

Session 5: The Demolition Charges

John 20:19-23 · John 6:53-58 · The Wall opens tonight

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the “divine power to destroy strongholds” of 2 Corinthians 10:4 has street addresses: the confessional and the altar. Confession is the demolition charge set against the wall itself; the Eucharist is the Stronger One moving in, the standing answer to the swept house; and the baptismal renunciations are the soldier’s own voice joining the siege. Tonight the sealed sheets open, alone, before the Lord.

Catholic Touchstone. The sacrament of Penance restores us to God’s grace and friendship (CCC 1468); the Eucharist wipes away venial sin and preserves us from future mortal sins (CCC 1394-1395); the renunciation of Satan belongs to the baptismal rite itself (CCC 1237).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Everything the study has built converges tonight. Session 1 promised weapons with divine power; Sessions 2 and 3 mapped the wall and its architect; Session 4 issued the armor and left one question deliberately open: where does a sinner actually get the breastplate of righteousness? Tonight answers with the Church’s glorious lack of subtlety: at the confessional, from Christ, free.

Ground Confession in John 20:19-23, and keep the scene concrete: the risen Jesus, wounds still visible, breathes on men (a deliberate echo of God breathing life into Adam, Genesis 2:7; Ezekiel 37’s breath on the slain stands between) and says: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Whatever a participant’s history with the sacrament, make them deal with the verse: Jesus deliberately routed forgiveness through human beings he authorized. Why he might do that for creatures like us is the pastoral heart of the night: strongholds are embodied things (built by eyes, hands, habits, hours), and Christ demolishes them in an embodied way: your own voice naming the thing in the dark, and a voice with his authority answering out loud: absolved. The wondering ends in the ear, not the imagination. People leave the box knowing the way you know a door has shut.

Say the hard, honest thing about grave sin plainly and briefly: a stronghold’s acts can be grave matter, and mortal sin (grave matter with full knowledge and deliberate consent) is ordinarily remitted in sacramental Confession, which one conscious of mortal sin seeks before Communion; perfect contrition, joined to the resolve to confess, reconciles even before the sacrament (CCC 1452, 1457). Go quickly, and do not let shame set the schedule. This study deliberately does not re-teach the full doctrine of mortal and venial sin; our catalog’s study Hold Fast covers it at length, and your reference card points there. Tonight’s register is invitation, not audit: the confessional is a field hospital with the lights on all night.

Then the Eucharist, and here the swept-house thread finally resolves. Jesus’s repeated, intensified language in John 6 grounds the Church’s realist reading, held with the Last Supper and apostolic tradition: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (6:56). Abides: the occupancy verb. In the study’s house-image (an analogy we teach as ours): the house Luke shows swept,

and Matthew calls empty, is not left vacant; Christ, who already dwells in the baptized in grace, deepens and renews his indwelling from the altar. The Catechism's claims are startlingly practical for our study: this food strengthens charity, wipes away venial sins, and "preserves us from future mortal sins" (CCC 1394-1395). For a room full of people fortifying against relapse, that is not devotional garnish; that is the garrison.

Third movement: the renunciations. In the Church's ordinary rite of Baptism your people, or their parents and godparents for them, spoke one of her most ancient battle-speeches, renewed liturgically at Easter: "Do you renounce Satan? And all his works? And all his empty promises?" (wording varies slightly by ritual book; check your parish missal). Tonight they learn to use it as a personal weapon in the first person: "In the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that..." This is resistance language, fully theirs by baptism (Session 3's guardrail stands: renounce, never command). And it is the hinge of the Wall liturgy at session's end.

The Wall opens tonight. Run it exactly as scripted in the Discussion Guide: unhurried silence, each person alone with their own sealed sentence, no sharing, no collection, no debrief. The sheet was written in Session 1, before the study taught them anything; many will discover their wall now has a name, an anatomy, and an architect they can identify, which is itself the evidence of grace at work these past weeks. The liturgy moves from reading, to renunciation, to resolve: and the resolve you commend is bringing the sentence (not the paper) to Confession soon. Have local confession times printed or on the parish site, and if possible, arrange with Father for the sacrament to be available within the week and say so tonight.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

2 Kings 5:1-14 (Naaman). The great commander with the incurable affliction, sent to wash seven times in the muddy Jordan, is the Old Testament's definitive study in the scandal of humble means: "Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" He wanted a dramatic cure proportional to his dignity; God offered a bath. His servants' question ("if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?") is aimed straight at every Catholic who finds the confessional too small a door for their particular wall. Central discovery; do not name it in advance.

Psalms 107:13-16. The psalm of the freed prisoners: "he shatters the doors of bronze, and cuts in two the bars of iron." Prisoners who "sat in darkness and in gloom" cry to the LORD, and the hardware itself fails. This is the night's epigraph and its second discovery: the demolition is his.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Vianney

The Curé of Ars, from his catechetical instructions and the witness of his life

The patron of parish priests spent long hours, day after day, in the confessional, and taught, in substance, that the sinner's misery is the very title by which he may approach the good God; that beside God's mercy our sin is as a grain of sand beside a torrent; and that souls stay chained for years to sins one honest confession would have struck off. Pilgrims came from across France to a box in an obscure village, because inside it they met not Jean Vianney but Jesus Christ.

For our purposes: few confessors in history watched more walls come down, and his testimony stands: Christ truly absolves in a valid confession received with contrition and purpose of

amendment. The wall's best defense is keeping you out of the box.

Presented as a summary of his well-attested teaching and practice; the compressions are ours (his attested images include mercy as a torrent and sin as a grain of sand).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ignatius of Antioch

Letter to the Ephesians (ch. 20), written on the road to martyrdom in the early second century (traditionally c. 107)

Writing in chains to the church at Ephesus, the apostolic father St. Ignatius calls the one bread of the Eucharist “the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death” (as commonly rendered in English). A bishop formed in the apostolic age, traveling under sentence of martyrdom, names the Eucharist not as a symbol of survival but as the thing itself: the food that undoes dying.

For our purposes: if the Eucharist is medicine against death, it is medicine against every lesser death first, including the slow one a stronghold deals. The Church's oldest voices already talked about the altar the way this study talks about the war.

The quoted phrase is his, in the standard English rendering of the letter.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Mystagogical Catecheses (Lecture 1, to the newly baptized)

St. Cyril reminds the newly baptized of the night they were baptized: how they faced the west, the region of darkness, stretched out a hand, and renounced Satan to his face “as though he were present,” breaking, Cyril says in substance, every covenant with him; and then turned bodily to the east, toward the light, to profess Christ. The renunciation was not a formality; it was a treaty publicly torn up, and the turning of the body preached the turning of the life.

For our purposes: tonight's renunciation is not a novelty this study invented; it is your own baptism, unsheathed. Some in the room will renounce a specific lie tonight with their sealed sheet in hand. Cyril would recognize the scene exactly.

Presented as a summary of Lecture 1. The Mystagogical Catecheses are transmitted under St. Cyril's name, though some scholars attribute their final form to his successor John; the rite they describe is in any case the Church's own.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1468.** “The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship.” Demolition is not the deepest description of what happens in the box; reunion is. The wall comes down because the embrace goes up.
- **CCC 1394-1395.** The Eucharist strengthens charity, and that living charity “wipes away venial sins”; and by deepening our life in Christ it “preserves us from future mortal sins.” The garrison sacrament, in the Church's own words.
- **CCC 1237.** Baptism's rite includes the explicit renunciation of Satan, spoken by the candidate or, for an infant, by parents and godparents: initiation into Christ begins with resigning, out loud, from the other army.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

THE SWEEPED HOUSE (RESOLVES TONIGHT, completed next week). Luke 11:24-26 (with Matthew

12:44's "empty") warned in week one that vacancy invites reoccupation. Tonight the Eucharist answers: "abides in me, and I in him." In the study's image, the house is occupied by the Stronger One in person. Name the resolution when John 6:56 lands. Session 6 completes it: an occupied house still needs furnishing (the renewed mind, the opposing virtues).

THE LIAR'S VOICE (develops). Expect the voice to be loudest tonight, in the pews before Confession is even mentioned: "you, in a confessional? after this long? he knows what you did." Name the pattern for the group before the Wall liturgy: the same enemy who whispered "it is no big deal" before the sin whispers "it is unforgivable" after. The switch is his tell. Final naming comes in the final session: Session 8.

THE ARMOR (resolved last week, deployed tonight). If someone connects the breastplate of righteousness to absolution, celebrate it: that is the study working.

THE WALL (OPENS TONIGHT). Follow the script. Protect the silence. Collect nothing. Afterward, do not ask anyone what they wrote, tonight or ever.

SESSION GOALS

1. Establish from John 20:19-23 that Christ deliberately routed forgiveness through authorized men, and why embodied absolution answers an embodied wall.
2. Deliver the Naaman discovery: the scandal of humble means, and pride as a load-bearing beam in many walls.
3. Resolve the swept-house thread: the Eucharist as occupancy ("abides"), with CCC 1394-1395's practical promises.
4. Restore the baptismal renunciation to the group as a personal, first-person weapon.
5. Conduct the Wall liturgy with unhurried reverence: read, renounce, resolve.
6. Send everyone toward actual confession times this week, with warmth and zero coercion.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, covenant, opening prayer (Psalm 107 epigraph): 8 min

Load note: tonight carries the study's heaviest freight. If discussion runs long, the John 6 movement (question 5) may be carried over to open Session 6, where the swept-house thread completes anyway; never trim the Wall's silence to save it.

- Win questions: 8 min
- Build: John 20:19-23 and the steelman (straight to God?): 22 min
- Discovery Moment: Naaman (2 Kings 5): 12 min
- Build: John 6:53-58, the occupancy, thread resolution: 15 min
- The renunciation teaching, then the Wall liturgy and closing: 25 min

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and trim Win to one question. Never trim the Wall liturgy; if the night runs long, end late. This is the evening the study was built around.

PASTORAL NOTE FOR THE LEADER (STANDING NOTE, WITH TONIGHT'S ADDITIONS)

No one is ever asked to name their battle. Restate confidentiality before the Wall liturgy. Where a stronghold involves addiction, compulsion, or harm to self or others, tonight is the natural night to

repeat, warmly and to the whole room, that Confession, spiritual direction, and professional help are allies of grace, not rivals or substitutes for one another.

Confession practicalities: have this week's local confession times printed. If any participant is anxious about the sacrament after years away, offer (to the whole group, so no one is singled out) a simple walkthrough card and the sentence that unlocks the box: "Father, it has been a long time, and I need help making this confession." No priest worthy of the collar hears that sentence as anything but good news.

During the Wall liturgy: lights stay on, door stays open, you remain visibly present and praying, not circulating or watching faces. If someone is in tears, do not intrude or demand disclosure; afterward, a quiet consent-based check ("would you like a minute, or a hand?") honors both grace and safety.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

"Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress... for he shatters the doors of bronze, and cuts in two the bars of iron." (Psalm 107:13, 16)
Lord Jesus Christ, tonight we bring you the wall itself.
You have shown us its anatomy, its architect, and the armor for the fight;
now bring us to the weapons only you could forge: your mercy, your Body, your name on our lips.
Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Tell us about a time a professional fixed in minutes something you had fought for months (a mechanic, a doctor, a plumber). What did it feel like to finally hand it over?
2. Why do you think we will happily attempt "some great thing" to fix ourselves (programs, resolutions, reinventions) before we will do a small, humble thing that actually works?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read John 20:19-23 aloud.

3. Watch the risen Jesus's actions in order: peace given, wounds shown, peace and sending repeated, and then he breathes on them with a word. What older scene does a divine breathing on man recall, and what does Jesus attach to this breathing?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Genesis 2:7: God breathed life into the first man. John's scene deliberately echoes it (Ezekiel 37's breath on the slain stands between), and it marks a new creation. And what the new breath carries is startling: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Among the risen Christ's first gifts to his assembled Church is the authority to forgive sins, deliberately routed through authorized men. Whatever we make of it, the routing is his idea, not the medieval Church's. The question worth sitting in is not whether he did this, but why: and the answer has everything to do with what walls are made of.

Build, Then Press: Straight to God

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

A sincere friend says: "I confess straight to God. David did: he sinned catastrophically and prayed Psalm 51 to God alone, and 'there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Timothy 2:5). A man in a box cannot forgive sins; only God can. And bread, however blessed, cannot fight an addiction. This externalized machinery is exactly the ritual religion Jesus criticized: God wants the heart." (Two objections live in that speech, one against Confession and one against the Eucharist; take them in turn, the second with question 5.)

Honor its strength: it protects God's sole prerogative, it prizes interior conversion, and it quotes

Scripture accurately.

4. Now press: hold the objection up against John 20:22-23, James 5:16, and what we know (from Session 2) about how strongholds are actually built. What is the objection missing?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

Grant everything true: only God forgives sin; contrition straight to God is precious and, for venial sin, genuinely effective; and the heart is the point. But John 20 is Jesus, not machinery: the one mediator himself chose to exercise his mediation through men he breathed on and sent, which is why the priest in the box acts in the person of Christ; going to Confession is going straight to God, by the route God built. “Confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16) sat inside a fuller apostolic practice: the verses just before it summon the presbyters of the Church, whose prayer and anointing carry forgiveness of sins (James 5:14-16). And even David’s Psalm 51 ran through Nathan: God’s pardon reached him by an embodied, sent word (2 Samuel 12).

And consider what the route does to a wall. Strongholds are embodied: built by eyes, hands, habits, hours, and defended above all by secrecy (St. Ignatius’s false lover, Session 3). Absolution is embodied demolition: your own voice drags the lie into daylight, breaking its favorite defense, and Christ’s voice answers through the priest, out loud, in your ears: absolved. No more wondering whether the feeling counted: the assurance is objective, whatever feelings do next. (The scrupulous should lean on that objectivity with a regular confessor’s guidance rather than re-confessing against it.) A wall built in the body is torn down in the body. That is not externalism; that is incarnation.

DISCOVERY MOMENT (THE SCANDAL OF HUMBLE MEANS)

Say: the Old Testament tells the story of a great man, a decorated commander, with an affliction all his power could not touch, who nearly refused his cure because it was too humble for him. Send the group to 2 Kings 5 and let them find the story (verses 1-14) and, specifically, the two sentences that sting: his protest, and his servants’ question.

Have both read aloud: “Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?” and “if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?” Then ask the room to translate the servants’ question into tonight’s terms, and let the silence do its work: we would attempt some great thing (the program, the pilgrimage, the total reinvention) sooner than kneel in a box and say the sentence. Why? Because the great thing leaves our dignity armed, and the humble thing disarms it: and pride is a load-bearing beam in many a wall. Naaman washed, “and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child.” The Jordan was muddy, and it worked.

Read John 6:53-58 aloud.

5. In week one, Jesus warned us about the swept house (Matthew’s parallel calls it “empty”). Listen again to verse 56 with that house in mind. How does Jesus describe the relationship his flesh and blood create, and which of his words answers the swept-house warning?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

Abides. The swept house’s fatal flaw was vacancy; the Eucharist’s promise is mutual indwelling: not

a visit, an occupancy. The Stronger One does not merely evict the strong man; he moves in. This resolves the warning that has hung over the study since Session 1: the goal was never a clean, empty house, and now we know how it is filled: Christ already dwells in the baptized in grace, and from the altar that indwelling is renewed, deepened, and defended, as often as we come. (The house-image is our analogy; the abiding is his promise.)

And hear how practical the Church is about it: this food strengthens charity, wipes away venial sins, and “preserves us from future mortal sins” (CCC 1394-1395). For anyone fortifying against relapse, frequent Communion is not extra credit; it is the garrison taking up residence. St. Ignatius of Antioch called it the medicine of immortality in the early second century; the prescription has not changed.

6. At Baptism the Church had us, or our godparents for us, renounce Satan out loud, and the promise is renewed each Easter. Why is renouncing, rather than commanding, exactly the right weapon for the baptized, and exactly the right size? (Only after they wrestle with it, introduce tonight’s practice: saying it in the first person, at the wall: “In the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that...”)

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

Because it is ours by baptism. Session 3 drew the line: commanding spirits belongs to the sent (and solemn exorcism to a priest with his bishop’s mandate); renouncing belongs to every baptized Christian: a personal adaptation of our baptismal promises, unsheathed and aimed. St. Cyril of Jerusalem describes the newly baptized facing the west, the region of darkness, and renouncing Satan “as though he were present”: a treaty publicly torn up. When you renounce the specific lie under your specific wall, in Jesus’s name, you are not picking a duel; you are resigning, again and by name, from the other army, and taking your own voice back from the propagandist. Resist and renounce; never converse, never command. It is the right size because it is aimed at the weapon he uses in the war this study fights: your consent to the lie.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Psalm 107:10-16 in full: the prisoners “in darkness and in gloom” sat in “irons” their own rebellion forged (v. 11 with Session 2’s Proverbs 5:22), cried out, and watched the hardware fail: doors of bronze shattered, bars of iron cut. The psalm is tonight’s whole liturgy in six verses.

For the full Catholic teaching on mortal and venial sin, examination of conscience, and returning after grave sin, see the Catholic Armory study Hold Fast; tonight deliberately keeps its register on invitation rather than instruction.

THE WALL: GUIDED PRAYER (SCRIPT FOR THE LEADER; A STUDY DEVOTION, NOT AN OFFICIAL RITE)

RUN THIS UNHURRIED; PROTECT THE SILENCE

1. SETTLE. Say: “Take out your sealed sheet. In week one you named, in one sentence, the wall you most wanted down. No one has read it; no one ever will. Tonight you open it alone, before the Lord.”
2. READ (3-4 minutes, silence). Say: “Open it. Read your own sentence slowly. In Session 1 you named this wall without knowing its anatomy, its architect, or your armor. Read it again as the

person you are now. Notice what God has already changed: in the wall, or in you.”

3. RENOUNCE (2 minutes, silence). Say: “Under every wall is a lie. Silently, in your own words, renounce it by name: In the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that... Then, if you are ready, hand the wall itself over: Jesus, Stronger One, this wall is yours. Bring it down in your time, by your power.”

4. RESOLVE (1 minute). Say: “The sheet is yours: keep it sealed as a marker, or tear it up this week as an act of hope. But the sentence on it deserves better than paper. This week, bring to Confession your own sins connected with this wall, if there are any; some walls are wounds, not sins, and wounds are not confessed but entrusted: to the Lord, and where needed to a director’s or professional’s care. Times are printed on the card. You will not be asked about it here, ever.”

5. CLOSE with the prayer below. Do not debrief the silence; let it ride home with them.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT

7. Naaman’s servants asked him: “if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?” What is the “great thing” you have been willing to attempt against your wall, and what is the humble thing you have been avoiding?

8. If the Eucharist really is the Stronger One taking up residence (“abides in me, and I in him”), what would change about how, and how often, you approach the altar?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- **Go.** Bring your own sins connected with the wall, if any, to Confession this week; wounds are not sins, and are entrusted rather than confessed. If it has been years, open with: “Father, it has been a long time, and I need help making this confession.” That sentence has never once been bad news to a priest.
- **Receive on purpose.** If you are Catholic and properly disposed (Confession first if conscious of mortal sin: see “Go”), receive Communion this week with one silent word: “Abide.” If you cannot receive, make a spiritual communion from the pew; the desire itself is prayer. Let the Amen mean: the house is yours.
- **Optional fast.** Pick one day and fast in some real, modest way, joined to your renunciation: fasting is prayer’s oldest companion in this fight.
- **Renounce at the gate.** This week, when the old suggestion arrives (Session 2 taught you where), answer it once, out loud if you can: “In the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that ___.” Then your countersword verse. Gate, renunciation, sword: thirty seconds.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Stronger One: tonight we opened the wall and read its name, and you were not surprised.

*We renounce, again, Satan, and all his works, and all his empty promises,
and the particular lie each of us has carried folded in our hands.*

Shatter the doors of bronze. Cut the bars of iron. And then, Lord: abide.

Our Father...

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:9

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 5, in order:

1. Psalm 107:13, 16 (opening prayer epigraph); Psalm 107:10-16 (Dig Deeper: doors of bronze, bars of iron)
2. John 20:19-23 (main reading: the breath, the authority to forgive)
3. Psalm 51 and 1 Timothy 2:5 (steelman: straight to God; one mediator)
4. James 5:14-16 (steelman answer: presbyters, anointing, mutual confession)
5. Genesis 2:7 (question 3: the Eden breath); Proverbs 5:22 (Dig Deeper cross-reference)
6. 2 Kings 5:1-14 (Discovery Moment: Naaman and the scandal of humble means)
7. John 6:53-58 (main reading: abides; the occupancy)
8. Luke 11:24-26 (thread resolved: the swept house answered)
9. 1 John 1:9 (memory verse; v. 8 as context if needed)
10. For mortal/venial sin in full: see the Catholic Armory study Hold Fast