



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 19 Commentary John 16:1 - 33

Lesson 20 Questions John 17:1 - 26

John 16:1-33

I. INTRODUCTION

Jesus is still earnestly speaking to His bewildered Apostles. He has yet to develop the role of the Spirit, His other Self, that proceeds from the love of Father and Son. John's Gospel has been called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit (Gospel, meaning "Good News"). This chapter is indeed good news for the infant Church sitting around Jesus. These men have received in that evening, news of their own failures: they have seen Judas' departure; they face a coming hour in the Garden of shocking disappointment and fear. Yet it is Jesus to whom they still cling.

Jesus first admits that what He has said was in order to keep their faith unshaken. He immediately shakes them with a coming rejection that they themselves will experience (John 16:2).

II. THE CHURCH'S DESTINY (John 16:2-4a)

A. The Apostles' Near Future. By the time that John's Gospel was written and read or heard by Christians, the break between the Jewish faith and Jesus' followers was complete. Its beginning was the expulsion of the Apostles from the synagogue (John 16:2). This meant loss of

privileges, of culture, of safety. Fanaticism can make men think it is permissible to commit a crime in order to serve religion; even to fulfill a service to God. Jesus uses the future tense: "They will expel—they will put you to death—they will claim to be serving God." Notice the prophecies here. Jesus gives His enemies credit for their fanatic beliefs. However, His teaching had been marvelously presented to these Scribes and Pharisees and been proven by deeds. They have not accepted "me or the Father." "But I have told you these things that when the hour comes, you will remember my telling you" (John 16:4).

The man born blind had already experienced his "hour,"—he was cast out of the synagogue. Jesus' hour is soon to come, so is Satan's! These events are foreshadowed in two of Jesus' parables: the grain of wheat must die, be buried in the earth; some seed sown by the farmer will be eaten up by the birds (Luke 8:4-8).

"Sorrow has filled your hearts" (John 16:6). That night was forever to be a source of sorrow for Peter and the others; it was also to be an agony in the garden for Jesus, a final time with His Apostles while He was alive.

B. Jesus' Departure (John 16:7-16). The chain of events connected with Jesus' glorification has already started. They dare not ask Him anymore, they are so bewildered. "Yet I tell you the sober truth; it is better for you that I go, for if I don't, the Spirit of consolation," their Helper, their Advocate, "will never come to you." With these words, Jesus begins in leisurely detail, to tell the role of another Person in God. But the unity of the divine Persons is such that "I will send him to you if I go." This announces the complete plan of salvation; it is like another Annunciation.

III. THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT

A. Three Functions of the Spirit (John 16:8-10). This Spirit will do three things when He comes:

1. He will convince the "world" of its error "about sin." The Spirit will turn the tables around. The presence of sin in the world is a vital witness to the failure of the world to satisfy us (John 16:8-10).

2. "About justice." The Church, after Jesus' departure, will be on trial in the forum of the world. Who was just (righteous), Christ or His enemies? The divine life and actions in the Church will testify that Jesus was sinless. His absence will be filled by the Spirit Present. John's own Christian community was proof that disbelief was sin; that justice was done through Jesus' triumphant passage to the Father. Death was not the end for Jesus; it was the beginning of His triumph, His glory.

3. The Prince of This World (John 16:11). The triumph of Christ is the defeat of Satan. The one is the sign of the other. Has Christ yet triumphed in you?

Jesus continues that He has much to say, but they can't bear it; it must await the light of the Holy Spirit and His activity (John 16:13). "The Spirit of Truth" is used by Jesus for the third time

in this discourse. "He will not speak on his own, but from what he 'hears.'" This is a hint of the Trinity. Jesus speaks of Himself in relation to the Father, and of the Spirit in relation to Himself: Jesus will send Him in the time to come. Perhaps Jesus is referring to the night in which He is speaking, for the Last Supper was the beginning of the triumph, of the resurrection, and the coming of the Third Person. Jesus is then glorified by the Father and His glory is continued in the Church through the Holy Spirit. The existence of the Church is continued as an effect of the shared life of the Father and Son, and the shared life of the Spirit and the Son.

B. Jesus' Return. "Within a short time," says Jesus, "you will lose sight of me, but soon after that, you will see me again." This caused quite a conversation among the Apostles. "What can He mean? How can we see Him again if He is going to the Father?" Jesus breaks in with a reference to a woman in labor who writhes in pain until the child is born, then rejoices in the new life that she has brought to the world. So their sorrow is temporary. The full meaning of Christ's resurrection heralds their own.

"The birthpangs of the Messiah" was a Jewish expression of the end times. St. Paul speaks of the result of his own suffering in a letter to the Christians in Colossae, the Greek City. "It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body make up the sufferings that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church" (Colossians 1:24). In the end time all will be glory. The Spirit will show that Jesus, the Just one, is near.

But all of Jesus teaching is obscure for the Apostles. "I have spoken to you in veiled language"—the parables, the predictions. Again he speaks of time to come (John 16:25, 27), when He will speak plainly to them. He tells them of the love the Father has for them and that He is "going back to the Father." The disciples unwisely presume that they will now possess the fullness of

comprehension. “So you now believe?” answers Jesus, then he disabuses them. Far from confirmed in faith, the “hour is coming and has come now, when you will be scattered, everyone to his own home, and leave me alone.” But He will not be alone, for “the Father is with me” (John 16:22). Yet, they will suffer in the world, as all valiant Christians will, but “take courage; I have overcome the world.” Let us remember this courage in our day, and its backing from heaven!

John gives the last words of Jesus to His apostles here. The evangelist, however, has still some rare and beautiful words of Jesus. The priestly prayer of Jesus to His Father, before He offers His Sacrifice, follows in Chapter 17. But let us look here into the Apostolic times for the role of the promised Spirit.

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN APOSTOLIC TIMES

A. The Coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:13-14, 2:1-6). Fifty days after the Resurrection, and at His Ascension, Jesus told them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Apostles then gathered in the city and went “to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Jude, the son of James.” All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with “... Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers.” This was prayer for nine days—the first “novena” at the Jewish feast of Pentecost. “And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house... Then there appeared to them tongues of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in

Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

B. Peter’s Leadership. Peter stood up with the Eleven and began to speak to the crowd (Acts 2:14, 16, 17), “You who are Jews, and all who are staying in Jerusalem, listen to my words... This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘It will come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out a portion of my Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.’” His hearers were “cut to the heart” and asked what they should do. “Repent, and be baptized, and receive the Spirit,” said Peter (Acts 2:38). Three thousand, says Luke in his account, became Christians that day. The Church, through the Holy Spirit, had begun to spread.

Soon after, Peter and John were going to the Temple one day. Peter, seeing a crippled beggar, took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong. As people gathered, Peter addressed them, and explained the whole story of Jesus. When the priests heard about it, they arrested Peter and John. When questioned, Peter spoke up, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” and again told of Jesus. Forbidding any more of this, the Priests and Elders dismissed them (Acts 4:1-12).

Welcomed back to the Christian community, all began to pray. “As they prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). Before the Sanhedrin again, Peter exclaimed, “We are witnesses to Jesus, we and the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:32).

We see that the Holy Spirit, as Jesus promised, is now the Divine teacher. He gives the Apostles power: “Many signs and wonders were

done among the people at the hands of the Apostles” (Acts 5:12).

The Pharisees next arrested the deacon Stephen, who “filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God’s right hand” (Acts 7:55). Stephen was stoned to death while a young man named Saul was the official witness to the death.

Peter and John next went to Samaria and preached there. No doubt some of the people who believed in Jesus when the woman at the well brought them out to meet Jesus, were receptive to the Apostles. “Peter and John prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit... Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:14-17).

C. Paul’s Leadership. The Apostles and their converts have taken the name of Jesus and the gifts of the Holy Spirit to Jerusalem, to towns nearby and to Samaria. Now the Lord adds an astounding and important apostle—the persecutor Saul. On the road to Damascus to arrest other Christians, suddenly Saul is struck by a brilliant light and the figure of Jesus stood before him: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” “Who are you, Lord?” gasped Saul. “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do” (Acts 9:1-6).

Meanwhile, the Lord said to a disciple there named Ananias, “Get up and go” to Saul from Tarsus, for he is praying. Horrified, Ananias protested, but heard the wonderful news: “Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Ananias went to the place the Lord directed him, and entering, laid his hands on Saul. “Brother Saul, I have been sent by the Lord Jesus... Be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17).

So Saul became Paul (the Greek form of Saul) and the apostle of the Gentiles—non-Jews. Meanwhile, Peter had been led to the home of a Roman leader, Cornelius, and baptized him and his whole household (which might have included children). So Peter, the chosen leader of the Church, gave it the first Gentile convert. Paul went to the desert to pray, just as Christ had done, before he began his missions all over the Roman Empire. The rest of the story in Acts is mostly Paul’s, but first, a Church Council was called at Jerusalem. Paul and his friend, Barnabas, whom the Lord had chosen, went to Antioch, capital of the Roman province of Syria. There they founded the Church, where the disciples were first called Christians. Some in that Church insisted that all baptized there be also circumcised in the tradition of Moses. This occasioned the meeting at Jerusalem.

It was a most important first in the Church. The Apostles and the elders met, Paul was present; Peter spoke first: “...My brothers, you know perfectly well that in the early days, God made His choice among you: the Gentiles were to learn the good news from me and so become believers. And God, who can read everyone’s heart, showed his approval of them by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as he had to us. God made no distinction between them and us, since he purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:7-9). James spoke up with a suggestion (in Acts 15) that they write a letter, with modified regulations about Jewish practices (including illicit marriages) and this was adopted. The first council of the Church had met and spoken. The Church retained its peace, and Paul and Barnabas went on to their other missions.

We shall look only at two of these, Ephesus, one of the finest cities in the Empire, and Galatia, a province in what is now central Turkey. We have fourteen of Paul’s wonderful teachings and descriptions of places he converted, in letters he wrote back to them. Peter had finally had to leave Syria and made his way to Rome, where he led

the Church until his martyrdom by crucifixion. It is interesting that Paul, also was sent to Rome under arrest, and also was martyred there, but by a sword, being a Roman citizen. The fact of Peter's death at Rome, established the bishop of that city as the Church's leader, replacing Peter and the authority over the Church given him by Jesus (Matthew 16:13-19).

Paul's letter to the Ephesians closes with a description of our spiritual war:

“It is not against human enemies that we have to struggle... but against the ruling forces who are masters of darkness in this world, the spirits of evil in the heavens...” Listing Roman armor, he ends with, “Take salvation as your helmet and the sword of the Spirit, that is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:12, 17).

In Galatians he is more specific: “Be guided by the Spirit... the desires of the spirit are opposites to our self-indulgence, whose results are sexual vices, false gods and sorcery, jealousy, bad

temper, ...malice, drunkenness, orgies and all such things... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. No law can touch such things as these... Since we are living by the Spirit, let our behavior be guided by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:17-26).

The Roman Empire forgot its pagan gods and became a Christian empire. The Spirit that Jesus sent to the world penetrated like air into Europe, Asia, across oceans and to new continents and islands till the fire and light and wind have reached us today. We have had 2,000 years of belief in and love of Jesus Christ, the most powerful force in all history, outlasting each civilization.

“When the Spirit comes,
he will lead you to the complete Truth”
(John 16:13).

“And the Truth will set you free”
(John 8:32)

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 20
(John 17:1-26)

Day 1 Read all Notes and Scripture references.

a. What thought in the notes challenged you?

b. What made you love Peter?

Day 2 Read John 17:1-5; Matthew 28:18-20 and Wisdom 15:3.

a. Who are the two Persons included in John 17:1-5 and how does Matthew 28:18 fit this?

b. What motives or sentiments do you discern in Jesus words?

c. Read John 17:6-8. Who are now introduced into the prayer?

d. List the verbs in Matthew 28:19-20 that apply to the disciples.

e. Which ones do you feel apply to you? Why?

Day 3 Read John 17:9-19, and 1 Peter 1:22-23 and John 13:18.

a. List the positive requests Jesus makes for His disciples.

b. List phrases in which Jesus names what He has done for them.

c. Re-read your list; what effect does it have on you?

Day 4 Read John 17:20-26, Romans 8:28-30, Thessalonians 4:17 and John 10:30.

a. Who are the new subjects of Jesus' prayer here?

b. Choose one of the phrases in verses 20-26, and write what it means for you.

c. What request in Jesus' prayer is made three times in verses 21-23? How can we make that request more important to us?

d. What oneness is still not realized in believers today?

e. Choose a statement in these verses that express a yearning that Jesus feels and comment on its effect on you.

Day 5 In this prayer of Jesus to His Father, find and list four common themes that stand out.

Day 6 How do you plan to put into practice your study of this beautiful prayer of Jesus?