

Radiant and Unfading

Take-Home • Session 4: A Life Measured by Virtue

What We Found

The author challenges three common ways people measure a successful life: having children, living a long life, and leaving a legacy. He measures each of them against something more important: a life of virtue and friendship with God. Blessed is the barren woman who is undefiled; blessed the eunuch whose hands have done no lawless deed (3:13-14). We hunted down the ground under that shocking blessing and found it in Isaiah 56:3-5, where God promises the faithful eunuch a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. Old age, we learned, is not measured by number of years: understanding is gray hair for man, and a blameless life is ripe old age (4:8-9).

Then we met a man described but not named: he pleased God, was loved by him, and was taken up while living among sinners, lest evil change his understanding. We found him in Genesis 5: Enoch, who walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. In a chapter where everyone else merely dies, Enoch is taken, and Wisdom reads his short life as tenderness: being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years. When the righteous die young, this book's instinct is not that God forgot them but that they were ready. That is the text's hope, not an explanation of any particular loss; no one knows why a given person died young, and we never tell a grieving family that we do. The passage closed with the courtroom doors creaking open: the righteous man who has died will condemn the ungodly who are living (4:16). Next session, the verdict.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose • *De Virginibus, Book I, to his sister Marcellina (4th century)*

Virginity offered to Christ is not useless or isolated but spiritually fruitful for others: the virgin's life becomes an offering to God and a benefit to the whole Church. Marriage is honored precisely so that celibacy can be seen as a free gift rather than an escape.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Paul II • *General Audiences on continence for the kingdom, Theology of the Body 73-86 (March to July 1982)*

Celibacy for the kingdom does not devalue marriage but anticipates the resurrection, when they neither marry nor are given in marriage. The celibate person is a living sign that our deepest longing is for God himself. Both vocations spring from the same nuptial meaning of the body and honor each other.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thérèse of Lisieux • *Last Conversations, 17 July 1897 (d. 1897, age 24)*

Dying at twenty-four, hidden, childless, and unknown to the world, she confided that her mission was about to begin: to make God loved as she loved him, to spend her heaven doing good on earth. The world's

metrics gave her nothing; the Church counts her a Doctor of the Church.

Live It This Week

- **Read ahead, slowly.** Read Wisdom 5 with a pencil. It is a courtroom scene; mark who is speaking, and notice what tense they speak in.
- **Rewrite one measure. Choose one way you are tempted to measure your worth or success. Write one sentence describing how God calls you to measure your life instead, and put it where you will see it daily.**
- **Honor a hidden life.** Write, call, or visit one person whose quiet faithfulness the world does not count, and tell them specifically what you see.
- **Pray for vocations, all of them.** Once this week, pray for someone discerning religious life or priesthood, for a married couple you know, and for a single or childless person carrying that quietly, by name if you can.

Memory Verse

"Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord." (Wisdom 4:13-14)

Before next session: read Wisdom 5.

Catechism references: CCC 1618-1620, CCC 2379.

Scripture We Opened

- Tonight's text: Wisdom 3:10-4:20
- The discovery: Isaiah 56:3-5 (the eunuch's name better than sons and daughters)
- The discovery: Genesis 5:21-24 (Enoch, who walked with God)
- Genesis 30:1 (Rachel's cry); 1 Samuel 1 (Hannah); Isaiah 54:1 (sing, O barren one)
- Deuteronomy 23:1 (the old exclusion of the sexually mutilated man, traditionally read of the eunuch)
- Psalm 127:3 (children a heritage from the LORD)
- 2 Kings 2 (Elijah taken up, Enoch's companion in the pattern)
- Matthew 19:12 (eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom)
- Matthew 22:30 (in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage)
- 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 32-35 (celibacy for undivided devotion)
- Acts 8:26-39 (the Ethiopian eunuch)
- Mark 1:30; 1 Timothy 3:2; 1 Timothy 4:3