

TAKE-HOME • SESSION 9

Ephesus and the Foundations

What We Found

Scripture's courtroom principle, a matter is established on two or three witnesses, gave us our frame, and tonight we heard the second and third. In Ephesus, Paul, an apostle who was not in Samaria, found about twelve sincere disciples running on John's baptism, who had not yet even heard the news of the Holy Spirit's outpouring. He asked them the question that assumes receiving the Spirit is a definite, knowable event: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Then he completed what they had: Christian Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus, which truly gives the Spirit, and, as a distinct further act, his hands laid on them, "and the Holy Spirit came on them." Two cities, two apostles, one instrument: a pattern, not an incident. And in the letter to the Hebrews we found a third, corroborating witness: "the laying on of hands" sitting in an apostolic-era list of elementary foundations, filed between the washings and the resurrection. The debt this study promised four weeks ago is paid.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Hippolytus of Rome (*the Apostolic Tradition, around AD 215*)

The third-century church order traditionally attributed to St. Hippolytus, its exact origin debated, preserves an early practice: after the washing, the newly baptized are brought to the bishop, who lays his hand on them and prays for God's grace. Roughly a century after the apostle John's death, washing was already followed by the bishop's hand and prayer.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan (*On the Mysteries*)

After the font comes the spiritual seal, when at the priest's invocation the Holy Spirit is poured out with the sevenfold grace the Church names from Isaiah 11: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and strength, of knowledge and piety and holy fear. The gifts prayed over the newly initiated were the ones resting on the shoot of Jesse.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome (*Dialogue Against the Luciferians*)

St. Jerome records and defends the practice of his day: bishops travel out to those baptized in smaller towns to lay hands on them and invoke the Holy Spirit, a custom he traces to Peter and John being sent to Samaria, while noting that its reservation to bishops also honors the good order of the Church. The root, even so, is apostolic.

Live It This Week

Parent and candidate together. The bishop, a successor of the apostles, is the ordinary minister of Confirmation. Find out his name this week if you do not know it, and pray one sentence for him together each day: "Lord, bless our bishop, N.; make him holy, and prepare him and us for the day of Confirmation."

Memory Verse

"And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them." (Acts 19:6)

Table Talk

One question for the drive home or the dinner table: Paul's question, at our own table: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit?" What would each of us honestly answer tonight?

Before Next Session

Read Ephesians 1:3-14, slowly.

Catechism references for this session: CCC 699, 1289, 1290.