

**Chinese Martyrs Catholic Church  
Bible Sharing Program 2023-24  
Session #3: Letters to the Seven Churches –  
The Penitential Rite Preparing for Entrance  
Into the Mystery of Heaven (Rev 2-3)**

CSB = Ignatius Catholic Study Bible  
CCSS = Cath Commentary on Sacred Scriptures  
BSP04 = 2004-05 BSP notes SN = Special notes  
NAB = New American Bible  
CSSN = Catholic Scripture Study notes  
LS = Dr. Hahn’s Lamb’s Supper

<b>A</b>	<p><b><u>Key Messages to the Seven Churches</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although addressed to the seven churches, the letters are also directed to today’s Church and all believers. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”.</li> <li>• To make the messages more easily memorized and distinguished, all seven messages to the churches begin with a solemn introduction by Christ himself. E.g., To the Church in Ephesus – to rekindle their love.</li> <li>• John’s vision commences the Heavenly sacrificial liturgy. The seven letters are analogous to the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass that prunes the hearts of the faithful as they enter into the sacred liturgy. Then, they proceed to the Liturgy of the Word: reading of the seven periods in OT.</li> <li>• All seven letters follow the same structure.</li> <li>• Locations of the seven churches. Their proximity to each other and the order of the letters that they are listed had possibly made it more convenient for the messenger; or that might just be the delivery route of the time.</li> </ul>	<p>Chapters 2 – 3</p> <p>CCSS p 56</p> <p>BSP #2 – E CCSS p 57, SN1 SN2 - 3, CCSB 2/2</p> <p>SN 4</p> <p>CSB</p>	
<b>B</b>	<p><b><u>To the Church in Ephesus – They Must Rekindle Their First Love</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The church in Ephesus, a kind of mother church of Asia, was the scene of the most successful of Pauls’ missionary endeavors. Several of Paul’s letters were written from this location (2Cor, Eph, 1 &amp; 2 Tim).</li> <li>• Jesus identifies Himself as “The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the seven gold lampstands”, representing He is with the seven Churches (seven lampstands), walking in the midst of them. Their bishops and leaders (seven stars) are under</li> </ul>	<p>2:1-7</p> <p>CCSS p 59, CSB, Acts 19:1-10</p> <p>2:1 CCSS, 1:16</p>	

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	<p>Jesus' authority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key messages: your labour, your endurance, unwilling to tolerate the wicked, tested those who call themselves apostles, they have "suffered for my name". <b>Reflect:</b> rekindle the first love, "Repent, and do the works you did at first". You have hated the works of the Nicolaitians. (See "D" below)</li> </ul>	CCSS	
<b>C</b>	<p><b><u>To the Church in Smyrna – Tribulations and Triumph</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Smyrna was a centre of the imperial cult. A famous martyr, St. Polycarp (d 155).</li> <li>Jesus, who identifies Himself as "the first and the last, the one who lives ... who once died but came to live", offers comfort by assuring the Christians of Smyrna that he knows well their tribulation and poverty, and that they should put their trust in Jesus since He is the Lord eternal who has conquered death; they are rich. <b>Reflect:</b> Jesus also knows that they suffered persecution by the Jews. They must be briefly tested (ten days), and remain "faithful unto death", the victors "shall not be harmed by the second death", that is, "the burning pool of fire and sulfur".</li> <li>"Do not be afraid of anything that you are going to suffer." Be not afraid means taking courage and never back down. Being courageous does not mean the absence of fear. Even Jesus experiences fear when facing the trial of death.</li> <li>Although tribulations may result from the devil's ploy, human adversaries may affect us and cause suffering. God is in control of circumstances and uses persecution and hardship to test, purify, and strengthen us.</li> </ul>	<p>2:8-11 CCSS</p> <p>1:17-18</p> <p>20:14, 21:8</p> <p>2:10 Lk 22:44</p> <p>CCSS 69 Gen 22:1-18 1Pet 2:19-22</p>	Dan 1:12-15
<b>D</b>	<p><b><u>To the Church in Pergamum – Pagan Worship, Practising Immortality</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"You live where Satan's throne is" – Pergamum was the</li> </ul>	<p>2:12-17 CCSS</p> <p>2:13</p>	

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	<p>capital of the Roman province of Asia where an immense altar to Zeus looked down the city. Jesus commends their faithfulness: “you hold fast to my name and have not denied your faith in me”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reflect:</b> Jesus accuses them of holding “to the teaching of Balaam (Nicolaitans)”. Like Balak, they have adopted the local cultural practices of pagan worship and immorality.</li> <li>• Those who repent and persevere are the victors who will be given “hidden manna”, a spiritual nourishment, and will receive “a white amulet upon which is inscribe a new name”, that is, the invitation to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.</li> </ul>	<p>2:14-15 Ex 20:3</p> <p>2:16-17 19:9</p>	
<b>E</b>	<p><b><u>To the Church in Thyatira – False Teachers</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thyatira, known for its trade guilds, was a commercial and manufacturing town. Idolatrous worship, rituals often involved sexual immortality. Christians would have experienced considerable social and economic pressure to participate. Apollo, the sun god and a son of Zeus, was the chief deity of the city. Therefore, Christ presents himself as the Son of God.</li> <li>• Jesus commends the church of Thyatira possesses the virtues of “love, faith, service, and endurance”, and the members are progressing. <b>Reflect:</b> With “eyes like fiery flame”, Jesus sees that they “tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, who teaches and misleads my servants to play the harlot and to eat food sacrificed to idols”. With repentance, they “must hold fast to what you have until I come”, and will be given the authority over everything.</li> </ul>	<p>2:18-29 CCSS</p> <p>Mt 18:6</p>	<p>1Kings 16:31-33, 21:25-26; 2Kings 9:22</p>
<b>F</b>	<p><b><u>To the Church in Sardis – Pride</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sardis was rich in trades and fertile farmlands and the church was prosperous.</li> </ul>	<p>3:1-6 CCSS</p>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reflect:</b> “You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead” implies that they are incomplete. “Remember how you accepted and heard”. If they refuse to repent, “I will come like a thief”. “However, you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments, they will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy”.</li> </ul>	1Th 5:2	
G	<p><b><u>To the Church in Philadelphia – Who Holds the Key of David</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A prosperous commercial centre. The local Jewish community persecuted the Christians. Jesus commends them that they have “kept my word and have not denied my name”.</li> <li>• <b>Reflect:</b> By declaring that he holds the key of David, the risen Jesus is affirming that he is the true Messiah, David’s heir. The church of Christ will replace their persecutors, the Jewish community, just as Shebna, the king’s steward, was replaced by Eliakim, and to receive the name of New Jerusalem.</li> </ul>	3:7-13 CCSS	Is 22:22
H	<p><b><u>To the Church in Laodicea – Indifference</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	3:14-22 CCSS	

**SPECIAL NOTES**