



# CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE STUDY

Catholic Scripture Study Notes written by Sister Marie Therese, are provided for the personal use of students during their active participation and must not be loaned or given to others.

## SERIES III

### THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Lesson 16 Commentary John 13:1 - 38

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### A SIGN OF LOVE AND GLORY

John 13:1-38

## I. INTRODUCTION

Jesus' self revelation to the world—to the crowds and to the leaders is closed. This chapter begins what some call the Book of Glory. Through His suffering and death Jesus brought about the tremendous glory of the Resurrection.

In the remainder of John's Gospel Jesus reveals Himself only to His closest followers—the Apostles and disciples. After the attempts to show Himself to the Chosen People and their leaders as their Messiah, He now turns to those who have accepted Him. We have now read the Book of Signs in which John gives us Jesus' miracles and His earnest talks about who He is.

John does not give us any of Matthew's information on these days before He died, about the destruction of the Temple, and of the calamities to come (Matthew 24,25). Mark and Luke also include that account. But John reserves for us in the next four chapters a great treasure: the words of Jesus in His last long sharing with His Apostles at the Last Supper. His farewell discourse includes much that we learn only from John, even in the resurrection appearances.

The emphasis in Chapters 13-17 is on the future, not the present. They tell us of the life we will live through the Spirit that Jesus will send, a life in the indwelling of love.

In the last discourse, union is an important theme: of the Father with the Son, of the Son with His disciples, and of the disciples with each other. This is the dynamism of love.

## II. A SIGN OF LOVE (John 13:1-17).

**A. The Washing of the Feet (John 13:1-11).** "Before the feast of Passover Jesus realized that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father" (John 13:1). "Passover" here means Jesus' passing-over to the Father, then returning in a new way. John's reason for putting the Passover meal before the Passover feast is that he wanted the crucifixion scene to coincide with the killing of the lambs at three in the afternoon. It is a brilliant narrative device, as we have seen in the story of the Samaritan woman. However, it is unclear from his Gospel whether Jesus died on the eve of Passover or on that day. John's account is different from the Synoptics. Matthew implies it was the Passover feast when Jesus gathered the twelve in the Upper Room (Matthew 26:17-20).

Mark adds “when they sacrificed the Passover Lamb” (Mark 14:12), which recalls the blood on the altar in Hebrew worship (Exodus 24:6). John merely calls it a supper—a meal.

It was now Jesus’ hour. At the wedding feast of Cana He had remarked to His Mother: “My hour is not yet come” (John 2:4). The “hour” is Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection.

“While he was in the world, he loved his own,” and “he loved them to the end.” “End” implies two times: the end of His life and the end of time. Both show that Jesus’ love is for always, on earth and in heaven.

**B. The Betrayer.** John seems particularly affected by the defection of Judas, whom he showed us in chapter six as not accepting the doctrine of the Eucharist and “who would betray him.” Here he carefully distinguishes him as Judas, “son of Simon the Iscariot,” in order to prevent any confusion with our St. Jude, the Judas who was also an Apostle and son of Thaddeus (John 13:2).

1. The Role of the Devil. Three times in his Gospel John tells us that the devil tempted Judas. Already in John 6:70, Jesus said to the Twelve: “Did I not choose you twelve? Yet, is not one of you a devil?” Very strong words, but used because Jesus is so disappointed that many left Him because of His words about the Eucharist (John 6:51-56). Jesus knows what is yet to come from Judas. Here we are told, “The devil had already induced Judas... to hand Jesus over.” Again in John 13:27, after Jesus had given Judas a piece of bread, John says, “Satan entered into him.” What a terrible fall for an Apostle!

We can see from this sad event that Judas, a man who had believed in and followed Jesus, could be turned away by the temptation of Satan, and that other men chosen as successors of the Apostles, bishops and even popes are not free from Satan’s temptations, and fall into sins which

scandalize many Christians who expect sanctity from the man with such an office. Yet, the office of Apostle was not exempt, the Scripture shows us here. We must not judge the reality of an office, or all who hold it by one who disgraced it.

Another thing for us to learn from this is that Satan prowls about to snare dedicated Christians, rather than those already sinners. Saints’ lives reveal that they were molested, even physically, by the devil. St. John Bosco often was attacked by a fierce dog that disappeared when Don Bosco made the Sign of the Cross, the sign of Jesus’ saving. St. Teresa of Avila, proclaimed a doctor of the Church in our century, often saw the devil and had to repulse him.

Scripture presents Satan as very real, very active in his efforts to win us away from God. Here he succeeded with one who was highly honored and loved by Jesus. But all of us have the freedom to say no; and have discovered ways to conquer the devil and our weakness: the use of the name of Jesus, the sacramentals of the Church such as water blessed in Jesus’ name (holy water), blessed objects such as palms, medals, all used through the Church in the name of Jesus. Daily prayer, daily time with God, is our greatest strength and our light (Acts 4:31). Avoidance of people, places, and occasions that lead us into sin is a protection.

2. The Character of Judas. Judas must have been a good man when Jesus called him. His first temptation is recorded in John 12:5-6 in the anointing at Bethany. Judas “was a thief” says John. Judas protested Mary’s use of expensive ointment for Jesus. He was in charge of the money bag for the group and “he used it to steal the contributions” (John 12:6). The Apostle had begun to fall, but he still accompanied Jesus. However, he was wavering, questioning his faith in Jesus.

Judas’ second temptation was to lying. In John 12:4 he claimed that Mary’s money for the ointment should have been given to the poor, implying that as treasurer he would have done that.

This, John knew was a lie, and he knew why Judas had said it in the hearing of all.

The third temptation and fall of Judas was related both to his loss of Faith and to his love of money. So he sold Jesus into the hands of His enemies for thirty pieces of silver. This once good man has become a traitor for lack of faith in Jesus, and for love of money. It is this that led him to the serious sin that Paul called “deadly”—a deliberate, serious and fully aware choice of an evil act.

There is a saying that “Some back into heaven looking at hell.” Fear of hell is a less admirable reason for choosing heaven, but if it is our only motivation it can save us. We might carefully explain to our children that Jesus spoke of a final state called hell; that it is real and our own choices bring it. We can teach them that avoiding little sins that lead to bigger ones is wise and yet doing so for love of the goodness of God, of Jesus, is far more noble.

Is your relationship with Jesus, with God, as important to you as your work, your business, or your career (Matthew 7:24)? Do you turn to God for help, trust in Him so that He rewards that trust (Matthew 7:25-27)? Judas’ relationship with Jesus was ruined by putting money first.

3. The Character of Peter. Peter, too, was a good man when Jesus called him. Peter was spontaneous, impetuous, and ardent. His faith and love grew as he went about with Jesus. It is Peter who answered Jesus’ question to His twelve apostles: “Who do you say that I am?” “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” blurted Peter (Matthew 16:16). Jesus declared that His heavenly Father had revealed that to Peter, and then in the presence of the Twelve said solemn words to Peter that have affected the Church throughout its history (Matthew 16:13-19).

Peter did not listen to Satan as Judas had, but is open only to Jesus, to God; therefore Jesus made him the head of all Christians. The Church

must be associated with Peter’s successors at Rome, where Peter led the Church and died a martyr. Are you able to explain this to others not in union with the Pope, with the Faith we have?

Yet Peter was rebuked at the Last Supper when he refused (out of his reverence for Jesus) to let Jesus wash his feet. In this story John gives Jesus’ reply that is tinged with the ceremony of baptism: “Unless I wash you,” said Jesus, “you will have no part with me!” Peter’s answer (John 13:9) is so like his spontaneity! We see his love like a rock of foundation, bringing Jesus to sadly think of Judas (John 13:10). Peter and Judas at this time are in very different developments in their call and in their faith. In which direction are we going?

Finally we see in this passage Jesus’ main characteristic. He is a servant. When people entered a Jewish house on sandaled feet, dusty from the road, a servant or slave brought a basin of water and a towel for their feet. But, Hebrew slaves could not be demeaned by being assigned this task. Jesus assumed it Himself in willingness to be a servant to all. We are called to the same role: to serve each other. Vatican II documents call the Pope “The Servant of the Servants of God.” These same documents put emphasis on the bishopric and priesthood as servants, not as lords. Jesus’ crucifixion was His greatest act of service to us.

When Jesus tells us: “Wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14) what does He mean? For a mother, a housewife, it means serving the meal to her husband and children, and a personal service all her life; helping a neighbor in need, visiting a shut-in. For a husband and father, it can mean going to work every day to support his family. We can also serve the followers of Jesus by leadership or a role of service in the church. A good example is a Eucharistic minister, a reader, usher, etc. Jesus’ words in John 13:15, 17 are said directly to us, too.

With Judas sitting at the table with Him, Jesus again alludes this disciple's coming action and quotes Psalm 41:10. At this point Jesus gives an important revelation as to who He is: "I am telling you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe that I AM," the same words as God answered to Moses as to who He was. Then again He thinks ahead — of His church and its importance: "Amen, Amen, I tell you, mark my word . . . Whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me." Jesus' representatives speak for Him as He spoke for His Father!

4. Announcement of Judas' Betrayal (John 13:21-30). Suddenly, Jesus is very troubled and tells that one of them will betray Him to His enemies. The men at table are shocked. One of them sitting next to Jesus leans back and asks who it is. Traditionally it is thought that this one was John the Apostle himself, "the one whom Jesus loved." John never identifies himself by name, but gives some indication that helps us. Jesus reveals it to the questioner and hands Judas a morsel of bread. It was the end for Judas, who leaves quickly. "And it was night," writes John, night for Judas' loss of faith, as in Chapter 6 was connected with the bread of the Eucharist, for if Jesus institution had already been done, Judas received the Body and Blood of Jesus in a terribly unworthy state. It was night in Judas' soul—darkness. John characteristically has noticed the light and darkness theme. Are we "light to the world" as Jesus said of His followers and of Himself? Does our union with Him show to others and attract them to Him?

### III. THE NEW COMMANDMENT (John 13:31-35)

**A. The Glory of Jesus.** Jesus seems to console Himself and His remaining Apostles by speaking next of His glory. He used the word four times in His next sentence (John 13:31), and calls Himself the Son of Man, indicating His human nature which He will give up in suffering and death and so receive the glory of the resurrection.

**B. Identification of Christians.** As a new Moses, He gives His chosen ones a new commandment: "Love one another." This commandment became the main Christian trait (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). In the Roman empire, onlookers of the lives of Christians used to say, "See how these Christians love one another!" This example is what converted the Romans.

This is our most important witness that we follow Jesus—love of each other, as Jesus asks in John 13:35. "This is how all will know that you are my disciples." If we are "light to the world" (Matthew 5:14) it will shine to others by seeing that commandment in us.

To make it real, or possible in your life, start with one usual failure, one instance of not loving a fellow Christian, and begin to change your response, your behavior. Win this victory, and continue with another. Remember, Jesus wants even further from us. "This is my commandment: Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you" (Matthew 5:43-44).

It is difficult to hate someone who loves you and treats you with love. In this way, hatred in the world will give way to love; this is the psychology that changes the world. "Two wrongs do not make a right," "If you want a friend, be a friend," "If you wish to be loved, love," and finally the Focolare phrase of today: "Love first." These adages from human experience prove Jesus right.

**C. Peter's Denial Predicted (John 13:36-38).** Jesus had just said that He would be with them only a little while longer. Immediately Peter wants to know where Jesus is going, and why couldn't he go with Jesus? He states the ultimate love he feels for Jesus: "I will lay down my life for you!" Peter will, much later in a place called Rome, lay down his life in a crucifixion with his head down; but not before he is humbled more than any of the others—he will deny Jesus three times that night! We know that Jesus forgave him and appeared to him personally after the

resurrection. St. Paul tells us this in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5.

We too may, by our deeds or words, deny that we are followers of Jesus, and yet, like Peter we will continue in faith because we love and believe in Jesus. These falls will teach us much about ourselves, as Peter learned about his weakness to his shame that night. We too will lose our cocksureness, and begin to work at becoming truthful and humble.

### **APPLICATION**

There are two lessons for our lives in this gathering of Jesus and His Apostles: family unity and the formation of character and faith in the children.

Jesus was careful to be with His Apostles day after day to the end. He formed them carefully by His words, His example. He kept them together and trained them in the spirit of love and unity, trained their faith in Him and His Father. It was not easy—note that these grown men were from a

number of different backgrounds and occupations. But the love of Jesus united them and motivated their unity.

Children who love their parents learn to love each other. Parents need to ask: Am I forming my children in all the habits and ideals God expects of me? Is this my main interest? Am I with them myself and observing their behavior, or have I learned to pay others to do that for me? Do I too easily accept the failures of society in regard to family? How much time do I give to each child?

Do too many economic or social goals take precedence over the daily guidance of our children? Are they trained to love and respect us and all lawful authority?

No one else is responsible for what our children become. What we instill in them and form in them is a gift to the nation, to society, to their families to come, and above all, to the good of the Church and the joy of God.

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