

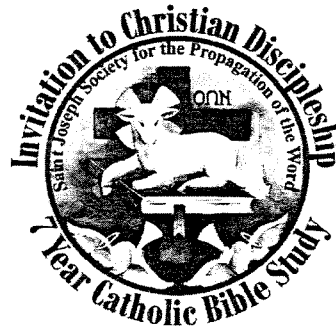
THE LAMB OF GOD



MEDITATIONS
ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A Seven Year Catholic Bible Study



THE LAMB OF GOD

MEDITATIONS ON

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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FOREWORD

This work, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, is part of a larger, seven-year Catholic Bible study, *Invitation to Christian Discipleship*. A second component of *The Epistle to the Hebrews* consists of a summary of lectures and worksheets designed for the student, published separately under the title of *Meditations on the Letter to the Hebrews*. This seven-year study has been developed for the Catholic laity so that the Word of Christ, rich as it is, dwells in them.

Thus they will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depths of Christ's love, and experience this love that surpasses all knowledge so that they may attain the fullness of God himself (Eph.3:18-19).

The general motivating force behind this study is the preservation and growth of the Christian Faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries. It has four immediate goals:

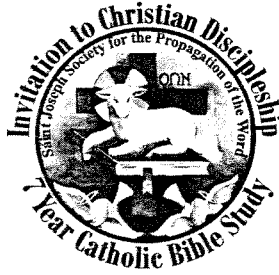
1. To ensure a true spirit of repentance
2. To foster a deeper commitment in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ
3. To create a greater awareness of the Holy Spirit in believers
4. To encourage a more vibrant participation in the life and mission of the Church

Invitation To Christian Discipleship has been accredited by the Catechetical Institute of the Diocese of Orange, California. It is now available to all parishes and at-home study groups. It is designed for a layperson to present. Books and CDs are available at www.invitetodiscipleship.org.

The St. Joseph Society for the Propagation of The Word Presents:

An Invitation to Christian Discipleship

James P. O'Bryan, S.T., Author and Presenter

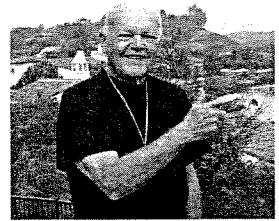


It was the early 1970's when a group of laywomen in Orange, CA approached Fr. O'Bryan about the lack of Catholic Bible studies in Orange County. There was, of course, the Protestant group nearby that had signed up over 200 Catholics to their study. Father knew he couldn't do the work without a great deal of assistance. Volunteers stepped up to do the logistical tasks and Father worked with the Holy Spirit to provide the works. This was the beginning of his "seven year sentence". Working 60 – 65 hours per week, he was never more than two weeks ahead and, most of the time he was working with less than a day to presentation time. His work was all hand written and needed to be typed and copied for distribution. These two hour sessions (1

hour sharing + 1 hour lecture) were attended by approximately 400 people weekly, split between a morning and an evening class. Father claims he never rewrote a word; "I didn't have time", he said.

Father's efforts resulted in a seven year study plus several spin-off works used for educating Catholics around the world. The seven year study includes:

- Invitation to Christian Discipleship (Intro)
- The Gospel of St. Mark
- The Gospel of St. Luke
- Acts of the Apostles
- The Gospel of St. Matthew
- The Gospel of St. John
- Romans
- Hebrews
- 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Revelation



Fr. Jim

Other excellent teaching materials, often used in RCIA and formation classes, are the result of Father's dedication to the laity. These materials include, "Christian with a Capital C", "Rock Foundation Revisited" and "On Eagle's Wings". In 2005, a Group was formed to help publish and distribute Father's work. The **St. Joseph Society for the Propagation of The Word, Inc.** has been instrumental in setting up a web site and taking on the ministry of spreading the Gospel by promoting the instructional works of Fr. O'Bryan. **Materials available include teacher's manuals, student workbooks, CDs of lectures and several inspirational works for RCIA and adult education.**

This in depth seven year study is designed to be presented by the laity or religious. Guidelines are available for starting a study group. Of particular interest is the fact that these studies are accredited by the Catechetical Institute of Orange County and have the Imprimatur through the Bishop of Orange, California. Beware, this class leads one to become a disciple or be a better disciple!

Check the web site for a study near you, or start one today.

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LAMB OF GOD

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

The Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the finest works of literature found in the New Testament. The author possessed not only an analytical mind but also a creative one. He writes with authority, originality, and with a logical flow of thought.

The work is Hellenistic in style, and its content suggests the author to be of the Alexandrian School of Egypt. It is possible the author may have been a pupil or associate of Philo of Alexandria, who dates roughly from 25 B.C. to 45 A.D. He appears to be well acquainted with the thoughts of Philo; he has been called a "Philonian converted to Christianity." However, his theology differs fundamentally from Philo's. If an association with Philo existed, his Christian conversion certainly altered and directed his theological thoughts. In Platonic fashion he beheld the Old Testament to be but a shadow of the things to come. In Christ, the heavenly world was revealed, and this same Christ enables mankind to gain access to the heavenly existence. The author finds both Christ and the heavenly sanctuary revealed in the Old Testament. For his readers, he undertakes the task to manifest those truths about Christ and His kingdom that are veiled and hidden within the Old Testament.

The Epistle to the Hebrews appears more to be a teaching delivered to students than a letter written merely to friends or acquaintances. Some scholars recognize the work to be a "homiletical *midrash*." In Hebrew the word *midrash* means "to examine, question, or search." A homiletical midrash would be a commentary or explanation on certain Sacred Scriptures. A midrash could either be an explanation and revelation of the hidden meaning of the text, or it could be an interpretation of the Scriptures in light of the present day situation. Hebrews has been called a homiletical midrash on Psalm 110.

DATE OF COMPOSITION

The contents of the work help us to establish the approximate date of its composition. At the time of composition many first generation Christians had passed on (see Heb.13:7); the author implies that he and his readers are

second generation Christians (see Heb.2:3); the author speaks of Timothy's release from prison (see Heb.13:23). It is generally agreed that this Timothy was the companion of St. Paul. The author mentions a time of persecution suffered by his readers. Before the end of the first century the work was known and quoted by Clement of Rome, when Paul wrote his epistle to the Corinthians in 95 A.D.

As the author makes no mention of the destruction of the temple and its sanctuary, many have deduced the letter must have been written prior to 70 A.D. However, the reference to the sanctuary in the Epistle applies to the sanctuary that existed while Israel sojourned in the desert. His references are to the written Scriptures before him, and he appears to have no interest in the nation of Israel itself. Therefore, many authors prefer a later date for the composition of the Epistle--a date some years after the persecution of Nero in 64 A.D. The author implied there had been a persecution, a time for spiritual growth, but the time had been wasted. A safe conjecture would be that the Epistle was written sometime in the eighties.

THE RECIPIENTS OF THE EPISTLE

The Epistle made its first appearance in history under the title "To the Hebrews," and was never known by any other title within the early Church. The vagueness of this title suggests to many that even early in the Church the original recipients of the Letter were unknown. The title implies our author wrote to Jewish Christians. However, nothing within the contents of the Letter would exclude Gentile Christians, nor is there any reference to Jewish Christians within the Epistle.

Many feel our author addressed a Christian group who accepted the interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures, but who had no further preoccupation with Judaism and its ritual worship. He addressed only a segment of a Christian Community; from the closing of the Epistle we see it had not been sent to the leaders or to the general body of the Community (see Heb.13:24).

It may be deduced that our author wrote to a group of Christians not new within the faith, who in the spiritual fervor of first conversion had heroically weathered their first trials and tribulations for the faith. However, with the passing of time, disappointment had set in. They may have been discouraged Christians experiencing what later centuries would call the "dark night of the soul," on the verge of abandoning their earlier Christian commitment. Their

Christian experience had failed to produce a mature Christian Faith. The daily martyrdom of Christian life has always required more grace to bear than the martyrdom that bears instant physical death. Our author refers to his work as a brief “word of encouragement” (see Heb.13:22).

The closing statement of the Epistle seems to imply that the recipients of the Letter lived in Italy. He writes: “*The saints of Italy send you greetings*” (Heb.13:24). This statement suggests that those away from Italy send greetings to the Christians in Italy. If Italy was the original destination of the Letter, this would account for the fact that the first historical reference to the Letter came from Clement of Rome.

THEME AND PURPOSE

From the title of the work and a casual reading of its contents, some have deduced that our author dealt with problems peculiar to Jewish Christians. The author is seen as addressing himself to a crisis and conflict out of which the independent Catholic Church would arise. It has been maintained that our author wrote to Jewish Christians to demonstrate how the sacrificial worship and priestly atonement of the New Covenant are superior to that of Judaism.

However, others felt that a deeper insight into the Letter reveals a much more catholic intention by the author. He is not so much concerned with demonstrating how Christianity is superior to Judaism, but how religion reaches its fulfillment and perfection in Christianity. If the recipients of the Letter are falling away from the true faith, it is because of a faulty concept of Jesus Christ and the Christian Religion. This, our author seeks to correct.

The author presents a religious philosophy unique among New Testament writers. His philosophical approach to the world is fundamentally Platonic. Our author believed in a heavenly existence in which all is perfect and eternal. All things on this earth, both past and present, are imperfect and transitory. They are but the shadows and reflections of the heavenly realities. He applied this belief to the Old Testament, and found there the imperfect copies of the heavenly realities.

The author is concerned about mankind’s ascent and access to God. He sees the sinfulness of man and the holiness of God as the problem of people’s union with God. To him, the Old Testament indicates a way of access to God, and therefore to freedom from sin. There existed the Levitical priesthood and its

sacrifices for the expiation of sins and for the worship of God. However, since that priesthood and its sacrifices existed in this historical world, they were imperfect copies and imitations of the eternal realities.

Our author discovers in the character of Melchizedek a Scriptural revelation of a copy and symbol of a priesthood prior, and therefore superior, to that of the Levitical priesthood. This priesthood possesses a more perfect sacrifice. Our author sees in Jesus Christ and the Christian Religion a breakthrough of eternal realities upon the earth. He beheld in the sacrificial death of Christ on the Cross, at a historical moment of time, the perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind. This sacrifice is eternalized. After His death, Jesus enters into the spiritual realm--into the heavenly world--as the great High Priest offering His Precious Blood for the expiation of sin. Entering into the heavenly sanctuary symbolizes entering into Divine union. Jesus remains eternally there to make intercession for sinners.

According to our author, man enters into union with God--not through ecstasy or mystical raptures--but through union with Jesus Christ in faith and love. For him, faith is the conviction of the unseen realities wrought through the death of Jesus on the Cross and His entrance into heaven. Faith is confidence, here and now, that one has access to union with God through Jesus Christ.

For our author, religion is worship of God, and worship implies a priesthood and sacrifice. In the Christian Religion worship of God has been brought to perfection in the High-priesthood of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice upon the Cross. He proclaims Christianity to be the perfect and eternal religion on this earth. He demonstrates how the death of Jesus on the Cross always has importance, here and now, in the spiritual life of a Christian. He feels a necessity to instill a bit of fear in his readers, and so he points out to them the dire consequences of apostasy from the Christian Religion (see Heb.10:26-27). This would be an approach he would consider to be in keeping with their immaturity in the faith: *“For if the Israelites did not escape punishment when they refused to listen as God spoke to them on earth, how much greater punishment will be ours if we turn away from him who speaks from heaven” (Heb.12:25).*

THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS

This brings us to the question then: who is the author of Hebrews? For many centuries it was accepted in the Church, for practical reasons, to have been written by St. Paul. The first expressed mention we have of the authorship of Hebrews comes from Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D.). Clement writes that the Epistle is Paul's, that it was written to Hebrews in the Hebrew language, and that Luke translated it with zealous care and published it in Greek. Clement's statement finds no support in any other historical documents. The early church historian Eusebius quotes Origen as saying that everyone competent to judge language must admit that the style of the Epistle to the Hebrews is not that of Paul, but that anyone familiar with Paul's teachings must agree that the thoughts expressed in Hebrews are marvelous, and in no way inferior to Paul's acknowledged writings. Origen says: "*But who wrote the Epistle God only knows certainly. The account that has reached us is twofold: some say that Clement, who became bishop of Romans, wrote the Epistle, others that Luke wrote it, who wrote the Gospel and Acts.*"

Origen knew that certain Churches did not hold the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, and in the strict sense he agreed with them. However, he felt that in a sense the Epistle could be attributed to Paul, as it expressed a doctrine worthy of Paul. Tertullian believed it to be primarily a work of Barnabas, and secondarily inspired by the thoughts of Paul. St. Irenaeus (140-202 A.D.) was acquainted with the work, but he held that it "was not Paul's." Irenaeus seems to represent the Roman Church, which was the last to accept the Pauline authorship of Hebrews. St. Jerome writes: "*The custom of the Latins does not receive it among the canonical Scriptures as St. Paul's.*"

It seems that the attempt to tie Hebrews with Paul was to ensure its place in the Sacred Scriptures. The general testimony of the Church was that it was an inspired work. Its being attributed to Paul helped win its rightful place among the inspired Scriptures. The difficulty of the Roman Church with the Epistle appears to be the harsh stand of the author on a second repentance as expressed in Hebrews 10:26-27. St. Augustine's decisive action of having the Epistle listed among the inspired New Testament writings, and approval by three African Councils, apparently settled the matter. After that time, even though the authorship was called into question, the Scriptural authority of this Book was not questioned until the Reformation.

Luther was led to attribute the authorship to Apollos. The description of Apollos in Acts described the man who, in Luther's mind, would have written a work like Hebrews. Other scholars have proposed their own candidates, such as Stephen, the first martyr, Philip the Evangelist, Peter the Apostle, and Silas the missionary companion of Paul. The scholar Harback proposes the lady missionary, Prisca. The absence of a name on the Epistle indicated to him the author was a woman; her name was omitted because the authority of a woman would not have been acceptable to the times. St. Cajetan, who lived at the time of the Reformation, quotes the statement of Jerome and concludes that one cannot confidently hold Paul to be the author of the Epistle, but in keeping with common custom he will call it Pauline.

In 1955, the Secretary of the Biblical Commission stated that all past decrees of the Biblical Commission concerning the authors of the Sacred Books and their time of composition were not binding on Catholic Scripture Scholars. These matters were open for research and discussion. However, after much research and discussion we seem to be able to say no more than Origen did some eighteen hundred years ago--only God knows who wrote Hebrews! However, we do know it is Divinely inspired, and that is not questionable.

Concerning the author of Hebrews, one scholar has written: *"One may say that he deals with the biblical language as a preacher, whose first duty is to be faithful, but his second to be eloquent."*

The Epistle to the Hebrews comes to us today as a product of the primitive Christian Church. As we study this work we cannot but be impressed by the quality of mind and spirit that produced such a unique contribution to the Christian Faith. Although its authorship has been in doubt for centuries, it comes to us out of the early Christian Community with an assurance of its Divine inspiration. This was always the general conscious awareness of the early Church. Its theology--its Divine message--is set within a Platonic and Philonian framework and background foreign to the thought of many today. The proper interpretation of these Divinely inspired Scriptures demands an understanding of the philosophical mentality of its author.

The Second Vatican Council (Rev.3:12) reminds students of the Sacred Scriptures:

The interpreter of sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what

meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words... The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in the particular circumstances as he used contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture.

Therefore, a proper study and interpretation of the Epistle certainly proposes problems for biblical students today. Perhaps the words of the author of Hebrews best describe the challenge and reward that lies before us.

Let us, then, go beyond the initial teaching about Christ and advance to maturity, not laying the foundation all over again: repentance from dead works, faith in God, instruction about baptisms and laying-on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And, God permitting, we shall advance! (Heb.6:1-3).

INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED OF GOD AND IS USEFUL FOR TEACHING--FOR REPROOF, CORRECTION, AND TRAINING IN HOLINESS SO THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE FULLY COMPETENT AND EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.” (2Tim.3:16-17)

FIRST DAY: Read 2 Timothy 3:13-17 and 2 Peter 3:15-16.

1. What does 2 Timothy 3:15 teach you about the study of the Scriptures?
2. According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, what purposes do the Scriptures serve in one's spiritual life?
3. What warning should we take from 2 Peter 3:15-16 about the study of the Scriptures?
4. What do these Scriptures indicate to you about your personal study of the Scriptures?

SECOND DAY: Read the Introduction from the summary; Hebrews 6:1-3.

1. What does Heb.6:1-3 seem to indicate about the study of this Epistle?
2. What influences outside of the Scriptures apparently influenced the mind of the author?
3. What do these influences suggest about the study and understanding of this Epistle?
4. What does it mean to say that Hebrews is a homiletical midrash on Psalm 110?

THIRD DAY: Read Psalm 110.

1. What characteristics about the Messiah do you find being revealed?
2. What is being implied by the words “*Sit at my right hand*”?

3. What does Jesus demonstrate by His use of the words of Psalm 110 in Matthew 22:44 and 26:64?

4. What is being demonstrated in Acts 2:33-36 by the use of Psalm 110:1?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: Date of Composition.

1. What does Hebrews 2:3 tell us about the date of composition of the Epistle?

2. What do we learn about the composition from Hebrews 13:7?

3. Why do some scholars hold the Epistle to have been written before 70 A.D.?

4. Why do we know that it was composed before the end of the 1st century?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: Theme and Purpose

1. What type of people appears to be the recipients of this Epistle?

2. What does the author desire to demonstrate about the Christian Religion?

3. What does he see as the problem of man's union with God and the solution to the problem?

4. What is being implied by the author in Hebrew 10:26-27?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: The Author of Hebrews; Acts 18:24-28.

1. What do you see to be the general view of the early Church concerning the authorship of the Epistle?

2. Why were so many interested in linking the authorship of Hebrews to St. Paul?

3. Why did Hebrews 10:26-27 cause the Church, for some time, to question the Divine inspiration of Hebrews?

4. What characteristics possessed by Apollos make him a believable candidate for the authorship of Hebrews?

CHAPTER 2

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

The author of Hebrews was a literary artist who used all the power of his art to describe, in impeccable Greek, his sublime concept of Jesus Christ. His presentation takes us past the Christ of the Cross and Resurrection, and beyond the Ascension, to the Christ of Glory. His opening sentence, like the overture to a great symphony, expresses the main themes to be developed within the general body of his work, from chapter one through chapter twelve verse twenty-nine.

He proclaims the absolute finality of the Divine revelation received through Jesus Christ. He then establishes the Son's relationship with the cosmos--the created universe. The Son is revealed not as a created being but as the Creator under God. The Son is presented as Creator of the universe. He establishes a vital relationship between creation and redemption. He, who created the universe, personally expiated the sins of the world, that is, redeemed mankind.

THE FINAL REVELATION

The author declares in the first verse that God has spoken in this world and man has heard. The Greek expressions "in many places" and "many ways" imply Divine revelation has been diffused, not only geographically, but also expressed to mankind through many modes and methods. The expression "many ways" implies that God reveals His Will to mankind through all those avenues open to Him: dreams, visions, symbolic manifestations, natural occurrences, personal intermediaries such as angels and prophets; occasionally God reveals directly.

The author, in his opening statement, made reference to the revelations of the Old Testament as being like grains of wheat scattered over the fields of time--as being revealed here and there over the centuries. When he goes on to add "*in this the final age, God has spoken to us through his Son,*" he desires to contrast the revelations of the Old Testament with that revelation now possessed by the Christian Community. The revelations of the Old Testament were imperfect and incomplete--not that they lacked validity and veracity--but because they contained promises rather than fulfillment. In God's Son,

Jesus Christ, Divine revelation has been perfected and completed because Jesus Christ is God's final word to the world. The Christian Religion cannot accept any claims of Divine revelations that teach a different Christ or proclaim a new gospel (see Gal.1:8-9).

When our author writes "*God has spoken to us through his Son,*" it is not primarily a reference to the verbal revelations or spoken words given by Jesus Christ, but rather to the entire life of Jesus--from Incarnation to Exaltation--- as being God's spoken word. The revelation revealed through and in the Son is especially the Divine plan of salvation, which was brought to fulfillment by God's sending His Son into the world. That Son, Jesus, died the sacrificial death on the Cross, and subsequently ascended to the right hand of God, where He now intercedes for mankind.

THESE LAST DAYS

Our author, by his reference to the "final age," implies the final age of the world has arrived--a Semitic expression of time implying that the future and final age has arrived. It was commonly held that with the coming of the Messiah the old age would end and the messianic age would begin. We see from the Scriptures that, despite the fact of the coming of the Messiah, the old age continues in existence. Jesus refers to the present age as "*an evil, faithless age*" (Mt.16:4a). The author of Hebrews believes this new age has arrived with Jesus' Ascension. The Gospel of Matthew supports this belief (see Mt.19:28). However, the Gospel of Mark implies that this evil age will not end until the Second Coming of Jesus in glory. Jesus said to His disciples: "*If anyone in this faithless and corrupt age is ashamed of me and my doctrine, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes with the holy angels in His Father's glory*" (Mk.8:38). Perhaps we can say that the New Age has come on earth like a Divine leaven seeking to permeate the evil environment of this present age. Apparently the two kingdoms (light, darkness) are presently here on earth and, for a time, both survive side-by-side. And so Paul warns all Christians to take care and "*do not conform yourself to this age*" (Rom.12:2a).

TWO DIMENSIONS OF CHRIST

The opening words of the Epistle leave no doubt about the status and nature of the Son of God. Our author first makes clear the Son's relationship to this world. As the pre-existing Son of God, He created the universe. As its Maker, He was Lord of the world from its creation. However, we must realize that the

Scriptures often present Christ in His incarnational dimension. It emphasizes the humanity of the Son of God by treating and speaking of Him as a human being. It seems to express the idea that when God's Son became man, he temporarily surrendered His Divinity and laid it aside: "*Though he was in the form of God...he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate*" (Phil.2:6-7).

The Son of God re-assumed this "discarded" Divinity after His death and resurrection, but He assumed it as God-Man--as Jesus Christ. It must not be inferred that the Scriptures imply that Christ previously lacked Divine Sonship. The title "Son" belonged to Him always! We read in Romans: "*God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh...*" (Rom.8:3b). Those words of Paul, "*in the likeness of sinful flesh,*" could aptly express, as understood by the early Church, Jesus' natural condition prior to His resurrection. When the Scriptures imply that Jesus, at His resurrection and ascension, entered into Divine sonship and received the universe as His inheritance--it is not a new status but a "re-entry" into a condition that had always been His, but one not previously experienced in His human nature.

A DIVINE PORTRAIT

Hebrews makes the essential nature of the Son clearly visible. Our author presents a Divine portrait of the Son by employing two images understandable to human beings. He suggests the first image by using the word *apaugasma*. The word can be understood in the active sense as "radiance." The Son is the *radiance* of God's glory. As the heavenly sun radiates light and heat, the Son of God radiates the very essence and nature of God. Or *apaugasma* can be understood in the passive sense as "reflection" or "refulgence." As a mirror reflects the splendor of the sun, so the Son of God perfectly *reflects* in this world the nature of God. Most present day scholars accept the passive sense of "reflection," as it seems warranted by the second image used and also because the terminology of the author appears to be influenced by the use of this word in Wisdom 7:26.

When our author writes that the Son "*is the reflection of God's glory,*" he implies the Divine source of the Son's nature, and its unbroken relationship with the Divine Nature. Our author creates his second image by using the word *charakter*. The Son is the exact *charakter* of the Father's being. The Greek word *charakter* implies a stamp or engraving such as one would find on a coin. This word came to express the personality of a person. "*The exact*

representation of the Father's being" implies that the Son does not merely resemble certain aspects of the Father, He is the *exact representation* of His essence, thereby revealing to mankind the Divine attributes. The Son is not a representation of the *Person* of the Father; He is a representation of the *essence and nature* of the Father. In the Incarnated Son the essence of God becomes knowable in the world.

It is in virtue of the Son's Divine Nature that our author states "*and he sustains all things by his word of power.*" The Greek expression implies that the power of the Son continually sustains the existence of the world. By His power the world came into existence, and by His power it is sustained in existence. Through the activity of the Son, the universe will be brought to its perfect fulfillment. Our author attributes to the Son of God the Divine Providence that governs the universe.

REDEEMER AND LORD

When the author of Hebrews writes: "*When he had cleansed us from our sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs*" (Heb.1:3b-4), he touches the main themes to be developed within the body of the Epistle.

Our English translation makes clear that he has "*cleansed us from our sins.*" However, the Greek text seems to imply that he had been purified of sin. The author does not wish to imply Christ sinned but rather, that He personified sinful humanity as its representative. He likewise has the image of the high priest in mind. In the Old Testament, the high priest must be purified of all sin before entering into the Holy of Holies. Our author seeks to emphasize here that our High Priest, Jesus Christ, enters sinless into the heavenly sanctuary, having been purified by His own Precious Blood. He sees Jesus' crucifixion as a sin offering for the cleansing of the community of its sins.

The word "purification" translated can signify a purgation of sins in the sense of a removal of the disease of sin; or it can signify, as is probably the case here, a cleansing from sins--making something pure, uncontaminated, in order that it can now become holy. Our author relates that when the "purified" Christ entered into the heavens "*he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*" The words used express more than Christ's merely taking His seat. They imply a solemn and royal enthronement by which the Son enters into Divine authority.

Our author presents Christ not only as Son, but as King. This twofold position of being both Son and King makes it doubly clear that Christ is superior to the angels in heaven. He has inherited a name “superior to theirs.” The implication is that as Jesus assumes His new status--signified by His enthronement--he receives a new name. In Semitic thought a name designated the being of a person, and the changing of a name indicated some essential change within the person. In the mind of our author, Christ receives the title of Royal Son. St. Paul reveals this new name when he writes:

Because of this, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name, so that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: JESUS CHRIST IS LORD! (Phil.2:9-11)

SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

Our author goes to some lengths to demonstrate the superiority of Christ over the angels, which indicates that this matter touches upon the particular problem faced by the recipients of his Letter. The word “angel” comes from the Latin *angelus*, which is a transcription of the Greek word *angelos*. *Angelos* and its Hebrew equivalent *mal'ak* both mean “messenger.” Angels were considered to be messengers and servants of Yahweh. God controlled and ruled the universe through the ministries of the angels. Angels guided and guarded the People of God (see Ex.23:20-21). The angels were a celestial army, the hosts of Yahweh; the angels made intercession for men before God (see Tb.12:12ff). According to Daniel the angels are without number (see Dn.7:10). St. Paul speaks of angels as spiritual beings (*pneumata*), and contrasts them with “flesh and blood”--human beings (See Eph.6:12). Jesus Christ confirmed the existence of angels and their service to mankind (See Mt.18:10). He told the Sadducees that the resurrected in heaven will be like the angels “*and are no longer liable to death*” (Lk.20:36).

The Catholic Church confirms that in the beginning God created spiritual essences called angels. The natural immortality of the angels flows from the pure spirituality of their nature. They possess understanding and free will. They are superior to men. Their primary task is the glorification and service to God, and their secondary task is the protection of mankind and the care of the salvation of human beings. St. Jerome wrote: “*How great is the value of the*

human soul that every single person has from birth received an angel for his protection.”

Our author proceeds to demonstrate from the Old Testament Scriptures the superiority of Christ over the angels. He uses seven quotations to establish the truth that the One Son is greater than all the angels, as He is the Son of God, the First Born, Creator and Lord of the universe whom the angels--no more than wind and fire--must worship and serve.

In his final statement he establishes the true position of the angels. Their chief function is to assist Christ in the salvation of mankind. The angels are instruments of Christ to bring men to salvation. The author emphasizes that the angels are not proper objects of worship. He leaves no doubt that Christ is a proper object of our worship.

JESUS CHRIST IS LORD

From this foundation the author stresses the importance of the gospel message received from Jesus Christ. He exhorts his readers to remain faithful, and warns that a failure to do so could have dire consequences for them. He points out that if the Law received through angels could not be rejected without punishment, what would be the consequence of ignoring the gospel message delivered by God's own Son? He seeks to impress on them the seriousness of the situation. This gospel is not to be taken lightly. Their acceptance and living of the gospel would determine their salvation. He seems to imply that there was a spirit of indifference--a lukewarmness--that could result, not in a deliberate rejection of the gospel, but in an almost unconscious drifting away from Christ and the gospel.

Perhaps this indifference had resulted from the apparent weakness and humility of Christ. Our author turns his readers' attention to the humiliation of Christ. He teaches that this humiliation led to the exaltation of Christ--an exaltation that has already occurred, which is not apparent here and now on earth but will be when Jesus Christ comes in glory. He writes: *“In subjecting all things to him, God left nothing unsubjected. At present we do not see all things thus subject, but we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death” (Heb.2:8-9a)*. The words of the author echo those expressed by St. Paul in Phil.2:6-11.

Our author has reiterated the great truth revealed in the first three verses of Hebrews: Jesus Christ is Lord! Jesus Himself confirmed: *“All power in heaven and earth has been given to me” (Mt.28:18)*. As our author pointed out, *“at present we do not see all things subject”* to Christ, but with the eye of faith we already behold Jesus Christ as the Lord of glory.

The Church confirms that in this present age Satan still holds a certain dominion because of sin. He exercises this dominion unless impeded by the Lord. We should not leave the situations and circumstances of our lives open to this evil dominion. Our belief in the Lordship of Jesus should find a practical expression in our daily lives. In all situations--but especially in times of weakness and stress--we should invite and invoke Jesus to express His Lordship here and now. The expression of that Lordship will not be measured by my desire, but by the nature of the Lord. However, such a practice opens all the dimensions of my life to Divine intervention. Do I really believe *“all power in heaven and earth”* has been given to Jesus Christ? Then I should live with a faith that expresses it!

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST
SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“IF ANYONE PREACHES A GOPEL TO YOU OTHER THAN THE ONE YOU RECEIVED, LET A CURSE BE UPON HIM!” (Gal. 1:9)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through The Final Revelation; Heb.1:1-4; Gal.1:6-10.

1. What is meant by revelation in the Old Testament as being partial and imperfect?
2. What would you say is the revelation that has come to us in and through Jesus Christ?
3. Why is this revelation said to be final and complete?
4. What is implied by the teaching of Paul in Galatians?

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: These Last Days; Mt.19:27-30; Mk.8:34-38.

1. What is meant by the Final Age or Last Days?
2. What is implied by Matthew 19:28?
3. How would you explain the apparent discrepancy with Mark 8:38?
4. What does it mean for you to “conform yourself to this world”?

THIRD DAY: Read Summary through A Divine Portrait; Phil.2:6-11; Wis.7:22-30.

1. What picture do you get of Christ from Phil.2:6-11?
2. What picture do the images used in Heb.1:3 present of Christ?
3. What does the reading from Wisdom teach you about the presentation of Christ in the New Testament?

4. What is meant by the expression that Christ “sustains all things by his powerful word”?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary through Superior to Angels; Hebrews 1:5-14.

1. What would be the author’s implication that Jesus was purified of sin?
2. What does our author desire to teach when he tells us that Jesus inherited a new name?
3. How does he demonstrate that Jesus is superior to angels?
4. What do you see as the importance of angels in the life of a Christian?

FIFTH DAY: Read Hebrews 2:1-4.

1. What point does our author now make between the Old and New Covenant?
2. Why does he exhort his readers to take the message of the gospel seriously?
3. How has the truth of the gospel been confirmed in your life?
4. What could cause a Christian to “drift away” from Christ?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: Jesus Christ Is Lord; Hebrews 2:5-9.

1. What two aspects of the life of Christ are essentially connected?
2. What does this teach you about the life of a Christian?
3. What do you learn from Hebrews 2:8?
4. How can you express faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ in your life?

CHAPTER 3

JESUS: PIONEER OF SALVATION

INTRODUCTION

The Scriptures teach *“the just man lives by faith.”* A Christian can only live a righteous life by being directed by the principles of Christian Religion whose foundation primarily rests upon faith. There is always the tendency for a Christian to lower his or her sights, and see life only in its earthly dimension--to judge and measure one's life by its empirical experiences, by what one feels and experiences here and now. This can cause Christian life to become desperate and hopeless.

Faith in Jesus Christ that truly incarnates itself in the life of a believer is the ground of Christian Hope. Regardless of one's present circumstances, the hopeful person knows the future will bring that which faith has promised. Hope gives the Christian spirit a buoyant quality that elevates it above despair and defeat to a dimension of joyous existence amidst life's trials, tribulations, and disappointments. *“We have put our hope in him who will never cease to deliver us” (2Cor.1:10b).*

Hope expresses itself in patient endurance. Christian patience becomes visible when a person faces and endures evil without despair or sadness of spirit. Hope is not only the root of patience but also the root of faithfulness. In time of temptation one does not fall away but remains firmly committed to Jesus Christ and the Christian life. For this reason Paul teaches: *“In hope we were saved” (Rm.8:24).*

Many Christians “drift away” from the Faith when their “hope in Christ” does not eliminate the pains and sufferings of human existence, or does not preserve them or those they love from all life's physical and social evils. Paul wrote: *“If our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of men” (1Cor.15:19).* The quality of such faith is poor; its poverty may be due to its misconception of Jesus Christ and the Christian Religion.

The recipients of the Letter to the Hebrews apparently fit the above description. Their faith in Christ had been weakened. As yet they had not abandoned the Faith, however, there was a real danger of apostasy from the Christian Religion. Their spiritual condition had been stimulated by their

Christian experience, but expectations had not been met and they experienced a spiritual letdown. In the early days of their conversion their faith had been stimulated by the belief in an imminent return in glory of Jesus Christ. In the strength of this hope they bravely bore persecution. However, the months passed, and so did the years, and nothing changed. Their faith still had to bear the scandal of Christ Crucified--which was bearable only in the light of Jesus' imminent and triumphant return to earth, a triumph in which they would share. They were tempted to abandon the Christian Faith.

The author of Hebrews seeks to impede such a spiritually disastrous step. He seeks both to enlighten and admonish his readers. He seeks to convince them that Jesus Christ is "God's holy one," and that there is not another in whom holiness may be achieved. He powerfully demonstrates to them the present and eternal value of the sufferings and death of Christ. He points out how the manner and mode of Jesus' death was Willed by God as the means of salvation for mankind. He clarifies for his readers the blessings of being a Christian. He turns their attention to the Incarnation of God's Son and its implication for all Christians.

THE EXTENT OF THE INCARNATION

The writer's first step is to clarify the human nature assumed by the Son, and the human condition into which the Son entered. He quotes Psalm 8 from the Septuagint Bible, which proclaims the dignity of the human nature. This Psalm, no doubt, echoes the thoughts expressed in Genesis where man, to whom God gives dominion of the earth, is described as being made in the image and likeness of God,. The author indicates this dominion is not limited to the earth but extends also to the world to come: "*In subjecting all things to him, God left nothing unsubjected*" (Heb.2:8). This implies man will be superior to angels: "*Do you not know that we are to judge angels?*" (1Cor.6:3).

Man's ideal destiny has been frustrated and unfulfilled. Satan overcame man through temptation. At man's fall, Satan assumed dominion of the world and became "*god of this present age.*" The evils of this "present age" culminate in physical death from this dominion. When the Son of God entered humanity in this fallen condition and assumed the burden of sin, He came under a certain dominion of Satan that opened him to suffering and death.

Our author points out that Jesus has achieved this lost, ideal status of man. He achieved it "*because he suffered death*" (Heb.2:9b). The name "Jesus" is used

for the first time. When used alone it expresses the Incarnation of the Son. This reference to Jesus being in glory implies that the Son did not discard His humanity and enter heaven. The writer desires to stress that it was not death itself, but the manner of death, that achieved salvation. It involved a suffering death. The expression "*he might taste death*" includes not only the act of dying, but the most bitter experience of death. The author emphasizes that "*for each one*" He tasted and suffered death.

THE PIONEER OF SALVATION

Suffering is a universal experience of mankind. The author attributes the sufferings of Christ to the Will of God. It was the "fitting" means by which God would bring Christ to perfection. He speaks of Jesus as being the *archegos* in the work of salvation. *Archegos* implies Jesus to be the author and originator of the work of salvation. Many scholars believe the best translation is "pioneer," for the concept expresses the idea of one who first experiences and takes part in that which he establishes. It is only His work that makes it possible for others to arrive at the same end. Jesus brings "many sons of God" to glory--to union with God.

Since God Willed to achieve "the work of salvation "as man," it was "fitting" that the work be achieved within the human condition. To be in the human condition means to suffer and die. When God Willed to become man, He had to Will to suffer and die because these are two of the essential elements of human existence in its present condition. God Willed for "the pioneer in the work of salvation" to be perfected through suffering. This does not imply that Christ suffered the imperfection of sin, but rather that He had not yet come to the moral perfection that comes only through growth and maturity. We may say that a seed is a perfect seed, but a seed still lacks the perfection of its potentiality, its maturity. Christ reached a personal, moral perfection through the manner in which He suffered and died. His faith, hope, and love reached their perfection.

Within these experiences, it has rightly been said that as human beings suffer, so God has suffered. God, in His assumed humanity, has experienced the death all human beings must experience. God did not remain outside of the human condition. He entered fully into it and shared its good and evil. Because of the sinlessness of that assumed nature, many hold that He experienced suffering and pain to a degree of intensity never experienced in human natures dulled and blunted by sin.

THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

Our author draws his readers' attention to the personal results flowing from "the work of salvation." First he makes it clear Christ died for all men, but the effects of the redemption are enjoyed only by those who remain faithful to Christ. There has been no universal response to the Gospel. He then goes on to say: "*He who consecrates and those who are consecrated have one and the same Father*" (Heb.2:11a). Christ, who perfected himself through suffering and death, now sanctifies His disciples. Christ "consecrates" Christians. This implies that He withdraws them from the world of sin, darkness, and Satan (see Acts 26:18). He purifies them of sin and sets them apart from this "evil and faithless age" for the service and worship of God. This consecration establishes a unique bond between Christ and Christians. It establishes such a unity and affinity that Christians are acknowledged as the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and they can claim the title "sons of God," for they are of the family and household of God.

Three Old Testament texts are cited to illustrate the union that exists between Christ and those who believe in Him. The first quotation from Psalm 22:23 may well express the belief the Christian Community held of Christ's presence at the time of Christian worship. It demonstrates Jesus' kinship with the Christian Community. The second and third quotations, which come from Isaiah 8:17-18 ("*I will put my trust in him*") may be recited to encourage the Community to have the same faith and confidence possessed by Jesus. The third quotation could imply that the children of God have been placed in the care of Jesus.

The author emphasizes that in this kinship of Jesus with the Christian Community, the Son of God completely assumed the human nature: "*Now, since the children are men of blood and flesh, Jesus likewise had a full share in ours...*" (Heb.2:14). Jesus' complete identity with man is achieved by His voluntarily assuming the human nature in its fallen condition. In this present condition, Satan, the prince of death, holds power over man, and man lives in constant fear of death. It is not the fact of death that causes fear as much as the thought of what follows death. Satan exercised his dominion over Christ through inflicting suffering and death upon Him. Jesus, by His Resurrection from the dead, demonstrated His conquest of Satan and the destruction of his dominion and power. Revelation teaches that Satan's power on earth will only be completely annihilated at the end of the world.

MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST

Jesus' absolute identification with humanity qualifies Him to become "*a merciful and faithful high priest before God on their behalf, to expiate the sins of the people*" (Heb.2:17). This is the first mention of the priesthood of Jesus--the essential theme to be developed within this Epistle.

This is the only New Testament work that applies this title to Jesus. It teaches that Jesus is not only our Redeemer but He is our Mediator before God. The author immediately has indicated the uniqueness of this priesthood when he describes Jesus as being "merciful" and "compassionate." The mercy of Jesus implies that He considers the circumstance and the situation of each sinful person. His judgments will be just, because He judges from the seat of Mercy.

As a faithful high priest, He can be trusted in His office of high priest--an office that pertains to all man's relations with God. In this office of high priest, Jesus expiates the sins of the people. The word "expiates" implies that Jesus makes amends for the sins of the people. The verb expresses the idea of the removal of sin or any defilement. In the Old Testament this was done by God or by His priest through the means decreed by God.

The writer desires to make clear how intimately Jesus Christ relates to each person--how He is concerned about what each one suffers. The author shows how people not only have Jesus' deepest sympathy, but also how, in their weakness, Jesus will share His strength with them. They must not picture Him as some critical judge ready to condemn them, or some super spiritual being too superior and removed from the human situation to be concerned. No! He knows the human situation with all its dangers, temptations, and hopes, because He shared completely in these things. He experienced them as a human being, with all the natural attractions, reactions, and repulsions of a human being. And so our author writes: "*Since he was himself tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are tempted*" (Heb.2:18). It is not those who give in to temptation that know the full power of temptation and its sufferings, but rather those who endure temptation to the end. Since Jesus bore the full power of temptation "*He is able to help those who are tempted.*" He possesses the strength to stand by us in times of temptation not only with sympathy for us but with aid also.

THE FIDELITY OF JESUS

Our writer emphasizes the fidelity of Jesus to His vocation in order to encourage fidelity in his readers. He uses two unique terms to describe Jesus: apostle and high priest. The Greek word *apostolos* means “one who is sent” as an ambassador or envoy of another. The Son of God became man because God sent Him into the world as His ambassador. Our author says: “*think on Jesus--contemplate Jesus who is the apostle and high priest of the faith we profess*” (*Heb.3:1*). He desires his readers to contemplate the obedience of Christ from the beginning of His earthly life. The Hebrew word *shaliach* also means “one who is sent.” The Rabbis spoke of the high priest as the “Shaliach of the People.” He was their representative before God, to offer sacrifice for their sins. Calling Jesus high priest intends to call to mind the sacrifice of His own life for the sins of the people. When the author invites his readers to contemplate Jesus as apostle and high priest, he brings before their eyes the entire life of Jesus. His entire life was one of self-surrender and oblation, and His vocation did not end until His death.

SUPERIOR TO MOSES

Having established the humanity of Jesus, the next logical step would be to establish the superiority of Jesus over Moses. Moses was considered, within Jewish theology, to have been the greatest human being because he spoke face to face with God. Certain teachings maintained he was higher than the angels. The author proves Jesus’ superiority over Moses by objectively presenting their positions in religious history. Moses appeared as a servant in the household of God. He proved faithful in his most arduous task. However, the Son is the founder of the household, and He appears within the household as Son not servant. The author concludes Jesus to be greater than Moses for the founder of the household is greater than the members of the household.

MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

The author sees the Christian Community as Christ’s Family on this earth. He beheld Jesus not as present *in* the members of the Church as Paul does, but rather here and now *with* the members of the household. He teaches that in order for a Christian to maintain this close association with Christ, and to keep his membership within the household, he must bravely confess his faith in Christ and live a life of hope that expresses confidence in God’s purpose by relying upon His promises. No member is assured a permanent position in this

family unless he remains faithful.

Moses' fidelity brings to the author's mind the infidelity of many members of God's household and the evil consequences of their infidelity. He desires his readers to personally reflect on this. He calls to mind the words of Psalm 95 that refers to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness when God put them to the test. He holds that the Holy Spirit, at this moment, personally addresses these words to the Christian Community. The position of "today" in the recitation stresses urgency.

The sins of Israel are not attributed to a lack of knowledge, but to their willfulness. Ignorance of God implies disobedience for one only "knows" (experiences) God's way through obedience. The writer interprets the phrase "*They shall never enter into my rest,*" along with Rabbi Akiba, to mean that the whole generation of Israelites would be excluded from the world to come. After placing the example of Israel's infidelity and its consequences before their eyes, he encourages his readers to look into their own hearts: "*Take care, my brothers, lest any of you have an evil and unfaithful spirit and fall away from the living God*" (Heb.3:12).

Our author is very aware of the importance of the Christian Community in the life of the individual members--the importance of Christian worship and fellowship. He now encourages the individual members to be a daily source of encouragement and strength to each other. He is aware how subtle is the evil that can enter the heart and estrange one from Christ. It is an evil that bit-by-bit enters the spirit, and imperceptibly turns the will from Christ until finally, the will finds itself hardened toward God's Will. Our author does not see a weekly worship service as sufficient to protect the spirit from the sin of infidelity.

He warns his readers that they will not end up as members of God's Family if they do not maintain that same spirit of faith and hope with which they began their Christian commitment to the end of their lives. He sees Christian worship and community as an indispensable means to this end.

"Today, if you should hear his voice, harden not your hearts!" (Ps.95:8).

JESUS: PIONEER OF SALVATION

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“SINCE HE WAS HIMSELF TESTED THROUGH WHAT HE SUFFERED, HE IS ABLE TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE TEMPTED.” (Hebrews 2:18)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction

1. What do you see to be the relationship between one’s faith and one’s hope?
2. What is the quality of patience that flows from Christian Hope?
3. How do Christians limit their “hope in Christ” to this world?
4. What effect does this have on one’s faith and hope?

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Extent of the Incarnation; Psalm 8.

1. How would you describe man’s ideal status?
2. In light of this how do you explain man’s present situation?
3. What does this teach you about suffering and death?
4. What does the author desire to imply by the use of “Jesus” in Hebrews 2:9?

THIRD DAY: Read Summary through Pioneer of Salvation: Hebrews 2:10-13.

1. What is meant by the expression that Jesus “tasted” death?
2. Why is Jesus the Pioneer of the work of salvation?
3. What is meant by the expression that “suffering perfected Jesus”?
4. What does Hebrews 2:11 teach you about your own Christian life?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary through Merciful and Faithful High Priest; Hebrews 2:14-18.

1. What does Hebrews 2:14 teach us about the nature of Jesus Christ?
2. How does Jesus free us from the fear of death?
3. In what way was Jesus under the dominion of Satan?
4. What does Hebrews 2:18 teach you?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary through Superior to Moses: Hebrews 3:1-6.

1. What does our author wish to teach his readers by asking them to contemplate Jesus as apostle and high priest?
2. What does this teach us about the Christian vocation?
3. What is being implied by Jesus being the founder of the household?
4. What does Hebrews 3:6 teach you about membership in the Community?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: Members of the Household: Hebrews 3:7-19.

1. What lesson does the author intend for the reader by quoting the words of Psalm 95?
2. What do you think is meant by “the deceit of sin”?
3. What do you learn from Hebrews 3:13?
4. What is the lesson for you in Hebrews 3:14-19?

CHAPTER 4

THE CONSEQUENCE OF DISOBEDIENCE

INTRODUCTION

The Christian pilgrimage is no aimless wandering in the desert like the Israelites of old. The vision of Jesus Christ in glory reveals to Christians their future. The life and teachings of Jesus clearly mark the way for Christians to enter into the glory that God calls them to achieve. Jesus told His disciples: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me"* (Jn.14:6).

The author of Hebrews wrote his epistle because he firmly believed this precept, and because he detected a falling away from this belief. He is not just a teacher of truth; he is a pastoral teacher whose loving concern for other members of the Christian Community urged him to enlighten, encourage, admonish, and correct. We find woven within the fabric of his entire work beautiful theological observations, side-by-side with personal warnings and admonitions.

The author fixed his readers attention upon that "lost" generation of Israelites who, under the leadership of Moses, left Egypt and slavery in joyful hope for the Promised Land. However, when they reached the Promised Land they refused to enter it. That day, they demonstrated their loss of faith in Yahweh, which was a result of their previous defiance of doing His Will. Yahweh summed up their behavior in these words: *"...all the men who have seen my glory and the signs I worked in Egypt and in the desert, and who nevertheless have put me to the test ten times already and have failed to heed my voice..."* (Num.14:21-22). Their previous behavior resulted in disbelief and defiance, and merited their sentence of condemnation. So began their forty years of wandering in the desert. They inflicted this punishment not only upon themselves, but also upon their children.

Within this historical lesson the author saw a possible foreshadowing of the life of present day Christians. If they came to the same spiritual condition, they too would suffer the same fate. With the loss of faith goes the opportunity for eternal salvation. Within just a few verses, the writer quotes these words from Ps.95 three times: *"Today, if you should hear his voice, harden not your hearts,"* in order to stress the urgent necessity to preserve faith. He desired

his readers to grasp the vital connection between faith and obedience, and infidelity and disobedience. He wrote: *“To whom but to the disobedient did he swear that they would not enter into his rest? We see, moreover, that it was their unbelief that kept them from entering” (Heb.3:18-19)*. He rightly sees a correlation between “disbelief” and “disobedience.”

BIBLICAL FAITH

The author later defines faith as *“confident assurance concerning what we hope for, and conviction about things we do not see” (Heb.11:1)*. He presents a psychological definition of faith as it describes the effects of faith in a person’s life. Faith gives to the spirit an assurance and conviction about matters beyond the experience of the senses. In its biblical concept, faith touches one’s entire personality. It centers not so much in what we believe, but rather in whom we believe. A person, by following God’s Will, experiences God to be secure and firm--to be reliable and faithful. God keeps His word and can be trusted. The Will of God expresses the very heart of God.

By accomplishing this Will, the believer moves more and more into an experience of God. As the spirit experiences the Will of God through its obedience, the Presence of God becomes more evident within the life of the believer. This evident Presence sparks greater assurance and conviction, which in turn stimulates a more eager and zealous desire to do the Will of God. It is because obedience brings one into the Life and Presence of God that obedience increases faith and love of God.

Faith always involves traveling in the dark. Faith is blind. It involves trusting in the light, the love, and the vision of another. Where we lack faith, our perception of the Will of God causes fear, anxiety, questioning, reluctance, and rebellion. As the spirit withdraws from the Will of God, it slowly abandons the Life and Presence of God until it finds itself in a spiritual desert where there is no sense of God’s Presence. The spirit faces the evil experiences of life without any awareness of God, without any faith. This condition results from disobedience--the withdrawal of the human will from the Divine Will. As St. Stephen teaches in Acts, this can lead to God abandoning man to the path he chooses: *“But God turned away from them and abandoned them to the worship of the galaxies in the heavens” (Acts 7:42)*.

THE SABBATH REST

Our author has emphasized that the cause of Israel's failure to enter into the "rest" of God was the result of disobedience that led to "their unbelief." He now desires to develop the theme of entering into God's "rest." First, our author presumes the promise to enter still remains open. He sustains this presumption by insisting that Christians are already entering into God's rest. He insists that Israel's entrance into Canaan was not the fulfillment of the promise at all. Israel's entrance was but a foreshadowing and prefiguring of that real entrance that he calls the "sabbath rest" yet to be realized. He saw this "sabbath rest" as being symbolized in Israel's observance of the Sabbath.

The writer says: *"Therefore, while the promise of entrance into his rest still holds, we ought to be fearful of disobeying lest anyone of you be judged to have lost his chance of entering" (Heb.4:1).* Our author calls for a healthy fear (*phobeisthai*), such as that possessed by a runner in a race who fears he may lose the race because of his complacency and failure to exert himself to the maximum. If such a runner loses the race, it could be judged that he lacked the heart to win; he didn't really will to win. This seems to be what is implied in *"lest anyone of you be judged to have lost" your chance of entering.* In other words, you really did not will to enter into God's rest.

The writer goes on to observe how it is not enough "to hear" the Word. Along with St. James, he insists Christians must be "doers" of the Word. He maintains that the Word of God had no power to positively influence the lives of the Israelites because they negated its power through unbelief. He does not imply that the Word of God did not affect them. It did, but they resisted its power, as their final judgment will manifest. The author emphasizes that the path to God's rest is the path of faith. *"It is we who have believed who enter into that rest..." (Heb.4:3).* From the verb construction used, we know the author did not imply that his readers had already entered into God's rest, but that they were on the path that would lead them securely to that rest.

Our author sees "God's rest" to be a Divine state of existence, since the Scriptures speak of God Himself entering into this "rest" (see Gn.2:2-3). It is a state of being that belongs to the world to come, into which God still invites mankind to enter. This eternal rest symbolizes mankind at peace and in complete union with God. It symbolizes the completed holiness of a person,

and his absolute and eternal consecration to God. The rabbis pointed out the eternity of this state since on the seventh day there was no reference to "...evening came, and morning followed..." (Gen.1:31).

As is his custom, our author exhorts his readers: "*Let us strive to enter into that rest, so that no one may fall, in imitation of the example of Israel's unbelief*" (Heb.4:11). It is a warning to his readers to be cautious of following the bad example of others. He does not warn about falling into disobedience but against falling into disbelief through disobedience.

THE WORD OF GOD

Our writer began this chapter by mentioning the possibility of members of the Christian Community being "judged" unfit to enter into God's rest. Now he tells them that "the Word of God" will render this judgment. Scripturally the "Word of God" would be the "Wisdom" of God expressed through God's messengers, in both the Old and New Testaments.

It appears that for the author the Gospel message and all that it contains would be the "Word of God." However, it must be understood that this Divine Wisdom is more than objective truth that presents itself before the tribunal of human reason for acceptance or rejection. The Word of God becomes a moral force in the life of the hearer. It does not lie like fallen seed in a field. It is alive and active, and this implies the power of self-determination. It moves and operates under its own steam. It knocks for entrance at the door of the spirit. It forces its acceptance or rejection to become a personal decision at man's deepest level. The spirit must respond either by accepting or expelling it. Its expulsion may be rationalized away, but the decision is not made purely on the intellectual level, but on a much higher one.

The Word of God possesses the power of analysis. It is the perfect analyzer of human conduct. Its powers of analyzing are compared to the sharpest sword or scalpel that minutely separates everything--scrutinizing each aspect, each influence, each motivation, each intention of human behavior. In other words, the Word of God penetrates every aspect of the human personality. "*It judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart*" (Heb.4:12c). It enters into the inner sanctum of the heart where even angels may not enter; it discerns whether the heart has hardened itself against God. It presses from each human act every drop of goodness and evil, and carefully weighs it. Nothing goes undetected,

unrecorded, or unaccounted. Such will be the judgment before the seat of Divine Justice.

The writer tells his readers that each one of us must one day see him/herself in the reflection of God's own eyes, which clearly manifest to the minutest degree what one has truly become. "*Nothing*," he writes, "*is concealed from him; all lies bare and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account*" (*Heb.4:13*). Here, under the vision of God, a person is truly named. The judgment of God is but the eternal declaration of what we have become through the decisions of our hearts--our willed decisions. What we affirm in time, God will reaffirm in eternity. God will eternally ratify man's will.

Our author has deliberately placed his readers before the judgment seat of Divine Justice. Later he will write: "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (*Heb.10:31*). He desires that his readers fully experience the fear of this without mitigation. There they will experience what the ultimate verdict of Divine Justice must be: "*You have been weighed on the scales and been found wanting!*" (*Dn.5:27*).

THE MAIN THEME

All that has previously been written has led up to the theme now to be developed--the priesthood of Jesus Christ. It is the essential theme of the Epistle, and it is the author's unique contribution to the Christology of the Christian Church. Our author has established the superiority of Jesus Christ over angels and Moses. This he did in order to establish the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ over the Levitical priesthood. He emphasizes the two natures of Jesus Christ when he refers to Him as "Jesus, the Son of God." He considered both natures as necessary for Jesus to fulfill the role of high priest. He tells his readers: "*Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession of faith*" (*Heb.4:14*). Already he suggests the work of Jesus before the throne of God on behalf of His people. It was the role of the high priest to expiate the sins of the people and to make intercession for them before God. He suggests that Jesus has entered into Heaven and mediates before God for sinful human beings who have placed their trust and confidence in Him. Therefore, he urges his readers to cling to a life preserver in a stormy sea. Once again the author insists upon a public profession of faith. Private conviction is not sufficient. "*Hold fast to our profession of faith*" implies an open declaration of it before men.

Our author urges his readers to approach, here and now, the throne of grace without fear. There they will find a high priest who has a heart of sympathy for them: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned” (Heb.4:15)*. The sinlessness of Jesus does not militate against the genuineness of His humanity. Sin is not natural for man, even though it is common to him. It is not an essential element of humanity. Jesus experienced the effects of sin upon His life through His assuming man’s nature, which was tainted through the sin of Adam.

When the writer urges his readers to approach the throne of grace, he implies that through their union with Jesus Christ they share in the priesthood of Jesus that gives them access to God. He writes: *“So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need” (Heb.4:16)*. The “throne of grace” is not some symbolic seat of mercy but, in the mind of our author, it is the veritable center of Divine life and love. To approach the throne of grace in order to seek mercy implies approaching as a sinner. Sinners come seeking the mercy of God, and weak human beings come seeking the aid of God. Our author does not expect Christians to be sinless, but he zealously labors that they will take extreme caution and care to avoid one sin--the sin of apostasy which denies faith in Jesus Christ. For our author, this is a road from which there is no return. This sin is never too far from his mind as he addresses his readers.

Our author now reaches that point in his Epistle where he will develop the theme of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. As already mentioned, it will be in the Old Testament that he will find the shadows of this perfect priesthood. He describes it in these words:

Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal patiently with erring sinners, for he himself is beset by weakness and so must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. One does not take this honor on his own initiative, but only when called by God as Aaron was (Heb.5:1-4).

From this point he will proceed to show how Jesus is a new priest, and to show the superiority of this new priesthood over the Levitical priesthood.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF DISOBEDIENCE

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK

(PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“THE WORD WHICH THEY HEARD DID NOT PROFIT THEM, FOR THEY DID NOT RECEIVE IT IN FAITH.” (Hebrews 4:2b)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; Numbers 13:25-33; Chapter 14.

- 1. In what way does the author reveal himself to be a pastor as well as a teacher?**
- 2. To what do you attribute the Israelites' refusal to enter the Promised Land?**
- 3. What does Numbers 14:21-22 teach you about their decision?**
- 4. What do you learn from the fact that their children shared in their punishment?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Biblical Faith; Gen.12:1-9; 15:1-6; 22:1-3.

- 1. What does the life of Abraham teach you about the virtue of Faith?**
- 2. What do you learn from the author's definition of faith? (Heb.11:1)**
- 3. How can obedience to God's Will increase ones faith?**
- 4. What effect can your personal disobedience have upon your faith?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: The Sabbath Rest; Hebrews 4:1-11.

- 1. What lesson does the author teach you in Hebrews 4:1-3?**
- 2. What does entering into God's rest symbolize?**
- 3. What must be accomplished according to Hebrews 4:10 in order for us to enter God's rest?**
- 4. What do you see as the work you must accomplish?**

**FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: Word of God; John 1:1-18;
Hebrews 4:12-13.**

1. According to John how would you describe the Word of God?
2. How is the Word of God presented to us in Hebrews?
3. How would you describe the effect of the Word of God upon those who hear it?
4. What does Hebrews 4:13 teach you about your relationship with God?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: The Main Theme; Hebrews 4:14-16.

1. In what way did our author see Joshua as a reflection of Jesus?
2. What does our author imply by “let us hold fast to our profession of faith”?
3. How do you think Jesus could be sinless and still have a “full share” in our nature?
4. What do you learn from Hebrews 4:16?

SIXTH DAY: Read Hebrews 5:14; Exodus 28:1-5; 29:1-9; Leviticus 10:1-11.

1. According to Hebrews, what are the conditions for being a priest?
2. What do you learn about the Levitical priesthood from Ex.28:1-5?
3. What do you learn from Ex.29:1-9?
4. What is the lesson being taught in Lev.10:1-11 about sacrifice?

CHAPTER 5

BEYOND THE INITIAL TEACHINGS

INTRODUCTION

Mankind's search for union with God is a universal experience. No tribe on earth has been discovered that did not possess an awareness of the unseen Divine Reality, and did not desire some kind of union with this unseen Power. On the other hand, mankind has simultaneously experienced a sense of sin and alienation from the Divine that produced a fear of union with God. In order to establish a harmonious relationship with the deity, mankind devised rites of worship and appointed ministers of these rites through which it could communicate with God. These ministers were the "priests" of the people. As representatives of the people, they had the duty to bring the people to God and to serve as a channel for bringing God to the people. In the primitive natural religions, people came to the priesthood because of their superior position in society. The king of the country, the fathers of families, the heads of clans were the priests. Likewise, within these primitive societies men came to the priesthood through personal charisma and superior knowledge.

The Hebrew name for "priest" still survives today in the Jewish family name "Cohen" (*Kohen*). Its root meaning remains unknown, and perhaps lost within the ancient Canaanite language which also used *Kohen* to express the term priest. In the ancient world the priest was the "oracle" of God. An oracle is supposedly a communication of the revealed Will of God as a guide of action. It was the duty of priests to instruct the people concerning God's Will. The supreme task of priests was to offer "sacrifice" to God for the people. Sacrifice expressed man's belief in God and the desire to worship Him. The Hebrew word *qorban* (Corban) expressed sacrifice in general. The Israelites considered the offering of any valuable gift to God as a sacrifice. The gift that was made to God expressed the homage of a subject to its lord, and the subject's desire to please and be united with the lord.

As mankind possessed the universal awareness of sin, sacrifice was offered to expiate sins. However, all sacrifice was not expiatory. When the offeror felt purified of sin, sacrifices were offered for many personal reasons. However, since sin and its awareness were common daily experiences, sacrifice to expiate the sins of the people played a major role in ritual sacrifice. Therefore, the most common word for sacrifice in the Old Testament was *zeboh*, which

meant a sacred “slaughtering.” The common word designating “altar” was *mizbeah*, meaning “the place of slaughter.”

Let us recall the significance of “blood” in Jewish ritual worship. They believed in the sacredness of blood as the Divine channel of life. Deuteronomy speaks of “blood is life” and “the seat of life” (see Dt.12:23). As the Jews believed God to be the source of all life, they believed “living blood” carried the Divine life. Blood came to be seen as the means of purifying people of their sins (see Lev.17:11). In the Jewish rituals, the life of the animal was not sacrificed primarily for God but for man.

In Israel the most sacred day of religious worship was the yearly feast of the Atonement. On this day the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies and audibly invoked the name of Yahweh; the high priest made atonement on this day for the sins of the Jewish Nation. For our author, the Day of Atonement was the “omega” point for the Jewish priesthood and ritual sacrifice. For him it prefigured the perfect priestly act that would atone for the sins of all mankind.

PRIESTLY QUALIFICATIONS

The author mentioned the qualifications he deemed essential for a person to be a true high priest. First, he must be taken from among the people for whom--as their representative--he will offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. Second, a high priest must have the quality of character that enables him to be patient with human frailty. The word “patient” (*metriopathein*) carries the connotation of a person’s very balance in reaction to the sins and weaknesses of others. The implication is that a high priest ought to be a person who first has learned to deal maturely with his own human weaknesses, and then to deal maturely with the weaknesses of others. Lastly, and most importantly, a person must be called to the priesthood by God.

The author presents Jesus’ claim to a priesthood superior to that of the Levitical priesthood. He begins with the last qualification. He quotes Psalms 2 and 110 to support the priesthood of Jesus Christ. He recalls the Divine Sonship of Christ, which of itself expresses His right to the fullness of glory, and which proclaims His kingly position in the household of God. Despite all this, in His humility, the Son of God does not assume the position of high priest, even though His sinlessness warrants it. The author implies that Jesus assumes the role of high priest out of obedience to the Father.

The words of Psalm 110, "*You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek,*" stimulated the writer's contemplation of Melchizedek. He discovered in him the image of an earthly priesthood, which he deduced to be superior to that of the Levitical priesthood. In this example of Melchizedek, he saw the reflection of that heavenly priesthood entered into by Jesus Christ. Since Melchizedek, as he appears in the Scriptures, had no beginning and no ending, he was a symbol of eternity. Since no end of his priesthood is recorded, his priesthood symbolizes an eternal priesthood. It will be drawn from this that the priesthood of Christ is eternal and therefore no successors are needed. He will always be there! When it is understood that the sacrifice offered by Christ is the perfect sacrifice, no other will ever be needed.

Jesus' identity with mankind and human weakness is expressed in the phrase: "*days when he was in the flesh.*" "Flesh" would be human existence vulnerable to trials, temptations, and death. It is human life as it has become because of the sin of Adam. It appears the author has a particular moment of Christ's life in mind. The author probably refers to those moments in the Garden of Gethsemane the evening before Christ died. The expression, "*with prayers and supplications*" implies that a definite prayer request was made from one who was in an urgent need of protection from some calamitous evil. Those words, "*with loud cries and tears,*" express the situation in which a heart filled with pain and terror involuntarily cries out. Our author says: "*And he was heard because of his reverence.*" "To hear" does not necessarily imply acceding to the wish. The prayer was heard and the request denied--at least on the level it was sought. Jesus would drink the cup of human suffering to the last drop and only then say, "*It is consummated!*" and bow His weary head in death. At His death His identity with sinful humanity would be complete.

The author observes: "*Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered*" (Heb.5:8). When the will of one flows naturally with the will of another, obedience is easy and joyous. However, when the Will of the Father points in one direction and the human will of the Son desires to go another direction, one has arrived at the crossroads of obedience. One has arrived at the Cross. Whose will will be done? In which direction does one go? To deliberately choose the will of another is an expression of love for them. To habitually do so indicates a love greater than that of self. As a human being, Jesus expressed perfect love of God by obediently accepting death on the Cross. His human love reached its perfection at that moment. Even as a child of this earth, Jesus was the perfect Son of God.

Because of this obedience, our author sees Jesus as being “*designated by God as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek*” (Heb.5:10). The writer indicates that the priesthood belonged to Jesus as Son, and also from an eternal oath of God: “*The Lord has sworn and he will not repent*” (see Ps.110:4). However, Jesus did not assume that priesthood until “designated by God” to do so. This apparently suggests that the designation occurred upon Christ’s entrance into heaven. On this earth Jesus did not act as high priest, since the earthly priesthood was filled by the Levitical priesthood. (The Last Supper and Calvary would be an exception; these pertained to a different and new order.)

SPIRITUAL RETARDATION

Our author knows that he is now moving into deep theological waters--waters unfamiliar to his readers. Apparently, it provokes him that he cannot discuss this subject at the depth he desires. He frankly tells them, as Paul once told the Corinthians (see 1Cor.3:1-3), they are spiritually immature. By this time in their journey of faith, they should be so advanced in the Christian Religion they could be teachers, but here they are still in the kindergarten of Christianity.

The author implies Christianity ought to be an on-going maturing process in which greater knowledge leads to a greater manifestation of virtues. He implies they have stifled their intellectual progress in the science of Christ, and in turn, have impeded their own spiritual progress. This may well indicate the evil spirit of sloth.

However, our author is not going to be intimidated by his readers’ sloth and immaturity; he will endeavor to raise their level of spiritual awareness in hopes of stimulating in his readers some interest and growth. He now exhorts: “*Let us, then, go beyond the initial teaching about Christ and advance to maturity, not laying the foundation all over again*” (Heb.6:1a). He speaks of his goal as the spiritual progress of his and their lives. He exhorts them not to remain static. The Christian life is an ongoing process of spiritual growth as was the earthly life of Jesus Christ. His life only reached its perfection at the end of His earthly life. The same word used to describe the perfection of Jesus is used to describe the goal of Christian life. This putting on “the mind of Christ” is a day-by-day growing in the Spirit. Growth in Christ is a spiritual adventure that cannot be entered into unless one is willing, in “*Abraham faith,*” to leave the known behind for the unknown. Growth in Christ cannot

be entered into unless one is willing to let God change things.

CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION

As a teacher of the Christian Faith the writer is well aware of the necessity of a good foundation in the Christian Religion. One cannot build a solid Christian life unless it rises upon a solid Christian foundation. However, a foundation is a foundation and not an edifice. A Christian life must be willing to build upon its foundation. It must be willing to leave the foundation in order to construct the edifice. The author does not wish to imply that the maturing of one's life comes through one's personal efforts, but rather, by the person's surrendering to the daily influence of the Spirit--by not resisting the flow of the Spirit within oneself.

The author desires no one to proceed toward Christian maturity unless he or she has been firmly grounded in the fundamental principles of Christianity. This would be like building upon sand, which could not support a Christian commitment in times of storm. The author is familiar with his readers' earlier beginnings. The foundation was well laid; nothing could be achieved by going through it all again. He enumerates what he considers to be the fundamentals of a Christian life: repentance from dead works that would deal with a Christian's inner personal life with God; baptism and the laying on of hands, which would be concerned with the social aspect of the Christian life; entrance into the community and one's Christian service within the community; resurrection and judgment, which deal with the goal and end of the Christian life. These would be the objects of our hope, which Paul says cannot be experienced immediately, but should now affect how we live our lives.

THE ETERNAL SIN

The author concluded the list of catechetical instructions with "eternal judgment." The judgment is called "eternal" for it will decree the final state of being--eternally saved or lost. Our author certainly intended a correlation between "eternal judgment" and the "eternal" sin of apostasy. Verses four through eight of chapter six are some of the most severe to be found in the New Testament. However, the author will conclude this section of his presentation with verses even more severe (see Heb.10:26-31). The reader must be very careful not to take the author's conclusion, "*it is impossible to make them repent again,*" out of context. It must be seen in the dimension in

which it is made. When in its proper context it may be equated with the unforgivable sin mentioned by Jesus Christ. It does not imply that the sin of apostasy is not forgivable, but that the sin of apostasy under these given conditions cannot be forgiven. It is important to keep these conditions in mind. This is certainly not a description of some ill-informed, cultural Christian who drifts away from the faith, or is enticed by deception to embrace some non-Christian sect. They leave what they never knew. Often the sin lies more heavily with those who failed to properly instruct and guard them.

Our author speaks of Christians who have been “illuminated.” Here there is no fundamental ignorance or lack of due knowledge. They have “tasted” the heavenly gifts. The word “taste” implies a true spiritual experience-equivalent to a “baptism in the Spirit.” They have become “sharers” in the Holy Spirit. They have experienced the Holy Spirit within their lives, and know Him through personal experience. They have not only experienced the essentials of the Christian Religion, but they have experienced the “flowering” of Christianity within their lives. *“They have tasted the good word of God.”* Their minds have been illuminated to behold the beauty of their faith. They have tasted *“the powers of the age to come.”* They have experienced in their lives the life of the Resurrected Christ. To now reject faith in Jesus Christ would be, in a sense, equivalent to killing Him within their lives—*“crucifying the Son of God for themselves and holding him up to contempt”* (see Heb.6:5-6). It has been said that the fallen angels cannot repent because they made their willed decisions fully enlightened. Nothing can alter their decision. In the mind of the author, such people have received the full experience of being a Christian. Nothing was lacking. A repetition of these experiences and gifts would change nothing. He deduces *“it is impossible to make them repent again.”* Of course that implies there is nothing the Church can do. It leaves the door still open for the grace of God.

Our author is very careful to indicate that he is not implying his readers have come to this state. The Scriptures teach us that a Christian can come to illumination and possess the gift of the Holy Spirit and be enriched with His gifts, but still lack the one most essential quality of Christian life--Divine Love. Paul clearly teaches this in chapter 13 and 14 of First Corinthians. We see from the teachings of Jesus recorded in Matthew 7:21-23, that on the day of “eternal judgment” Christian people will be rejected because they lived loveless lives as Christians. Our author congratulates his readers for their lives of charity, and assures them that God will reward them: *“God is not*

unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him by your service, past and present, to his holy people” (Heb.6:10). It is not their past or present behavior that concerns him, but their future behavior. He has detected manifestations of “an evil and unfaithful spirit” expressing itself in a disinterest in their spiritual progress and welfare. He exhorts: “Our desire is that each of you show the same zeal to the end, fully assured of that for which you hope. Do not grow lazy, but imitate those who, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises” (Heb.6:11-12).

Our author has detected that at the heart of this spiritual illness lies the failure to exercise the virtue of Hope. He offers to them the example of Abraham who only *“after patient waiting...obtained what God had promised” (Heb.6:15)*. Our author teaches that God has sworn and will not repent, that Jesus Christ is high priest forever. Jesus has not abandoned them. At this very moment He stands behind the “curtain” to intercede for them. Their hope is in Jesus Christ the high priest. Anchoring their hope in Jesus Christ brings them in hope to the very *“throne of grace.”*

BEYOND THE INITIAL TEACHINGS

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“DO NOT GROW LAZY, BUT IMITATE THOSE WHO, THROUGH FAITH AND PATIENCE, ARE INHERITING THE PROMISES.” (Hebrews 6:12)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; Leviticus 17:8-14; 16:1-19.

1. What role did sacrifice play in the religious worship of people?
2. Why was blood held to be sacred among the Jews?
3. Why was blood believed to have the power of purification?
4. What were some of the unique aspects about the Day of Atonement?

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Priestly Qualifications; Gen.14:17-20; Heb.5:5-10.

1. What are some of the elements in the Genesis presentation of Melchizedek that make him a prefiguring of the priesthood of Jesus?
2. How does Jesus fulfill the qualifications to be a high priest?
3. What does the reading from Hebrews teach us about the humanity of Jesus?
4. What does Hebrews 5:8 mean to you?

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Spiritual Retardation; Heb.5:11-14; 1Cor.3:1-3.

1. What does our author see as the result of spiritual immaturity?
2. What does St. Paul see as the cause and result of spiritual immaturity?
3. What do you understand by Heb.5:14?
4. What does Christian maturity mean to you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: Christian Foundation; Heb.6:1-3; Acts 2:37-39; Acts 8:14-19; Acts 19:1-7.

- 1. What does our author consider to be the foundation of Christian training?**
- 2. Which of these elements are mentioned in the readings from Acts?**
- 3. From your experience would you say Christians are well grounded in these elements of Christian faith?**
- 4. What three dimensions of the Christian life are covered by these instructions?**

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: The Eternal Sin; Heb.6:4-8; 1Cor.13:1-3; Mt.7:21-23.

- 1. How is one to understand the phrase, “impossible to make them repent again”?**
- 2. In the mind of the author, what are the circumstances that make such a condition possible?**
- 3. What do you learn from the reading of Paul to the Corinthians?**
- 4. What do you learn from the reading of Matthew?**

SIXTH DAY: Read Hebrews 6:9-20.

- 1. What things did our author see as pointing to his readers’ salvation?**
- 2. What does this teach you about your own salvation?**
- 3. What does Heb.6:12 say to you?**
- 4. What is the importance of the Christian Virtue of Hope?**

CHAPTER 6

HIGH PRIEST IN HEAVEN

INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the previous lesson, the author denoted a decrease of Christian Hope in the lives of his readers. St. Paul taught that Jesus Christ is our Hope. The writer detected that his readers were no longer so sure of this--at least not to the degree they once were. They now questioned putting their hope in Jesus Christ in the face of their present trials and temptations, and on top of this they saw no speedy Second Coming, which they had been led to believe would be imminent. They had caught the Maranatha Fever and now they suffered from the Maranatha Blues.

Our author prudently prepares his Christian friends for the long haul. Certainly, he desires the Second Coming as much as they do. However, he views the problem with the eyes of a spiritually mature Christian. The Scriptures tell us not only that the time of the Second Coming is not part of the revelation given to the Christian Community, but it urges Christians on to the daily living of their Christian lives in which they do the work assigned by the Lord. Only God knows when the Son will return. And, He won't tell. He wants it to be a Big Surprise.

The Lord does not encourage any "sky-watching," or Bible-searching for signs of the Second Coming. The Acts of the Apostles suggests that Jesus had no sooner left this earth when the whole Christian Community was standing around looking for His return: "*They were still gazing up into the heavens*" when the Lord sent down two angels (they wouldn't have believed only one) to tell them to get on with the work. The angels said, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at the skies?*" (see Acts 1:10-11). After this little heavenly admonition, the Christian Community reluctantly turned to do some Church work. However, they never put much heart into the work until the Holy Spirit "fired" them up with a love for the salvation of their brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, they never really abandoned a hope for an immediate and easy solution to their problems. "Maranatha?"

From the vantage point of spiritual maturity the author possessed a vision of faith that stimulated great hope in Jesus Christ "our Hope." He desired to share this vision with his readers. He did not conceive of Jesus as someone

who left His loving and dependent friends behind with only a promise of returning “one beautiful day.” The author reveals this great and consoling truth to his friends: “*beyond the veil through which Jesus, our forerunner, has entered on our behalf,*” he remains having been “*made high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*” (see *Heb.6:19-20*). The greatest cause for Christian Hope, our author maintains, is that Jesus Christ has been designated High Priest in Heaven--not as a high priest of the Levitical Priesthood but one according to the order of Melchizedek. What this means for them our author will explain.

THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

The writer goes on to clarify what is meant by calling Jesus “high priest.” Psalm 110 proclaimed Jesus to be the same kind of priest as Melchizedek. The author proceeds to demonstrate the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood over the order of Aaron.

Melchizedek was a “type” of high priest and Jesus Christ was the same “type” of high priest. Since the high priesthood of Jesus Christ was of the “kind” of Melchizedek, the writer now analyzes the priesthood of Melchizedek. In Hebrew the name *Melchizedek* signifies “My king (is) righteous.” The word *zedek* means “righteous.” Our author explains: “*His name means ‘king of justice.’*” He is called the “king of Salem” which the author interprets as “king of peace” (*shalom*). It was foretold that the Messiah would bring righteousness and peace. Our author intends his readers to note that righteousness precedes peace. Isaiah wrote: “*Justice will bring about peace: right will produce calm and security*” (*Is.32:17*). Unless Jesus Christ brings first righteousness, there can be no peace. Righteousness would be a state of sinlessness before God. As high priest, Jesus Christ must accomplish the work of “righteousness” by which sinful human beings could come to freedom from sin. Only in such a condition could a person be essentially at peace--at peace with God.

Genesis 14 relates that Abram and Melchizedek met as Abram returned from a successful engagement against a coalition among four Canaanite kings. At the time of the encounter with Melchizedek, Abram is still childless. Melchizedek is called “a priest of the Most High God.” It was a rabbinical principle that what is not mentioned in the Torah does not exist. Our author applies this principle to the present text of Genesis. Since there is no mention of Melchizedek’s beginning or ending, he concludes he had none. He is an eternal figure. This should not be interpreted that he possessed eternal life

within himself but he appears in the Sacred Scriptures in such a fashion that he biblically becomes the “type” of priesthood possessed by Jesus Christ—one without beginning or end. Our author’s only interest is in the Scriptural presentation of Melchizedek. He presents an image of an eternal high priest of Yahweh: Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham gave tithes to him. From these facts the author deduces that Melchizedek possessed a superior priesthood to that of the Levitical Priesthood.

Abraham appears in the Old Testament as a “corporate symbol.” He is one person who represents a group of people. Obviously he represents all those who are his descendants in the flesh. In addition, Paul teaches he represents all the faithful people on earth. As Abraham kneels to receive the blessing of Melchizedek all of his descendants kneel in him (as yet none were born). The writer sees the Levitical Priesthood, in its father Abraham, kneeling before Melchizedek for a blessing and likewise giving tithes to him. The two actions of being blessed by another and giving tithes to another doubly signified the superiority of the person who blessed and received tithes. Melchizedek blessed Abraham and received tithes from him in virtue of his priesthood. The author deduced the Levitical Priesthood to be inferior to that of the “order of Melchizedek.”

IMPERFECTION OF THE OLD COVENANT

Having demonstrated the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek over the priesthood of the Levites, the author now moves to demonstrate the inferiority of the work of the Levitical Priesthood. Let us recall that the perfect end of religion, as understood in the Old and New Testament, is mankind’s union with God. The author asks the question: *“If, then, perfection had been achieved through the levitical priesthood...what need would there have been to appoint a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, instead of choosing a priest according to the order of Aaron?” (Heb.7:11)*. The author does not directly answer his question. He goes on to demonstrate the fact that a new priesthood has been called forth. He knows a correlation exists between the Torah and the priesthood of the Old Testament. He knows a correlation exists between the Torah and the Old Covenant. To deny perfection in one area or the other will reflect negatively on the other areas. If it was necessary to establish a new priesthood, it would be necessary to establish a New Law and a New Covenant.

It becomes more apparent that the author sees Jesus entering into the new priesthood upon His death. Clothing Jesus Christ in eternity with immortality, God designated that His Son cannot die. Immortality and eternity are two of the essential characteristics of that order of priesthood, while physical descendants and mortality are two of the essential characteristics of the earthly priesthood.

Once having established the reality of this new priesthood and its superiority, the author bravely carries his argument to its logical conclusion. The Torah has been set aside. It is now null and void. It is abrogated “...because of its weakness and uselessness, for the law brought nothing to perfection” (*Heb. 7:18:19a*). In actual practice the law failed to achieve its designed end. It did not make the people holy. It lacked the power to radically change the hearts of men. It never reached the root of sin. It touched only the surface of sin. Man’s sinlessness, under the law, had the depth and permanence of a reflection upon the surface of a still pond.

St. Paul observed: “*The law was powerless because of its weakening by the flesh*” (*Rm. 8:3*). The author rightly makes no distinction between the law and the priesthood because it was the law that decreed the priesthood, directed it and sustained it in existence. If the law falls, the priesthood and the covenant fall with it.

A BETTER HOPE

The author saw the negative reasons for annulling the law but he also saw the positive reason: “*But a better hope has supervened, and through it we draw near to God*” (*Heb. 7:19*). The foundations of this better hope are the sacrifice of Jesus’ life and His designation as high priest upon His entrance into Heaven.

The author implies that this new order of priesthood achieves what the old order of priesthood failed to do: it fulfills the true end of religion--union with God. The expression “draw near to God” is used in the Old Testament to signify priestly worship. By using this expression, the author suggests that Christians have become “priestly people” who can draw near to God. However, Christian people must never forget that this drawing near to God can only be through Jesus Christ, our High Priest!

Because of the permanence of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, Jesus becomes the guarantee of the new order of relationship established between mankind

and God. The author implies that if the priesthood and the law have been set aside, then the Old Covenant has ended and a New Covenant has been inaugurated. He writes: *“Thus has Jesus become the guarantee of a better covenant” (Heb.7:22)*. This New Covenant is “better” because it primarily rests upon Jesus the High Priest. It is a covenant the Father has established with Jesus Christ. It is not a covenant in which the Father once again enters into a covenant relationship with sinful humanity, but a covenant He enters into with His beloved Son who “remains forever.” As Jesus remains forever, His priesthood will not pass away. *“Therefore he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he forever lives to make intercession for them” (Heb.7:25)*.

The author speaks of this saving activity of Jesus not as something of the past but as one going on in eternity. No limits or qualifications are put on Jesus’ ability to save the sinners who approach God through Him. It is for this reason that Paul has said: *“Christ Jesus our Hope!” (1Tim.1)*. In the mind of our author, Jesus’ work is eternal. He gives to mankind the greatest possible service: *“He forever lives to make intercession for them.”* In later Judaism, expiatory sacrifice was regarded as “intercession.” Does the author have this concept in mind? It could have awakened this concept in his readers. If so, he is implying that the sacrifice of Jesus has its eternal continuance in Heaven.

THE NEW PRIEST

Our author has presented Jesus Christ as the New High Priest. For a moment he desires his readers to gaze upon and contemplate this New High Priest, and the difference between the old and the new. Not until suffering had completed its work within Jesus was He designated high priest by God: *“And when perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, designated by God as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb.5:9-10)*. The author writes: *“It was fitting that we should have such a high priest [so in keeping with the God of love]: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens” (Heb.7:26)*.

No longer beset with weakness, there is no longer a need for tears and cries; He has taken His seat at the right hand of glory in the fullness of His perfection. There in heaven He is removed from all the evil and contamination of this earthly life. Nothing could ever alter the permanent characteristic of His eternal priesthood-holiness--a holiness that gives Him eternal access and acceptance to God, an innocence in which not a vestige of evil, not a dust of it,

clings to Him. He is a high priest uncontaminated even by a breath of sin from the past and now removed from the possibility of any future contamination—"separated from sinners, higher than the heavens."

Our author cannot but compare the sacrifice offered by the New High Priest with that of the old. He reflects that constant sacrifice had to be made because of the sinful condition not only of the people, but also the high priest. The imperfections of those sacrifices are evident from the fact that they could not effect any permanent status of holiness among the people of God. For the first time he mentions the sacrifice of the New High Priest: "*He offered himself*" (see Heb.7:27). It was a sacrifice that demanded self-oblation.

THE NEW MINISTRY

The author now desires to develop the ministry of the New High Priest, where this ministry is enacted, and what this ministry entails. He certainly pictures the New High Priest involved in an active ministry even if he has Him seated. As is his custom, the writer reflects upon the Old Testament account. There he finds the pattern and the prefiguring of the perfect and eternal ministry.

Bringing his readers back to earth reminds him to emphasize that the ministry of Jesus is heavenly and not earthly (see Heb.8:4). The author is interested in the laws prescribing ritual worship in the Old Testament. To him, the copy of the perfect and eternal lies in the old and imperfect. He quotes Moses to establish the fact that the old did have an eternal pattern upon which it was modeled (see Heb.8:5).

The writer knows that Jesus has obtained a ministry on which the earthly priestly ministry was patterned upon. He writes: "*Jesus has obtained a more excellent ministry now, just as he is mediator of a better covenant, founded on better promises*" (Heb.8:6). The author realizes that the ministry of the Jewish high priest flowed from the fact that a covenant relationship had been established between God and the Israelites. This ministry of the Levitical Priesthood was to implement the covenant, and is tied firmly with the covenant. Therefore, in the logical mind of the author, if the ministry has been changed because it was of "itself weak and useless," it certainly reflects upon the covenant it served. He rightly deduces a new ministry; a new priesthood implies a new covenant. He now addresses himself to this point and quotes from Jeremiah. This quotation not only mentions the fact that the old covenant had failed, but that a new covenant would be established and this

new covenant would not be an external covenant like that made at Mt. Sinai, with the people as a whole and Moses as their representative. The new covenant would be personal and internal. In Jeremiah, our author caught a glimpse of the final perfection that this new covenant would achieve (see Jer.31:31.)

The author logically deduces that with the coming of the new, the old must go. He writes: “*When he says, ‘a new covenant,’ he declares the first one obsolete. And what has become obsolete and has grown old is close to disappearing*” (Heb.8:13). The failures of the Old Covenant dramatically culminated in the destruction of the life of the Word of God by the “People of God.” Out of these ashes, so to speak, rises the New Covenant. From the most terrible of all evils, an evil that symbolized all evil and its fullness--the “death of God”--rises the greatest of all good--the New Covenant sealed in the Blood of the Lamb.

HIGH PRIEST IN HEAVEN

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“HE IS ALWAYS ABLE TO SAVE THOSE WHO APPROACH GOD THROUGH HIM, SINCE HE FOREVER LIVES TO MAKE INTERCESSION FOR THEM.” (Hebrews 7:25)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction: Genesis 14:17-20: Hebrews 7:1-3.

- 1. What are some dangers in the over-emphasis of the immediacy of the Second Coming?**
- 2. What did our author see Jesus doing during the interim?**
- 3. What is the good to be done during this interim?**
- 4. What element does the author omit from the Genesis account?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: The Order of Melchizedek; Hebrews 7:4-10.

- 1. What two characteristics of the Messiah are symbolized in the name and title of Melchizedek?**
- 2. What lesson is being taught here about righteousness and peace?**
- 3. How does the reading demonstrate the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek over the priesthood of the Levites?**
- 4. What can we say will be some of the characteristics of the priesthood of the order of Melchizedek?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Imperfection of the Old Covenant; Hebrews 7:11-21.

- 1. What is the perfection that the Levitical Priesthood failed to achieve?**
- 2. What would you say is the good purpose of religious law?**

3. What do we learn from Hebrew 7:18?

4. What do you understand as a “better hope”?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary through The New Priest; Hebrews 7:22-28.

1. What is our foundation for a “better hope”?

2. What do you understand by Hebrews 7:25?

3. How should this be applied to your spiritual life?

4. What are the qualifications of the New High Priest?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: The New Ministry; Hebrews 8:1-6.

1. Where do the activities of the New High Priest take place?

2. What does it indicate to you when the author tells us the ministry of Jesus takes place in heaven and not on earth?

3. What lesson does the author want to teach in Hebrews 8:5?

4. Why does our author deduce there is a New Covenant?

SIXTH DAY: Read Hebrews 8:7-13; Jeremiah 31:31.

1. What was the evident failure of the Old Covenant?

2. According to Jeremiah, what are some of the differences between the Old and New Covenant?

3. What do you understand by “I will write them upon their hearts”?

4. According to the mind of our author, do you think the New Covenant relationship can be perfectly established here on earth?

CHAPTER 7

OBEDIENCE SAVES

INTRODUCTION

Yahweh foretold through the prophet Malachi: *“But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays” (Mal.3:20a)*. For the author of Hebrews, Jesus Christ fulfilled this prophecy because His sacrificial death brought healing and righteousness to sinners. The obedience of Jesus, unto the shedding of His blood, made atonement for mankind. Paul wrote to the Colossians: *“He pardoned all our sins. He cancelled the bond that stood against us with all its claims, snatching it up and nailing it to the Cross” (Col.2:13b-14)*. Jesus Christ was simultaneously the corporate symbol of mankind and mankind’s Victim for sin.

Jesus died not solely to redeem mankind but to reunite mankind with God. Therefore, by His death on the Cross Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant. Our author says He is the mediator of a better covenant (see Heb.8:6). In Hebrews, Jesus appears not only as the Victim for sins but also as High Priest who offers Himself (see Heb.7:27). The works of redemption and atonement flow from the fact that a New Covenant was established. Jesus could not act under the Old Covenant in such a priestly fashion. Because Jesus had been designated as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, our author maintains that Jesus became the guarantee of a better covenant (see Heb.7:22). This “better covenant” had been foretold through the prophet Jeremiah.

From the Old Covenant the author draws his knowledge of the New Covenant. The Old Covenant with its priesthood, ministry, and rituals, is the copy and shadow of the New Covenant: *“See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain,”* Yahweh said to Moses (Ex.25:40).

In order to more fully appreciate the author’s deductions, let us review the concept of covenant in the Old Testament. The Greek word *diatheke* (covenant) expresses the concept of a covenant being a contract and will, an inheritance received from a benefactor. An inheritance is generally received upon the death of the testator. As long as the testator lives he can change his will and designate another as heir apparent. The expression “shedding of blood” is synonymous for dying. If a benefactor shed his blood, his death

would be presumed. We see that blood plays an essential part in the establishment of a covenant.

In the Old Testament we find two rituals for establishing a covenant relationship. The first type we find in chapter fifteen of Genesis, when Yahweh enters into a covenant with Abram. In such a ritual, an animal was slain and divided into equal halves. Each half represented the life of one of the contracting parties, symbolizing that the two persons are divided. Each person passes through the two sections of the slain victim. As they do they symbolically assume the life of the victim and thereby, the two persons symbolically become one person. The life of the victim was sacrificed in order to unite two persons previously separated.

The second ritual occurred at Mt. Sinai when Yahweh called Israel into a covenant. We read in Exodus 24:4-8 that Moses erected an altar in front of which the people stood some distance removed. Before erecting the altar, Moses read Yahweh's conditions for a covenant relationship with Him. For a covenant to be valid it must be freely entered into by all parties concerned. When the Israelites understood the conditions of the agreement they replied: *"We will do everything the Lord has told us"* (Ex.24:3). The obedience and surrender of their wills to that of Yahweh was also an essential element of the covenant relationship. It goes without saying that any covenant between God and man must be initiated by God.

Once the groundwork for the covenant relationship had been established, it remained to ratify the covenant agreement. Moses then erected the altar. The altar symbolically represented Yahweh. When the bulls had been sacrificed, Moses sprinkled the blood of the animals on the altar and on the people saying: *"This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you, in accordance with all these words of his"* (Ex.24:8). The life-blood of the victim sealed the covenant. The covenant made the Israelites one with Yahweh to such a degree that Yahweh considered them as His own children.

The covenant lasted as long as the agreement was kept. Any breaking of the agreement destroyed the covenant and forfeited the promised blessings. Because Yahweh considered the weakness of the Israelites, He established the Levitical priesthood as a means to preserve the covenant. The priest, as the representative of the people, was *"to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins"* (Heb.5:1).

It may be asked: "Why did these ritual sacrifices have the power to seal a covenant and bring about unity between divided persons?" If we think with the mind of our author, the answer becomes obvious. What had occurred in time were shadows and types of an eternal reality. These were symbols and representations of the perfect sacrifice of God's Son on the Cross. These sacrifices foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus, and drew their power from it. However, these covenants awaited final ratification at Jesus' death upon the Cross. Since the blood of the sacrificial victims was but a shadow of the Blood of Christ, it only possessed the power to purify the surface.

With the passing of years the Jews forgot the purpose of their sacrifices. Their ritual purity became an end in itself. Through His prophets, Yahweh sought to correct these abuses: "*For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocausts*" (Hos.6:6). Our author observed: "*The former commandment has been annulled because of its weakness and uselessness, for the law brought nothing to perfection*" (Heb.7:18-19a).

THE OLD WORSHIP

The writer desires to draw a comparison between the worship of the Old and New Covenants. Worship within the Old Covenant centered on the Tabernacle. The Hebrew word for tabernacle generally signified "habitation," "dwelling." While in the desert, the tabernacle was housed in a tent. This tent was referred to as the "tent of meeting," for here Israel could encounter Yahweh. It was also called the "tent of witness." The "witness" was a reference to the Ten Commandments, which revealed the Will of Yahweh to Israel.

The actual tabernacle would have been the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the two stone tablets of the Commandments. Since these expressed the Will of God, they expressed His personal Presence. *Ark* literally means "box." The Ark was believed to be the actual place of Yahweh's dwelling with Israel. The Ark always remained closed. This Tabernacle symbolized the Presence of the Lord, His holiness and His hiddenness, but likewise His accessibility under certain well regulated and guarded conditions. It teaches that Yahweh reveals himself, in the degree and manner He Wills; if man desires communication with God, it must be in compliance with God's Will. The construction of the Sanctuary and the worship prescribed expressed, in a concrete fashion, Divine Worship as demanded by Yahweh at Mt. Sinai. There, we saw that Moses had close access to God. In the Levitical priesthood

the high priest cautiously assumed the role of Moses once a year. The Sanctuary itself consisted of two parts: an outer section called the Holy Place, in which priests entered daily to offer prescribed worship, and beyond the Holy Place, the inner sanctuary, called the Holy of Holies, wherein rested the Ark of the Covenant entirely covered with gold. As already mentioned, the golden lid of the Ark was known as the *kapporet* or the “propitiatory.” This was the place of atonement, and was called the “mercy seat.”

In the performance of service, the priest entered daily into the Holy Place, but only the high priest entered one day out of the year into the Holy of Holies. All this symbolized mankind’s relationship with God under the Old Covenant. It was worship with fear, at a good distance. Through this means the Holy Spirit taught that man had no free access to God. Our author writes: “*The Holy Spirit was showing thereby that while the first tabernacle was still standing, the way into the sanctuary had not yet been revealed*” (Heb.9:8). It also implied that the ritual worship of the Old Covenant did not truly purify the Israelites, and as spiritual lepers, they must keep their distance from Yahweh.

THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY

The New High Priest ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. It has been asked, what is this greater and more perfect tabernacle into which Jesus Christ has entered? It is the general opinion of the early Fathers of the Church that this “*greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation*” is the Resurrected Body of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ entering into His Divine glory, in which his earthly body becomes glorified. The Fathers also held that by our incorporation into Christ through baptism, the members of the Church have entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. However, the author’s words do not give the impression that the Christian Community, here and now, has full access to God. Jesus’ sacrifice and ministry pertain to the “world to come.” He has pointedly said that Christians on earth have “*tasted the heavenly gift...tasted the powers of the age to come*” (Heb.6:4-5).

The author stresses the difference between the old cultic worship and the new. Christ enters into the heavenly sanctuary “with his own blood,” which symbolizes His death. He gave His life to be the Mediator between God and mankind. Jesus becomes the “meeting tent” in which God and man can be one. Jesus is “atonement,” and as such Jesus “achieved eternal redemption.” The author of Hebrews asks that if those “shadows of eternal reality”

removed the surface of sin, what must be the depths of purification that flow from the personal sacrifice of the unblemished Jesus Christ, who offered up His life through His eternal Spirit. This reference to the “eternal Spirit” implies the Son’s Divine personality, which offers His own sacred humanity for sacrifice. Such a completely Divine personal sacrifice had the power to enter into the depths of the human heart, into the depths of human conscience, and purify it of the depths of sin, leaving a person free “*to worship the living God*”--to fulfill His Will (see Heb.9:11-14).

Jesus Christ has become the mediator of the New Covenant because His death ratified the New Covenant, which gave to mankind the opportunity for a new life in God. Through the death of Jesus Christ, mankind is able to reach the end for which it is created. The death of Jesus made the New Covenant final and eternal.

Even though the author puts great emphasis on “blood,” we should keep in mind that it is not blood itself that he is emphasizing, but the life of Jesus sacrificed. The Blood of Jesus symbolized for him the death of Jesus.

A SUPERIOR SACRIFICE

Our author stresses the superiority of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Since it brought about a work far superior to the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, it is a far more superior sacrifice. Jesus Christ appears in the heavenly sanctuary as the Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world. His sacrificed life appears before God as an eternal offering for the sins of mankind. It is a sacrifice that can never be repeated, since death is a final act. Furthermore, at His death, the human nature of Jesus assumed immortality, and can never suffer or die again.

Our author argues that the very fact of repetitious sacrifice in the Old Covenant demonstrates the inadequacy of its ritual sacrifice. The effects of such sacrifice could not touch the human will. It could not produce a complete cleansing. If it had, the worshipers “*once cleansed, would have had no sin on their conscience*” (Heb.10:2b). In regard to the sins of the conscience, all that the feast of Atonement accomplished was to call the sins to mind and created a deeper sense of guilt. It was human beings who fell away from God, and nothing less than a human being could bring them back to God. Our author observed, “*It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take sins away*” (Heb.10:4). It is for this reason that Jesus “offered himself.”

The author centers his readers' attention on the true nature of Jesus' sacrifice. It was the exercise of human freedom of will that caused sin and all subsequent sins. Through the avenue of free will, man traveled away from God, into a sinful existence. It could only be through the avenue of human will that man could make his journey back to God, into a loving relationship with Him. This is the journey Jesus took. Jesus perfectly accomplished the Will of God in His life when He obediently accepted even death, death on a cross (see Phil.2:8). Our author points to the "Will" of Christ as the place where true sacrifice was enacted, and where true atonement occurred and redemption achieved. "*By the 'will' we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*" (Heb.10:10).

HIS WORK COMPLETED

The writer suggests the completion of Christ's sacrifice by speaking of Christ now seated at the right hand of God. In the Old Testament, a priest always stood before the Lord. Jesus has entered into His rest because His work in creation has been completed. Nevertheless, His work as Intercessor continues, for that is His work in the heavenly sanctuary. However, the work on earth has not been completed. This our author implies when he states, "*now he waits until his enemies are placed beneath his feet*" (Heb.10:13). Apparently the work on earth must be done before the Church can enter into its rest. When this is accomplished, Christ will return to earth "*to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him*" (Heb.9:28c). The author sums up the completion of His work in these words: "*By one offering he has forever perfected those who are being sanctified*" (Heb.10:14).

Not only have sins been forgiven, but those who "*are being sanctified*" are assured perfection. The writer has observed: "*...he [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*" (Heb.5:9). The New Covenant came into being through the obedience of Christ to the Will of the Father. No one can enter into the blessings of this New Covenant except through a willed commitment to obedience. Sanctification and perfection are certainly a work of Divine Grace that blossoms forth in perfect obedience. As the Holy Spirit testifies: "*This is the covenant I will make with them after those days... I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds*" (Heb.10:16). "All those who obey him" have entered into a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. The great blessing of the Covenant will be theirs: "*Their sins and their evildoing I will remember no more*" (Heb.10:17). Our author concludes that for

such persons the Old Covenant has nothing to offer, it has become obsolete: *“Once these have been forgiven, there is no further offering for sin” (Heb.10:18).*

When Jesus died, the Gospel relates, the curtain before the Holy of Holies was ripped apart. We read: *“Once again Jesus cried out in a loud voice, and then gave up his spirit. Suddenly the curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom” (Mt.27:50-51).* The author of Hebrews perfectly interprets for Christians what this signified, and its importance to them:

Therefore, brothers, since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary by the new and living path, he has opened up for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and since we have “a great priest over the house of God,” let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust... (Heb.10:19-21).

A door to God has been opened through Jesus Christ and it is the only door we should dare enter. As we pass through this door of union in faith and love, through obedience to Jesus, we find not only ritual purity but the redemption and sanctification of our entire person--we become a people acceptable to God, *“...our hearts sprinkled clean from the evil which lay on our conscience and our bodies washed in pure water” (Heb.10:22).*

Christians are urged to remain faithful to their profession of faith in Jesus Christ, and to an active membership within the Christian Community, because they cannot be separated one from the other; *“Let us hold unswervingly to our profession which gives us hope...rouse each other to love and good deeds...not absent ourselves from the assembly, as some do” (Heb.10:23ff-25).*

To come to the end of one's life separated from Christ, in the mind of the author, is the greatest evil that could befall a Christian. As he contemplates the possibility of such an ending he can only shake his head and sadly say: *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb.10:31).*

OBEDIENCE SAVES!

OBEDIENCE SAVES

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“SO CHRIST WAS OFFERED UP ONCE TO TAKE AWAY THE SINS OF MANY: HE WILL APPEAR A SECOND TIME NOT TO TAKE AWAY SIN BUT TO BRING SALVATION TO THOSE WHO EAGERLY AWAIT HIM.” (Hebrews 9:28)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; Genesis 15:7-21; Exodus 24:1-11.

1. What do the two rituals teach you about the Covenants?
2. What are some of the essential characteristics of a Covenant relationship?
3. What is being expressed in Exodus 24:1-2?
4. In what way could you see Christ's presence in these Covenants?

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: The Old Worship; Hebrews 9:1-10.

1. What does “tabernacle” mean and signify?
2. What was symbolized by the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies?
3. What do you understand by Hebrews 9:8?
4. What does this reading teach about worship in the Old Covenant?

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: A Heavenly Sanctuary; Hebrews 9:11-18.

1. How did the early Fathers of the Church interpret the heavenly sanctuary?
2. What does this teach you?
3. What do we learn from Hebrews 9:14?
4. What does Hebrews 9:15-18 teach us about the New Covenant?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: A Superior Sacrifice; Hebrews 9:19-28.

1. What was signified by sprinkling the people with blood?
2. What do you understand by the use of the word “blood” in Hebrews?
3. What does Jesus offer when He enters the heavenly sanctuary?
4. What do you understand by Hebrews 9:28?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: His Work Completed; Hebrews 10:1-14.

1. Why would you say the sacrifice of Christ cannot be repeated?
2. Why is there no necessity to do so?
3. In what way is Christ’s work completed on earth?
4. What was the essential element in Jesus’ sacrifice?

SIXTH DAY: Read Hebrews 10:15-31.

1. What has been the result of Jesus’ work on earth?
2. What work yet remains for us to do?
3. What is the great blessing flowing to us and how should this affect our religious life?
4. What do we learn from Hebrews 10:26-31?

CHAPTER 8

FIDELITY TO CHRISTIAN FAITH

INTRODUCTION

From our study of Sacred Scripture we know supernatural faith is never purely an assent of the mind to the truths of Divine revelation, but rather faith involves a complete personal response to the Person of God who reveals. People express faith by having confidence in God's loving Presence, which leads to trusting their lives to God. Faith truly rooted in the human spirit expresses itself in fidelity and faithfulness to God's commands. For the author of Hebrews, faithfulness issues forth in salvation. Faithfulness is that day-to-day surrender to the Will of God. Jesus demanded that His disciples place in Him the same quality of faith they placed in the Heavenly Father (see Jn.14:1). Christian Discipleship therefore demands fidelity to Jesus Christ.

The author of Hebrews notes that the past lives of his readers demonstrated a heroic faithfulness. His readers not only suffered verbal scorn and physical abuse, but they even went a step beyond. They bravely associated themselves with those who were publicly condemned for being Christians, thereby sharing in their sufferings and suffering a substantial loss of material possessions. They *"joyfully assented to the confiscation of (their) goods"* (Heb.10:34b). This joyful assenting may be difficult for many in our society to understand. Those Christians did not experience joy in the thought of losing their worldly goods, but when they were deprived of them, they did not experience a sense of loss but a sense of joy. They experienced greater joy in their loss than they had experienced pleasure in their possession. This in itself was a supernatural gift. What had been a loss on the physical level had created a gain on the spiritual level. They experienced true joy in their very own beings--they experienced a joy in sheer existence. They realized they had *"better and more permanent possessions"* (Heb.10:34c).

The author sees these Christians as men and women in an arena who have won the prize. They have been declared winners. However, the prize is delayed; their winnings have been withheld temporarily. There is danger in this situation in that they will grow tired and impatient with waiting, and leave the arena, thereby losing their promised reward. Like Jesus, they must remain in the arena until the prize is awarded, or else it will be forfeited. They possessed the fortitude to win their prize, and now they must practice patience

in order to receive it. In this interim period there is the danger of drifting away from commitment to Christ.

Christians who choose to build a spiritual life prudently see to it that the “top” of their energy goes into their spiritual exercises. They do not leave their spiritual exercises to when they come to the bottom of the barrel of human time and energy. They are not like the imprudent virgins, who go to see the Lord when their lamps are about to go out. The best hour of their day goes to communication with the Lord, not the last dregs of the day. They seek first the kingdom of God before adding everything else.

Without proper spiritual exercises a vital spiritual life cannot survive. Christian Communities need centers of encouragement, and there cannot be encouragement in such centers unless there are brothers and sisters there to encourage others. Our author incites his readers: *“We should not absent ourselves from the assembly, as some do, but encourage one another...”* (Heb.10:25). The early Christians, like the Jews of old, could not consider a genuine religious life divorced from community life. The covenant relationship was established with a People, and it must be lived within the Community of the Covenant People. For a person to separate himself from the community was tantamount to a rejection of the covenant relationship. A covenant commitment could scarcely survive if isolated and alienated from community worship and fellowship, without exceptional graces of God. St. Augustine wisely observed: *“The Holy Spirit does not pursue the separated member.”*

CHRISTIAN ENCOURAGEMENT

Our author detects that selfishness is involved in the failure to be part of Christian assemblies. A person’s presence at worship is a passive encouragement to others. If they are open to others, their presence can quickly become an active encouragement. How often we hear the reason for not going to Church: “I get nothing out of it.” “It does nothing for me.” What do you hear in those voices? How clearly sounds the death knell of the spirit. A life that turns in upon itself selfishly sooner or later drives God out of that life. There is “no room in the inn.”

The author of Hebrews incites Christians to be an encouragement to one another. Not only does he encourage the Church, but he teaches his readers how to encourage others and what to encourage in them:

“Do not, then, surrender your confidence; it will have great reward” (Heb.10:35).

“...God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him by your service, past and present, to his holy people” (Heb.6:10).

“Our desire is that each of you show the same zeal to the end, fully assured of that for which you hope. Do not grow lazy” (Heb.6:11-12a).

“We must consider how to rouse each other to love and good deeds” (Heb.10:24).

“Let us hold unswervingly to our profession which gives us hope, for he who made the [covenant] promise deserves our trust” (Heb.10:23).

“You need patience to do God’s will [this implies God’s will causes sufferings in our lives due to the unredemptive elements of our lives] and receive what he has promised” (Heb.10:36).

He confirms with Paul that true Christian Hope has a firm foundation not only in the Mercy of God but in the faithfulness of Christian lives: *“...hold unswervingly to our profession which gives us hope...you need patience to do the will of God and receive what he has promised”* Therefore, a true Christian encourages true hope by encouraging members of the Church *“to hold unswervingly to our profession,”* to be patient under trials and sufferings. They encourage each other not only affirmatively—*“hold firm, be patient”*--but they are *“to rouse each other to love and good deeds.”* There is the Justice of God as well as the Mercy of God, and the Just God *“will not forget your work and the love you have shown him by your service, past and present, to his holy people.”* Therefore, the Christian Community must encourage lazy Christians to works of loving service within the Christian Community. To work without love would be in vain.

Our author is certainly not unmindful of the Lord’s judgment of the disciple who buried his one talent: *“You worthless, lazy lout!” (Mt.25:26).* Nor is he unmindful of the sentence rendered: *“Throw this worthless servant into the darkness outside, where he can wail and grind his teeth” (Mt.25:30).*

Since our author is a disciple of truth, he encourages his readers not to surrender their confidence in their Christian profession, or lose their trust in Jesus Christ. Only a life of fidelity and faithfulness assures salvation. He encourages his readers by quoting the words of Habakkuk:

For just a brief moment, and he who is to come will come; he will not delay. My just man will live by faith, and if he draws back I take no pleasure in him. We are not among those who draw back and perish, but among those who have faith and live (Heb.10:37-39; Hb.2:3-4).

As we have mentioned in a previous study, the correct translation of “*live by faith*” is rather “*live by faithfulness.*” The prophet and our author both encourage fidelity to the Covenant and perseverance with integrity unto salvation.

DEFINITION OF FAITH

Within the Holy Scriptures, the author finds abundant evidence to support his thesis that God demands a time on earth from all His people when only faith in Him and hope in His promises sustain the soul. It is a time of testing and purification endured by all chosen souls.

He begins his exposition by describing the qualities necessary in the spirit that must permeate the soul with patience during its journey. He gives not so much a definition of faith as a description of the qualities that comprise the fidelity demanded by faith in God. He writes: “*Faith is confident assurance concerning what we hope for, and conviction about things we do not see*” (Heb.11:1). This definition of faith expresses the subjective environment, the inner milieu of the spirit in which a Christian must abide while on this earth.

The first word, *hypostasis*, translated “assurance,” expresses the quality of spirit that deals with things that are lacking within the life of the believer, but confidently awaited. The person of faith has an inner guarantee of possessing these things in the future--such as personal purification and perfection, union with God, and eternal life. It is only a matter of time before these things will be obtained.

The second quality, *elegchos*, translated “conviction,” deals with invisible things presently possessed but seen only through faith. For example: removal

of sin through baptism, the Presence of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the just, and the state of sanctifying grace. Through faith, a Christian knows all these things, and more, to be the present state of Christian existence.

Nevertheless, the author wants it noted that if a believer draws back from faith, all is lost. Faithfulness is absolutely necessary: *“Do not, then, surrender your confidence; it will have great reward. You need patience to do God’s will and receive what he has promised” (Heb.10:35-36)*. The author goes on to demonstrate to his readers that it was only *“because of faith the men of old were approved by God” (Heb.11:2)*.

OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Our author indicates that the history of religion and the foundation of religion begins in faith: *“Through faith we perceive that the worlds were created by the word of God, and that what is visible came into being through the invisible” (Heb.11:3)*. The abundance of spiritual richness available to mankind flows only to the souls who live their lives in fidelity to God’s Word.

The author dramatically demonstrates this teaching with examples from the lives of Old Testament saints. He begins at the dawn of religious history with the example of Abel and Cain. Genesis confirms God’s pleasure with the sacrifice of Abel, but not that of Cain. This implies to the author that one offered his sacrifice to God in faith, and the other did not. The Scriptures relate that God blessed Abel but cursed Cain. At the very beginning of religious history we note who God will bless and who He will not bless. Even though Cain slew Abel, the author implies that Abel lives. As blood symbolizes life, and the blood of Abel continues to “cry out,” the life of Abel continues after death. Such faith leads to eternal life.

Enoch is the next example offered. The Scriptures confirm that Enoch “walked with God.” Our author concluded that Enoch’s walk had to be one of faith, otherwise he could not have pleased God. From this, our author declares a fundamental principle of salvation: *“Anyone who comes to God [by this he implies entering heaven and union with God] must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb.11:6)*. Therefore, a saving faith must include these elements: belief in the existence of God, belief that God is personal, and God is just. The words that are translated “seek him” express in the Greek a liturgical term of worship of God. This example and definition

leaves a door open for many to be saved who, through no fault of their own, never come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The third example of faith is Noah. Noah endeavored to turn men from their sins but failed to do so. Noah's faith was vindicated by the salvation achieved by himself and his family. Those who failed to believe perished in the flood. The example of Noah demonstrates that belief in God's Word may often go contrary to human reason and logic. It may make one appear stupid in the eyes of others. Because Noah had faith he was saved from being "foolish," and the "wise" men of his day proved to be foolish. *"For God's folly is wiser than men..." (1Cor.1:25).*

THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM

The author goes on to present Abraham. In this example he demonstrates the correlation between faith and obedience, and obedience and love. Abraham leaves his former life behind and trusts his future to Divine Guidance. With his son and grandson, they dwelt as strangers in the land of his descendants. The author suggests that because they were men of faith they could not receive an earthly inheritance and their inheritance. They were destined to the true reward of faith. They were *"looking forward to the city with foundations, whose designer and maker is God" (Heb.11:10).*

The author mentions the wife of Abraham, Sarah. Because of her faith, Sarah subjectively made it possible for God--to whom nothing is objectively impossible--to cause her to bear a child. This example illustrates that God can produce the impossible within those who possess faith in Him. It demonstrates that where there is faith, God can bring to life that which is dead. That which naturally speaking has become sterile and barren may, through faith, bear an abundant harvest: *"As a result of this faith, there came forth from one man, who was himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands of the seashore" (Heb.11:12).*

The life of Abraham culminated with the greatest act of fidelity to God's command. Abraham's faith had to extend beyond the veil. He was called to believe that God could raise the dead to life. He believed this and acted accordingly. God may ask His friends to be generous with Him but it is only in order that He may be unimaginably generous to them. Both Isaac and Jacob demonstrated their faith in God's promise to Abraham, as they transmitted this promise through their last blessings. Our author sums up the faith of the

three patriarchs in these words: *“They did not obtain what had been promised but saw and saluted it from afar” (Heb.11:13)*. The author suggests that the lives of his readers are a pilgrimage on this earth. They have no lasting home here--God has prepared something far greater for them. The final reward of a life of fidelity is not an earthly blessing but a heavenly one.

THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

The greatest Old Testament personage after Abraham was, no doubt, Moses. In many ways Moses prefigured the Messiah to come. The author demonstrates from the beginning to the end of his life, how that life expressed faith in God's promise to Israel. Moses' faith expressed itself in a life of fidelity and faithfulness to the command of God. The author stresses not only the faith of Moses, but also the sanctity of Moses when he writes: *“He wished to be ill-treated along with God's people rather than enjoy the fleeting rewards of sin” (Heb.11:25)*.

The Scriptures reveal that Moses did not enter the Promised Land as a result of one sin of infidelity. Moses saw the Promised Land from a distant mountain top. As our author wrote, *“They did not obtain what had been promised but saw and saluted it from afar.”* For these men of faith, the true promise concerned something better--a reward in a higher realm—*“a better, a heavenly home.”* For our author it is this quality of faith that enables men and women to reject *“the fleeting rewards of sin”* and choose a desert path in this life, even if it involves the wrath of the king, and ill-treatment from their fellow men.

The author continues to turn the pages of the Old Testament pointing out, one after another, the great men and women of faith who lived out their lives in heroic faithfulness, not only in the face of great sufferings, but in the face of a promise not received, but only seen and saluted from a distance. The author ends this whole account of Old Testament heroism in faith on a jarring and shocking note: *“Yet despite the fact that all of these were approved because of their faith, they did not obtain what had been promised. God had made a better plan, a plan which included us. Without us, they were not to be made perfect” (Heb.11:39-40)*. They had to await the inauguration of the New Covenant. Despite all these trials and sufferings they did not obtain the promise. Over the centuries they waited patiently until the Coming of Christ. Although faith had its reward, it must look to Christ for the fulfillment of its reward--forgiveness of sins, atonement, and total redemption.

If the saints of the Old Testament had to place to have hope and faith in Christ, then certainly the readers of Hebrews must see that to abandon faith in Jesus is to abandon all hope. The saints of the Old Testament lived their lives out in fidelity to God with only the “promise” of God stimulating their faith and hope. Christians, on the other hand, have already begun their entrance into the Promised Land--they *“have tasted the heavenly gift and become sharers in the Holy Spirit...they have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”* (Heb.6:4-5). If they should now falter in their fidelity to Christ, if they should turn back, God will certainly find no pleasure in them.

“In view of this, we must attend all the more to what we have heard, lest we drift away...how shall we escape if we ignore a salvation as great as ours?” (Heb.2:1,3).

“We are not among those who draw back and perish, but among those who have faith and live” (Heb.10:39).

FIDELITY TO CHRISTIAN FAITH

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“YOU NEED PATIENCE TO DO GOD’S WILL AND RECEIVE WHAT HE HAS PROMISED.” --Hebrews 10:36

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; Hebrews 10:32-39.

- 1. How would you describe the virtue of faith and the virtue of faithfulness?**
- 2. What do we discover about the recipients of this epistle from verses 32 to 34?**
- 3. What do you understand by Hebrews 10:36?**
- 4. What do we learn from Hebrews 10:38?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Christian Encouragement.

- 1. What, in your opinion, is the important reason for not absenting oneself from the Christian assembly?**
- 2. How does the author encourage his readers?**
- 3. What should we encourage in others?**
- 4. What is the importance of the Christian Community in your life?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary through Old Testament Examples; Hebrews 11:1-7; Genesis 4:1-10; 5:21-24; 6:11-12.

- 1. What do you understand by Hebrews 11:1?**
- 2. What is the importance of Hebrews 11:6? What does it teach us?**
- 3. What lessons are to be learned from the examples of Abel, Enoch, and Noah?**
- 4. In what way do these three men symbolize Jesus Christ?**

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: The Example of Abraham; Hebrews 11:8-23.

1. How is the faith of Abraham depicted?
2. According to our author, where was Abraham being led?
3. In what way does Sarah symbolize the Virgin Mary?
4. According to our author, how is Abraham's faith in the resurrection from the dead illustrated?

FIFTH DAY: Read Hebrews 11:24-31.

1. How do the parents of Moses become a symbol of Joseph and Mary?
2. What do we learn about Moses from Hebrews 11:24-26?
3. How does this demonstrate the faith and fidelity of Moses?
4. What do we learn from Hebrews 11:29?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: The Example of Moses; Hebrews 11:32-40.

1. Why would our author hold that Moses never entered the Promised Land?
2. What do the examples of the saints of the Old Testament teach you about the Christian life?
3. What does our author mean by Hebrews 11:39?
4. What does that teach the Christian Community?

CHAPTER 9

THE WAY HOME

INTRODUCTION

For the author of Hebrews, being a Christian implied being a spiritual athlete engaged in a contest with eternal consequences. He pictures the earthly life as a sports arena, and Christians as contestants standing in an amphitheater surrounded by rows of spectators. First there is the visible row of spectators comprised of the crowd hostile to the Christian life, eager to see their defeat and merciless in their attitude towards the contestants.

However, they are not the only witnesses to the spectacle. Above the earthly crowd rests a cloud of witnesses. They are there to strengthen and encourage the contestants on to final victory. There, present in the cloud, are those heroic men and women who lived and died for the faith and chose death rather than apostasy. Their lives are witnesses to God's power and fidelity. They are more than spectators. They are concrete examples of what the contest is all about. Their example teaches those still in the arena how to play to win. They themselves are all winners. St. John Chrysostom observed that as the clouds in the sky protect the contestants from the burning rays of the sun, the saints in heaven act as a protective shield around the faithful on earth.

SPIRITUAL ATHLETES

The author writes: *"Therefore since we for our part are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every encumbrance of sin which clings to us and persevere in running the race which lies ahead" (Heb.12:1)*. Our writer is a good spiritual coach. The word that is translated "encumbrance" comes from *ogkon* which signifies "bulk of body." He wants the spiritual contestants to trim down--to rid themselves of anything unnecessary and useless that impedes progress.

First of all he exhorts us to get rid of personal sin. Sin is seen as an entanglement hindering proper movement and as something "encircling" the contestant and blocking the path. The race must be run against the clock and much energy will be needed to successfully complete the course. Habitual sins are truly spiritual parasites that absorb and drain spiritual energy. They may leave the soul too weak to run the race--much less win it. All sin implies

misused and misdirected power. Secondly, the contestants must avoid unnecessary social and business entanglements that dissipate needed human energy and often fragment the personality. Those who win Faith's crown must abide in the Will of God until the end, and that takes time, energy, direction, concentration, attention and willed effort.

THE SUPREME WITNESS

Earlier the author wrote, "*Fix your eyes on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we acknowledge in faith, who was faithful to him who appointed him*" (Heb.3:1b-2a). He calls the attention of the contestants to look above the cloud of witnesses and says: "*Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith. For the sake of the joy which lay before him he endured the cross, heedless of its shame. He has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God*" (Heb.12:2). The contestants are called to contemplate the humanity of Jesus. He bore a shameful death because he died for the sins that make slaves and criminals of all peoples. He bore this in order to have the joy of being the Redeemer of the world. The earthly example of Jesus must be kept in mind: "*Remember how he endured the opposition of sinners; hence do not grow despondent or abandon the struggle*" (Heb.12:3). He points out that they "*...have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood*" (Heb.12:4). The day may yet come when they will have to shed their blood in order to remain faithful to their Christian commitment.

The Lord knows the future and what it will demand from their faith. He permits sufferings in their lives to prepare and perfect them. Was not Jesus perfected through what He suffered? To illustrate the purpose of suffering, the author uses the homely example of a father's chastisement of his child for the good of the child. He recalls the words of Proverbs 3:11-12: "*The discipline of the Lord, my son, disdain not; spurn not his reproof; For whom the Lord loves he reproves, and he chastises the son he favors*" (see Heb.12:5-6). The author goes on to encourage: "*Endure your trials as the discipline of God, who deals with you as sons*" (Heb.12:7a).

The word that is translated "discipline" (*paideias*) can signify "instruction" or "training," or "child development." However, when a person is being trained to withstand sin unto death, discipline must consist of more than verbal instructions. It demands a program of training that will enable the person to withstand what must or may come to be. The author clearly teaches that the sufferings endured by Christians in this life are being used by God to perfect,

to purify and to prepare the Christian for union with God. As he expressed it: *"...that we may share his holiness" (Heb.12:10)*. From the limited point of human vision, we usually cannot see the good being accomplished. In times of Divine discipline the person indeed experiences pain and sorrow. It evoked these words from St. Teresa of Avila: *"If you treat all of your friends like you do me, no wonder you have so few!"* The effect of God's discipline upon the person depends upon the attitude and reaction to suffering. What is borne in patient endurance begets fruitful blessings.

COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

The author is aware of the effect the members of the Community have upon one another. He exhorts the Community to rekindle its spirit and strive along the Way with vigor. He writes: *"So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. Make straight the paths you walk on, that your halting limbs may not be dislocated but healed" (Heb.12:12-13)*. The stronger members of the Community ought to be a positive encouragement for those weaker in faith and virtue. They should not become "stumbling blocks" one for another, but strive to remove unnecessary obstacles from the paths of their brothers and sisters.

Speaking to the Community, the author says: *"Strive for peace with all men, and for that holiness without which no one can see the Lord" (Heb.12:14)*. Within this one sentence he teaches that Christians must live in the world--be present to the lives of men--but they are to be not of the world. They must be people of good will to all men. However, if a Christian must choose between peace and holiness, the choice must be holiness; it is an essential condition for union with God. For the pleasure of peaceful relationships, one must not sacrifice personal holiness.

ROOT OF BITTERNESS

The author now considers elements which destroy both peace and holiness. He exhorts: *"See to it that no man falls away from the grace of God; that no bitter root springs up through which many may become defiled" (Heb.12:15)*. This phrase, "falls away," carries the same concept as "drifts away." It is not a reference to a single act but a continuous, almost imperceptible drifting and falling away from a listening to and heeding the Holy Spirit. He brings our attention to the almost imperceptible growth of evil within the human spirit. First, the hearing goes, and the spirit grows sluggish toward the Voice. Next,

the will seeks its pleasure in sources other than God's Will. The strongest stimulus stimulates. Spiritual progress stops. Life never remains static; it is either in a state of ascension or descension. The sparks of infidelity feed upon the straws of disobedience, and defection continues and becomes more consciously deliberate, until the evil root produces its bitterest fruit--open defiance and contempt of Christian duties and its exalted status.

The "root" spoken of here in Hebrews is infidelity of the heart. It is sin of the will--so deeply personal. The "bitterness" of the root is the full flowering of infidelity--apostasy from Christ. When such a spirit appears within the Christian Community it becomes a spreading evil in which "many may become defiled."

THE ESAU PEOPLE

Esau, the son of Isaac, has become the biblical symbol of the profane person. This would be the person who would live with no reference or acknowledgment of God's claim over human life. The Esau man or woman lives for the gratification of the moment. The biological and emotional dimensions of life entirely engulf them. Their lives are dedicated "*to enjoy the fleeting rewards of sin*" (Heb.11:25b). They may give lip service to Christian morality, but their appreciation of it will never be permitted to impede their enjoyment of life's fleeting pleasures. For our writer, the sin of fornication best symbolizes this moral condition.

In the actual case of Esau we see a man who, through the grace of God, received a privileged position that one day would bring him many benefits and blessings. However, he was indifferent to the gift of grace; it meant nothing to him. Personal gratification on the physical level, even in a small matter, became more important than any spiritual privilege. For the one, he gave up the other. But typically of the character, he ignored his past life and claimed the benefits that should have come from his privileged position of first born. However he, and all like him, ran into the Justice of God.

God's Mercy comes to those who repent, not to those who merely sorrow for their sins for one selfish motive or another. Many people lament the bitter fruit of sin without ever repenting that they preferred to "*enjoy the fleeting rewards of sin*" to being a child of God. What it really comes down to is that Esau, and all those he represents, would again sell his birthright for a hot meal. If one does not choose God, there may not be another time in which to

make the choice: *“He had no opportunity to alter his choice, even though he sought the blessing with tears” (Heb.12:17c).*

THE VOICE TO HEED

As the Epistle draws to a close the author again contrasts the Old and the New Covenants. By his description of the inauguration of the first covenant, he emphasizes God’s unapproachableness, and the unholiness of the people that made approaching God impossible. The reaction of Israel to the Voice of God suggested their reluctance to achieve holiness, and their preference for Moses to mediate between them and Yahweh. Since Israel lacked the love that casts out fear, it was a covenant of fear. Even Moses experienced great fear in his role as mediator. Our author says that Christians have not drawn near to a holy, fearful mountain but

you have drawn near to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to myriads of angels in festal gathering, to the assembly of the first-born enrolled in heaven, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood which speaks more eloquently than that of Abel (Heb.12:22-24).

The expression “city of the living God” implies that God does not dwell on “Mount Zion” in majestic isolation and fearful splendor, but that He dwells surrounded by persons who love Him and are loved by Him. The author has given a brief peek into the Holy of Holies. There we see not only angels but also the spirits of the just of the Old Testament in perfect communion with God and angels. We see all those holy men and women of the Old Testament who passed the judgment of God and were declared worthy to enter the heavenly city because of their faith and the merits of the Passion of Jesus. There, seated in the heavenly sanctuary, is Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant that is sealed in His blood.

The author turns his readers’ attention to their side of the veil and instructs them how to live here, in order to arrive there. They are not only to keep their eyes upon Jesus but he warns them: *“Do not refuse to hear him who speaks...how much greater punishment will be ours if we turn away from him who speaks from heaven!” (Heb.12:25).* From the first two sentences of Hebrews we know it is Jesus who speaks. To hear and obey Jesus is the only Way into the Holy of Holies.

The author confirms the apocalyptic ending of the universe. Not too subtly he intimates that all those shaken in their faith in Jesus Christ will be part of the final conflagration. Only those who “hold fast to God’s grace” are those who will inherit “the unshakable kingdom” that will not pass away. For our author, the same God stands behind both the Old and New Covenants; what makes the difference is Jesus Christ. Jesus offers the only avenue to personal holiness in this world. To reject Jesus means to reject holiness. The author concludes his formal presentation with the proclamation: “*For our God is a consuming fire*” (See Heb.12:28-29). He implies that this “fire” will consume all that are unholy in the universe.

THE WAY HOME

The Christian Community draws near to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. Christians stand in the vestibule of Heaven. If they are to be judged worthy of entrance, their lives on earth must reflect their citizenship in the “city of the Living God.” The writer stresses: “*For here we have no lasting city; we are seeking one which is to come*” (Heb.13:14).

The closing chapter of Hebrews is a hasty summary of the spiritual exercises that will ensure a life of peace and holiness. The Christian Community, as a reflection of the Heavenly Community, must live in the spirit of “philadelphia” brotherly and sisterly love. They must avoid those spirits which destroy personal holiness and will exclude them from the heavenly city--namely selfish promiscuity and greed. They are to model their lives on the apostles and saints who have preceded them.

As long as we must live in this world we will be tempted in faith. He prudently warns them against false teachers and doctrines. He goes further by insisting that they do not participate in Jewish worship. Jesus Himself had suffered excommunication from the earthly Jerusalem and died outside the gate. There on the Cross He died as a sin offering. There is now no relationship between Judaism and Jesus. “*We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat*” (Heb.13:10). The Jews could not partake of the “sin offering.” Therefore, our author urges his readers to join Jesus outside the earthly Jerusalem--to abandon the sacrifice of the Old Covenant and gather around the altar and the sacrifice of the New Covenant--Jesus Christ Crucified. There let the Christian sacrifice and offerings pleasing to God be the praise of lips and hearts that profess the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Not only must they worship through prayers of praise and thanksgiving, but their lives should be veritable altars from which pleasing acts arise to God--deeds of goodness and generosity and the obedience that gives joy rather than sadness to Christian leaders.

As this Epistle draws to a close, the author offers a final prayer for his readers in which he acknowledges the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and in which he professes Jesus to be not only Lord but the great Shepherd of the Church. To the sacrifice of Jesus he attributes all possible spiritual enrichment. To the union with Jesus he attributes all the graces needed to live and die in peace and holiness. He prays:

May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus our Lord, furnish you with all that is good, that you may do his will. Through Jesus Christ may he carry out in you all that is pleasing to him. To Christ be glory forever! Amen (Heb.13:20-21).

EPILOGUE TO HEBREWS

The author of Hebrews has demonstrated how the Christian Religion is the one and true religion for all mankind. It alone perfectly fulfills the end and purpose of religion.

The author contrasted the Jewish and Christian Religions. In this contrast he presented the Jewish Religion as an earthly copy and shadow of true religion. The true and eternal religion is Christianity, with Jesus Christ as its heart and center. He presents Jesus Christ as the perfect high priest who offers the perfect sacrifice of Himself, which begins on the Cross of Calvary and ends with Jesus entering into the heavenly sanctuary with the Precious Blood of atonement. There the perfect sacrifice and offering of Jesus becomes an eternal act never to be repeated--never needed to be repeated. The sacrifice of Jesus completely satisfies for sin and merits all the graces necessary for the salvation of all mankind.

The Cross of Christ becomes the altar of perfected religion before which the redeemed stand before as a royal priesthood to offer to Jesus praise, and to God, hearts obedient to His Will. Here the author of Hebrews ends his revelation. The author does not deal with how this eternal reality is expressed in time and applied to individual persons being saved on earth, where one

thing follows upon another. However, he has said:

Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood which does not pass away. Therefore he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives to make intercession for them (Heb.7:24-25).

“To approach God through him” signifies worship of God through Jesus Christ.

The Lord’s Supper represents in time this eternal sacrifice. Perhaps our author never understood this truth himself. Since time does not permit, we will only briefly recall the teachings of Scripture and the Church on this doctrine. The Scriptures confirm that Jesus enacted a ritual celebration of his death at the Last Supper. Matthew records:

During the meal Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. “Take this and eat it,” he said, “this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them. “All of you must drink from it,” he said, “for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out in behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt.26:26-28).

Jesus commanded this ritual to be perpetuated in the Church with these words: “Do this as a remembrance of me” (Lk.22:19). With these words he gave the Apostles the power to reenact the Last Supper, thereby establishing this ritual celebration within the Church, and simultaneously calling the Apostles into the ritual priesthood of the New Covenant. From the earliest teachings of St. Paul, we know the Church understood that communion with the Body and Blood of Jesus occurred through the ritual celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Paul wrote:

Is not the cup of blessing we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf... You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and also the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and likewise the table of demons (1Cor.10:16-17,21).

Paul spoke of the Eucharist as sacrificial food by comparing it with pagan sacrificial food. Moreover, Paul taught the reenactment of the Lord's Supper to be a ritual proclamation of the death of Jesus. *"Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes!"* (1Cor.11:26).

This actually implies that the Lord's Supper proclaims and effects the forgiveness of sin. Today this ritual celebration is called the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Catholic Church teaches it as a doctrine of Faith:

In the Sacrifice of the Mass, Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is made present, its memory is celebrated, and its saving power is applied. In the Sacrifice of the Mass the sacrificial gift and the primary sacrificing priest are identical with the sacrifice of Calvary--only the nature and mode of the offering differs. In this sacrifice, God grants the grace and gift of penance, and remits sins however grievous they may be (Council of Trent).

THE WAY HOME

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“LET US KEEP OUR EYES FIXED ON JESUS, WHO INSPIRES AND PERFECTS OUR FAITH.” Hebrews 12:2a

**FIRST DAY: Read Summary through The Supreme Witness;
Hebrews 12:1-4.**

1. What do we learn from the “cloud of witnesses”?
2. What is the danger of not laying aside “every encumbrance of sin”?
3. How does Jesus inspire and perfect one’s faith?
4. What do you learn from Hebrews 12:4?

**SECOND DAY: Read Summary through Community Responsibility;
Hebrews 12:5-14; II Maccabees 6:12-17.**

1. What is the purpose of Divine Discipline?
2. What do you learn from the reading in Maccabees?
3. How should we respond in times of trials and sufferings?
4. How does a Christian “strive” for holiness?

**THIRD DAY: Read Summary through The Esau People; Hebrews 12:15-17;
Genesis 25:24-34; 27:30-38.**

1. How are both peace and holiness lost?
2. How does the root of bitterness develop in the spirit?
3. How would you describe “Esau People”?
4. What do you learn about the spiritual life from these readings?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: The Voice to Heed; Hebrews 12:18-29.

- 1. What is the difference between approaching God under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant?**
- 2. How does Jesus make the difference?**
- 3. What do we learn about Heaven from Hebrews 12:22-24?**
- 4. What does Hebrews 12:29 mean to you?**

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: The Way Home; Hebrews 13:1-8.

- 1. What spirit should pervade the Christian Community?**
- 2. How should this spirit be expressed?**
- 3. What two evils especially destroy holiness?**
- 4. What important part do the saints play in our Christian lives?**

SIXTH DAY: Read Hebrews 13:9-25.

- 1. Why should Christians not identify with Jewish worship?**
- 2. What do you understand by Hebrews 13:10?**
- 3. What are the Christian sacrifices pleasing to God?**
- 4. What truths of the spiritual life are emphasized in the prayer of Hebrews 13:20-21?**

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INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A Seven Year Catholic Bible Study

Commentary by: James P. O'Bryan, S.T.

This Catholic Bible Study series is entitled INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP. It is an in-depth study of the New Testament for Catholic laity so that the Word of Christ, rich as it is, might dwell in us.

Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself. (Eph. 3: 18-19)

The general motivating force behind this course is the preservation and growth of the Christian faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries.

This course has four immediate goals:

1. To ensure a true spirit of repentance
2. To foster a deeper commitment in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ
3. To create a greater awareness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer
4. To encourage a more vibrant participation in the life and mission of the Church

This Study is now available to all parishes and at-home study groups. It has been accredited by the Catechetical Institute of the Orange Diocese, Orange, California, for CCD re-certification. The study is designed for presentation by either a religious or layperson. Most studies have received NIHIL OBSTAT and IMPRIMATUR through the Bishop of Orange, California. All studies have been submitted for Imprimatur and no work of Father O'Bryan has ever been rejected.

The complete study consists of:

1. A spiral-bound Teacher's Manual containing the printed text for all of the lectures of the study ordered (Mark, Luke, Acts, etc.)
2. A spiral-bound Student Manual (Meditations) containing a corresponding Summary of the Lecture and Worksheet for each week's study. Each student should purchase a copy of the Student Manual to keep a personal record of their responses to the questions, as well as notes that might be taken during the lecture or group sessions.

Note: A few studies are available only in 3-ring binders. One copy each of the Teacher's Manual and Student Manual are purchased, and copies of the student manual must be made for each participant.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY CLASS FORMAT

First Hour - Small Group Sharing:

- Students break into their small groups (10 or fewer participants)
- Prayer said aloud together (Example: Prayer to the Holy Spirit)
- Songs can be sung
- Sharing begins (approximately 45 minutes)
- Stretch / Break for coffee etc. (10-15 minutes)

Second Hour – Lecture:

- Prayer said aloud by lecturer.
- Lecture begins for the following week's study (approximately 45-60 minutes)

Total Class Time - 2 Hours Each Week

The study can be adapted for 10 to 400 people. Committed people needed may vary depending upon the number of students.

Recommended Personnel:

- Lecturer: To present the material
- Small Group Leader: One for every 10 people sharing answers.
- Secretary: Functions might include making copies of materials (not required if participants each have their own spiral bound student book), distributing copies as required; advertising; registration; collecting fees (where applicable for materials, etc.)

Purpose:

The motivating purpose for the formation of the Bible Study is to preserve and impart the Christian Faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries. Since "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ," is there anything more important for a sincere Christian than a study of the Scriptures?

Recommended Work Assignments for Parish Studies

Secretary

Will place announcement of day, time and location in the Sunday bulletin beginning four weeks prior to the Bible Study beginning. A flyer can also be posted on the parish bulletin board.

Accept registrations by mail, phone, through the parish office or personally.

Collect fee, if applicable, at the first session of the Bible Study. The registration fee can be used to defray the cost of the study (workbooks printing, coffee etc.) and is also a form of commitment by persons attending to complete the study. You may choose to have a "love offering" bowl for ongoing costs, i.e., coffee etc.

Be responsible for coffee, treats at break.

Each week reproduce the Summaries/Worksheets for entire group and distribute to each small Group Leader (This may be done by rectory personnel). This is not necessary if each student purchases a personal workbook.

Group Leader

Through years of experience, it has been found that it is best to strictly follow the discipline listed below.

--After community prayer, group shares worksheet answers for the week.

--Working in a clockwise order, the student to left of the leader answers the first question. The leader then asks if anyone has an additional or different answer. Move then to the next student, who answers question number (2) and so on, through all the questions for the week. The leader should help ensure answers are in accordance with the Catholic Church. If in doubt, check it out!

--It is the group leader's responsibility to confine discussion to the subject matter being dealt with in the weekly lesson. (Sharing problems or special prayers can be done after lesson is completed) If extraneous discussion is not regulated, the questions will not be answered in the time allotted.

--If a student has a question on the subject and no agreement can be reached, put that student in charge of finding the answer through a priest or any Catholic resource. The answer is to be brought back to the group the following week. (The leader should research the question as well.)

--ONLY students who have done their written homework may participate in the discussion. Others are encouraged to attend, listen, and write down the answers. There is much to be learned from one another, so incomplete homework is no reason to stay away. On the other hand, sharing off-the-cuff (without prayerful study and written answers) has proven too often to be disruptive and misleading.

--If the student is self-centered and tries to dominate the discussion, the group leader must speak to him privately and gently explain the problem, requesting his cooperation within the study guidelines. If the student persists in unacceptable behavior, that student is asked to remain silent or leave the study. (It is better to lose one destructive student than to lose the entire group.)

- Try to bring out the best in each student.
- Occasionally there is just one correct answer; when that is given, do not allow haggling, just move on to the next question.
- At the end of the discussion period, distribute next week's Summary/Worksheet for the students' home study (not required if participants have purchased individual workbooks).
- If time runs out before ALL questions are answered, BREAK anyway. People need the coffee break in order to move around and relax. This is very important. The student needs to be refreshed and ready to concentrate on the upcoming lecture. This should seldom occur. Manage your time; a student may really need an answer to the last question. Time allowed is 45 minutes for small group sharing.
- The first night of the study is a good time to explain the expectations of the group. We share as a community in love, kindness and consideration. This is not just an intellectual study.

Lecturer

Open with a short prayer.

Prepare (rehearse / edit) and deliver the commentary on Sacred Scriptures for the week. Present the material with personal enthusiasm.

Each lesson contains a great deal of material. The lecturer should read and rehearse ahead of time for a most effective presentation. It need not all be presented. Time allowed is 45-60 minutes per lecture.

You may also elect to play Fr. O'Bryan's recorded tapes or CD's. These are available wherever the studies are sold. They are also excellent for personal review and reflection. (Note: many groups have done years of lessons listening to Father's original recordings...they are great!)

Total Class Time - 2 Hours Each Week!

ESTABLISHING A CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY IN YOUR PARISH

The Catholic Bible Study: INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DICIPLESHIP

By James P. O'Bryan S.T.

This Bible Study is designed to be presented by the laity but it may also be presented by religious. The number of participants will determine whether the study should be presented in the parish hall, class-rooms, or in homes. Some parishes have fifty or more people wanting to attend. (When this study was first presented by Fr. O'Bryan, it drew from the entire diocese, not from just one parish. There were 200 people at both the morning and evening session for the seven years...that's right, 400 people each week attended the study in one place.)

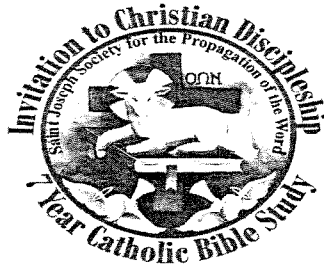
Many groups, large and small, still prefer to use the original (and recommended), method because it provides the fullness of the work. First, the full lecture, or an edited version, is presented by a "lecturer". The lecturer should spend time in prayerful preparation each week before presenting the material, and it should be presented with enthusiasm. Tapes and CDs of Father's original lectures are also available for purchase. They often are used in place of a lecturer. Listening to his recorded lectures at leisure, and being able to pause and replay them provides a wealth of information each week.

The homework portion of the study calls us to obedience and daily prayer as we strive to complete our assignment. Homework is a major factor in our personal spiritual growth. How much time will you give to God? The recommended method requires 2 hours each week as a group and additional study time at home, but the rewards are tremendous. This format may be used in homes or parishes.

A variation on the above, used successfully with High School groups (as large as 50) and adults, is to present the Summaries in place of the full lecture. Homework is assigned, answers are shared in a group, and then the Summary is read for the following week. All students have their printed assignments or workbooks. Homework may be trimmed to one or two questions per day for high schoolers (they already have homework to do). This method can reduce a session to about one hour total rather than 2 hours. This method is useful for severely time-challenged people, but the summaries only include about 20% of the complete lecture. However, the purchase of the recorded lectures which can be listened to during the week may be useful in providing a fuller experience for those who are unable to attend the full sessions.

A more recent method has also been successful for small home groups. Instead of using the Lectures and a lecturer, only the Bible and the Summary/Worksheets or Meditation Workbooks are used. Group members take turns reading aloud the Summary and the Bible references in the workbook--answering the questions as they go along. This eliminates the requirement for homework. A leader is still necessary at each meeting--one leader can be chosen for the whole study, or the attendees can take turns. (Note: Again, listening to parts of the recorded lecture in free time during the week may be helpful in providing more than the 20% of information given in the Summary. Also, the homework portion, though a pain to many, has a place in our lives as we strive to be more obedient to God's call).

All of the above styles have proven to be successful for different people in different situations. Start one in your community today!



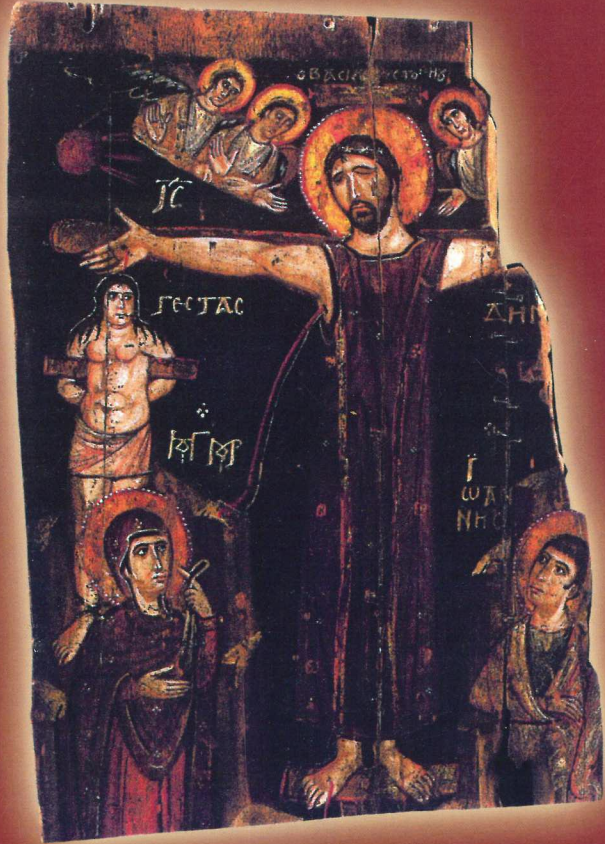
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* Available early September; ** Available October; *** Available mid November. (All are available now in 3-ring binder form @ \$40 + tax + S&H)					
Other Catholic Teachings by Fr. O'Bryan					
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Most of the scripture studies shown above are available in Spanish. The Spanish versions are student workbooks in 3-ring binders 8 1/2" x 11". These may be ordered at the price of \$14+ \$1.09 tax + \$5 shipping & handling (\$20.09 total).



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