel reserved for God alone; when he says "I am the true vine," he claims to be in his own person the true Israel who bears the fruit the old vine could not. And he seals the divine claim: "I and the Father are one."

And in each image he also names us. We are the flock the Shepherd knows by name and lays down his life for; the branches who can do nothing apart from the vine and who abide through his sacramental life, supremely the Eucharist; the bride he is coming for, loved both as a whole Church and as each particular soul. The Church, then, is not merely a human institution we choose to join. She is his body and his bride, the place his life flows.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) There is one flock and one Shepherd; the Church's unity flows from the unity of Christ himself, so that schism wounds the very body of the Good Shepherd.

St. Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376–444) We abide in the vine through the same life, the same sap, received sacramentally: our union with Christ is not a metaphor but real participation, supremely through the Eucharist (Commentary on the Gospel of John, Book 10, on John 15:1).

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) Christ is Bridegroom of the whole Church and, in a personal way, of each soul; the personal love is real, and it is received within the larger Bride.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) Christ is the Head of the Body that is the Church; abiding in him is the constant reception of grace from the Head into the members (cf. Summa Theologiae III, q. 8).

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. The next time you are at Mass, slow down at the moment of Communion. Receive the Eucharist aware that the union with the vine begun in your Baptism is being nourished and deepened, the sap of Christ's own life flowing into you afresh. Do not let it pass as routine.
2. Name one place you have been trying to bear fruit by your own effort, cut off from the vine, and make one concrete reconnection this week: fifteen minutes of Scripture daily, confession scheduled, one person to pray with, or Sunday Mass made the fixed center of your week.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **John 10:11**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Luke 14:15-24 (the Great Banquet) and Matthew 25:1-13 (the Ten Bridesmaids).

Catechism: CCC 754, 755, 796, 813-822, 1396