



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 17 Commentary John 14:1 - 31

Lesson 18 Questions John 15:1 - 27

FAREWELL ADDRESS

John 14:1-31

I. INTRODUCTION

We have seen Jesus humbling Himself before the Apostles, washing their feet. This began what scholars call The Book of Glory, which takes Jesus from the Last Supper to His resurrection and triumphant Glory.

Now we begin the Farewell Discourse given only by John from Chapter 14 through Chapter 17. We see the troubled Apostles, then the necessity of faith, the Second Coming (Parousia), the way to Him in His glory, and the Revelation of the Advocate, the third Person in God.

The Farewell Address is one of the most beautiful and helpful in any Gospel. John has collected words of Jesus to His Apostles, words he must have heard, since he is a chief figure in the event. Few of these are in the Synoptics.

II. JESUS' DEPARTURE AND RETURN (John 14:1-4)

A. Troubled Apostles. "There is no need that your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1), Jesus tells His Apostles as a reassurance after His predictions of what was coming. When John was

writing his Gospel his Ephesus community also was troubled by Jesus' departure. But Jesus is going only "to prepare a place for them." This He calls the Dwelling Place in the Father's house. It can mean the heavenly home that is waiting for them. It may also mean where God is. St. Paul speaks of the Church as God's Dwelling. Another meaning is God's dwelling in the many members of the Church.

Christ, as risen, dwells in heaven, but also in the Church as the Body of Christ; in the Blessed Sacrament; and in our hearts. These are three Presences that we Catholics have. Many of us do not realize His presence in our hearts, nor in the Church as His Body (Ephesians 1:22-23). The fact that Jesus is predicting their place with Him is reassuring to the Apostles. Despite their hearing about the betrayal and the denial (later they all desert Him when He is arrested) they will remain together in their faith in Him forever.

These troubled apostles not only founded the Church and spread it, but they were all martyred for Him. John himself is considered a martyr because he suffered a long imprisonment on the island of Patmos, and was thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, but survived. This tradition comes

from St. Polycarp, a disciple taught by John. As such he became a bishop, one of the earliest. His writings are among the earliest records in Christianity.

B. A Dialogue with Jesus (John 14:5, 8, 22). Three Apostles, Thomas, Philip and Jude, ask questions about the departure of Jesus, furthering His dialogue with them. John seems to wish to bring in these lesser known Apostles.

1. Thomas can't understand how they could know the way to Him as Jesus said, if they didn't know where He was going. This brings Jesus to utter one of His supreme affirmations in one short sentence: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Christian hope is not in a method but in a person. It is through Jesus, He says again and again, that one comes to the Father. We have heard Jesus mention His "Father" to His enemies, but in this private session with His followers He begins to enlarge upon this. The Jews even today do not believe in or accept the New Testament. This is the difference between Christians, who accept Jesus as God, Son of the Father, and the Jews; and the difference between the Moslems and Christians. Jews and Moslems tend to accept Jesus as a great prophet, but not divine.

Thomas has two other scenes in John. At Bethany when Jesus received the news of Lazarus' death and decided to go to him, Thomas bravely cries out, "let us go and die with him!" (John 11:16). But when told by the others of Jesus' resurrection he cannot accept that. He is called the "Doubting Thomas" (John 20:24-29).

2. Philip quickly interrupts, "Lord, show us the Father" (John 14:8). This shows the longing of the Old Testament to see God. Philip thinks an extraordinary manifestation is needed, as their forefathers saw atop Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:9-10).

Wearily, Jesus replies, "Philip, all this time you've known me. Whoever sees me sees the Fa-

ther!" This is a strong teaching for them on His perfect union with the Father, God. Even His works are done by the Father through Him. It is the same claim He has made to His enemies, but here He is teaching His followers. It is a strong, stressed revelation to the Apostles and to us in the Church of more than one Person in God (John 14:11). Now that they have seen His works, He asks, did they not believe they showed a divine being?

And He makes a startling statement: they will do greater works than He did. What can this mean? The Church, those who believe and accept Him, will surpass in scope, in history and in extent on earth all that Jesus did in time and place while He was on earth. The last verse in Matthew's gospel is similar, when the Apostles were gathered with Jesus at the Ascension: "Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...I am with you always" (Matthew 28:18-20). Today the Church is across this wide world, and miraculous power has often been shown in Christians, particularly in outstanding ones such as the saints.

To Philip, Jesus adds the teaching of answered prayer through Jesus. "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, so that the Father may be glorified" (John 14:13). Clearly, those who believe in Jesus will ask only what is good, or what they think good. Jesus praises faith that expects answers, prayer that is persevering, as in the parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:7). We need to reassure ourselves; build up our faith with these words to Philip.

3. Judas, called Thaddaeus in Mark 3:18, is one of the three by this name in the New Testament. This Jude (to distinguish him from Judas Escariot) is an Apostle, as Judas, the traitor, was. Jude has become a popular saint, called the Saint of the Impossible. There is a large shrine in the United States dedicated to St. Jude. The third Judas is the author of a New Testament letter. He is

one of four boys: James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude (Mark 6:3). Mary of Cleopas, John says in 19:25, is a “sister” of Mary of Nazareth. This word, along with brother, is the word used for any relative in the New Testament. The Jews did not have a variety of words for relatives. It is the Apostle Jude that asks the next question.

III. THE FATHER’S RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS (John 14:10-14)

Jesus has already answered Philip’s request to show them the Father. Now He speaks of His perfect union with the Father: “I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” It is clear that He is teaching the two Persons in God. He repeats these words twice. It is from such statements that we teach the unity of the Father and the Son. Through Jesus one comes to the Father, knows the Father, sees the Father.

IV. THE ADVOCATE (John 14:15-17)

Now Jesus reveals another truth about God, one which is not revealed in the Old Testament. He names another Person, a third Person whom He will send: who helps, comforts, comes to their aid. He calls him an Advocate, and the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17). Since Jesus has told us that He is the Truth, we begin to see that the Spirit is also God, one with the Father and the Son. It is this Holy Spirit of God who came to them with obvious signs on Pentecost: flames of fire were over their heads, and a driving wind was heard around the house. But the world cannot accept the Spirit because it is opposed to God, and is interested only in the senses and in bodily life on this earth. When John says “world” here, he means worldly interests as opposed to God’s interests.

How can we, who were given the Spirit in our baptism and in other sacraments, hear him? In us, the Spirit of Jesus communicates with us by our convictions that speak to us about divine things; by attraction to them. He also speaks to us in inner pondering, in our understanding which he guides.

We can learn to “discern the Spirit” by realizing what lesser spirits or realities also attract us: sin, indifference (to God, etc.); and that the Holy Spirit brings goodness, peace and joy. He brings God’s call to us. Where these are, God is.

The Apostles will receive Jesus’ promise in still a different way—the Resurrection. “You will see me, because I live, and you will live”; this is also a promise to us of our resurrection. But first, there must be an obedience here on earth, to Jesus’ commandments, these show by deeds, love for Him. Living by Jesus and in Him, will bring love for us by the Father (John 14:18-21).

Now comes Judas’ question: “What happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?” (John 14:22). “Whoever loves me,” Jesus answers, “will keep my words,” which are also words of the Father. This is why it is so important that we read for ourselves all of Jesus’ words.

Jesus then tells them of a new role of the Spirit. “He will teach you everything.” This “everything” was passed by the Apostles to their converts, the first Church. The Church has taught the Truth from its first beginning. As the Church goes throughout history, the Spirit guides its teaching; it cannot officially teach doctrinal error, or Jesus would be proved wrong in His words about the Church. However, the Church can be, along with its generation, lacking in knowledge in such truths as science and history; this has happened in history. Later generations discover truths about these matters, but the Church has revealed Truth in matters of faith and morals.

Jesus again names the Advocate and the Father, and promises His peace to the disturbed apostles. This will be His first greeting after the resurrection: “peace be to you” (John 20:19). “The ruler of this world is coming,” however, and Jesus seems to answer this next challenge with the realization that “he has no power over me.” The chapter ends with a declaration of His love for the

Father and that “I do just what he tells me” (John 14:31).

It is another prediction of the passion and death, when Jesus allows the evil in mankind and the power of the Devil who constantly tempts us to evil.

The Gospel seems to end here. “Get up, let us go.” Instead there seem to be additions later, so we have more to hear in this long and beautiful record of Jesus’ last meal with His Apostles.

V. SIGNS OF UNITY IN OUR LIFE

The union of Jesus with His Father is echoed in the Church, through the Holy Spirit who unites the Church, and fosters unity in a number of ways.

A. In the World. Mankind is gathered into peoples united in races in large areas. Asia has its “yellow race,” Europe its “white race,” Africa its “brown and black races.” These tend to unite in different nations, dependent on geographic locations, climate etc. We have China and India; England and Germany; Ghana and Zaire. Nations have different political unities, though united in the same race and nation.

B. In the Religious Sense. As the people of earth gathered into countries and areas, they recognized that a higher power existed; they recognized a need to honor this higher power. So we each have various united ways of expressing this: Hinduism in India, the Aztec gods in Mexico, pagan gods in Greece and Rome, American Indian gods of rain, earth, etc. This kind of unity in religious worship is found throughout history.

The Jews, as we know, were chosen to know the True God. In a wonderful fashion, God revealed Himself to one individual, to his family and finally to the nation of Israel. It was through

Israel that God so united Himself with mankind that He became one of them—Jesus Christ Our Lord. And through Jesus we have a worldwide Church (the word “catholic” means worldwide). The same Spiritual grace unites all baptized persons; the one true faith unites all Catholic believers. God could not unite us more closely than in Him.

Among the sacraments which sanctify us is a special one of union—the sacrament of Matrimony. In marriage two become one in heart and mind, will and body in a life together that produces new life. In a Catholic marriage ceremony this is symbolized in one way by the groom lighting one of three candles, the bride lighting another, and both lighting a third one; two candles became one candle. Their union produces another human person. This is a powerful image of the Three-in-one God.

So John’s Gospel gives us in this discourse the basic and clear teaching of Jesus on the Trinity: there are three persons in one God. The Spirit’s role began on Pentecost Sunday, when the 120 disciples (Acts 1:15) are gathered again in the “upper room.” The mother of Jesus is with them, Acts tells us (Acts 1:13-14). When you study Acts you will learn that this Last Supper room is also the place which is the birthplace of the Church, for Peter and the Apostles unlocked the doors and went out to preach and bring Jesus to the crowd that had gathered in astonishment at the wind around the house.

Learn to pray to the Holy Spirit; learn to trust his guidance in the Church and in yourself. He dwells as God in His temple, in each baptized person who has not chosen to reject him through serious, willful sin. The Holy Spirit guides our life, inspires all our responses to the Good News of Jesus, and leads us to our Father.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 18

John 15:1-27

Day 1 Read the Notes

- a. Was there any new understanding for you in them?

- b. Any challenge for change in your way of life?

Day 2 Read John 15:1-13, Isaiah 5:1-7, and Jeremiah 2:21.

- a. What kind of Christian would Jesus call a “barren branch”?

- b. What “prunes” every good branch?

Day 3 Read John 15:9-13.

- a. In your life now, how can you “lay down your life,” if only day by day?

Day 4 Read John 15:14-17, and Romans 6:20-23.

