

Take-Home 1 | Until the End of the Age

Was This Only for the Apostles?

A mission beyond the first generation

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

What We Found

Jesus commissioned the Eleven for a task larger than their lifetimes: all nations, Baptism, everything he taught, with his presence "to the close of the age." He prayed for those who would believe through their word, which includes us. Ephesians 2 gave us the picture for the whole study: a foundation laid once by the Apostles, and a household still being built on it. What was meant to continue, and how, is the question we will follow for seven more weeks. (Matthew 28:16-20; John 17:20-23; Ephesians 2:19-22.)

Voices of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Summary: Christ was sent by God, the Apostles were sent by Christ, and the Apostles, preaching through the countryside and cities, appointed their first converts as bishops and deacons for future believers. The Church's ministry begins as a mission received, not an authority invented.

First Letter to the Corinthians, 42

Second Vatican Council

Summary: The mission entrusted by Christ to the Apostles will last until the end of the world, and for that reason the Apostles took care to appoint successors. The Council reads Matthew 28:20 as the reason the office had to continue.

Lumen Gentium, 20

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: The risen Christ, by giving the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, entrusts to them his power of sanctifying, so that they become sacramental signs of Christ. By the power of the same Spirit they entrust this power to their successors.

CCC 1087

Ready Response

If someone says: "The Great Commission is for every believer. It has nothing to do with bishops."

You can say: You are right that every Christian shares the mission, and the Catholic Church teaches that (CCC 863). The question our study asks is different: whether the Apostles also handed on responsibilities that not everyone holds. Read Acts 1 and 2 Timothy 2 with me and see what you think.

Live It This Week

Pray. Read John 17:20-23 on three different days this week. Thank Jesus for praying for you before you were born.

Remember. Thank one person who handed the faith to you, in person or by message.

My Guess. Fill in the sealed box on Take-Home 1, seal it, and bring it to Session 2. You will not have to defend it.

Scripture Memory

“Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Matthew 28:20 (RSV2CE)

MY GUESS | keep sealed

What would need to be handed on for Christians a century after the Apostles to receive what Christ gave them?

Write a provisional answer below. Seal this sheet, or a copy, in an envelope and bring it to Session 2. We will open the guesses together in Session 4. No one will grade it.

Before Next Session

Read: 2 Timothy 2:1-2; 2 Timothy 1:6, 13-14; Titus 1:5-9. Read them slowly and notice every verb of handing on.

Catechism: CCC 77, 861-862.

In the Catechism this week: 857-860; 1087.

Take-Home 2 | Until the End of the Age

A Mission Handed On

Teaching, appointment, and the laying on of hands

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

What We Found

Paul planned for transmission four links deep, and the chain carries more than a message. Timothy received a gift through the laying on of hands and a deposit to guard. Titus was to appoint elders in every town who could teach and correct. The titles elder and bishop overlap in Titus 1, but the work Titus does is a bishop's work, and within a generation the three orders are named. Catholic apostolic succession joins the apostolic faith to the continuing pastoral ministry of the bishops. (2 Timothy 1:6; 2:2; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 1:15-26; CCC 77; 1554-1562.)

Voices of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Summary: The Apostles knew there would be strife over the office of bishop, so they appointed the men named above. Afterward they gave instructions that, when these died, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. Clement treats orderly succession as part of the apostolic arrangement itself.

First Letter to the Corinthians, 44

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Summary: The tradition of the Apostles is manifest in every church to anyone who wants to see it. Irenaeus says he can list the bishops the Apostles appointed and their successors down to his own day. A received faith and a recognizable ministry go together in his argument.

Against Heresies, III.3.1

Second Vatican Council

Summary: Episcopal consecration confers the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, the high priesthood. With the office of sanctifying it confers the offices of teaching and governing, which by their nature can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college.

Lumen Gentium, 21

Ready Response

If someone says: "Elders and bishops are the same in the Bible, so the Catholic hierarchy is a later invention."

You can say: The two words do overlap in Titus 1, and I will not pretend otherwise. But look at what Titus is doing there: appointing ministers in every town on Paul's authority. That is what a bishop does. The role came first and the titles settled soon after, by about the year 107 in Ignatius of Antioch.

Live It This Week

Pray. Pray each day this week for your diocesan bishop and your parish priests, by name.

Learn. Read CCC 1554, 1558, and 1562. Write one sentence on how a bishop's ministry and a priest's ministry are related.

Hand on. Explain one thing from tonight to someone this week, using the passages rather than an analogy.

Scripture Memory

"Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us."

2 Timothy 1:14 (RSV2CE)

A Personal Response

What responsibility for handing on the faith has already been entrusted to me, and am I guarding it?

Before Next Session

Read: Matthew 16:13-19; John 21:15-17; Luke 22:31-32. Notice each time Jesus speaks to Peter alone.

Catechism: CCC 552-553, 880-882.

In the Catechism this week: 77; 861-862; 1554-1562.

Take-Home 3 | Until the End of the Age

The Keys of the Kingdom

Peter's office in Christ's Church

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

What We Found

Peter confessed Christ, and Christ gave Peter the keys and the power to bind and loose, in the singular. Isaiah 22 showed us what a key means: a steward runs the king's house on the king's behalf, with real authority that outlasts him. Jesus gave Peter the sheep three times, and in the same conversation predicted his failure and told him to strengthen the brothers. The Church understands Peter's pastoral office as continuing in the bishops of Rome. That teaching does not say popes are sinless or always right. (Matthew 16:13-19; Isaiah 22:19-23; John 21:15-17; Luke 22:31-32; CCC 880-882; 891.)

Voices of the Church

Pope Benedict XVI

Summary: In his catechesis on Peter, Benedict reads the three images Jesus gives him, the rock, the keys, and the power to bind and loose, as one particular responsibility within the Church. Peter is made the foundation of the Church's faith and unity, and his ministry serves that faith and communion.

General Audience, 7 June 2006

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Summary: Irenaeus singles out the Church of Rome, founded and organized by Peter and Paul, as the church with which every church must agree because of its preeminent authority. He then lists its bishops from Linus down to his own day. This is an early witness to Rome's place, not a full statement of later papal definitions.

Against Heresies, III.3.2-3

Second Vatican Council

Summary: Just as Peter and the other Apostles formed one apostolic college, so the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and the bishops, successors of the Apostles, are joined together. The college has authority only together with its head, and the pope's full, supreme, and universal power over the Church is preserved.

Lumen Gentium, 22

Ready Response

If someone says: "The rock is Peter's faith, not Peter. The papacy is built on a misreading."

You can say: Christians do read "this rock" differently, and I am happy to talk about that. But look at the next verse. "I will give you the keys" is addressed to one person. Whatever the rock is, the keys are Peter's, and a key in Isaiah 22 means a steward's continuing office.

Live It This Week

Pray. Pray daily this week for the pope, your bishop, and the unity of all Christians.

Read. Read Lumen Gentium 22 slowly. Note what it says about the pope and what it says about the other bishops in the same paragraph.

Practice. Explain, using John 21, the difference between Christ's authority and authority exercised in his name.

Scripture Memory

"But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren."

Luke 22:32 (RSV2CE)

A Personal Response

How can I grow in both love for Christ's Church and honesty about the need for conversion inside her, starting with me?

Before Next Session

Read: Matthew 18:15-20; Acts 15:1-29. Read Acts 15 in one sitting and notice who speaks and in what order.

Catechism: CCC 83, 85-86, 1444-1445.

In the Catechism this week: 552-553; 880-882; 891; 1444.

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.

Take-Home 5 | Until the End of the Age

Whose Sins You Forgive

The apostolic ministry of reconciliation

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

What We Found

Only God forgives sins, and Jesus proved he has that authority by healing the paralytic. Then the risen Jesus sent his disciples as the Father sent him and breathed the Holy Spirit on them. Only then did he say, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Paul calls this a ministry of reconciliation carried by ambassadors for Christ. The Church receives it through bishops and priests, who act in Christ's person and never as the source of mercy. The form of the sacrament has changed over time; its foundation in Christ's gift has not. (Mark 2:1-12; John 20:19-23; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; CCC 1441-1442; 1447; 1461.)

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom

Summary: Chrysostom marvels that men who live on earth have been entrusted with what belongs to heaven. He applies "whatever you bind on earth" and the forgiving of sins in John 20 directly to the priest's ministry. A king can bind the body; the priest, by Christ's gift, binds and looses the soul. The power is Christ's, exercised through the minister.

On the Priesthood, III.5

Second Vatican Council

Summary: Priests, exercising Christ's office as shepherd within their authority, gather the family of God and lead it to the Father. In the sacrament of Penance they reconcile sinners with God and with the Church, acting in dependence on the bishop.

Presbyterorum Ordinis, 5

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: Since Christ entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to his Apostles, the bishops who are their successors, and priests as the bishops' collaborators, continue to exercise it. Bishops and priests, by the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Church regulates its exercise through faculties.

CCC 1461-1462

Ready Response

If someone says: "I confess straight to God. I do not need a priest in the middle."

You can say: Keep doing that; the Church asks it of you every night. The question is whether Jesus also gave a way to hear forgiveness spoken to you by someone he sent. Read John 20:21-23 with me and notice that he breathes the Spirit on them before he says a word about sins.

Live It This Week

Pray. Pray Psalm 51:1-12 slowly on three days, asking for both mercy and a new heart.

Prepare. Make a private examination of conscience. If you can receive the sacrament, make a concrete plan and a time. If you are exploring the faith, ask a priest for a conversation.

Repair. Take one appropriate step toward repairing a harm you caused. Get advice first if contact would be unwise or unsafe.

Scripture Memory

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

2 Corinthians 5:20 (RSV2CE)

A Personal Response

When did I last hear forgiveness spoken to me, and what is keeping me from hearing it again?

Before Next Session

Read: Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. Notice every word of receiving and handing on.

Catechism: CCC 1341, 1366-1367, 1374-1376.

In the Catechism this week: 1441-1442; 1447-1448; 1452; 1461-1462; 1495.

Take-Home 6 | Until the End of the Age

Do This Until He Comes

The Eucharist and Christ's one sacrifice

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

What We Found

Jesus gave his Body and Blood inside a Passover meal and commanded, "Do this in remembrance of me." Paul handed that gift on to Corinthians who were not in the upper room, in the words "received" and "delivered," and extended it "until he comes." He called the cup a participation in Christ's Blood and warned that unworthy reception profanes the Lord's Body. Exodus 12 taught us what a memorial is: a rite that makes God's saving act present to a generation that was not there. Hebrews taught us what the Mass is not: a second sacrifice or a repeated death. The Mass makes the one sacrifice present, with the same Victim and Priest, in an unbloody manner. (Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29; 10:16-17; Exodus 12:1-14; Hebrews 10:10-14; CCC 1341; 1367; 1374-1376.)

Voices of the Church

St. Justin Martyr

Summary: Justin, writing around 155, says Christians do not receive the Eucharist as common bread or common drink. They receive it as the flesh and blood of the Jesus who was made flesh, changed by the word of prayer that comes from him. He then describes the Sunday assembly: readings from the apostles and prophets, a homily, prayers, the bringing of bread and wine, thanksgiving, and communion, with deacons carrying it to the absent.

First Apology, 66-67

St. Ignatius of Antioch

Summary: Ignatius, around 107, says certain heretics abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess that it is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins. He adds that the Eucharist is to be celebrated by the bishop or by one the bishop entrusts. Real Presence and ordered ministry appear together in his letter.

Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 7-8

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: The command of Jesus to repeat his actions and words "until he comes" asks more than remembering him. It is directed at the liturgical celebration, by the Apostles and their successors, of the memorial of Christ, of his life, death, resurrection, and intercession with the Father.

CCC 1341

Ready Response

If someone says: "Hebrews says once for all. The Mass says the cross was not enough."

You can say: The Church agrees with Hebrews completely; a priest who thought the Mass added to the cross would be wrong. The Mass does not repeat the sacrifice. It makes the one finished sacrifice present so its fruits reach us now. Hebrews also says Christ's priesthood continues forever. In the Mass, Christ exercises it sacramentally, for us.

Live It This Week

Prepare. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 before Mass this week and make a sincere examination of conscience.

Pray. Spend a few quiet minutes after Communion thanking Jesus for his self-gift. If you are unsure whether you can receive, ask a priest before Sunday.

Give. Choose one concrete act of self-giving service this week as a response to what Christ gives you.

Scripture Memory

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

1 Corinthians 11:26 (RSV2CE)

A Personal Response

When I receive Communion, do I receive it as a reminder, or as the Lord?

Before Next Session

Read: Mark 7:6-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:13-14. Notice the word "tradition" and who is using it.

Catechism: CCC 80-83, 85-86.

In the Catechism this week: 1334; 1340-1341; 1363-1367; 1374-1376; 1411; 1544-1547.

Take-Home 7 | Until the End of the Age

Guard What Has Been Entrusted

Scripture, Tradition, and faithful development

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

What We Found

Jesus condemned a tradition that voided God's command. Paul commanded the Church to hold the traditions he taught by mouth or by letter, and praised the Corinthians for keeping them. The word is the same; the source is the test. The Catechism separates the apostolic Tradition from traditions that can change, and puts the Church's teaching office under the word of God as its servant. Understanding can grow, the way a body grows, but the faith cannot be reversed. And 2 Timothy 3 names Timothy's teachers and the Scriptures in the same breath. (Mark 7:6-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; CCC 80-86; 94.)

Voices of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Summary: Against teachers who claimed a secret tradition handed to a few, Irenaeus argues that the Apostles held nothing back and hid no mysteries. If they had known secret things, they would have entrusted them above all to the men to whom they were entrusting the churches themselves. The apostolic teaching is public, and anyone can check it in the churches the Apostles founded.

Against Heresies, III.3.1

St. Vincent of Lerins

Summary: Writing in 434, Vincent asks whether there is progress in the Church of Christ and answers: certainly, and a great deal. But it must be real progress of the faith, not alteration of it. Understanding, knowledge, and wisdom should grow, in each person and in the whole Church, as a body grows from infancy to age while remaining the same body.

Commonitorium, 23

Second Vatican Council

Summary: The Tradition that comes from the Apostles makes progress in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. Understanding of what has been handed down grows in three ways. It grows through the contemplation and study of believers who treasure these things in their hearts, and through their experience of spiritual realities. It grows too through the preaching of those who received the sure charism of truth with episcopal succession.

Dei Verbum, 8

Ready Response

If someone says: "Jesus condemned tradition. The Bible is all you need."

You can say: Jesus condemned a tradition that canceled God's command, and he said that was the reason. Paul, in the same Bible, praised the Corinthians for keeping the traditions he delivered and told the Thessalonians to hold what they were taught by mouth or by letter. The question is never whether something is a tradition. It is where it came from.

Live It This Week

Read. Read CCC 80-86 in one sitting. Write the difference between Tradition and traditions in your own words.

Sort. Pick one thing you do as a Catholic and decide whether it is apostolic Tradition, a changeable practice, or a devotion.

Explain. Explain the Mark 7 and 1 Corinthians 11:2 contrast to someone this week, in plain words, and admit what you still need to look up.

Scripture Memory

"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 (RSV2CE)

A Personal Response

Is there a place where I have treated my preference as if it were the faith, or the faith as if it were my preference?

Before Next Session

Read: Acts 2:42-47; 2 Timothy 1:5; 2 Timothy 3:14-15; Matthew 28:18-20. Come ready to revise your sealed guess one last time.

Catechism: CCC 863-864, 1546-1547.

In the Catechism this week: 66-67; 80-86; 94; 120.

Take-Home 8 | Until the End of the Age

What We Receive, We Hand On

The mission entrusted to the whole Church

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

What We Found

The first community devoted itself to the Apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers, and shared what it had. Timothy received the faith from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, and the Scriptures from childhood, before Paul laid hands on him. Fruit comes from remaining in the vine. All the baptized share Christ's mission; bishops and priests hold a distinct sacramental ministry that serves it. Gifts for all, offices for some, one mission centered on Christ. What we received is meant to bear fruit in us and reach someone else. (Acts 2:42-47; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15; John 15:1-8; CCC 863-864; 1546-1547.)

Voices of the Church

St. John Paul II

Summary: The lay faithful are sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ. They exercise the priestly office by uniting their daily lives to the Eucharist. They exercise the prophetic office by witnessing to the Gospel in word and deed, and the kingly office by ordering the affairs of the world according to God. This is not a lesser Christianity; it is the Christian life of the baptized in the world.

Christifideles Laici, 14

Second Vatican Council

Summary: The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the Head. Incorporated into his Body by Baptism and strengthened by the Spirit in Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself. The apostolate is exercised in faith, hope, and charity, which the Spirit pours into all the members of the Church.

Apostolicam Actuositatem, 3

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: Christ is the source of the Church's whole apostolate, and its fruitfulness depends on the members' living union with him. Charity, drawn above all from the Eucharist, is the soul of the whole apostolate.

CCC 864

Ready Response

If someone says: "If only priests can absolve and consecrate, lay people are just spectators."

You can say: Timothy's faith came from his grandmother and his mother before an Apostle ever laid hands on him, and Paul names them. Every baptized person shares Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission, in

places no priest will ever go. What not everyone holds is one office inside that mission. The priest exists to feed and send the rest of us.

Live It This Week

Receive. Choose one sustainable practice of prayer, learning, or sacramental preparation that this study showed you need. Start it this week.

Accompany. Invite one person into a next step: a conversation, a Mass, a prayer, or another study. Then listen more than you talk.

Continue. Set the next conversation or meeting before you leave tonight. Faithful accompaniment needs patience, not one perfect explanation.

Scripture Memory

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Acts 2:42 (RSV2CE)

A Personal Response

Who is the one person I named tonight, and what is the first step I promised to take?

Before Next Session

This was the last session. Keep the eight Take-Homes together and reread one each week. When you are ready for more, the Catholic Armory catalog has two companion studies. Unless Someone Guides Me is on the authority of the Church, and Abide is on the Eucharist and staying in Christ. Bring a friend to whichever you choose.

In the Catechism this week: 863-864; 897-900; 1411; 1461; 1546-1547.