

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 7: You Are Not on Your Own

Acts 2:37-47 • about 55 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. Tonight the students hear the crowd at Pentecost ask the question the whole study has been building toward, What shall we do?, and they hear the answer. The answer is not try harder. It is Baptism, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. For baptized students, this is the night they learn what they already have; for any student not yet baptized, it is the night they learn what is being offered.

Where we are in the story

Six sessions in, the students have the whole story: Jesus invites, seeks, forgives as God, dies for us, rises, and welcomes us home. Tonight they learn how a person actually enters that story and how they keep living in it: with the Church, not alone. Next week they are sent.

Tonight's aim

Students discover that when three thousand people asked what to do, St. Peter told them to repent and be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, and that the new Christians then lived four things together: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. By the end of the hour every student should be able to say that being a Christian is something you live with other people in the Church, and that their Baptism was the door.

The passage in plain terms

It is Pentecost, fifty days after Easter. The Holy Spirit has come, and St. Peter has just preached the first sermon of the Church, telling the crowd that the Jesus they crucified is Lord and Christ. The crowd is cut to the heart and asks, Brethren, what shall we do? (2:37). Peter answers: Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38). About three thousand people are baptized that day (2:41).

Then Luke describes their life: they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (2:42). They share what they have, meet in the temple, break bread in their homes, and praise God, and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (2:43-47).

Two details for the students. First, Peter's answer to what shall we do is not a list of rules; it is a sacrament and a gift. Second, verse 42 is four things the new Christians did together as a Church; we can pray and read Scripture alone, but the Christian life is not meant to be lived in isolation.

What the Church teaches

The Church teaches that Baptism is the door to life in the Spirit and the gateway to the other sacraments; it forgives sins, gives us new life, and makes us members of Christ and of his Church (CCC 1213, 1262-1267). Most of the students walked through that door as babies. Tonight is where they learn what was given to them.

Why does a baby need Baptism? Because of our first parents' sin, we are born without the original holiness God intended for humanity. This inherited condition is called original sin. It is not a personal sin a baby committed (CCC 404-405). Baptism removes original sin and gives new life in Christ, although our struggle against sin remains, which is why Confession exists. If a student asks whether Adam and Eve were real, the Church teaches that our first parents really did turn away from God at the beginning of human history, told in Genesis in figurative language (CCC 390); she does not fight with science about how human bodies came to be, and this study is not the place to try.

The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity, not a force or a feeling (CCC 685). Confirmation is not a person ratifying their Baptism to make it real; Baptism was real the day it happened (CCC 1308). In Confirmation, God gives a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, deepens the grace of Baptism, strengthens our union with Christ and the Church, and equips us for witness (CCC 1302-1303). Renewing our baptismal promises is our response to that gift, not its cause.

The four things in Acts 2:42 are the Church's own description of her life: the apostles' teaching (what the Church teaches), fellowship (the community), the breaking of bread (the Eucharist, which the first Christians called by exactly that name, CCC 1329), and the prayers (CCC 2624). Tonight the students also hear plainly what the Eucharist is: at Mass, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of Jesus spoken by the priest, the bread and wine become Christ's Body and Blood; Jesus is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, not merely represented by a symbol; and the Mass makes present his one sacrifice on the cross without Jesus dying again (CCC 1366-1367, 1374-1376). A sixth grader does not need the philosophy; they need the claim, stated clearly.

Keep the safeguard in view: the answer to what shall we do is not try harder. It is receive. Grace comes first (CCC 1996-2000), and the four things in verse 42 are how a person keeps living from it. God saves persons and incorporates them into the Church; those are not alternatives.

Saints who said yes

St. Peter

The man who denied Jesus three times on the night of the arrest is the man who preaches the first sermon of the Church, after which about three thousand people are baptized. In between, the risen Jesus forgave him by the lake and asked him three times, Do you love me? (John 21:15-17). Peter is proof that being forgiven and being sent are the same story.

St. Stephen

One of the first seven deacons chosen to serve the community in Acts 6, and the first Christian to die for Jesus. As he was being stoned he prayed for the men killing him, Lord, do not hold this sin against them (Acts 7:60), the same kind of prayer Jesus prayed from the cross. The teaching of Jesus had become the way he faced death.

Questions students may ask

- I was baptized as a baby, so did I ever say yes? At Baptism, God truly gave you new life in Christ, even though you were a baby; your parents and godparents answered for you, the way they fed you before you could feed yourself. As you grow, you learn to live that gift. In Confirmation, God gives a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, deepens the grace of Baptism, and strengthens you to live and share the faith, and you renew your baptismal promises as your response. Your response does not make your Baptism real. It already was.
- Who is the Holy Spirit? God himself, the third person of the Trinity, living in you. Not a force or a feeling. The same Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost is given to us in Baptism, and in Confirmation he strengthens us and increases his gifts in us.
- Why did I need Baptism as a baby if I had not done anything wrong? Because of our first parents' sin, every one of us is born without the original holiness God meant for us. That inherited condition is called original sin. It is not a sin you committed. Baptism removes it and gives you new life in Christ, though your struggle against sin remains. If someone asks whether Adam and Eve were real: the Church teaches that the first human beings really did turn away from God, and Genesis tells it in picture language; the Church does not argue with science about how human bodies came to be, and we are not going to try tonight.
- What does fellowship mean? It means sharing life with other Christians: showing up, eating together, helping each other, praying together. The first Christians did not try to follow Jesus alone, and neither should we.
- Why do I need the Church? Can I not just believe by myself? You can and should pray and read Scripture on your own. But look at verse 42: the Church's teaching, fellowship, the Eucharist, and prayer together are things you cannot have by yourself, and the Eucharist can only be celebrated by a validly ordained priest. Jesus saved those three thousand people and united them in one Church. You cannot be baptized by yourself, and you cannot receive the Eucharist by yourself.

Materials

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Acts 2 and Ezekiel 36, pencils, name tents, reflection cards. Optional: invite students who know the date of their Baptism to bring it, or a photo; never require it or ask anyone to say their status in front of the group.

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 4. Reading Acts 2:37-47 in segments, 5. Discovery questions, 15. Flashback to Ezekiel 36, 5. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection in three units with pauses, 13. Prayer, one step, and closing, 4.

If you are running long: shorten the opening situation to one answer. Never cut question 2, question 4, the flashback, or the three units.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Come, Holy Spirit. You filled the first Christians and made them one family. Fill us tonight, and show us the family we already belong to. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *We now have the whole story: Jesus invites us, seeks us, forgives us as God, dies for us, rises, and welcomes us home. Tonight we find out what three thousand people did when they heard that story for the first time, and what they did the next day, and the day after that.*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine someone teaches you the rules of a sport, or how to play an instrument, for one afternoon. Then they say: Now do it perfectly. You are on your own. What is missing?*

Leader: Two or three answers; they will name practice, a coach, a team. Then say: Tonight three thousand people ask what to do, and the answer is not, you are on your own.

READ ACTS 2:37-47

Briefly explain that the Holy Spirit has just come at Pentecost and Peter has preached that the crucified Jesus is risen and is Lord. Then read in segments, in parts: a narrator, the crowd, and St. Peter. Read verses 37 to 41, then questions 1 to 3. Read verses 42 to 47, then questions 4 and 5. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for Acts 2 before you start.

Leader: Brethren means brothers. The breaking of bread in verse 42 is the first Christians' name for the Eucharist.

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 37 to 41

1. In verse 37, what does the crowd ask after hearing Peter preach about Jesus? What does cut to the heart mean?

Answer • share after the discussion

They ask, Brethren, what shall we do? Cut to the heart means they are shaken; they have just realized that the Jesus they rejected is the Lord. It is the question everybody asks once they understand the story: now what?

2. Read Peter's answer in verse 38 carefully. What are the two things he tells them to do, and what does he say they will receive?

Answer • share after the discussion

Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Notice that the answer is not try harder or be good. It is turn around, be baptized, and receive a gift. The first thing a Christian does is receive.

Leader: This is the point of the night. Make sure the group sees that Peter's answer is a sacrament and a gift, not a list of rules.

3. How many people were baptized that day (verse 41)? What does that tell you about how they understood Baptism?

Answer • share after the discussion

About three thousand. They did not go home to think about it or try to fix their lives first. They were baptized that same day. Baptism was the door, and they walked through it as soon as it was open.

Read verses 42 to 47

4. Verse 42 lists four things the new Christians devoted themselves to. Name them. Which of them can you do on your own, and which need other people?

Answer • share after the discussion

The apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. You can pray on your own, and you should. But the Church's teaching needs the Church to hand it on, and fellowship needs other people. And the breaking of bread, the Eucharist, is Christ's gift to his Church: only a validly ordained priest can celebrate Mass and consecrate the bread and wine. The first Christians did not try to follow Jesus in isolation, and neither should we. And look at verses 44 to 46: they shared what they had with anyone in need and broke bread in their homes with glad hearts. The Holy Spirit changed not only what they believed but how they lived with each other.

Leader: Give the students time to find all four before you name them. If someone knows the breaking of bread is the Eucharist, celebrate it.

5. Verse 47 says the Lord added to their number day by day. Who is doing the adding?

Answer • share after the discussion

The Lord. The Church grew because God kept bringing people in, through the witness of people living verse 42 together. God saves each person, and he gathers those he saves into one family, his Church.

FLASHBACK: CLEAN WATER, A NEW HEART, GOD'S OWN SPIRIT

Read aloud: *Peter promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. That gift had been promised long before. We flash back about six hundred years, to the prophet Ezekiel, where God is promising to cleanse and renew his people after they have failed him.*

Read Ezekiel 36:25-27 (give the page number; one reader)

1. What three things does God promise to do in these verses?

Answer • share after the discussion

Sprinkle clean water on you so that you are clean, give you a new heart, and put his own Spirit within you. Clean water, a new heart, God's Spirit: that is Baptism and Pentecost, promised six centuries early. Peter is not inventing anything on Pentecost morning. He is handing out what God had promised.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Read aloud: *Back to Jerusalem, where three thousand people are about to receive exactly that.*

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: *Look at the four things in verse 42: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Which one is strongest in your life right now, and which one is missing? Write those two on your reflection card.*

Leader: *A full minute of silence. No sharing. Some students will realize they have never thought of Mass as the breaking of bread; let that land quietly.*

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. Baptism is the door. It forgives sins, gives new life, and makes you a member of Christ's Church (CCC 1213). Those of you who have been baptized walked through that door, most of you as babies, before you could remember it. Anyone preparing for Baptism is welcome here, and we will help you take the next step. Why does a baby need Baptism? Remember the garden from Session 2. Because of our first parents' sin, we are born without the original holiness God intended for us. That inherited condition is called original sin, and it is not a sin a baby committed. Baptism removes it and gives new life in Christ, though our struggle against sin remains.

Leader: Pause here and ask the group: What does Baptism give us? Then go on to the next box. Never ask a student to say publicly whether they have been baptized. If one tells you privately they were not, or is not sure, this is a moment for warmth, not awkwardness; talk with a parent afterward. If students brought Baptism dates or photos, take a minute to hear them. Some students may already be confirmed; the description of Confirmation still holds for them.

WHO STRENGTHENS US IN CONFIRMATION?

Read aloud: Second question: who strengthens us in Confirmation?

Share after the discussion

The Holy Spirit given to us in Baptism is God himself, the third person of the Trinity, not a force or a feeling (CCC 685). Confirmation, which is ahead of some of you, does not make your Baptism real; it already was. In Confirmation God gives a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, deepens the grace of Baptism, and strengthens you to live and share the faith (CCC 1302-1303).

Leader: Pause again: ask, Who is the Holy Spirit? (God, the third person of the Trinity.) Then go on.

WHO IS TRULY PRESENT IN THE EUCHARIST?

Read aloud: Third question: who is truly present in the Eucharist?

Share after the discussion

The four things in verse 42 are still the Church's life: what the Church teaches, the people around you, the breaking of bread, and prayer together (CCC 1329, 2624). Here is what the breaking of bread is. At Mass, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of Jesus spoken by the priest, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Jesus is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, not just a symbol of him. The Mass makes present his one sacrifice on the cross; Jesus does not die again (CCC 1374, 1366-1367). Jesus saved those three thousand people and united them in one Church. We can pray and read Scripture on our own, but we are not meant to live the Christian life in isolation. We need the Church's teaching, fellowship, worship, and sacraments, and you are in that family.

Leader: Last pause: ask, What becomes of the bread and wine at Mass? Fix any misunderstanding warmly before you move to prayer.

PRAYER

Leader: Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.

Read aloud: Let us pray. Talk to God in your head while I say these words. Holy Spirit, you are God, and you come to us as a gift we could never earn. Thank you for Baptism, for those of us who have received it, and for the door that is open to everyone. Help me live the four things: your teaching, your people, your bread, and prayer. Amen.

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: One thing this week. Pick the one of the four that is missing for you, and do it once. Go to Mass with your family, join a parish activity, read the Gospel with someone, or pray with one other person. Tell me next week which one you picked.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, you added to their number day by day. Thank you for adding us. Make us a family that learns, shares, breaks bread, and prays together, and let it show. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

“You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

Acts 2:37-47 (read aloud in segments); flashback Ezekiel 36:25-27

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- Acts 2:14-36 (Peter's sermon, if a student wants what came before)
- John 21:15-17 (Peter forgiven and sent)
- Acts 7:54-60 (Stephen's prayer)

CATECHISM

- CCC 1213, 1262-1267 (Baptism, the door; its effects)
- CCC 389-405 (original sin as an inherited condition)
- CCC 685 (the Holy Spirit is a divine person)
- CCC 1302-1303, 1308 (the effects of Confirmation; Baptism needs no ratification)
- CCC 1329 (the breaking of bread as a name for the Eucharist)
- CCC 1366-1367, 1374-1376 (the Real Presence; the one sacrifice made present)
- CCC 2624 (Acts 2:42 as the pattern of the Church's prayer)
- CCC 1996-2000 (grace comes first)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Peter (Acts 2; John 21:15-17)
- St. Stephen (Acts 6-7)

MATERIALS

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Acts 2 and Ezekiel 36, pencils, name tents, reflection cards. Optional: invite students who know the date of their Baptism to bring it, or a photo; never require it or ask anyone to say their status in front of the group.

NOTE

Never ask baptismal status publicly. Confirmation is described accurately but briefly; do not turn tonight into Confirmation prep.