

The Three Witnesses

1 John 5:1-12

WHAT WE FOUND

"His commandments are not burdensome" (5:3), not because they ask little, but because they come with the birth: the born-of-God overcome the world, and "this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith" (5:4), an allegiance, not a technique, participating in a conquest already won (John 16:33). The strange insistence of 5:6, "not with the water only but with the water and the blood," turned out to be the whole Incarnation defended in five words: against every teacher, ancient or modern, whose Christ arrives at the Jordan but exits before Calvary, John insists the One baptized is the One who bled.

Then the courtroom: three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, meeting the Torah's own standard of proof (Deuteronomy 19:15), and all three converging on one scene John watched with his own eyes: the pierced side, "and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness" (John 19:34-35). The Church has long seen Ezekiel's river from the temple's side (Ezekiel 47) beginning to flow there, and the witnesses never retired: the Spirit in your anointing (CCC 695), the water in every font, the blood in every chalice (CCC 1225). As Eve from Adam's side, the Church was born from his (CCC 766). We were also honest about the "Johannine Comma": absent from the earliest manuscripts, omitted by our translation, and unneeded; the Trinity does not rest on a disputed gloss.

The verdict is possession: "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life" (5:11-12). Life is a Person, had or not had, now. One sentence remains in this letter's argument, the sentence this study is named for, and it is next week.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

Irenaeus, whose teacher Polycarp knew John, records that John proclaimed the Gospel against the error of Cerinthus, who severed the heavenly Christ from the crucified Jesus. Against every fleshless Christ, Irenaeus insists on the one Jesus Christ who truly was baptized and truly suffered: the water and the blood belong to the same Person, or the Gospel is not good news at all.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Baptismal Catecheses*

Preaching to the newly baptized, Chrysostom points to the pierced side: from it flowed water and blood, the water a symbol of baptism, the blood of the holy mysteries, and as God formed Eve from the side of sleeping Adam, so Christ formed the Church from his own side in the sleep of death on the cross. The sacraments, he teaches, were purchased there; when you approach the font and the chalice, you approach that wound.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 120*

Augustine lingers over the evangelist's verb: the soldier did not merely wound Christ's side, he opened it, and Augustine hears in that word a door swinging; there the gate of life was opened, from which the sacraments of the Church flowed, without which no one enters into true life. The ark of Noah had a door in its side, he recalls; the new ark does too.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

At Mass this Sunday, receive with 5:8 deliberately in mind: the blood, still testifying. Arrive ten minutes early and pray the three witnesses over your own history: my anointing, my baptism, this chalice.

2.

Memorize 1 John 5:12 and pray it as a possession check each night this week: not "was I good today" but "do I have him, am I abiding, now."

3.

Read John 19:31-37 once this week beside Ezekiel 47:1-12, and write one sentence: what flowed out of the opened temple, and what of it has reached me.

MEMORY VERSE

"He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life." (1 John 5:12, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **1 John 5:13-21**, and here is the one rule: read verse 13 slowly, out loud, alone, and let it land before you read on. Then dig out your Take-Home 1 from the very first week and bring it. The oldest thread in this study comes home next session.

Catechism Connection: CCC 1225; 766; 694; 695