

PETER

CORNERSTONE OF CATHOLICISM

STUDY GUIDE

SESSION 6



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil obstat: Derek Barr, Censor Deputatus

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SESSION 6

IN THE SHADOW OF THE GALILEAN: PETER'S RISING LEADERSHIP



OPENING PRAYER

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” —2 Peter 1:16-19

Eternal Father, we glorify your holy name. Thank you for the revelation of your goodness and your love for us. Please help us to follow in the footsteps of St. Peter and grow deeper in our love for you and for your kingdom, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

St. Peter, pray for us.

INTRODUCTION

In the last sessions we saw Peter profess Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God, and we saw Jesus choose Peter as the rock on which he will build his Church and entrust Peter with the keys of the kingdom. Now Jesus is about to set his face to Jerusalem, and anticipating the approaching scandal of the crucifixion for his disciples, Jesus takes Peter, John, and James up a mountain. St. John Paul II said concerning the Transfiguration,

“The glory of the Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ as the Father commands the astonished Apostles to ‘listen to him’ ... and to prepare to experience with him the agony of the Passion, so as to come with him to the joy of the Resurrection and a life transfigured by the Holy Spirit.”

At Caesarea Philippi, Peter responded with quickness and certainty to Jesus' question, but his astonishment at what he beholds on the mount of Transfiguration will require time and silent reflection to fully comprehend.

CONNECT



1. Share an example of a king or kingdom, either from history or from a story or movie, that has made a strong impression on you. What struck you most about this king and his kingdom? How do earthly kingdoms inform your perceptions of the Kingdom of God?
2. Think of an experience or a period in your life that you didn't want to end. How did you try to prolong it? How did you feel when it eventually ended? How did its memory affect you afterward?
3. Have you ever spoken or acted impulsively? If so, in what circumstances did it serve a good purpose? In what circumstances did it lead to regret? In either case, would prayer have helped you? What did you learn from those experiences?



WATCH VIDEO

The following is a brief outline of the topics covered in the video segment.

I. Peter illuminates the mission of Jesus

A. Jesus died to save us "from" sin

B. Jesus lived to save us "for" the kingdom

1. The kingdom was topic most frequently taught by Jesus

2. First Jesus establishes Peter as rock and gives Peter keys; establishes succession

3. Then Jesus speaks of crucifixion and heads to Jerusalem

II. Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36)

A. Peter, John, and James

(Peter first among inner 3)

1. Jesus (with 12 Apostles) is the new Jacob/Israel (12 sons/tribes)

2. Jesus (with inner circle of 3 Apostles) is the new David (3 key figures: Josheb, Eleazar, Shammah)

3. Jesus (with inner circle of 3 Apostles) is the new Moses (3 key figures: Aaron, Nadab, Abihu)



DISCUSS

1. What answer is usually given to the question, “Why did Jesus die?” What answer does Dr. Gray give to the question, “Why did Jesus live?” According to Dr. Gray, why is this second question as important as the first?

2. During the Transfiguration the Father says, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him.” What is the Old Testament background for the titles of “my Son” and “my Chosen,” as well as the command to “listen to him”?

3. On the mountaintop Peter responds to the vision of Jesus’ glory by offering to build three booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Have you ever seen or felt the glory of God? If so, describe your experience. Have you ever had such a profound spiritual experience that you wanted to mark or commemorate it in some way, as Peter wished to do with the three booths? If so, what did you use?

4. Second Peter 1:19 calls the Transfiguration a “lamp shining in a dark place.” Share an experience that encourages you in difficult times.

5. Dr. Gray calls Peter the bridge between the King and his kingdom. How do the actions and words of Peter help you recognize Christ as King?

6. Dr. Gray says that loyalty to the king necessitates loyalty to his kingdom. How do you live as a loyal citizen of the kingdom?

...*"The Transfiguration gives us a foretaste of Christ's glorious coming, when he 'will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body.' But it also recalls that 'it is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God':*

Peter did not yet understand this when he wanted to remain with Christ on the mountain. It has been reserved for you, Peter, but for after death. For now, Jesus says: 'Go down to toil on earth, to serve on earth, to be scorned and crucified on earth. Life goes down to be killed; Bread goes down to suffer hunger; the Way goes down to be exhausted on his journey; the Spring goes down to suffer thirst; and you refuse to suffer?'"—CCC 556

MEMORY VERSE

"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" —Luke 9:35



CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you revealed your glory to St. Peter in the Transfiguration. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on you as we follow your example on our own journey through suffering toward eternal glory with you in heaven. May we love you as Lord and King and serve your kingdom. Amen.

St. Peter, pray for us.

FOR FURTHER READING

Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, Chapter 9: "Two Milestones on Jesus' Way: Peter's Confession and the Transfiguration" (Ignatius, 2007)



COMMIT – DAY 1

TRANSFIGURATION AND TABERNACLES



Mt. Tabor photo © Augustine Institute

Exploring the setting for the Transfiguration gives us greater insight into Peter’s experience of this glorious revelation. The gospels do not name the mountain on which Jesus’ transfiguration took place, but early Christians identified the site as Mount Tabor, and this mountain became a pilgrimage site as early as the fourth century. This isolated mountain rises dramatically from the plain at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley and commands breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside. The Sea of Galilee is eleven miles to the east of Mount Tabor, and Nazareth is about five miles northwest.

Mount Tabor is mentioned several times in the Old Testament. Look up the following verses and note what is said about Mount Tabor.

Joshua 19:22 _____

Judges 4:4-7 _____

Psalms 89:12 _____

Jeremiah 46:18 _____

Hosea 5:1 _____

The timing for the Transfiguration is given in relation to Peter’s confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi. But as Dr. Gray suggests, the Feast of Tabernacles, called in Hebrew *Sukkoth* or Feast of Booths (the Hebrew word *sukkoth* literally means “booths”), is the likely backdrop for the Transfiguration. The Feast of Tabernacles lasted for eight days, so the reference to “eight days” in Luke’s gospel (Luke 9:28) may point to this feast and indicate that the Transfiguration took place on the final and greatest day of Tabernacles.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a fall harvest festival that commemorated God’s presence with, and care for, the Israelites during their journey in the wilderness after the Exodus. According to Josephus, Tabernacles was the most popular of the three pilgrimage feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) observed by Jews in the first century. Look up Leviticus 23:39-43. What are some of the defining characteristics of the celebration of this feast?

One important ceremony during the celebration of Tabernacles was the ceremony of light. Each night during the feast the priests would light four huge lamps (menorahs) set up in the Court of the Women in the Temple. According to ancient sources, the light from the Temple on these nights illuminated the whole city of Jerusalem. Look up the following passage. What do these lamps commemorate?

Numbers 9:15-17 _____

The Feast of Tabernacles also becomes associated with the Temple because Solomon dedicates the Temple on the Feast of Tabernacles. Look up the following passages. What happens during the dedication of the Temple?

1 Kings 8:4-11 _____

2 Chronicles 7:1-3 _____

After God's people sin by worshipping the golden calf, Moses intercedes on their behalf and wins God's promise to go with Israel as they travel to the Promised Land. God subsequently leads and shelters them through their wanderings—using the cloud to shelter them from the heat of the sun during the day and the pillar of fire to guard them at night. Once the Israelites enter the Promised Land and their wanderings cease, God continues to shelter his people, but now from his dwelling place in the Temple. The cloud of God's glory descends on the Temple at its dedication, reminding Israel of the cloud of God's protection in the wilderness and witnessing to God's presence in the Temple and his continuing watchful care. The Psalmist often sings of the protection and watchful care that God gives his people. How does he express God's care in the following verses?

Psalm 27:5 _____

Psalm 61:4 _____

Psalm 91:1 _____

Psalm 121:5 _____

Jesus and his disciples are too far north to arrive in Jerusalem in time to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Instead of ascending the mountain on which the Temple sat in Jerusalem, Jesus takes his three closest disciples up another mountain. Instead of seeing the brightly lit menorahs in the Temple, the disciples see Jesus' countenance change. His face "shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light" (Matthew 17:2). In this vision of Jesus' glory, Peter saw the reality of the words Jesus had spoken at an earlier celebration of Tabernacles in the Temple: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). How does the context of the Feast of Tabernacles shape Peter's experience of the Transfiguration and his inquiry about building booths on the mountain?



The Transfiguration © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY

How might the Father's words, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" express the Father's watchful care both for Jesus and for the disciples?

Take a moment to pray through one of the psalms listed earlier, and reflect on God's watchful care in your own life.

COMMIT – DAY 2

PETER’S WORDS: BEFORE AND AFTER



In the Gospels, Peter’s quickness to respond sometimes gets him in trouble. One moment he proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God, then, in the next, he voices his opposition to Christ’s upcoming death in Jerusalem. Later, when asked if Jesus pays the half-shekel Temple tax, Peter answers “yes” without checking with Jesus. And, at the Last Supper, Peter declares that he will never forsake Jesus (even if all the others do), but later denies he knows Jesus *three* times. As Dr. Gray says in his teaching, prudence and Peter are sometimes at odds in the Gospels.

Yet Peter’s impetuous actions in the Gospels don’t show us the whole story. The Apostle, who sometimes spoke before considering fully, was also the Apostle who recognized that Jesus was the Son of the Living God. Peter denied Jesus, but he also wept bitterly, repented from the depths of his heart, and was a recipient of the forgiveness that was at the heart of Jesus’ teaching. And it was this repentant, forgiven sinner that Jesus called to feed and care for his sheep (see John 21), reaffirming Peter’s position as head Apostle and rock on which Jesus was building his Church.

After Pentecost, the story of Peter’s transformation just gets more amazing. Peter, who with the other disciples kept the doors locked for fear of the Jews after Jesus’ crucifixion (see John 20:19), does what after Pentecost in Acts 2:14? (And note how big the crowd is in Acts 2:41.)

What happens at Peter’s words in Acts 3:6-8? _____

How do the Jewish leaders respond to Peter in Acts 4:13? _____

What do people expect to happen when Peter walks by in Acts 5:15? _____

The opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles show Peter as the head preacher of the Apostles, courageously proclaiming God’s Word. Peter also works miracles in Jesus’ name, and word of these miracles becomes so well-known that people anticipate healing if Peter’s shadow simply falls upon them. Peter will baptize the first Gentiles (Acts 10) and then sail to Rome and establish the Church in the capital city of the empire. Along with his preaching, Peter’s words to the early Church in his epistles manifest the wisdom and direction of Jesus. Clearly, the Holy Spirit transformed Peter, and his tendency for rash words was turned to boldness and clarity in proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ.

While the Holy Spirit transformed Peter into the head preacher of the Apostles following Pentecost, the foundation of Peter's preaching and teaching is found in the teaching of Jesus. Look up these verses and then fill in the following chart. In the left column note the topics that are discussed in the conversations between Peter and Jesus in the listed gospels. Compare these conversations with Peter's later teaching in his epistles, and fill in the right column with the similarities. Then pick one or two of the verses to reflect on in prayer today.

	Peter's conversation with Jesus	Peter's preaching
Luke 12:35-48		1 Peter 4:7-11 1 Peter 5:8-9 2 Peter 3:14
Matthew 18:21-22		1 Peter 3:9
Matthew 19:27-30		1 Peter 1:3-4 1 Peter 5:1, 10 2 Peter 1:3-4, 11

COMMIT – DAY 3

GIVE TO GOD WHAT IS GOD’S



After the Transfiguration, Jesus and the Apostles return to Capernaum before heading south to Judea and Jerusalem. While there, tax collectors who collected the “half-shekel tax” approach Peter and ask, “Does not your teacher pay the tax?” (Matthew 17:24). What tax were they referring to? Look up the following passage. Who pays the tax, and what is the money to be used for?

Exodus 30:11-16 _____

As Dr. Gray explains in his teaching for this session, taxes in the ancient world were a royal right. They were an act of allegiance to the king, a tribute given for the king’s protection. Thus, by paying taxes, one identified his king and paid him honor. It is this understanding that prompts Jesus to question Peter’s response to the tax collectors’ question. Jesus is not just any king; he is the divine King of kings—and as such there is no one over him to whom he owes allegiance or tribute. Jesus sends Peter out to the Sea of Galilee where Peter catches a fish with a shekel in its mouth. By using this coin to pay the tax, Jesus avoids “giving offense” but does not pay tribute where it is not due. This gives further evidence of his identity—the King over all other kings.



The Tribute Money/ HIP / Art Resource, NY

Jesus is King, and we are called to be his humble servants. Sts. Peter and Paul often refer to Christians as servants of God, with Paul using the Greek *doulos*, which means “slave.” See the following passages:

Romans 1:1 _____

1 Corinthians 7:22 _____

Philippians 1:1 _____

Colossians 3:24 _____

1 Peter 2:16 _____

During one of his teachings, Jesus also challenged the Apostles to see themselves as servants: *"...when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'"* (Luke 17:10).

Later, according to Matthew's gospel, Jesus will be asked about paying taxes to Caesar. Jesus responds by requesting to see a coin. When shown one, he asks, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" The image is Caesar's, they reply. Jesus then says, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:17-22). Once again there is a deeper truth beyond the controversial question of taxes.

What things possess God's image?

Genesis 1:27 _____

Jesus reminds us that the things that bear the image of God, each human person, transcend the temporal and fleeting things bearing the image of this world and its kings. Yet, Jesus' response raises new questions: What things in our lives belong to God? What should we render back to him? What does St. Paul say we are to present to God?

Romans 12:1 _____

Above we saw both Peter and Paul equate following Jesus with being slaves or servants. As God's servants we do not serve against our will, but as men and women freed from the bondage of sin, adopted as God's children, who now serve our Master and Father out of gratitude and love (see Romans 6:17-18). Additionally here in Romans 12:1, Paul states that we are called to offer ourselves, our very bodies and lives, as a living sacrifice to God. We are adopted sons and daughters of God, created in his image and restored to his likeness by grace. We are called by Jesus to render our very selves back to God. In a very real sense our very lives are the tribute we pay to God, in whose image we are made. Jesus is challenging us to review our lives to determine if we are putting heavenly concerns first and rendering "to God the things that are God's."

As we strive to live as faithful servants and sons and daughters of the King, we should ask ourselves, *How will I honor my King today? What proof will others see of my allegiance to Jesus Christ? What will I render back to God in my daily life?*

COMMIT – DAY 4

AMBASSADOR FOR THE KINGDOM



J. R. R. Tolkien created a rich world in his book *The Lord of the Rings*. He populated it with a variety of colorful characters. Perhaps the most lovable of all the creatures of Middle Earth are the Hobbits. They are a simple, peaceful people who love the good things in life. For the most part they live their lives without concerning themselves with the outside world. The Hobbits have heard the old stories about an ancient kingdom of men that once included their idyllic Shire, but these seem like distant and irrelevant fables.

The Hobbits were content with keeping to themselves and minding their own business. Then Bilbo, an uncharacteristically adventurous Hobbit, finds a powerful Ring. Later, Bilbo's nephew Frodo learns that the Ring is not only powerful, but destined to bring great evil to the world. With his companions, Frodo sets off on a quest to destroy the Ring. Along the way, Frodo and the others meet the true king of Middle Earth. They fight at his side and eventually facilitate the destruction of evil and the king's return to the throne. When Frodo and his fellow Hobbits return to the Shire from their many adventures, they bring with them firsthand knowledge and experience of the king and his kingdom.

They know the king—they have traveled with him, served him, and come to love him. They learn that, despite the Shire's distance from the capitol city, they are a part of a greater kingdom. They live out their lives as faithful subjects of that greater kingdom.

This is only one example of many stories throughout history about kings and kingdoms. Jesus himself told parables of kings to help illustrate the eternal kingdom that he, as its King, came to establish. Peter encountered the King and his kingdom and was transformed by this encounter. We see this in an especially important way in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the preparations for the Last Supper.

Jesus sends Peter with John to procure the colt for the entry into Jerusalem. This will be the first time that Jesus is publicly recognized as King, and Peter facilitates this royal event. Jesus' riding into Jerusalem on a donkey is a statement of his kingship. Look up the following passages. Who is being made king, and what events mark the kingship?

1 Kings 1:33-34 _____

2 Kings 9:12-13 _____

Jesus' riding a donkey into Jerusalem hearkens back to the kings of Israel. The people recognize this and throw their garments on the ground before Jesus the King.

Before Jesus celebrates the Passover with his Apostles, he again sends Peter to make preparations. The Last Supper will be a major kingdom event. As Jesus says in Luke 22:15, he “earnestly desired to eat this Passover” with his Apostles, the most loyal and trusted subjects of his kingdom. It is these men, with Peter at their head as Prime Minister, to whom Jesus will entrust his kingdom.

Who in your life helps bring you closer to the King and his kingdom, as Peter does?

We will see in coming lessons how Peter often acted as the spokesman for the rest of the Apostles (see Matthew 19:27, for example). Throughout the book of Acts, Peter taught and acted with an authority that could only have been given to him by Jesus. He defined and clarified the teachings of Jesus within the infant Church. He received the vision allowing Gentiles to come fully into the faith, paving the way for St. Paul’s great missionary work. He became a bridge between Christ and the Church. He brought the King to his kingdom, and the kingdom to its King.

Consider now that Jesus has called us to serve him as the King of kings and to play our unique role in his kingdom, the Church. Yet, like those in *The Lord of the Rings* and other stories who have seen and experienced a kingdom that many don’t see, we must live our lives as representatives of that other King and his kingdom.

Read St. Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5:20. How are you an ambassador for the kingdom? How do you help others draw closer to the King?

What is one concrete thing you can do this week to express the reality that you are a loyal subject of the King and his kingdom?

COMMIT – DAY 5

TRUTH AND BEAUTY



Transfiguration – Apse Mosaic, Church of the Transfiguration, Mount Tabor, Holy Land



Basilica of the Transfiguration, Mount Tabor © Zvonimir Athletic/Shutterstock.com

The Church of the Transfiguration sits majestically atop Mount Tabor in the Holy Land. The current church, built in 1924, was designed by Antonio Barluzzi, who is often referred to as the “architect of the Holy Land” because of the numerous churches he designed. Two small chapels, one dedicated to Moses and one to Elijah, flank the entrance of the church. The main church is dedicated to the heavenly event that took place on the mountaintop. You have only to take a few steps into the main sanctuary before your gaze is drawn upward to the glorious apse mosaic of the Transfiguration.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each describe the Transfiguration in their gospels. How do they describe Jesus, both his face and his dress, as he is transfigured?

Matthew 17:2 _____

Mark 9:3 _____

Luke 9:29 _____



Church of the Transfiguration photo © Augustine Institute

How does the mosaic display Jesus' appearance?

The gospel writers tell us that Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus. The mosaic does not name these two figures. What symbols or objects are used to identify each man?

Moses _____

Elijah _____

All three gospel accounts tell us that Jesus took Peter, John, and James up a mountain. What reason does the Gospel of Luke give for the journey?

Luke 9:28 _____

According to Luke, what is Jesus doing when he is transfigured?

Luke 9:29 _____

In the Transfiguration apse mosaic, what is pictured at the top center? What does it represent?

In the Transfiguration mosaic, where is Jesus looking?

The top center of the mosaic shows a blue sky filled with clouds and golden stars, representing the heavenly dwelling place of God. It is while Jesus was praying that his countenance was changed. In the apse mosaic, this conversation with God in prayer is portrayed in Jesus' gaze into the heavens. We may imagine Jesus looking up to heaven and into the Father's face as they speak to one another. After some time, the conversation between Father and Son is expanded to include Moses and Elijah.

The gospel writers often record Jesus going off alone to pray, sometimes to a mountain. Look up some examples in the following verses:

Matthew 14:23

Mark 1:35

Luke 5:16

This time, Jesus takes his three closest disciples with him to allow them an intimate look at prayer between the Father and the Son.

The Transfiguration was an event of unspeakable, overwhelming majesty: the Son of God, suddenly manifest in his glory, speaks with two great figures that had lived hundreds of years earlier. All heard God the Father's voice and direction. The Transfiguration was also a benevolent gift of encouragement to Peter, John, and James, a vision of Christ's glory that they could hold on to in the darkness of Jesus' crucifixion, and in the midst of their own suffering in the years to come. But the Transfiguration is also a school of prayer. Jesus and the three disciples went up the mountain to pray. It is during prayer that the light of God's glory is manifest to the disciples. This was a literal transformation in the midst of Jesus' prayer. Here Jesus shows us the transforming power of prayer.

Jesus invites us to develop the daily habit of finding a lonely place to be with him—a place where we can “go into [our] room and shut the door and pray” (Matthew 6:6). In that ongoing conversation with Jesus, the purifying light of God’s holiness can shine in our souls and remake us in the image of his Son.

Luke is the only gospel writer to tell us the topic of conversation into which Moses and Elijah join. What does Luke say?

Luke 9:30-31 _____

Jesus has recently identified Peter as the rock on which he will build his Church, and to whom he will leave the keys of the kingdom. Having put in place his succession plan, Jesus then reveals that he must suffer and die.

“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” —Matthew 16:21

The Cross is to be the means of his departure in Jerusalem. Jesus knows the suffering that lies ahead of him, the betrayal at the hand of a friend, the scourging, and the torment of the crucifixion. We can hardly begin to understand how overwhelmed his heart must have been. Yet, Jesus takes the weight of what is ahead of him to prayer with his heavenly Father. He does not look to himself, but raises his eyes to heaven.

Moses and Elijah are brought into the conversation of Jesus’ departure. Their presence is a sure sign to the Apostles that, in Jesus and his suffering, the Law and the prophets are being fulfilled. Moses and Elijah’s presence, recalling their faithfulness in suffering, also strengthens Jesus. From this event, Jesus is resolved: “...he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51).

In our own prayer, whether it is in reflecting on the daily Mass readings, exploring a particular book of the Bible, or memorizing a favorite passage, God can and will direct, inspire, and challenge us through the Scriptures. In God’s Word we meet many holy men and women who are part of that great Cloud of Witnesses (see Hebrews 11) before the throne of God, and their words and actions can encourage us in our pursuit of holiness. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us:

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” —Hebrews 4:12

Let’s learn from the school of prayer Jesus modeled in the Transfiguration. Let us go there often and “listen to him.” Then we too will be transformed.

