

Session 1: The Unveiling of Jesus Christ

What We Found

The book's own name, *apokalypsis*, means unveiling, and the first thing unveiled is not a timeline but a Person: the risen Jesus Christ. The blessing of Revelation 1:3 falls on one who reads aloud and on those who hear: this book's wording strongly suggests birth in the Church's gathered worship, and John received it on the Lord's Day, traditionally understood as Sunday. The vision of the Son of Man (1:12–18) is painted from Daniel 7 and 10: Jesus carries the marks of both the son of man and the Ancient of Days, a claim of his divinity made in pure image. He interprets himself with Isaiah's divine title and with the only credential that matters to a suffering church: I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. And he stands among the lampstands: whatever is coming in this book, Christ is already in the midst of his churches.

Four Ways Christians Have Read This Book

- *Preterist*: the visions chiefly concern the first-century crisis of the early Church.
- *Historicist*: the visions map the sweep of Church history.
- *Futurist*: the visions chiefly concern the final crisis at the end of history.
- *Idealist*: the visions portray the timeless battle between Christ and evil in every age.

The Catholic Church has not canonized any one school; her instinct is a both-and, drawing on each approach only insofar as it squares with Catholic doctrine and sound reading. This study will keep all four on the table and will always tell you what is of faith and what is permitted opinion.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome · *Letter 53, to Paulinus*

St. Jerome wrote that the Apocalypse of John has as many mysteries as it has words, and that in each of its words lie hidden manifold meanings. Approach this book with patient, humble digging rather than confident decoding.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr · *Dialogue with Trypho, ch. 81*

Writing around the middle of the second century, St. Justin testifies that a man among the Christians named John, one of the apostles of Christ, prophesied by a revelation made to him: our earliest clear witness to this book.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies, Book 5*

St. Irenaeus reports that the apocalyptic vision was seen almost in his own generation, toward the end of Domitian's reign: the anchor of the traditional dating, about A.D. 95.

Live It This Week

- Once this week, read Revelation 1:1–8 aloud, even if you are alone: the book blesses the voice that reads and the ears that hear (1:3). Receive the blessing on purpose.
- Read Revelation 1 once more slowly, and read Daniel 7:9–14 beside it.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17–18, RSV2CE)

MY GUESS (WRITE, THEN SEAL)

Later in this study we will meet this verse: And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. (Revelation 12:1, RSV2CE)

Who do you think the woman is? Write your guess below, fold this sheet, seal or staple it, and put your name on the outside. We will open these together mid-study. No wrong answers; honest guesses only.

My guess: _____

MY SUNDAY GUESS (WRITE, THEN SEAL)

One sentence: what do you predict this book will turn out to have to do with what Christians do on Sunday morning?

Write your guess below, fold this corner over it, and do not revise it. This seal opens in Session 9.

My Sunday guess: _____

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 2.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 115–118; 128–130.

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

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

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.

Session 3: To the Churches, Part II

What We Found

Three diagnoses of the comfortable heart. Sardis: a living reputation and a dead reality, called to awake, strengthen, remember, keep, repent; yet even there Christ counts the faithful by name. Philadelphia: little power, kept word, and an open door no one can shut, because Christ holds the key of David (we opened Isaiah 22 and found the royal steward's key now in the Son of David's hand); to an earthquake city he promises permanence, a pillar in the temple of God. Laodicea: I need nothing meets wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked; Christ's three remedies likely echo the city's famed banking, textiles, and medicine: everything it boasted, it needed from him. And the harshest letter ends with the gentlest image: Christ outside the door of his own church, knocking, asking to come in to supper. In the later devotional image, the handle is on the inside; even the knock and the voice are his grace. Smyrna and Philadelphia, the two churches presented as weakest in worldly terms, are the two without a rebuke: Christ's arithmetic is not ours.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *Confessions, Book I, ch. 1*

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. The study's application: lukewarmness is what a restless heart looks like when it has numbed itself with lesser comforts; the cure is the return of desire to its true object.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis de Sales · *Introduction to the Devout Life (summary)*

St. Francis de Sales teaches, in substance, that devotion is prompt, ready love of God available to every state of life, and that the merely respectable Christian life, avoiding grave sin while loving God sluggishly, falls far short of the devotion he urges; the study adds that it is dangerous precisely because it feels safe.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Teresa of Ávila · *Lines found in her breviary*

The lines traditionally found written in her breviary say, in substance: let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; all things are passing; God never changes; patience obtains all things; whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.

Live It This Week

- Answer the knock once, concretely: one act of zeal chosen against your own lukewarm spot. Then share one unhurried meal this week and eat it as if Christ were the guest of Revelation 3:20: he is.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 4–5.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 827; 1428, 1430–1433; 2544–2547.

Session 4: The Throne and the Lamb

What We Found

Through the open door of Revelation 4:1 John was shown heaven's throne room, and we went with him and found worship: the four living creatures, drawing on Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6, singing the thrice-holy hymn; twenty-four vested elders casting their crowns; incense; and the sealing Amen. Heaven's worship is structured, communal, embodied, and unceasing. Then the pivot of the whole book: no one is worthy to open God's scroll until an elder announces the Lion of Judah, and John looks and sees a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain. He hears Lion; he sees Lamb. The Lamb's conquest is cross-shaped, and his followers conquer through faithful witness in union with him. The new song tells what the blood accomplished: a people ransomed from every tribe and tongue and nation, made a kingdom and priests. And the elders hold golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints: your prayers do not evaporate; they are present before the throne.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies* (summary)

St. Irenaeus taught, in substance, that the four living creatures around the throne correspond to the fourfold Gospel: lion, ox, man, and eagle picture the one Christ proclaimed by four evangelists, gathered here into unceasing praise.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *City of God*, Book 22 (summary)

St. Augustine describes, in substance, the life of the world to come as one unending Sabbath of praise: we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise; this is what shall be in the end without end. John was shown that praise already sounding.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies*, Book 3

St. Irenaeus links the four living creatures with the fourfold Gospel: one Gospel in four forms, held together by one Spirit. St. Irenaeus is the early witness to the link; the now-familiar emblem assignments settled later.

Live It This Week

- Each morning this week, pray Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come (Revelation 4:8) aloud as your first words of the day.
- Once this week, bring one specific worry to prayer and picture Revelation 5:8: your prayer in a golden bowl, presented before the throne.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! (Revelation 5:12, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 6.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 956; 1090; 1137–1139.

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

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

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.

Session 6: Sealed and Countless

What We Found

Chapter 7 answers who can stand?: the sealed can stand. Before the winds blow, God's servants are marked on the forehead, a scene drawn from Ezekiel 9, where the marked are protected through judgment, not around it. For Catholics the seal is close to home: claimed at baptism, sealed at confirmation (CCC 1274, 1295–1296). The 144,000 has literary features that strongly support a portrait rather than a census: Judah first, Dan missing, Joseph's line doubled, twelve times twelve times a thousand. And then the book's pattern paid off: John hears a number and sees a multitude no man could number, from every nation, exactly as he once heard Lion and saw Lamb: God's people, counted and complete from his side, countless from ours (the Church leaves room here, and we said so honestly). They have come through the great tribulation with robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb: purity by his sacrifice, not our achievement. The Lamb is their Shepherd; God wipes away every tear. And the seventh seal opens onto about half an hour of silence in heaven, which we practiced together.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

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

St. Bede teaches, in substance, that the 144,000 signifies the whole Church in her perfection: the people of the patriarchs and the apostles multiplied into fullness; many in the tradition, building on that arithmetic, read the countless multitude as the same Church seen from our side.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose · *On the Mysteries (as quoted in CCC 1303)*

St. Ambrose bids the newly initiated recall the spiritual seal they have received and guard it: God the Father has marked you, Christ the Lord has confirmed you, and has placed the pledge of the Spirit in your heart.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

The Church at Prayer · *The Liturgy of All Saints (November 1)*

Every year on All Saints the Church proclaims Revelation 7:2–4, 9–14 in her worship: the sealed servants of God and the countless white-robed multitude. She reads it not as a puzzle but, in this study's image, as her family album, and she venerates that countless multitude as her own.

Live It This Week

- Practice Revelation 8:1 once a day: two minutes of complete silence before God, phone elsewhere. No words; just stand before the throne sealed and known.
- If you have beloved dead, pray for them once this week in this chapter's words: that God shelter them with his presence and wipe away every tear.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Revelation 7:17, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 8:2–11:18.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 1138; 1274; 1295–1296; 1303–1305.

Session 7: The Trumpets

What We Found

Before a single trumpet sounds, the prayers of all the saints rise as incense from the golden altar, and the censer's fire falls to earth: what rises is prayer; what falls is answer. The martyrs' how long? is being taken up, and nobody prays into the void. The trumpets themselves replay the plagues of Egypt (blood, hail and fire, locusts, darkness): readable as God doing Exodus again, dismantling idols to free people. Most strike in measured thirds (the fifth is time-limited instead): warnings, not annihilation, and their evident aim is repentance, and the lament of 9:20–21 (they did not repent) implies as much. At the section's center, the Church's vocation at the section's center is testimony, not force of arms: John eats the scroll like Ezekiel (sweet in the mouth, bitter in the stomach), and the two witnesses (Moses's and Elijah's powers, Zechariah's olive trees; their identity an honest open question) testify, die, and rise: a shape long read as their Lord's story stamped onto his witnesses, and onto his Church. The three-and-a-half figure (1,260 days, forty-two months) draws on Daniel and is traditionally heard as a broken seven: persecution real, painful, and bounded. And the seventh trumpet announces what every Our Father asks: the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas · *Summa Theologiae* (summary)

We do not pray to change God's plan, but because God has arranged that some things be granted through our prayers: prayer is a true cause within providence. Revelation 8:3–5 is that doctrine in one picture.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage · *To Demetrianus* (summary)

Amid plague and disaster, St. Cyprian answered the pagan world, in substance: these scourges are not your gods' anger but the true God's summons to turn to him while there is time; Christians suffer the same evils, but not with the same despair.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Hippolytus of Rome · *On Christ and the Antichrist* (summary)

St. Hippolytus records the ancient expectation, in substance, that Elijah will return as a witness before the end. His reading stands beside the equally venerable one that hears in the two witnesses the Church's own prophetic testimony; the Church has defined neither.

Live It This Week

- Pray Psalm 141:2 each evening this week (let my prayer be counted as incense), and mean one specific intercession by it each night.
- If a trumpet has been sounding in your own conscience, answer it: get to confession before our next session if you can.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 11:15, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 11:19–12:17, and bring your sealed My Guess sheet from Session 1.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 334–335; 1037; 2635–2636; 2816–2818.

Session 8: The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon

What We Found

The guesses came unsealed, and the text voted for nearly all of them at once. The ark of the covenant, hidden from view for nearly seven centuries, appears in heaven's opened temple (11:19), and in the same breath a great portent: a woman clothed with the sun. Her regalia is Israel's (Joseph's dream: sun, moon, and stars, completed to twelve), her travail is Zion's (Isaiah 66), so she is the people of God laboring to bring forth the Messiah. Her child rules with the rod of iron of Psalm 2 and is caught up to God's throne: Jesus, birth to Ascension in one verse, which makes the woman, at the personal level, Mary. And her other offspring are those who keep God's commandments and bear testimony to Jesus: us. The Catholic answer is a built-in both-and: the Catechism names the Mother of God the Woman (CCC 1138), and the corporate reading rises from the text's own imagery and the tradition (Mary, type of the Church, CCC 967). The dragon is decoded by the text: that ancient serpent, the Devil, which turns the whole chapter into Genesis 3:15 staged: the first gospel, the enmity, the woman, her seed, and the serpent's defeat. Michael casts him down, and the real weapons are named: they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. The accuser has been disbarred. The woman is carried on eagles' wings (Exodus 19:4) into the wilderness, often understood as including the Church's present pilgrimage: pursued, provided for, en route.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies, Book 3*

The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith. The Fathers called Mary the new Eve within a century of the apostles.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose · *Lumen Gentium 63, drawing on St. Ambrose*

Mary is the type of the Church in the order of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ. The Catholic reading refuses to choose between Mary and the Church: type and exemplar, person and people, distinct yet inseparable.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Pius X · *Ad Diem Illum (summary)*

St. Pius X teaches, in substance, that John saw in the woman the Virgin Mother, who, her blessed childbearing accomplished, labors mystically still in birth pangs for us, the members of Christ: Mary, mother of Christians: exactly Revelation 12:17's rest of her offspring.

Live It This Week

- Once this week, when the accusing voice starts, answer it out loud with Revelation 12:11: conquered by the blood of the Lamb. Then go about your day.

- Pray one Memorare or one decade of the Rosary this week for the persecuted members of her family; if Marian prayer is new or uneasy for you, simply read Revelation 12 and John 19:25–27 side by side.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (Revelation 12:11, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 13 and 14:1–5.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 391–395; 410–411; 963–964, 968–970; 1138.

Session 9: The Beasts and the Mark

What We Found

The dragon delegates. From the sea rises a beast assembled, in the widely held reading, from Daniel 7's four beasts in one (leopard, bear, lion, ten horns): state power absolutized, wearing Rome's face for the first hearers and resurfacing wherever politics demands what belongs to God, with the deception's supreme form, the Antichrist, still ahead (CCC 675–676; a personal figure in the common expectation). From the land rises a lamb-horned, dragon-voiced beast (the false prophet): religion and propaganda in the first beast's service, enforcing worship through the market: no buying or selling without the mark. And we discovered that evil creates nothing of its own: it corrupts, misuses, and counterfeits the goods God made. A parody trinity (dragon, beast, false prophet); a parody resurrection (the mortal wound healed); a parody seal (the mark on hand and forehead, aping the seal of God's servants and Deuteronomy 6's command to bind God's word on the hand and as frontlets between the eyes: deed and thought). On 666: the leading scholarly reading finds Nero Caesar's name-number (with the 616 manuscript variant matching), the symbolic reading hears six falling short of seven three times (a human number, 13:18), and the Church's earliest word on it, from St. Irenaeus, is a warning against guessing games. Revelation ties the mark to deliberate worship and allegiance, not to accidents: no one is damned by a barcode. And the answer stands on Zion: the Lamb, and the sealed thousands with HIS name on their foreheads, who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Twice the chapter pauses to address the reader: a call for the endurance and faith of the saints (13:10), and a call for wisdom (13:18).

And then the second seal opened. The inventory we have been meeting since Session 1 (the Lord's Day, the lampstands, the priestly robe, the Sanctus, the incense that is the prayers of the saints, the altar, the ark) assembled into one discovery: heaven's worship is the worship the Church enters at every Mass, a participation in the one sacrifice of Christ, made present and never repeated (CCC 1090; 1366–1367). We did not learn a new fact about Revelation; we learned where we have been standing on Sunday morning all along.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies, Book 5*

St. Irenaeus knew the number 666 from the ancient copies, weighed candidate names himself, and warned, in substance, against asserting any: safer to await the fulfillment; had the name needed proclaiming, the seer would have proclaimed it.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *City of God, Book 14*

Two loves have built two cities: love of self, reaching contempt of God, the earthly city; love of God, reaching contempt of self, the heavenly. The study's application: the beast's empire and the Lamb's Zion contend for every heart, in every age.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr · *First Apology (summary)*

We worship God alone, St. Justin told the emperor in substance, but in all else we gladly serve you: taxes paid, prayers offered, adoration refused. Everything lawful to Caesar; nothing of God's.

Live It This Week

- Do one act of costly allegiance this week in the place you named: small and real beats large and imaginary.
- This Sunday, attend Mass with our inventory in mind, from the sign of the cross to the final blessing. Count what you now recognize, and thank God for one item by name.
- Read Daniel 3:16–18 once, and pray the three friends' words over your situation: in their compressed motto drawn from Daniel 3:18: but if not, we will not serve.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. (Revelation 13:10, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 14:6–20.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 675–676; 2113; 2242; 1090; 1137–1139; 1326; 1366–1367.

Session 10: The Eternal Gospel and the Harvest

What We Found

Before anything is reaped, heaven says everything out loud. The eternal gospel turns out to be the oldest message aimed at the newest idol: fear God, give him glory, worship him who made heaven and earth: creation's claim against every beast. Babylon is introduced by her obituary (fallen, fallen), because this book refuses to present any evil as ultimate. The third angel's warning, the sternest text in the study, speaks the prophets' wrath idiom (Isaiah's smoke, Jeremiah's cup) and addresses conscious worshipers of the beast; the Church's doctrine holds both hands full: hell is real as definitive self-exclusion freely chosen, and God predestines no one to it and desires all to be saved (CCC 1033–1037). Four verses later comes the book's tenderest beatitude, which the Church prays over her dead: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord... their deeds follow them, a clause that accords with the Church's teaching on the particular judgment (CCC 1021–1022): nothing done in the Lord is left at the grave. Then two harvests grown from Joel 3:13: the grain reaped by one like a son of man, the vintage thrown to the winepress; whether the grain is the saved ingathered or both harvests are one judgment, the Church leaves open, and we said so. And Isaiah 63's winepress-treader comes with garments already stained.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis of Assisi · *Canticle of the Creatures*

Near his own death St. Francis praised God through Sister Bodily Death: woe to those who die in mortal sin; blessed those whom death will find in your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm. Warning and beatitude, held together without contradiction.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Alphonsus Liguori · *Preparation for Death (summary)*

The remembrance of death is not morbid but medicinal, St. Alphonsus teaches in substance: the great teacher of how to live, detaching us from what we cannot keep and attaching us to the One no death can take from us while we remain in his grace.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

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

St. Bede reads the two harvests, in substance, as the end of the age gathering both crops the earth has grown, each given at last to its own end. The study's application: the crops ripen through long seasons of choices; history is not interrupted by the end but completed by it.

Live It This Week

- Begin the deed you named, the one you want following you: one concrete step this week, however small.
- Pray once for your own death: that it find you in the Lord; the Hail Mary's second half (now and at the hour of our death) hands you the words.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" (Revelation 14:13, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 15–16.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 1021–1022; 1033–1037; 2096–2097.

Session 11: The Song and the Bowls

What We Found

Beside a sea of glass mingled with fire stand those who conquered the beast, singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb: the Red Sea shore restaged, with the beast as Pharaoh, and with the sea and the song, the Exodus pattern we have traced all study (Passover Lamb, plagues, eagles' wings and wilderness) stands complete. Unlike Israel's sea, theirs did not part; the vision suggests a crossing made through faithful endurance, conquering by the blood of the Lamb (12:11). The Church adds the personal key: your Red Sea was the font (CCC 1221). The song itself never mentions the singers: every line is God's deeds, God's justice, the nations coming home: victory, sung rightly, is doxology (and our RSV2CE reads O King of the ages at 15:3). Then the bowls: Egypt's plagues full, no longer warning thirds, and the moral logic said aloud: they shed the blood of saints and prophets, and a voice from the altar answers: true and just are thy judgments: the book's altar scenes (the martyrs' prayer beneath it, the incense rising from it) converging in one reply. The martyrs' how long? is answered: the bowls read as granted prayer, not divine temper: and still the refrain of unrepentance (twice) reads as a door standing open to the last. Armageddon can be read, as many interpreters do, as a symbol wearing history's battlefield as a name (a mountain of Megiddo where Megiddo has none), and in the middle of the muster our Lord himself interrupted: I am coming like a thief; blessed is he who is awake: watchfulness, not calculation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose · *On the Mysteries (summary)*

St. Ambrose reads the Red Sea crossing, in substance, as the figure of baptism: the enemy drowned, the people brought through water to freedom and a song. The study's application: every font is a shoreline; Revelation 15 is the far shore.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *as quoted in CCC 311*

Almighty God, being supremely good, would never allow any evil in his works, as the Catechism quotes St. Augustine, unless he were so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself. Even the last plagues stand inside a providence that wastes nothing.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom · *homily before his exile (summary)*

Nothing is truly to be feared except sin, St. John Chrysostom preached in substance: not exile, not confiscation, not death. The real terror of the bowl chapters is not the plagues; it is the heart that endures them and will not turn.

Live It This Week

- Learn the far-shore song early: pray Revelation 15:3–4 aloud once each day, especially on any day something goes right.

- Choose one wakefulness practice against the sleep-habit you named (fixed prayer time, media fast hour, examen before bed) and do it daily this week.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! (Revelation 15:3, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 17–18.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 268–271; 311; 1040; 1221.

Session 12: Babylon the Great

What We Found

Babylon's file opened, and she turned out to be the counterfeit of a mother. Chapter 12's woman: clothed with the sun, in labor, hunted, fed by God in the wilderness. Chapter 17's woman: purple and scarlet, gold and pearls, enthroned on the beast, golden cup full of abominations, drunk with the blood of the saints. Her first-century face was the least mysterious symbol in the book: seven mountains, heard as the famous seven hills; the city with dominion over the kings of the earth; the code name early Christians used for Rome, as tradition reads St. Peter's own sign-off (1 Peter 5:13): the empire that martyred the saints. And she outruns Rome by design: dressed in Jeremiah's Babylon and Ezekiel's Tyre, she can stand for the world-city of every age: wealth, pleasure, and status purchased at the price of blood and souls: seduction where the beast is coercion. Chapter 18 sang her funeral in borrowed prophetic dirges, and the cargo manifest carried the sharpest verdict: gold, silk, spice, cattle... and slaves, that is, human souls: an economy that lists people last, priced with the freight. The command that interrupts the funeral is addressed to believers inside her: Come out of her, my people: primarily not relocation but disentanglement: repentance, simplicity, generosity, clean allegiance. And the file closed with its gravest charge: in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *City of God, Book 18 (summary)*

St. Augustine treats Babylon as the standing capital of the earthly city across history, and speaks of Rome, in substance, as a second Babylon in the west. The study's application: Babylon is less a dot on a map than a citizenship of the heart.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom · *Homilies on Lazarus and the Rich Man (summary)*

St. John Chrysostom preached, in substance, that not to share one's wealth with the poor is theft from the poor, for the goods we hold beyond our need are theirs. Babylon's ledger prices souls last; the Church's Doctors price them first.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Bernard of Clairvaux · *On Consideration (summary)*

St. Bernard warned Pope Eugene III, in substance: in pomp and bustle you risk seeming the successor not of Peter but of Constantine; remember you are heir to a fisherman. The saints call the Church's members away from Babylon's style: love reforms what polemic only defames.

Live It This Week

- Make one concrete exit from Babylon this week: cancel, fast from, give away, or repent of the one thing you named. Small and real.
- Do one act of mercy toward the people the world's manifest lists last: give to or pray for an anti-trafficking apostolate, a crisis pregnancy center, or the working poor of your own town.

- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues. (Revelation 18:4, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 19–20.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 827; 1867; 2113; 2423–2425.

Session 13: The Supper of the Lamb and the Millennium

What We Found

The New Testament's only Hallelujahs are sung over answered martyrs: he has avenged on her the blood of his servants (19:2): the how long? of the fifth seal, carried through the incense and the bowls, closed in song concerning Babylon (the dragon and death itself meet their sentences at the throne). Then the announcement the book was arranging all along: the marriage of the Lamb has come, and 19:8 holds grace and works in one verse: it was granted her to be clothed, and the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints: the wedding dress is grace, tailored from a lifetime of graced choices (CCC 2008–2009). The beatitude of 19:9 is the one the Roman Rite's priest echoes over the raised Host: Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb: the study's liturgy thread, planted at the Lord's Day reading of Session 1, resolves in the Communion rite. The Rider's robe is dipped in blood before the battle (Isaiah 63 arriving; read through Calvary, the tradition has long heard the blood as first his own, though Isaiah's oracle speaks of enemies' blood), his sword is his mouth (his weapon is his word), and no combat is narrated: the enemies fall at once. On the millennium we learned the honest picture: early diversity (St. Justin held a future reign and records that faithful Christians disagreed), St. Augustine's church-age reading that became the mainstream (on his reading, we are living in the millennium), and the Church's defined rails: Christ reigns now, and returns once in glory to the one universal resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment (each soul's particular judgment at death stands, CCC 1021–1022), and millenarianism, even modified, is rejected (CCC 676). At the great white throne the books of deeds and the book of life open together (grace and works in judgment form), and Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire: the keys of 1:18, used at last.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch · *Letter to the Ephesians*

Not long after Revelation, on its traditional dating, St. Ignatius called the Eucharist the medicine of immortality, the antidote against dying, that we should live forever in Jesus Christ. The marriage supper's medicine is already on the altar.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr · *Dialogue with Trypho (summary)*

St. Justin, who himself expected a future reign of the saints, records with candor, in substance, that many Christians of pure and pious faith thought otherwise: faithful disagreement on the millennium attested already by the mid-second century.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *City of God, Book 20 (summary)*

St. Augustine teaches, in substance, that the thousand years is the present age of the Church, Satan bound so the nations can be gathered, the first resurrection the soul's rising to grace: the saints reign with Christ even now.

Live It This Week

- At Mass this week, when you hear Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb, answer it deliberately as Revelation 19:9: a wedding invitation, handed to you.
- Add one thread to the linen: one graced deed, done before our final session.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. (Revelation 19:9, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 21–22: the final session.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 668–670; 676; 1038–1041; 1329; 1402–1405; 2008–2009.

Session 14: The Bride and the New Jerusalem

What We Found

The ending's decisive image moves in one direction: down. The holy city comes down out of heaven from God: not our escape from creation but God's arrival to renew it: a new heaven and a new earth, the universe itself renewed (CCC 1042–1047). The covenant's oldest refrain arrives home: the dwelling of God is with men (the tabernacle word: God tents with his people forever), and the tenderest sentence in Scripture is delivered: he will wipe away every tear from their eyes; death shall be no more. The city measures as a cube, and Scripture's clearest other cube is the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 6:20): the shape strongly suggests the whole city as inner sanctuary, and the text gives the reason there is no temple: its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. Twelve gates for the tribes, twelve foundations for the apostles: Israel and the Church, one city, gates never shut, the nations walking by its light (Isaiah 60 fulfilled). Eden reopens: Ezekiel's temple river transformed, flowing now from the throne; the tree of life restored with leaves for the healing of the nations, nothing accursed: and the summit of the whole Bible: they shall see his face: the beatific vision (CCC 1023, 1028), his name on their foreheads: the seal, arrived. The morning star promised in Session 2 is decoded: it is Christ himself; every promise in the seven letters is fulfilled in and through him. And the Bible ends not with a period but a dialogue whose longing the Church makes her own at every Mass: The Spirit and the Bride say, Come... Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies, Book 4*

The glory of God is living man; and the life of man is the vision of God. Revelation 22:4 in doctrinal form: the whole city is built for that seeing.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *City of God, Book 22*

There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. Behold what shall be in the end without end. Not unending drudgery: loving praise that never exhausts its Beloved.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Thérèse of Lisieux · *Story of a Soul*

Searching Scripture for her place in the Church, St. Thérèse found it: in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be love. A hidden life of love is citizenship in the city.

Live It (and after)

- Pray Come, Lord Jesus once each day, and mean it at Mass as this book's closing prayer.
- Read Genesis 1–3 and Revelation 20–22 side by side once this month: the Bible's bookends: the garden becoming the city, at the price of the Lamb.
- Pass it on: invite someone to the next group, or lead one. Blessed is he who reads aloud (Revelation 1:3): you are now equipped to be that reader.

Memory Verse

And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." (Revelation 21:5, RSV2CE)

The Study Is Complete

You have now received fourteen memory verses to keep, pray, and give away: the First and the Last who holds the keys; be faithful unto death; the knock at the door; worthy is the Lamb; tribulation overcome; the Shepherd who wipes away tears; the kingdom announced; conquering by the blood of the Lamb; the endurance of the saints; blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; the song of the King of the ages; come out of her, my people; the marriage supper; and all things made new. The Spirit and the Bride say: Come.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 756–757; 1023–1029; 1042–1047; 1130; 2817.