

This Great Mystery

Session 4. One New Man

The wall came down so that a temple could go up, and you are part of the masonry.

What We Found

Paul asked his Gentile readers to remember how far outside they once stood: without Christ, without citizenship, without the covenants, without hope, without God. Then came three words that change everything: but now, near. Not walked closer by effort, but brought near in the blood of Christ.

We found that there was a real wall in the Jerusalem temple keeping Gentiles out, with a death threat carved into it, and that Paul says Christ demolished it. More than that: Paul does not say Christ made peace, he says Christ IS our peace. Out of two peoples he created one new humanity, new in kind, and it exists in him.

We put Paul's words next to the prophet Isaiah and discovered Paul was quoting promises centuries old: peace announced to the far and the near, and a cornerstone laid by God himself. What happened at the cross is what Isaiah was promising all along.

And we found where the whole passage lands: the demolition was a construction project. Strangers became citizens, citizens became family, and the family is being built into a holy temple, 'a dwelling place of God in the Spirit', founded on the apostles, squared to Christ the cornerstone, and still growing. Stones are not built into a temple alone.

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom, d. 407

Preaching on this passage, St. John Chrysostom insists that Christ did not simply raise the Gentile to the Jew's level, as if the Jew stood still and the Gentile climbed. Both were brought into something greater than either had been. He reaches for the image of a foundry: it is as if two statues, one of silver and one of lead, were melted down together, and what came out of the furnace was a single statue of gold.

Homilies on Ephesians, Homily 5. Summary of St. John Chrysostom's teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone in the room who feels like a latecomer to the faith, this lands directly: you were not squeezed into someone else's finished building; something new was made that includes you by design.

St. Augustine of Hippo, d. 430

St. Augustine loved the image of the cornerstone and returned to it often in his preaching. A cornerstone, he observes, sits where two walls meet. One wall comes from one direction, the other from another, and they join at the corner. So Christ joins the wall coming from the circumcision and the wall coming from the uncircumcision: two peoples, approaching from different histories, meeting in one stone and becoming one building at the point where he stands.

His Epiphany sermons and expositions of the Psalms. Summary of St. Augustine of Hippo's teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ask the room where the two walls meet in their own parish: the cradle Catholics and the converts, the old families and the new arrivals. The corner is Christ or the walls never touch.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), d. 1942

Edith Stein, a Jewish philosopher who became a Catholic and a Carmelite nun, understood her baptism not as an exit from the Jewish people but as a deeper binding to them, because the Christ she now belonged to was himself a son of Israel. She deliberately united her fate to theirs under Nazi persecution. Witnesses report that when the SS came to arrest her at her convent, she took her sister Rosa's hand and said, in substance, come, let us go for our people. She died at Auschwitz.

Her life and writings; the testimony of witnesses at her arrest. Summary of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)'s teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. The one new man does not erase where anyone came from. Paul's Gentile readers were not asked to stop being Greek, and Edith Stein did not stop belonging to Israel. The new humanity gathers histories; it does not delete them.

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Visit a church building once this week outside of Mass, even for ten minutes. Sit where you can see the altar and read Ephesians 2:19-22 slowly. Then look around at the actual stones and ask what they are a picture of.
2. Name, honestly and only to God, one person or group you keep on the other side of a wall: someone you have written off, avoid, or quietly hold in contempt. Take one concrete step toward them this week, a message, a coffee, a prayer for them by name every day. Not a grand gesture; one stone out of the wall.
3. At Mass this Sunday, when the sign of peace comes, remember verse 14 before you say the words: peace is not a pleasantries you exchange, it is a person you are both standing in.
4. Memorize Ephesians 2:14 and say it once each morning.

Scripture Memory

Ephesians 2:14

"For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility."

Ephesians 2:14

Go Further in the Catechism

- CCC 756. the Church as God's building on the apostolic foundation, Christ the cornerstone
- CCC 797. the Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit
- CCC 2305. Christ 'is our peace'; peace as more than absence of war
- CCC 839. the Church's unique relationship to the Jewish people

Before next session. Read Ephesians 3:1-21 before we meet again, and pay attention to how the chapter opens.