

Sin Unto Death

1 John 5:13-21

WHAT WE FOUND

The oldest seal opened: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **that you may know** that you have eternal life" (5:13). The study's title was the letter's purpose statement all along, paired with the Gospel's: written that you may *believe* (John 20:31), then written that you may *know*. And the letter had already defined its knowing: by walking (2:3), by loving (3:14), by abiding (4:13), real, present-tense, joyful possession, commanded against both presumption and chronic salvation-anxiety. A Catholic walking in the light is *supposed* to know.

Then the discovery hiding in the last page: Scripture itself distinguishes degrees of sin: "there is sin which is mortal... all wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal" (5:16-17), the verses the Catechism cites by name for the mortal/venial distinction (CCC 1854). The Torah knew it (unwitting versus high-handed, Numbers 15), David prayed it (hidden faults versus presumptuous sins, Psalm 19:12-13), and the mature anatomy stands: grave matter, full knowledge, deliberate consent; charity killed versus charity wounded; and confession as the mortal wound's remedy. And John assigned us work: intercede for the brother whose sin is not mortal, "and God will give him life" (5:16); and though John does not command prayer for the sin unto death, he does not forbid it either. Moses climbed the mountain after the calf; Monica prayed seventeen years; nobody declares a living soul a lost cause.

The epistle's last line is a lifelong assignment: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (5:21), everything trusted for what only "the true God and eternal life" (5:20) gives. The test: what, if lost tonight, would make life feel over? Watch that altar. Two tiny letters remain: next week, 2 John, thirteen verses.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae, I-II, q. 88*

Thomas gives the distinction its anatomy: mortal sin turns the soul away from its last end, God himself, destroying charity the way death destroys life, and so is irreparable by anything within us, requiring God's healing action; venial sin disorders the soul's steps without abandoning the destination, wounding charity but not killing it. The names are not degrees of divine annoyance; they describe what each sin actually does to the life of grace in us, which is exactly the letter's vocabulary: life, and death.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Alphonsus Liguori *The Great Means of Salvation and of Perfection*

Alphonsus, Doctor of moral theology and of prayer, compressed a lifetime of pastoral care into one maxim: he who prays is certainly saved; he who does not pray is certainly damned. He meant tonight's confidence taken literally: prayer according to God's will is the ordinary channel of the grace of perseverance, and so intercession for a sinning brother is never decoration. It is the family's actual work, with actual effect: God

will give him life.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis de Sales *Introduction to the Devout Life, Part I*

De Sales presses where comfortable souls go soft: it is not enough to renounce mortal sin; the devout soul must also break its *affection* for venial sin, the fond attachment that keeps small disorders as pets. Venial sin does not kill the soul, he teaches, but cherished venial sin weakens it, dulls its taste for God, and holds the door ajar for worse. The distinction of 5:16-17 is real, and it was never permission.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Begin a Monica list this week: the names you will intercede for daily, starting with the one from tonight's Send. Keep it in your Bible at 1 John 5:16 and pray it every day without exception.

2.

If anything mortal stands unconfessed in your own life, go to confession this week; that is not a suggestion appended to the study, it is the study. If nothing does, make a devotional confession anyway and name one cherished venial attachment to break.

3.

Memorize 1 John 5:13 and pray it each morning as an act of obedient assurance: written that I may know. Let the day begin from possession, not from audition.

MEMORY VERSE

"I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **2 John**, the whole letter; it will take you ninety seconds, so read it three times. Mark every occurrence of *truth* and *love*, and find the verse where a word we have tracked since Session Four appears for the last time in Scripture.

Catechism Connection: CCC 1854-1857; 2634-2636