

Take-Home One

Who Handed You This Book?

Unless Someone Guides Me | Session One

What We Found

A wealthy, literate, devout court official sat in a moving chariot reading Isaiah 53, one of the clearest messianic passages in the Old Testament, and could not tell who the prophet was talking about. He had everything except one thing, and what he asked for was not a better text. It was a person. “How can I, unless some one guides me?”

We searched for a verse listing which books belong in the Bible, and there is not one. The list came to us from the Church, discerned over centuries under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is not a weakness in Scripture; it is the reason you own a Scripture at all. We found the same shape in Nehemiah 8, where the people hear the Law read aloud and the Levites still have to give the sense. That was not an accident of one assembly; the Law itself attached teachers to the text, sending hard cases to the priests and the judge (Deuteronomy 17:8-9) and telling Israel to seek instruction from the priest’s mouth (Malachi 2:7). Israel was never handed a text without a teacher.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

Against the Letter of Mani Called "The Foundation," ch. 5

He says he would not believe the Gospel itself unless the authority of the Catholic Church moved him to it. He is not putting the Church over the Gospel; he is naming how the book came to be in his hands and known to be what it claims.

Voice of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against Heresies, Book III (summary)

Against opponents claiming a private key to Scripture, he makes apostolic teaching public and checkable: go to the churches the apostles founded, and see what has been handed on in the open.

Voice of the Church

St. Vincent of Lérins

Commonitorium, ch. 2

His famous test: what has been believed everywhere, always, and by everyone. He proposed it because Scripture is deep, people read it in contradictory ways, and nearly every party claims the text.

The Sealed Question

Do not discuss this with anyone. Write your answer, fold this page, and bring it still folded to Session Five. We will open them together.

MY GUESS

Write down the one verse you think most clearly teaches that Scripture alone is the final and only infallible rule of faith, the one authority no church, council or tradition may overrule.

Why that one?

Ready Response

Three ways this comes up in a real conversation, and what to do. The goal is never to win. It is to open a door that stays open.

“That’s not in the Bible.” Do not go hunting for a verse. You hunted for one this evening and came back empty, and the emptiness was the finding. Ask instead, warmly and with no edge: “Which book of the Bible tells us which books belong in the Bible?” Then stop talking; the silence does the work.

“The Catholic Church added books.” One sentence, no heat, then move on. Those books stood in the Greek Scriptures the early Church read and in the Latin Bible for over a thousand years, and the Council of Trent defined the canon in 1546 in response to the sixteenth century denial of their canonical status.

“I just read what it plainly says.” Half of it is true, and say so. Then hand him the man in the chariot, who read Isaiah 53 and could not say who the prophet meant. Why a person, not a clearer text?

Live It This Week

- Read Acts 8:26-40 slowly, once, without a commentary. Notice how much of it is God arranging a meeting.
- Find out who first handed you a Bible or first taught you the faith. Thank them this week, or offer a Mass for them.
- Look up how the Sunday Mass readings are chosen. You are handed Scripture on a schedule you did not design.
- Pray daily, by name, for the one person you most want to have this conversation with. Ask for their good, not for your victory.

Memory Verse

“How can I, unless some one guides me?” **Acts 8:31**

Before Next Session

Read: Luke 1:1-4 and John 21:25. Both are short. Ask one question as you read: what existed before the writing did?

Catechism: CCC 81, 82, 85, 107, 108, 120. If you read only one, read 120.

Take-Home Two

The Word Before the Book

Unless Someone Guides Me | Session Two

What We Found

The Gospel was preached, believed, and died for before a word of the New Testament existed. St. Luke says so in his own opening: his account rests on what was delivered to him by eyewitnesses. The written Gospel depends on the handing on, not the other way around.

St. Paul tells the Thessalonians to hold to what they were taught “either by word of mouth or by letter,” and he does not rank the two. He uses the same Greek word Jesus uses in Mark 7, where it is condemned. The difference is never the handing on itself. It is the source: the tradition of men, or what the apostles delivered.

And we went looking for Jannes and Jambres in Exodus and did not find them, because they are not there. Paul names Pharaoh’s magicians from Jewish tradition outside the Old Testament, eight verses before he writes that all Scripture is God-breathed.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Basil the Great

On the Holy Spirit, ch. 27 (summary)

The Church holds some things from written teaching and others from apostolic tradition handed on unwritten, in Basil’s phrase received in a mystery, and both carry the same force. His examples are ordinary: the sign of the cross, turning east to pray, the words used at the blessing of the eucharistic gifts.

Voice of the Church

St. John Chrysostom

Homilies on 2 Thessalonians (summary)

Preaching on 2 Thessalonians 2:15, he takes the verse plainly: if Paul distinguishes what was taught by word from what was taught by letter, the apostles did not deliver everything in writing, and both deserve credence.

Voice of the Church

Papias of Hierapolis

Preserved in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History III.39

Writing in the early second century, he says that whenever anyone came who had followed the elders, he asked what the apostles had said, because he did not think what came out of books would help him as much as a living and abiding voice.

Ready Response

Two ways this comes up, and what to do. The goal is never to win. It is to open a door that stays open.

“Tradition is just man-made.” Agree with half of it, warmly. Some traditions are exactly that, and Jesus condemned those by name in Mark 7. Then: “Paul told the Thessalonians to hold to what he taught them by word of mouth. What do you do with that verse?”

“Then show me your list of oral traditions.” Concede it plainly, because there is no list and pretending otherwise will cost you the conversation. Tradition is not a stack of extra facts kept next to the Bible. It is the handing on of the whole faith, including how the Scriptures are read and the sacraments celebrated.

Live It This Week

- Read 2 Timothy 3 in one sitting, and watch verse 8 go past on the way to verse 16.
- Tell one person one thing about the faith out loud this week, without sending them a link.
- At Mass, notice how much of the liturgy you know by heart and never learned from a page.
- Keep praying by name for the person you named last week.

Memory Verse

“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” **2 Thessalonians 2:15**

Before Next Session

Read: Psalm 133. It is three verses. Ask one question as you read it: what would that unity have to look like to be visible from outside?

Catechism: CCC 75-83. If you read only one, read 83.

Take-Home Three

The Church He Actually Built

Unless Someone Guides Me | Session Three

What We Found

Jesus gives a procedure for a dispute in Matthew 18, and the third step is to tell it to the church. You cannot report a matter to an invisible body, and an invisible body cannot declare anyone an outsider. The command only works if there is a church you can find, name, and hear back from.

We counted the ones in Ephesians 4: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. Paul's unity is doctrinal and visible, not merely a shared feeling.

And we said out loud what the Church actually teaches about those who believe in Christ and have been validly baptized but are not in full communion with the Catholic Church: they are accepted as brothers and sisters in the Lord, they bear no personal guilt for a separation they were born into, and real elements of sanctification and truth are found among them.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch

Letter to the Smyrnaeans, ch. 8

Around the year 107, on his way to be killed, he tells the Smyrnaeans that where the bishop appears, there the people should be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is the earliest surviving use of the phrase, and it points at something you can find.

Voice of the Church

St. Cyprian of Carthage

On the Unity of the Catholic Church, chs. 6-7

Writing during an actual schism, he says a person cannot have God for a Father who does not have the Church for a mother, and compares her to the seamless garment the soldiers refused to tear.

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

City of God, Book XVIII, ch. 49 (summary)

Against those who held the true Church contains only the pure, he argued from the parables that she is a mixed body until the harvest, and that we are not the ones who do the sorting.

Ready Response

Three ways this comes up, and what to do.

“The real Church is invisible.” Start with the part that is true and mean it: God alone reads hearts, and every visible church has people in it who are not living the faith, and our Lord said it would be that way. Then put him the question you sat with yourself. In Matthew 18 our Lord tells you to take it to the church. Ask your friend, without any edge, how he would actually carry that out. Not to corner him. Ask it because you tried to answer it yourself and found you could not do it with a church you cannot find.

“Denominations are just branches of one vine.” Do not defend the divisions. They are a wound, Catholics own a share of the history that made them, and saying so as your own is worth more than any argument that follows. Then give him the thing that surprised you: the Church herself teaches that baptism truly joins them to Christ and that there is real, though imperfect, communion between us (CCC 818-819). And then Ephesians 4:5, which you counted through in the room. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. Ask him what one faith about baptism would sound like.

“So my grandmother is going to hell?” Answer straight away and warmly, before anything else: no, the Church does not teach that. We cannot pronounce on anyone’s eternal state, and the Church has never taught that a person is damned simply for not being Catholic, least of all someone who bears no personal guilt for a division she was born into. Baptism truly joins a person to Christ. Say the kind thing before you say the theological thing. If it is his grandmother, the kind thing is most of what he was asking for.

Live It This Week

- Read Acts 2:42-47 and notice how ordinary and how organized it is.
- Pray once this week for Christian unity, by name, for someone not in full communion with the Church.
- Find out who your bishop is, if you do not know, and pray for him.
- If you have said something dismissive about another Christian community, go repair it.

Memory Verse

| *“One Lord, one faith, one baptism.”* **Ephesians 4:5**

Before Next Session

Read: Isaiah 22:19-22. It is four verses about a palace official you have probably never heard of. Read it twice and hold onto it.

Catechism: CCC 771, 811-822. If you read only two, read 818 and 819.

Take-Home Four

Bind and Loose

Unless Someone Guides Me | Session Four

What We Found

Matthew 16 is not a free-standing metaphor about keys. It draws its imagery straight from Isaiah 22, where a royal steward is installed over the house of David: one man singled out, a key laid on his shoulder, authority to open and shut that no one reverses, and a paternal title. In Isaiah the whole point is that one man vacates the office and another fills it. An office that changes hands is not a personal gift that dies with the man.

In Acts 15 the Church faced a genuine dispute where both sides could quote Scripture, and it was settled by an assembly that debated, decided, and wrote that it had seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.

And we said the hard things ourselves rather than waiting to hear them: the rebuke at Caesarea Philippi, the three denials, and Paul opposing Peter to his face at Antioch. The commission was never a statement about the man's reliability.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Letter to the Corinthians, chs. 42-44

Writing from Rome around the year 96 to a congregation that had deposed its leaders, he argues that the apostles appointed overseers and provided that other approved men should succeed them. Note who is writing to whom, and that he expects to be heard.

Voice of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against Heresies, Book III (summary)

Against those claiming secret apostolic teaching, he points to something public and checkable: the churches the apostles founded can name the men who have held the teaching office in unbroken order.

Voice of the Church

St. Leo the Great

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

A fifth-century bishop of Rome, teaching in substance that the care entrusted to Peter did not lapse at his death but continues in those who hold his chair.

Ready Response

Three ways this comes up, and what to do.

“The rock is the confession, not Peter.” Say that the confession matters, because it does. Then give him what you found for yourself, since half the room had Isaiah 22 and half had Matthew 16 and neither half knew what the other was holding: one man singled out, a key handed to him, authority to open and shut that nobody reverses, a paternal title, and in Isaiah an office that one man vacates and another fills. Nobody arranged that for you. You put the two lists side by side. Then be as honest as the session was, because it will cost you nothing: one scene does not settle everything Catholics believe about the papacy. What it settles is that Matthew 16 is an installation, and that the office was built to change hands.

“Jesus called Peter Satan.” Get there before he does, and put the three denials and Antioch on the table yourself. You did that in the room and it cost nothing. Then say the thing that took the sting out of it: the promise was never a compliment. Christ said in advance that this man would fail him and handed him the charge anyway, and the same Gospel keeps the promise and the rebuke on the same page without any embarrassment about it.

“There were wicked popes.” Agree, and do not go soft on it; the history is the history and he will trust you more for saying so. Then say what the promise is actually about: the preservation of teaching, not the holiness of the man. Learn the conditions in CCC 891 well enough to state them without the page in front of you, and note that outside those conditions a pope’s ordinary teaching still asks something of a Catholic (CCC 892) without being irreformable. Do that once and you will be calm about this for the rest of your life, because you will know how much of what he is attacking the Church never claimed.

Live It This Week

- Read John 21:15-19, where the man who denied three times is asked three times and given a charge.
- Pray for the Pope by name once this week, whatever you think of him.
- Learn the conditions in CCC 891 well enough to state them from memory.
- Bring your sealed envelope next week. Do not open it.

Memory Verse

“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ...” **Acts 15:28**

Before Next Session

Read: Hosea 11:1. One verse. Note carefully who it says came out of Egypt.

Catechism: CCC 552-553, 857, 880-882, 891.

Take-Home Five

Reading Like the Apostles

Unless Someone Guides Me | Session Five

What We Found

We opened the envelopes, and most of us had written the same verse. Which surfaced the thing this study has been circling since the first night: we all accept the same Bible. The disagreement was never about whether Scripture is true. It is about who says what it means.

Then we read Hosea 11:1 on its own and found it is not a prediction at all. It remembers the Exodus, in the past tense, and the son is Israel. Matthew applies it to the child Jesus and calls it fulfilled, because he is claiming that Jesus is Israel gathered into one person. Nobody reading Hosea alone would arrive there.

The same holds for the rock that was Christ, Adam as a type, baptism answering to the flood, and the bronze serpent. The apostles read with a key, and the key was handed to them on a road outside Jerusalem. What keeps that reading honest is a public rule: the literal sense is the foundation, the whole canon constrains, and no reading may contradict the faith.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

Questions on the Heptateuch (summary)

In the Old Testament the New lies hidden; in the New the Old lies open. Each Testament keeps doing something to the other.

Voice of the Church

St. Melito of Sardis

On Pascha (summary)

Preaching in the second century, he reads the Passover throughout as the shape of what Christ has done. The date matters: this is what Christian preaching looked like within about a century and a half of the Resurrection.

Voice of the Church

St. Gregory the Great

Moralia on Job, Letter to Leander (summary)

Scripture is like a river both shallow and deep, in which a lamb can walk across and an elephant can swim. Inexhaustible depth, which is not the same as every reader's depth being equally reliable. Elsewhere, in his Homilies on Ezekiel, he says the divine words grow with the one who reads them.

Ready Response

Three ways this comes up, and what to do.

“Typology lets you find anything anywhere.” Agree that it can, and that Catholics have done it badly; you have probably sat through a homily that proved his point. Then say what you were given instead of a shrug, because you can state it from memory now: the literal sense is the foundation, the whole canon constrains the reading, and nothing may be read in a way that contradicts the faith. Then the honest question. Matthew, Paul, Peter and Hebrews all read this way, so it was never a question of whether you and he are allowed to. It is a question of who gets to say when someone has got it wrong. You have an answer to that. Ask him what his is.

“Matthew is misusing Hosea.” You read Hosea 11:1 on its own, so you can say his point before he says it: it is a memory, in the past tense, and the son is Israel. Nobody reading it cold arrives at Bethlehem. Then say what Matthew is actually claiming, which is far bigger than a proof text: that Jesus is Israel gathered into one person, living the nation’s history over again. That is dense, not careless. Whether you accept it turns on whether the apostles were handed a key, and that is the conversation worth having slowly.

“You are reading your conclusions back into the text.” Say yes. Everybody does it, you included, and it is a fair warning rather than an argument. Then hand him the one piece of evidence you did not get to arrange: in 1 Corinthians 10:4 Paul says the rock was Christ, and Exodus says nothing of the kind. Either an apostle was reading with something the text alone does not supply, or he made it up. That is not a choice any Catholic constructed, and it sits in his Bible exactly as it sits in yours.

Live It This Week

- Read Luke 24:13-35 slowly and notice how much of it Christ does to them rather than for them.
- Pick one Old Testament story you know well and ask what it is a pattern of. Do not force it.
- At Sunday Mass, notice the relationship between the first reading and the Gospel. Outside the Easter season the two are deliberately paired, often typologically. On weekdays the two readings usually run on their own tracks, so do not force a link that is not there.
- Say thank you to whoever has been your guide.

Memory Verse

“Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.” **Luke 24:45**

Before Next Session

Read: 1 Peter 3:15-16. Two verses. Count how many of the words are about how you speak rather than what you say.

Catechism: CCC 112-114, 116, 128-130.

Take-Home Six

With Gentleness and Reverence

Unless Someone Guides Me | Session Six

What We Found

The verse the whole discipline of apologetics is named after spends most of its words on manner rather than matter. Be ready to make a defense, yes. Also: reverence Christ in your heart, do it with gentleness and reverence, keep your conscience clear. And the purpose clause at the end does not say the critics will be shamed by better arguments. It says they will be shamed when they revile a life and the life turns out to be good.

In Acts 17 Paul speaks to pagan philosophers and does not quote Scripture at them, does not open by telling them they are wrong, and does not mock their idols. He compliments their religiousness, starts from an altar they had already built, and quotes their own poets. Then some mocked, some deferred, and some believed, which is the normal distribution even when it is done perfectly.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Justin Martyr

Dialogue with Trypho (summary)

One of the earliest works of Christian apologetics takes the form of a long conversation with a named Jewish interlocutor who is given real arguments and real courtesy, even though the work also turns sharply polemical in places.

Voice of the Church

St. Francis de Sales

Given as a summary of his method; no locus printed

Sent to a region that had largely left the faith, and finding almost no one would come hear him, he wrote his case out in short pieces, passed them under doors, and waited. For years.

Voice of the Church

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Summarized from the Catechism at CCC 2478

The Catechism cites his rule that every good Christian ought to be more ready to put a good interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it; that if he cannot, he should ask how the other understands it; and that if the other understands it badly, he should correct him with love.

Ready Response

The last three, and the most important.

When you are winning. Stop. Think of whoever came to mind when you were asked about the person who tried to change your mind and only made you dig in. That is what you are about to be for somebody. A person who has been publicly bested rarely reconsiders; more often he hardens, and he will associate the Church with how that felt. Winning the exchange and losing the person is the failure this whole course was built to prevent, which is why you were asked to name one thing you will not do with what you have learned here.

When you do not know. Say so, plainly and without embarrassment: “I do not know. Let me find out and come back to you.” Then actually come back. You already know this works, because somewhere in these six weeks somebody said it to you and you thought better of them for it, not worse.

When it is family. A table with an audience is the worst venue there is, and family arguments about religion are rarely about religion. So do not open it at Christmas. Try a year of being noticeably easier to live with, and say nothing at all until somebody asks you. It is slower and harder than the version you wanted, and it is the one that works.

Live It This Week

- Memorize 1 Peter 3:15-16, both verses, including the conditions.
- Do the thing you named in the closing practice.
- Go to confession before you go looking for a conversation.
- Keep praying for your person by name. You have done it for six weeks; do not stop now.

Memory Verse

“Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” **1 Peter 3:15**

Where to Go From Here

The modules: Three standalone sessions extend this course and can be run in any order: Peter and the Keys, The Seven Books, and The One-Liners.

Catechism: CCC 821, 856, 2471-2474, 2478. If you read only one for the rest of your life, read 2478.

Take-Home

Peter and the Keys

Unless Someone Guides Me

Module One

What We Found

Peter is named first in every apostolic list and explicitly called first in Matthew 10. He speaks for the group, preaches first at Pentecost, and receives the vision that opens the Church to the Gentiles. Three scenes single him out completely: the keys at Caesarea Philippi, the prayer at the Last Supper, and the threefold charge beside the sea.

In Luke 22 the grammar does the work. Satan asks to sift all of them; Christ says he has prayed for you, singular; and then tells him to strengthen his brothers.

And we learned the four conditions under which the Church holds that a pope teaches infallibly, and everything those conditions leave out: opinions, interviews, conduct, politics, prudential judgments. Note the distinction carefully: what those conditions leave out is the guarantee of irreformability, not every claim on our assent (CCC 892). The claim has always been far narrower than its critics assume.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Jerome

Letter 15, to Pope Damasus, around 376 (summary)

The great critical scholar of his age, writing from the East during a contested succession, asks Rome with whom he should be in communion and says he is joined to the chair of Peter.

Voice of the Church

The Fathers of Chalcedon

At the reading of Leo's Tome, 451

The bishops examined the Roman letter against the faith, and then acclaimed it, the acclamation including the cry that Peter had spoken through Leo.

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

Against the Donatists he appealed to the unbroken order of bishops at Rome as a publicly checkable fact. The argument only works because everyone already knew the list.

Ready Response

“There were terrible popes.” Agree, and name one if you know one. There is nothing here you have to defend, and he is probably expecting you to flinch. Then say the part almost nobody in these arguments has actually read, and you have. CCC 891 sets out four conditions under which a pope teaches infallibly, and the guarantee is about the preservation of teaching, not the holiness of the man. Outside those four, his ordinary teaching still asks for religious submission of mind and will (CCC 892); it simply is not thereby irreformable. His opinions, his interviews, his conduct and his politics are not covered at all. The claim is narrower than the one your friend is attacking, and you can show him where it is written down.

“Paul rebuked Peter.” This one does not have to rattle you, because our Lord was not surprised by it. In Luke 22 you watched the grammar do the work: Satan asks to sift all of them, Christ says he has prayed for you, singular, and then tells that same man to strengthen his brothers, on the night he knew the man would deny him. Then John 21, three questions for three denials, and the flock handed over anyway. Say that. A rebuke from Paul fits that pattern rather than breaking it, because the promise was never a statement about how reliable Peter was.

“The early Church knew nothing of this.” This is where you will be tempted to bluff. Do not. If you do not know the second and third centuries well, say so, and say you will go and read. What you can say is what you read for yourself: four passages, a quarter of an hour, and Peter named first and called first, prayed for by name, asked three times and given the flock, preaching first at Pentecost, and handed the vision that opened the door to the Gentiles. That is in the New Testament, not in a later argument about it. Ask your friend to read the same four and tell you what he sees.

Live It This Week

- Memorize the four conditions in CCC 891.
- Read Luke 22:31-34 and John 21:15-19 together, in that order.
- Pray for the Pope by name daily this week.

Memory Verse

“*But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.*” **Luke 22:32**

In the Catechism

CCC 552-553, 880-887, 891, 892. Learn 891 by heart.

Take-Home

The Seven Books

Unless Someone Guides Me

Module Two

What We Found

The seven are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees, with additional material in Esther and Daniel. They circulated with the Greek Scriptures the early Church read, they stand in the canon lists of Hippo and Carthage in the 390s, and they stood in the Latin Bible of the West for over a thousand years.

We read Wisdom 2 beside Matthew 27 and found the taunt at the cross tracking the plot against the righteous man closely: he claims God as father, he is tested with insult, he is condemned to a shameful death, and his trust is thrown back at him.

And we told St. Jerome's story completely rather than conveniently. He doubted these books and said so; he also translated two of them, quoted them, and deferred to the Church's judgment on their use, without ever giving up the distinction.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

On Christian Doctrine, Book II (summary)

Faced with a question Scripture does not answer about itself, he advises following the authority of the churches, preferring those held by the greater number and the weightier. His own list includes the disputed books.

Voice of the Church

St. Jerome

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

He distinguished the Hebrew canon from books he described as read for edification rather than for establishing doctrine, and said so bluntly. He also translated Tobit and Judith when bishops asked him for them, and he deferred to the Church's judgment on their use; he never withdrew his own distinction.

Voice of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Letter to the Corinthians (summary)

Writing around the year 96, he holds up faithful women of Israel's history as examples, and Judith is among those he reaches for.

Ready Response

“The Catholic Church added seven books.” You can give him the chronology without raising your voice, because you now know it in order. Those books circulated with the Greek Scriptures the apostles and the early Church read, they stand in the canon lists of Hippo and Carthage in the 390s, and they stood in the Western Bible for a thousand years before anyone proposed doing without them. Trent defined the canon in 1546 in response to the sixteenth century denial of their canonical status. Say it once, in that order, and let him go and check it.

“Jerome rejected them.” Say yes before he has finished the sentence. Then tell the rest of it, because the rest of it is the best thing you took from this evening: he doubted these books and said so bluntly, he translated Tobit and Judith when bishops asked him for them, he quoted these books, and he deferred to the Church’s judgment on their use without ever giving up his own distinction. Our tradition is large enough to hold a saint who argued with it. You do not have to sand him down to stay Catholic, and the complete story is more persuasive than the tidy one.

“Trent is too late to count.” He is right that Trent is late, and you should be the one to say so; the first dogmatic definition really is sixteenth century. Then set the events beside each other the way you did in session: canon lists in the 390s, a thousand years of use, their demotion out of the canon in the sixteenth century, and only then the definition. A definition arrives when somebody reopens a question. Nobody defines what nobody is disputing.

Live It This Week

- Read the Book of Tobit. It is short, it is a family story, and most Catholics have never read it.
- Read Wisdom 2 and then Matthew 27 in one sitting.
- Learn the seven names well enough to list them without looking.

Memory Verse

“My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation.” **Sirach 2:1**

In the Catechism

CCC 120, 121-123, 138.

Take-Home

The One-Liners

Unless Someone Guides Me

Module Three

What We Found

Nearly every short objection is answered by a second passage the objector has not weighed. Call no man father sits in a paragraph, Matthew 23:8-10, that also forbids the titles rabbi and master and reserves teacher to Christ, and Paul calls himself both a father and a teacher. The warning about empty phrases sits in a Bible where the living creatures never cease day and night, where one psalm repeats a refrain twenty-six times, and where our Lord in Gethsemane prays a third time using the same words.

And the commandment against images sits five chapters before God commands two golden cherubim and a bronze serpent, and Scripture goes on to describe Solomon's temple filled with carved figures. What is forbidden is making a god. Scripture even shows the line being crossed: Hezekiah destroyed the bronze serpent, the very thing God had commanded, once people started burning incense to it.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Basil the Great

Cited in the Catechism at CCC 2132

The honour rendered to an image passes to the one whom the image represents. The Catechism draws the conclusion: whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it.

Voice of the Church

St. John Damascene

On the Divine Images (summary)

The Incarnation changes what may be depicted. The invisible God could not be imaged; God who has taken flesh can be. The argument about statues is finally an argument about whether matter can carry grace.

Voice of the Church

The Second Council of Nicaea

787

The seventh ecumenical council distinguished the veneration given to images from the adoration due to God alone, answering the iconoclast crisis of the eighth century. The same objection was pressed again in the Reformation era, roughly seven centuries later, and the council's distinction had already been drawn.

Ready Response

The four lines you drilled, and the second passage you found beside each one. These are your notes, not a script.

“Call no man father.” You went looking and found Paul calling himself their father in 1 Corinthians 4:15, Stephen saying brethren and fathers in Acts 7:2, and Abraham the father of us all in Romans 4:16-17. The line comes from Matthew 23:8-10, which in the same breath forbids the titles rabbi and master and reserves teacher to our Lord alone; yet Paul calls himself a teacher in 1 Timothy 2:7. Say the true part first, though, because it is true: our Lord is going after men who love titles and the best seats, and that lands on clergy in every century, ours included.

“Vain repetition.” Revelation 4:8, where the living creatures never cease day and night. Psalm 136, twenty-six verses with one refrain. Matthew 26:44, where our Lord prays a third time using the same words. Emptiness is what the verse is aimed at, not repetition. And you can admit as cheerfully to your friend as you did in the room that a rosary prayed while you are thinking about lunch is exactly what the warning is about.

“Graven images.” **This is the one you found for yourself. You held Exodus 20:4-5 in mind and then read** Exodus 25:18-20, Numbers 21:8-9 and 1 Kings 6:23-29, and the commandment cannot mean what the objection needs it to mean. Then 2 Kings 18:4, where Hezekiah destroys the bronze serpent, the very object God had commanded, because people had started burning incense to it. Say that one out loud. It grants that the danger is real, and Scripture is the one granting it.

“Why confess to a priest?” John 20:23 gives the apostles authority to forgive sins and to retain them. The verse does not spell out how that authority is exercised, so do not claim it does. Point instead at what it grants: a choice between forgiving and retaining, which is a judgment, and nobody renders a judgment on a case he has not heard. That is the reasoning behind confessing our sins aloud rather than only privately, and James 5:16 tells us to confess our sins to one another. If he presses further than that, this is a good place to say you will go and find out properly.

The Most Important Line on This Sheet

“I do not know. Let me find out and come back to you.” Then actually come back. Nothing else you could have said would have been more persuasive.

Live It This Week

- Pick the one objection you fumbled and learn its second passage properly.
- Practise saying I do not know out loud until it stops feeling like a loss.
- Read Exodus 25 and 2 Kings 18:4 together.

Memory Verse

“Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” **1 Peter 3:15**