

Take-Home 4 | Until the End of the Age

Binding and Loosing

Authority that serves the word of God

Keep this sheet for prayer, review, and practice this week.

What We Found

Matthew 18 and Acts 15 show a Church that can settle disputes with authority. Correction goes privately first, then before the Church. At the council, Scripture and experience are both on the table, and the letter says "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." Acts 16 shows the decision binding churches that were not in the room. The same letter's dietary rules were discipline, later relaxed by the same authority, which is why the Church distinguishes the unchanging deposit of faith from rules that can develop. And not every exercise of authority is infallible; the conditions are precise. (Matthew 18:15-20; Acts 15:1-29; Acts 16:4-5; CCC 83, 85-86, 1444-1445; Lumen Gentium, 25.)

Voices of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch

Summary: Let no one do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Only that Eucharist is to be considered valid which is celebrated by the bishop or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Where the bishop is, there let the people be, as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. Unity is visible in a ministry, not only felt in a sentiment.

Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 8

Second Vatican Council

Summary: The teaching office is not above the word of God but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on. It listens to the word devoutly, guards it scrupulously, and explains it faithfully, and from this one deposit it draws everything it proposes for belief as divinely revealed.

Dei Verbum, 10

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: In giving the Apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. Bind and loose mean that whoever is excluded from your communion is excluded from communion with God, and whoever you receive anew into your communion God will receive into his. Reconciliation with the Church and with God go together.

CCC 1444-1445

Ready Response

If someone says: "The Church cannot claim Acts 15 as a precedent. It bans blood and strangled meat, and you eat both."

You can say: The council decided two kinds of things. Its doctrine, that Gentiles are free of circumcision, has never changed. Its food rules were discipline to keep Jewish and Gentile Christians at one table, and the same authority later lifted them. The Church has always told those two apart. Binding does not mean frozen.

Live It This Week

Sort. Pick one Catholic teaching or practice you find difficult. Decide whether it is doctrine, discipline, or a devotion. Write the answer down.

Read. Read the Catechism paragraphs on it in context. Write down the question that remains.

Ask. Bring that question to a priest or catechist this week instead of settling it with a slogan.

Scripture Memory

“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.”

Acts 15:28 (RSV2CE)

A Personal Response

Where am I treating a discipline as if it were the deposit of faith, or the deposit as if it were negotiable?

Before Next Session

Read: Mark 2:1-12; John 20:19-23. Read John 20 twice and note the order of what Jesus does.

Catechism: CCC 1441-1442, 1461.

In the Catechism this week: 83; 85-86; 888-892; 1444-1445.