

Session 2: To the Churches, Part I

What We Found

The seven letters share one usual pattern (not every element appears in every letter): Christ's self-title (usually echoing the chapter 1 vision), I know, commendation, where needed a charge, a call, the refrain to hear what the Spirit says to the churches (plural: every letter is for every church, including ours), and a promise to him who conquers. Ephesus is doctrinally vigilant but has abandoned the love it had at first; the remedy is concrete: remember, repent, do the works you did at first. Smyrna, poor and persecuted, is called rich and receives no rebuke at all; its own bishop, St. Polycarp, would live its letter to the end. Pergamum and Thyatira are confronted over accommodation with idolatry, branded with the old names Balaam and Jezebel: the timeless temptation to belong to Christ on Sunday and to the idols of career, status, and appetite the rest of the week. And the promises (the tree of life, the crown, the hidden manna, the white stone, the morning star, and more) converge on one gift: eternal communion with Christ himself.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Polycarp of Smyrna · *Martyrdom of Polycarp, ch. 9*

Ordered in the stadium to curse Christ, the aged bishop of Smyrna answered that for eighty-six years he had served Christ, who had done him no wrong, and asked how he could now blaspheme his King who saved him. Condemned to the pyre around A.D. 155, he was killed by the executioner's blade when the flames did not consume him (*Martyrdom of Polycarp, chs. 15–16*). Be faithful unto death was his church's letter, and his life.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch · *Letter to the Ephesians (summary)*

Being marched to his death not long after Revelation, on the common dating, St. Ignatius wrote to this same Ephesian church, praising, in substance, their faith and unity and urging them to gather frequently for the Eucharist, where the powers of Satan are broken. For us, the study's application: the road back to first love runs through the altar.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Victorinus of Pettau · *Commentary on the Apocalypse (summary)*

The earliest surviving Latin commentary on Revelation teaches, in substance, that the seven churches stand for the one universal Church in her fullness: what Christ says to one, he says to all. These letters are our mail.

Live It This Week

- Do one first-love work this week: a practice from when your faith was young or newly serious that you have quietly dropped. Do it once, concretely, before we meet again.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 3.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 827; 1428; 2113.