

Session 5: The Seals

What We Found

The slain Lamb, and no one else, opens the seals: history's worst unfolds inside his sovereignty, never outside it. The four horsemen ride out of Zechariah's visions carrying Ezekiel's four sore judgments (sword, famine, pestilence, wild beasts): prophetic stock imagery for what conquest, war, scarcity, and death do in every age, which is why generation after generation has recognized them, and why no date-setting scheme has ever held the key (the final trial the Church confesses, CCC 675–677, still stands ahead). We found the grammar of limits: power was given, a measure set, a fourth of the earth; evil is real and bounded, on a leash held by a pierced hand. The fifth seal is the book's engine: the martyrs under the altar, their deaths received as an offering (the blood at the altar's base, evoked), praying the psalter's ancient cry, how long?, and receiving white robes and the answer: a little longer. The sixth seal speaks judgment in the prophets' own poetry of collapse (Isaiah 34; Joel 2), the poetry Jesus himself quoted on the road to the cross (Hosea 10:8 in Luke 23:30), and ends with the question hanging: who can stand?

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Augustine · *City of God* (as quoted in *Lumen Gentium* 8)

The Church presses forward on her pilgrimage amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God. The study's application: the horsemen are the persecutions; the white robes are the consolations; and the Church's road runs between them until the number is complete.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

Tertullian · *Apology*, ch. 50

The early Christian writer Tertullian ended his defense of the persecuted Church with the famous claim that the blood of Christians is seed. The fifth seal shows why: the martyrs' blood is poured at the base of heaven's altar, counted as sacrifice, and answered.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Bede the Venerable · *Explanation of the Apocalypse* (summary)

St. Bede teaches, in substance, that the seals unfold the Church's trials across her whole time between Christ's comings, to be read spiritually for every generation rather than pinned to a single date.

Live It This Week

- Pray your how long? once this week: name it before God, place it in your imagination under the altar of Revelation 6:9, and end with the martyrs' address: O Sovereign Lord, holy and true.
- When hard news reaches you this week, before reacting, say once: the Lamb opens the seals. Then respond as a Christian, not a spectator.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33, RSV2CE)

Our Lord's word for overcome is Revelation's conquering verb, *nikaō* (John 16:33 uses the form *nenikēka*).

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 7.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 675–677; 1011; 2473; 2642.