

INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP



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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN
TEACHER'S MANUAL

INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN

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FOREWARD

This present work, The Gospel According to Saint John, is part of a larger Catholic bible study, Invitation to Christian Discipleship a seven year study which consists in lectures, summary of lectures, worksheets are published separately under the title of *Where Eagles Fly*. This seven year study has been designed for the Catholic laity that the “Word of Christ” rich as it is dwell in them.

Thus they will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breath and length and heights and depths of Christ’s love, and experience this love which 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 insure 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.**

The Catechetical Institute of the Diocese of Orange, California has accredited Invitation To Christian Discipleship. It is now available to all parishes and at-home study groups. It is designed for a lay person to present.

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INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

PRELUDE

The Gospel according to John emphasizes truth. Jesus is identified as *“the truth.”* Jesus declares, *“Anyone committed to the truth hears my voice”* (Jn. 18:37). In other words, those committed to the truth obey and fulfill the Will of Jesus Christ. The study of the Fourth Gospel ought to be undertaken with the holy intention of knowing and loving the truth manifested in and through Jesus Christ. If we become better grounded in truth, our study has been a success.

As the beautiful faculty to discern truth, the intellect, can be perverted to defend error, so too, our “good” intentions are never above suspect. Too often these are not godly; therefore, not good at all. Only when human intentions, ambitions and desires are purified by God’s grace and submissive to His will, can they be good. *“None is good but God alone”* (Lk. 18:19), Jesus teaches.

Some may hamper, in themselves, a fuller acceptance of the Gospel Truth. They do not approach the Scriptures with simplicity and purity of intention. The Scriptures are used to defend cherished opinions and ideas. They will not be opened to any light of truth that may demolish their beliefs. Therefore, they will manipulate the Scriptures.

Many erroneously see the Scriptures as a direct means for Church unity. The Scripture scholar, Raymond Brown, teaches that the most Catholics and non-Catholics can hope for is an agreement on the literal meaning of the Scriptures (what the words actually say). Perhaps this is as close as the Scriptures can come to being a direct means of unity. As Brown indicates, the agreement on the literal meaning does not lead to the same theological interpretations. The differences in the theological interpretation is often that

which makes one Catholic and another non-Catholic.

Primarily, to be an instrument of Church unity, it consists in each of us seeking the truth with purity of intention and with effort – expressing loving zeal for the truth of God. Secondly, we endeavor not merely to know the truth, but to bring about the truth of God in our thinking, feelings, expressions, in what is done, and in what is omitted. To incarnate this truth in such a degree, we put on the Mind of Christ. Thirdly, this truth must find a loving expression in what we think, say, do, and do not do. Love insures us we have not only the Mind of Christ but the Heart of Christ. We are truly disciples of Jesus Christ.

Such men and women, whatever you call them (Protestant, Catholic or otherwise), will be the building stones of Christian unity with which the Divine Architect, the Holy Spirit, will build anew, in perfect unity, the Body of Christ. It is our hope, one day, to be a building stone within this Temple.

A UNIQUE REVELATION

The Fourth Gospel is a most intriguing work. This unique Gospel has been a constant challenge to Biblical Scholars. Called by one, “the great enigma of early Christian tradition,” another claims, “to understand this gospel is to understand what early Christianity really was.”

In the early part of the 20th Century, many non-Catholic scholars claimed the internal evidence within the Fourth Gospel made it a work alien to the Palestine of Jesus’ time. It was written in a Grecian spirit and a product of the 2nd Century AD. It was neither an authentic nor reliable source about Jesus of Nazareth. Anything of historic truth within the Gospel came from the Synoptic Gospels. Archaeologists began to unearth new evidence in Egypt and Palestine; information began to pile up; it culminated with the discovery of the Qumran Scrolls in 1948. The findings dissipated much of the erroneous confusion. The pendulum of scholarly thought took a drastic swing to: “You know it is probable that the Fourth Gospel was composed against a Palestinian background within the time of Jesus. It is even possible that a man called John, a son of Zebedee, an apostle of Jesus Christ, is its author.”

Catholic scholars were saved from these erroneous opinions, not because they were better biblical scholars – in many instances they were not as good – but

by virtue of their obedience to the authoritative teachings of the Church. In the face of all the “scientific evidence,” the Church maintained that the Fourth Gospel was produced from the inspired teachings of St. John, the Apostle. Now scientific evidence blesses this obedience. Our previous unscientific stand is now worthy of adherence to it, due to the present archaeological findings. Evidence now indicates the Gospel to be of apostolic times and even possibly of apostolic origin! The Gospel as we possess it today was probably completed around 90 A.D. and written at Ephesus in Greek with the Apostle John as its author.

Placing the Fourth Gospel in apostolic environment is solving only one of the problems proposed by the Fourth Gospel. The problems discussed by biblical scholars pile up into a mountain. A library of discussion and solutions already exists. It is not the purpose of such a study to burden ourselves with all these problems. But the essential ones need to be understood for a more in-depth and enlightened understanding of the Word of God.

Often, because of spiritual sloth, tired or unused minds, we desire to take the easiest course. Why not just read the Gospel and forget the rest? First of all, that would not be obedient. The Holy Spirit blesses obedience. The Second Vatican Council demanded more of us than that! Secondly, we ought to love the word of God enough to study it as deeply as possible and be willing to give time and energy needed for understanding God’s message.

The study of the Pharisees serves as an example of how the history behind the Bible aids appreciation and insight. What does the Bible tell us about them? Not too much. We know they were a group of men who opposed Jesus and He had a few uncomplimentary things to say about them. In reality, they were the most powerful group of men in Jewish society at the time of Christ. They considered themselves as the true Israel of God . . . the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter days. Because of their lifestyle and teachings, they were highly respected by the people and held great influence with them. When Herod the Great came to power, he demonstrated little respect for the Jewish population. Herod did not hesitate to execute members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, but he befriended the Pharisees. He feared their influence with the people. When we understand what history has to tell us about these men, we know a little more about the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. When this lone man stands before these powerful, self-righteous men and demands that they repent, we behold

His outstanding courage and fidelity to truth and his mission. Jesus' insistence that these men repent brought him to the Cross. It is history that helps us to understand the marvelous human character of our Blessed Savior. How right his enemies were when they said, "*Teacher, we know you are a truthful man and teach God's way sincerely. You court no one's favor and do not act out of human respect*" (Mat. 22:16).

In a nutshell summary, we can say the critical analysis of the Fourth Gospel presents these problems: More than one hand has been involved in the production of the work we possess today. On the one hand, the evidence indicates the primary author produced a well-constructed, cohesive document. To this, another hand appears to have made alterations, insertions and re-editions. The Prologue and the last chapter appear to be additions to the original text. This is not to say that John was not the author of the material. We find a perfect conclusion of the Gospel in Chapter 20:30-31 only to have it followed by another conclusion in an additional chapter. Also, the public life of Jesus appears to have two conclusions: the first we read in Chapter 10:40-42 and the other in Chapter 12:37-43. Certain parts of the Gospel appear not to be in proper context. We are informed that Jesus goes into hiding and then this is followed by a public proclamation. Part of Chapter Six appears to belong to the Last Supper Discourse. The original ending of the Last Discourse was 14:31 when Jesus said, "*Come, then! Let us be on our way.*" After this, we have an addition of three more chapters of discourses. We have, in several places, similar teachings being repeated . . . what is said in Chapter 5:19-25 is repeated in 5:25-30; Chapter 6:35-50 is very similar to Chapter 6:51-58; what we read in Chapter 14:1-31 is largely repeated in 16:4-33.

COMPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL

A solution for these difficulties may be found in the historical background of the Fourth Gospel. Tradition confirms that John lived in Ephesus. In the beginning, he exercised his ministry in Palestine. Perhaps, shortly before 70 A.D., he arrived in Ephesus. Especially after the death of Peter and Paul, John was the supreme Christian teacher. Traditional for the times, a school and Christian community grew up around this venerable teacher and apostle. In keeping with the apostolic method, John first preached the Gospel. No doubt, his disciples often recorded his teachings. Although John does show a familiarity with the Gospel of Mark, an independent historical Gospel

tradition developed. At the insistence of the Bishops of Asia Minor, John first recorded his testimony. This may have been as early as 70 A.D. Some scholars believe the first edition was written in Aramaic and later translated into Greek by John or by a disciple. They have been led to this opinion because when the Gospel is translated into Aramaic, some parts fall naturally into Aramaic poetry. Certain sections, confusing in the Greek, become clear in Aramaic. This recalls to mind the words written by the Greek translator of Sirach around 175 B.C.:

For words spoken originally in Hebrew are not as effective when they are translated into another language. That is true not only of this book but of the law itself, the prophets, and the rest of the books which differ little when they are read in the original.

I am sure the same applies to Greek translations from the Aramaic.

Traditions tell us that John was the last surviving apostle. He lived long enough to give birth to a rumor he would never die, but live until the Second Coming. During his long apostolic life, he no doubt presented his material in different ways, freshly applying it as new problems faced a changing Christian Church. It is believed he made a second edition of his Gospel with certain additions. After his death, a close disciple is believed to have re-edited the Fourth Gospel. In this re-edition, he included material known to the community as teachings of the apostle – but unrecorded. Instead of taking the liberty of rewriting the Gospel, he included the material by tacking it where he considered it appropriate. He most probably added the Prologue, believed to be a hymn sung by the Johannine Community, and the final chapter of the Gospel. This was done to correct the widespread error that Jesus had said John was not to die. The true account of this event was known by the disciple and added as the last chapter.

Scholars have noted that all the material attributed to John: the Fourth Gospel, the three letters, and the Book of Revelations are so similar in style and substance that they are clearly attributable to St. John's school at Ephesus.

THE HISTORICITY OF THE GOSPEL

The Fourth Gospel is deeply historical. The author reveals a knowledge of

Jerusalem landmarks existing before 70 AD., but destroyed during the Roman conquest of the city. We are indebted to the Fourth Gospel for certain historical facts about the life of Jesus that are not recorded in the Synoptic Gospels: Jesus, like John the Baptist, had a baptizing ministry before he began preaching; he had a public ministry of several years during which he made several visits to Jerusalem; the Pharisees and the other authorities opposed Jesus for a long time before his death; many details of Jesus' Passion and Death are recorded only by John. But more than recording what happened, John, because of his close relationship to the Master and his own unique genius, was able to express the meaning of what had happened in history.

THE CHARACTER OF JESUS

John presented a Jesus different from the one found in the other Gospels. He not only speaks differently, but the entire projection of his personality differs from the Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. The Divine nature of Jesus dominates the mind of the author. What Jesus says and does always has a quality of kingliness and transcendency. John never seems to forget that the Word made Flesh – “*what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched*” – was the Word who, in the beginning, was with God and was God! Like a theme, the divine name “*I Am*” runs throughout the Fourth Gospel. The very Light of God has entered into a world darkened by sin. His very Presence is Judgment. The very encounter of men with Jesus reveals them to be children of the day as they believe and accept Jesus, or children of the darkness as they refuse to believe and reject Him. For this reason, Jesus declares,

Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? I assure you, the contrary is true; I have come for division. From now on, a household of five will be divided three against two and two against three; father will be split against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

(Lk. 12:51-53)

Jesus only offers Peace to his disciples, to men of good will and it is not a peace the world can give or receive. It is Peace in the Spirit!

John and Paul are, without a doubt, the two great theologians of the New Testament. Paul's theology is framed within the apostolic ministry of preaching, spreading, clarifying and defending the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's theology is born within the ministry of the Church, spreading the "Good News." The theology of John is rooted in the historical Christ. It is the contemplation of the personal life of Jesus that gives birth to his theology. Perhaps it was John's definite intention to root Christian Theology in the historical Christ in order to safeguard it from pious conjectures and myths. John rooted Christian theology in the life of Jesus. The theology rose out of a mind and heart that contemplated, as Mary did, the words and deeds and being of Jesus.

The Old Testament colors the portrait of Jesus presented by the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus is pictured as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies; Jesus is the promised Messiah. Likewise, John found in the Old Testament inspiration for his portrait of Jesus. We do not have to look beyond the Sapiential Books to discover John's inspiration for his unique portrait of Jesus. John sees Jesus Christ as the "Wisdom" of the Old Testament incarnated in the Person and Life of Jesus.

The most powerful personal portrait in the Old Testament is Moses. Many people expected the Messiah to be the Prophet-like-Moses. John sees Jesus as the New Moses. He indicates this in Chapter Six when Jesus is declared to be the true bread come down from heaven. In Chapter Seven, Jesus offers the living water corresponding to the stream flowing from the rock struck by Moses. It is never far from the thought of John that Jesus is the New Moses.

As a preparation for the study of St. John's Gospel, our reading this week will be taken from the Sapiential Books. These readings will illustrate that John beheld in Jesus the "Wisdom" of God come down to earth – made visible in the humanity of Jesus. In other words, John beheld Jesus as Divine Wisdom Incarnated!

THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL

We are told in the final chapter of the Gospel written by John why this gospel was composed:

Jesus performed many other signs as well – signs not recorded here – in the presence of his disciples. But these have been recorded to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that through this faith you may have life in his name.

(Jn. 20:30-31)

John tells us that he deliberately chose certain words and deeds of Jesus and recorded them for a twofold purpose: “to help you believe” and that “you may have life in his name.”

Many scholars believe that when John wrote “to help you believe,” he had definite groups of people in mind. He endeavored to bring faith and salvation to people in his own time and history. He composed the Fourth Gospel to meet the concrete difficulties facing the Church at the end of the first Christian century.

It may come as a surprise to learn that John the Baptist was one of the problems. How could this be? His position is so clear in the Scriptures. That is precisely why his position is so clear in the Scriptures, but was not all that clear in the minds of many people at the time the Scriptures were written. Some people failed to follow Jesus because they believed John the Baptist was the Messiah. We know that Acts makes mention of twelve disciples of John at Ephesus brought into the Christian community by Paul. We have a record from the third century in which a reference is made to an existing group, opposed to Christianity, who maintained that John the Baptist was the Messiah. So we see, this sect survived well into the Christian era.

Since the discovery of the Qumran Scrolls, a relationship between John the Baptist and the Essenes at Qumran has been established. The monastery was close to where John baptized and was located in the wilderness where he was reported to have lived. The expressions of John were not foreign to Qumran thought. The Essenes would have been sympathetic to John. We have good reason to believe that John the Evangelist was originally a disciple of John the Baptist. It is difficult to believe that the author of the Fourth Gospel did not have knowledge of the Essenes and their teachings. Some read in John’s presentation of Jesus an appeal to the Essenes to accept Jesus as the Messiah. After the Roman destruction of Qumran in 68 A.D., some of the Essenes may have survived as the followers of John the Baptist. John’s unique presentations of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth may well have been

an appeal to these men to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

By the time the Fourth Gospel was written, lines between Jewish Christians and Jews were being tightly drawn. The feelings existing between the two are well expressed in this Gospel. For the most part, John's use of the term "Jews" is a reference to those who have refused to accept Jesus and actively oppose belief in Jesus. There is no effort on the part of John to appeal to these people or to convert them. To his mind, they are incorrigible. He refers to the Jews who accept Jesus as Israelites. They form the true Israel. We are led to believe there were many Jews who came to a belief in Jesus but remained silent about it. They could not bring themselves to be disassociated from their religious and cultural background. Yet, on the other hand, there was a determined effort by the Pharisees to drive out of the Jewish community anyone who professed Jesus as the Messiah. They inaugurated a curse at the beginning of the synagogue service upon all such believers. John makes an appeal through this Gospel to those Jewish believers to leave the synagogue . . . to put their faith completely in Jesus.

From the earlier writings of St. Paul, we know that within the Christian community, members had arisen who perverted the truth of the Gospels. The Fourth Gospel seeks to protect the Christian community from the doctrines of heretical Christians. One such group maintained that human flesh, the body, was evil. Therefore, it was impossible that Jesus could ever have come in the flesh: what men believed to be the body of Christ was but a phantom. Not only does the Gospel clearly refute this error, but the First Epistle of John refers to such people as being of "*the spirit of the anti-christ*" (1 Jn. 4:3).

The delay of the Second Coming of Christ was a major problem facing the early Church. It apparently threatened the faith of some. The problem may be well expressed in II Peter 3:4, 8 and 9:

They will ask, "Where is that promised coming of his? Our forefathers have been laid to rest, but everything stays just as it was when the world was created" . . . This point must not be overlooked, dear friends. In the Lord's eyes, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years are as a day. The Lord does not delay in keeping his promise – though some consider it "delay."

St. John endeavored to correct this by teaching what has been called a

“realized eschatology.” John would not have Christians looking to the heavens for the return of Christ, but he would have them conscious of what they had received already from Christ:

Through the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had returned and was present within them in a most special manner.

Through Baptism and the Eucharist, the greatest possible blessings had come to Christians . . . divine sonship and eternal life.

Since we possessed eternal life, death should hold no fear, either for us, the living, or for our beloved, the dead (Jesus had taught not to be afraid of those who could kill the body.) . . . The spirit of the blessed will live an eternal life as Jesus does, one with the Father.

There should be no fear of the final judgment for Christians. This judgment had already occurred in a belief and acceptance of Jesus or the rejection of Him.

This teaching of *“realized eschatology”* was not alien to the teachings of Paul as we read in Romans 14:17-19:

The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of justice, peace, and the joy that is given by the Holy Spirit. Whoever serves Christ in this way pleases God and wins the esteem of men. Let us, then, make it our aim to work for peace and to strengthen one another.

Essentially, the Fourth Gospel is a document of Faith. It demands a response in its hearers, readers, or students. One believes and accepts Jesus Christ as *“the way, the truth, the life”* or he rejects Him. According to John, it is a matter not just of life or death . . . but of eternal life or death!

Let us prayerfully undertake the study of the Gospel in order to increase our faith in Jesus, the Son of God and hopefully grow in eternal life. . . .

CHAPTER 2

THE PROLOGUE

INTRODUCTION

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD; THE WORD WAS IN GOD'S PRESENCE, AND THE WORD WAS GOD.

HE WAS PRESENT TO GOD IN THE BEGINNING.

THROUGH HIM ALL THINGS CAME INTO BEING, AND APART FROM HIM NOTHING CAME TO BE.

WHATEVER CAME TO BE IN HIM, FOUND LIFE, LIFE FOR THE LIGHT OF MEN. THE LIGHT SHINES ON IN DARKNESS, A DARKNESS THAT DID NOT OVERCOME IT.

. . . HE WAS IN THE WORLD, AND THROUGH HIM THE WORLD WAS MADE, YET THE WORLD DID NOT KNOW WHO HE WAS.

TO HIS OWN HE CAME, YET HIS OWN DID NOT ACCEPT HIM.

. . . THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND MADE HIS DWELLING AMONG US, AND WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY: THE GLORY OF AN ONLY SON COMING FROM THE FATHER, FILLED WITH ENDURING LOVE.

(The words of the original hymn.)

When Jesus came to the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi, he

asked his disciples this question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Jesus looked at his disciples and asked a more difficult and extremely personal question, "And you," he said to them, "Who do you say that I am?" An embarrassed silence was broken by Peter. He saved the day with, "You are the Messiah . . . the Son of the living God!" Christ recognized this as a response of faith. Jesus replied, "Blest are you, Simon son of Jonah! No mere man has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father" (Mat. 16:13-17).

Some are not as quick as others to speak. It takes time for them to formulate feelings and thoughts into speech. Some things are never said. We wait too long to say them. All the opportunities to speak have passed! One of the silent disciples that day was the author of the Fourth Gospel. He never forgot that haunting question, "*Who do you say that I am?*"

In time, John answered this question. The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel is the answer!

The intention of the Fourth Gospel is to produce faith in the divinity of Jesus. One of the methods used is to bring forth reliable witnesses to the divinity of Jesus. Perhaps out of humility, John omits himself as a witness.

His witness was well known to his disciples. It had brought many of them to Christ. After his death, a disciple added one more witness to the Fourth Gospel – the witness of John the Evangelist. Here in the Prologue, we read John's testimony. Originally, it was a hymn composed by John.

The Gospel of St. John has been referred to as the "*Pearl of Great Price*" among the writings of the New Testament. The Prologue has been called "*the*" pearl within the Gospel. Fathers of the Church, such as Augustine and John Chrysostom, believed it to be beyond man to express the thoughts of the Prologue. Because of the sublimity of these thoughts, the symbol of the eagle who soars alone and higher than the other winged creatures, has been applied to John the Evangelist. The words of the Prologue are a searchlight of insight for the Fourth Gospel. If we can turn on the full light of understanding which these concepts can give us, we will unlock many of the mysteries and lessons

of this Gospel.

These words have a unique history in the Church. It was believed by many Christians that the words themselves possessed a unique charisma. Christians wore the words in an amulet around their necks as a protection from evil. They were used by the Church as a benediction over a newly baptized child and over the sick. For centuries, the Prologue was read as a final blessing at all Latin Masses.

As John contemplated the life and being of Jesus Christ, he found nothing of this world comparable to Jesus Christ. Everything expressed by the other Evangelists left still unsaid what his faith had to express – what for him was an adequate response to “*Who do you say that I am?*”

In the Sapiential Books of the Scriptures, he found thoughts comparable to what his faith understood. These words of Wisdom spoke to his belief: “*[He] is an aura of the might of God and a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty . . . [He] is the refulgence of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness*” (Wis. 7:25-26).

THE WORD MADE FLESH

How could words express a faith so sublime? There was a Hebrew expression “*dabar*.” It signified an utterance, alive, filled with energy and life. It almost expressed a thing alive within itself. When the “*dabar*” proceeded from God, it not only revealed truth to those who accepted it, but it became an inner power, a compulsion, forcing a prophet to convey truth to others. As the Lord expressed in Isaiah:

For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my “dabar” be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it. (Is. 55:10-11)

(When Isaac, by mistake, gave to Jacob a “*dabar*” of blessing belonging to Esau, it could not be recalled or repeated.)

The expression “*dabar*” in the mind of John, better than any other, expressed the mystery of Jesus’ true nature. When the Hebrew word was translated into Greek, it became “*Logos*” – an expression already sacred within Greek culture. Translated into English, it reads, “Word.”

How could John express the origin of the “*Word*”? Nothing in creation adequately expressed it. When the Scriptures had desired to express a time beyond creation – beyond the beginning of all created things – it used the word “*Genesis*” – translated, “*In the beginning.*” John’s answer to the question, “*Who do YOU say that I am?*” began:

“IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD AND THE WORD WAS GOD” (Ver. 1).*

Christian theologians had not yet expressed in words the doctrine of the Trinity. The seeds of this doctrine were being expressed when John wrote, “*The Word was God.*” He did not write, “He was the God” – thus identifying Him with the Father, nor does he say, “the Word was a God,” implying “another” god. Under divine inspiration, he expressed the sublime truth that Jesus proceeds from the Father and has a Divine Sonship relationship. He was an existing Divine Person.

THE DIVINE WORD

How does John express this truth in the Gospel? What words and deeds of Jesus revealed this to him? We know Jesus does not use the expression “Word” or “Logos” in the Gospel. Apparently, its Hebrew or Aramaic equivalent was not used by Jesus, nor would its use have been meaningful to his audience. Jesus had expressed a concept of divinity. On one occasion, his claim to divinity had been so clearly understood, his enemies sought to stone him.

The most sacred name of the Old Testament we find in the Book of Exodus 3:13-14:

“But,” said Moses to God, “when I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ if they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?” God replied, “I am who am.” Then he added, “This is what you shall tell the Israelites:

I AM sent me to you.”

God expresses to Moses that he is the existing one or “I am who causes to be.” From this was formed the name Yahweh, the holy Name of God.

In Exodus, God tells the Israelites, “*you will know I am Yahweh.*” This knowledge will be gained through what He does. Sometimes He will help or save them. Other times He will punish them in order that they will know He is Lord. (Ex. 6:5; 7:5.) Yahweh, or Divinity, is primarily revealed by divine activity.

Six times in Deutero-Isaiah there occurs, “*I am Yahweh and there is no other.*” It clearly stresses there is no other God. When the authors of the Septuagint translated the Bible into Greek, “*I am*” became “*ego eimi.*” In the Septuagint Bible, “*ego eimi*” becomes a divine name. In Isaiah, we read: “*Ego Eimi [I am] Ego Eimi [I am] who blots out transgressions.*” Here, “*ego eimi*” appears as a name applied to Yahweh. In Isaiah 51:12, we read: “*I, it is I who comfort you.*” In Isaiah 52:6*: “*My people will therefore know my name; that day they will understand that it is I who say, ‘I am here.’*” “*Ego eimi*” is the one who speaks. “*Ego eimi*” becomes a divine name to be known in the day of the Lord.

In the Fourth Gospel, the words “*ego eimi*” appear time and time again on the lips of Jesus. In John 8:28*, Jesus says, “*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am Ego eimi . . .*”! One of the most dramatic uses of this expression is found in the arrest of Jesus. Jesus meets the soldiers in the Garden of Olives and asks, “*Who is it you want?*” ‘*Jesus the Nazarean,*’ they repeated . . . ‘*I am he*’ [Ego eimi]. . .” As Jesus said to them “*Ego Eimi,*” they retreated slightly and fell to the ground. (Jn. 18:5-8.) John illustrates how repeatedly Jesus used the expression, “*ego eimi*”: “*before Abraham ever was, I Am*” (Jn. 8:58*). It was this statement that resulted in Jesus’ almost being stoned to death. “*You will surely die in your sins unless you come to believe that I AM [Ego Eimi]*” (Jn. 8:24). (This, for John, is the perfection of faith.) “*When you lift up the Son of Man, you will come to realize that I AM [Ego Eimi] . . .*” (Jn. 8:28).

Seven times John predicates certain attributes of ego eimi (I am). He endeavors to express what the Incarnated Word means to us:

I am the bread of life. (Jn. 6:35,51)

I am the light of the world. (Jn. 8:12; 9:5)

I am the gate. (Jn. 10:7,9)

I am the good shepherd. (Jn. 10:11,14)

I am the resurrection and the life. (Jn. 11:25)

I am the way, the truth, and the life. (Jn. 14:6)

I am the [real] vine. (Jn. 15:5)

“The Word” was John’s own expression for the divinity of Jesus Christ.

In John 5:24 and 15:3, Jesus characterizes his message as a Word – the Prologue shows the messenger himself was the Word. When Jesus speaks in the Gospel, he used a word expressing this same concept to the people. The word used by Jesus has been translated into the Greek as “*ego eimi*.” Throughout the Gospel, this divine name is being identified with Jesus Christ. The simple “I Am” translation in English often fails to carry this concept of divinity to us.

HE WAS PRESENT TO GOD IN THE BEGINNING. (Ver.2)

Here, John declares the pre-existence of the Word before creation. Jesus himself speaks of this in John 17:5, “*Do you now, Father, give me glory at your side, a glory I had with you before the world began?*”

That John identifies the Word with Exodus 3:13-14, “*I Am who I am,*” is clear when he writes verse three:

THROUGH HIM ALL THINGS CAME INTO BEING, AND APART FROM HIM NOTHING CAME TO BE. (Ver.3)

The Word is expressed to be the creative power of God. When the Word creates, it means creation is an act of revelation. All creation bears the stamp of God’s Word This applies to all the external actions of God including

all the acts of salvation. Wisdom 13:1 and Romans 1:19-20 insist that, from His creation, God is recognizable by men.

For all men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God; and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing him who is, and from studying the works, did not discern the artisan.

(Wis. 13:1)

SOURCE OF LIFE

According to the Prologue, whatever came to be, flowed from the creative activity of the Word. The Word is the source of existence and being. Life is attributed to the operation of the Word. This clearly is in keeping with the book of Wisdom:

Court not death by your erring way of life, nor draw to yourself destruction by the works of your hands. Because God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. For he fashioned all things that they might have being . . .

(Wis. 1:12-14)

For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it.

(Wis. 2:23-24)

WHATEVER CAME TO BE IN HIM, FOUND LIFE, LIFE FOR THE LIGHT OF MEN. (Ver. 4)

Whoever is brought into being, through the Incarnate Word, receives a particular quality of life that enables the person to truly live, to live eternally. Jesus said to Nicodemus that in order to live, one had to be reborn. “*I solemnly assure you, no one can see the reign of God unless he is begotten from above . . . I solemnly assure you, no one can enter into God’s kingdom without being begotten of water and Spirit*” (Jn. 3:3-5). The Fourth Gospel is called the Gospel of Life. John uses the word “*zoe*,” which means “life,” sixty-six times. He tells us he has written the Gospel that we may have life in His Name. When John refers to the Word, begetting life, he means eternal life. Whenever we read the word “*life*” in this Gospel, we should understand that

John means “eternal life.” This is not the same as everlasting life, which could be an extension of physical life beyond death. By “eternal life,” John means something other than natural, human life. The quality of this life is different. “Eternal” life has a divine quality. It is the very life lived by the Father and possessed by the Son. The Son was sent into the world to share eternal life with men. It is the Age of the Life to come given here and now. It is given to those who believe in Jesus and obey his will. Just as life in Genesis was imparted by the breath of the Lord, so Jesus breathes forth the Holy Spirit upon the Church, upon his disciples. The gift of the Holy Spirit imparts this life. Man is not saved unless he has come to share in the eternal life of God. This can only be achieved through a union with Jesus Christ.

In the mind of John, the Incarnate Word was the Light of the World. The very life of Jesus was a light to guide man towards eternal life and keep him safe from sin. Jesus was the Way, a Way for us, enlightened by the example of his life. The Jewish rabbis believed and taught that the Torah, the Law, was divine. It was the true light of the World; the bread come down from heaven – the food of the soul. The Torah gave and nourished life. John, like Paul, could not accept this teaching. The Law brought only condemnation and death. His Gospel seeks to establish that it is not the Torah but the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, who is life, light, and nourishment. As in Genesis, the preexisting Word gave natural life to all being, now the Incarnate Word, in a new creation, brings eternal life to men. *“The real light which gives light to every man” (Ver. 9).*

THE LIGHT SHINES ON IN DARKNESS, A DARKNESS THAT DID NOT OVERCOME IT. (Ver. 5)

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

The terms “*light*” and “*darkness*” are used symbolically in the Fourth Gospel. Light is equivalent to truth and darkness to the perversion of truth. Light and darkness are symbols of two forces existing in this world. These forces, according to Jewish tradition, are personified as the Prince of Light, the Archangel Michael, and the Prince of Darkness, Belial-Satan. When a man walks in truth, seeks to live in the light of truth by drawing closer to the life of God, he becomes a child of the light. When man sins and walks in sin, he invites darkness to enter. In time, darkness overcomes and the man becomes a child of darkness. John sees the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, as the Light

that has come into this world to destroy the darkness of sin. As Jesus is rejected, the darkness grows and prevails. John illustrates the growth of darkness in proportion to the rejection of Jesus. He says it is night when Jesus is betrayed; when Jesus hung upon the Cross, darkness hung upon the earth; when Jesus lies within the tomb, darkness prevails. For John, it is the hour of the Prince of Darkness, the short-lived triumph of evil and death. The resurrection of Jesus is the return of Light and the conquest of darkness and sin by the Life of Jesus that is now the Eternal Light that darkness will never overcome. Jesus explained to Nicodemus:

The judgment of condemnation is this: the light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were wicked. Everyone who practices evil hates the light; he does not come near it, for fear his deeds will be exposed. (Jn. 3:19)

This verse of Scripture is foretelling the tragedy of Jesus' public ministry . . . because of sin, the world will not recognize the Incarnate Word, and his own people will not accept him. Darkness so prevails in the world that the world becomes synonymous with Darkness and John proclaims that the whole world is in the power of the evil one. And not surprisingly he writes:

HE WAS IN THE WORLD, AND THROUGH HIM THE WORLD WAS MADE, YET THE WORLD DID NOT KNOW WHO HE WAS.

TO HIS OWN HE CAME, YET HIS OWN DID NOT ACCEPT HIM. (Ver. 10-11)

THE WORLD

The "World" is a very common expression in John. It can refer to the created universe (the Kosmos) or to the society of man. Between Chapters One and Eight, John speaks of the world as not being evil itself, but under the influence of the evil one. God still loves the world and sends his Son to save the World. From Chapter Eight, with the rejection of Jesus, the world becomes more and more associated with men who have no faith in Jesus. They reject Jesus under the leadership of Satan. Jesus' coming is therefore a Judgment on the World and the sons of darkness who make up its society. By

this time, the “*world*” becomes so synonymous with disbelief in Jesus and hatred of him, the followers of Jesus cannot be of the world (in the world – but not of the world). The Spirit of Jesus is incompatible with the world and hostile to it. The world, because it is darkness, hates Jesus and his followers. Jesus overcomes the world by his death and resurrection. Jesus casts down Satan. The working out of the victory against the world continues after Jesus’ departure. He sends his disciples into the world and the faith of the disciples will overcome the world. Where there is no faith, the world will conquer the disciples, as in the case of Judas and Ananias and Sapphires. (To that ancient list, we could add a lengthy modern list.) By the end of the Gospel narrative, the world and darkness become synonymous.

BORN AGAIN

The insertion of John the Baptist at verse 6 of the Prologue, is an indication that the remaining verses apply to the public ministry of Jesus Christ. Verse 11 tells he came to claim his own property. This reference is clearly to the people of Israel. According to Exodus 19:5, Yahweh had said to Israel, “. . . *you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people . . .*” The Prologue tells us that he was not known nor was he accepted: “. . . *The Son of man has nowhere to lay his head*” (Lk. 9:58). The rejection of Jesus was caused by sin that darkened man’s mind, so that he could no longer see the truth and particularly, because of the sin of pride. Pride makes the vision of our true spiritual state unbearable to us. Proud men refuse to admit they are sinners and they will not hear nor heed a call to repentance. Jesus was rejected and hated because his own life was a light revealing the truth of man’s sinful situation . . . that he truly had become a child of darkness. In verse 12, we are informed that not all men rejected Jesus:

ANY WHO DID ACCEPT HIM HE EMPOWERED TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD.

Chapters Thirteen through twenty are addressed to the disciples of Jesus: “*He had loved his own in this world, and would show his love for them to the end*” (Jn. 13:1). As yet, these disciples are not perfect, but they have fulfilled the necessary requirements for discipleship and, more important, for salvation. They are well on their way to being children of the Light, children of God.

THESE ARE THEY WHO BELIEVE IN HIS NAME: WHO WERE BEGOTTEN NOT BY BLOOD, NOR BY CARNAL DESIRE, NOR BY MAN'S WILLING IT, BUT BY GOD. (Ver.13)

For being a disciple of Jesus to becoming a child of God, certain basic conditions are needed. Jesus taught the necessity for a childlike spirit. This I would interpret as a certain basic humility and simplicity expressed by a degree of honesty about self and the world. It is expressed also by a degree of openness to receive, to be changed. This would empower one to make an honest judgment about self, his sinfulness, his imperfections, his need for deliverance and salvation. (Do, in truth, our sins bring us closer to God than our good deeds?) This same basic honesty or humility would lead one to acknowledge that Jesus is a man who does all things well, he is truthful and sincere, he is holy. He offers me the opportunity to be free of sin, to become holy myself. Can he be the Savior of Mankind? Here begins the trial of faith.

Faith is but a mustard seed – it must grow, therefore, it must be fed. “Teacher where do you dwell?” the disciples asked Jesus, and he replied, “Come and see.” How faith in Jesus grows, we will study soon, but its fulfillment is already clear. It must lead a disciple to the belief and profession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the World – “He who takes away the sins of the world.” This is faith in His Name!

Verse 13 teaches that faith, a necessary condition for salvation, only brings us to the desert edge . . . it does not bring us into the Promised Land, Union with the Father. No one begotten by blood, carnal desire, human will can enter the Promised Land. This is a rejection of human nature as it is now as being unacceptable for union with God. A person must be begotten – born again – of God. The sanctity of mankind, the becoming a child of God, is completely a divine work independent of all but the good will of man. This clearly states the need for baptism; we must be born again of water and the Holy Spirit. The result of baptism is complete regeneration; a person becomes a new creation by God. This great good has been made possible because in the Incarnation, God has entered humanity and now humanity, through Jesus Christ, can enter God.

THE INCARNATION

THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND MADE HIS DWELLING AMONG US, AND WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY: THE GLORY OF AN ONLY SON COMING FROM THE FATHER, FILLED WITH ENDURING LOVE. (Ver.14)

Here is stated the fundamental doctrine of Christianity: the Incarnation. Stated by Paul in Philippians 2:6-7: *“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.”* This was unthinkable to Greek thought. They admired the *“Logos”* as the spirit. It would be unthinkable that a real encounter with the *“Logos”* would be in the human flesh. The Prologue does not say that the Word entered into flesh or abided in flesh, but that the Word became flesh – *“flesh”* implies a complete human being. Because of the Incarnation, union with God was now bound within human history and human existence.

In I Jn. 4:2-3, the doctrine of the Incarnation is reaffirmed: *“ . . . every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, while every spirit that fails to acknowledge him does not belong to God.”* John entitled the divine being as the *“Word”* because God was destined to speak to men through His Son. This divine being has assumed human form as the most effective way to speak to men. In becoming man, the Word does not cease being the Word, but becomes God’s *“full expression”* to humanity. A contact with the Word-made-flesh is contact with revelation itself. Jesus is incarnated Wisdom or revelation itself. It is a revelation that the Creator is here present to creatures; and the Creator does not come with empty hands, for He gives light and life and love and resurrection. The Word becomes flesh not only to encounter men and be encountered by them, but to speak to them and be heard by them.

THE DIVINE PRESENCE

The Prologue teaches that the Word made his dwelling among us. This teaches that, though the Word has become *“flesh,”* he has not ceased to be God. The Word is said to *“pitch his tent,”* tenting among us. The theme of *“tenting”* is found in Exod. 25:8-9, where Israel is told to make a tent (a tabernacle) so that God can dwell among His people; the Tabernacle became

the site of God's localized presence on earth. It promised that in the ideal days to come, this tenting among men would be in a special manner. In Joel 4:17: "*Then shall you know that I, the Lord, am your God, dwelling on Zion . . .*" In the ideal Temple described in Ezekiel 43:7, God will make His dwelling in the midst of His people forever: ". . . *here I will dwell among the Israelites forever.*" When the Prologue proclaims that the Word made his dwelling among men, we are being told that the flesh of Jesus Christ is the new localization of God's presence on earth, and that Jesus is the replacement of the ancient Tabernacle. The Gospel presents Jesus as the replacement of the Temple. (*Jn. 2:19-22.*) In Revelations 21:3 and 7:15, we read: "*Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall tabernacle with them . . . and be their God.*" For John, the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ was the first act in the final redemption-drama of the end of time: God's promise was fulfilled, for he had tabernacled with men in the flesh of Jesus Christ and now continues to tabernacle on earth in Christ's resurrection-body, the Church. (*Jn. 2:19-22.*) The Jews boasted that Wisdom tabernacled in the Torah in Israel; John makes a higher claim, namely, that God himself tabernacles with men in Christ and his Church.

"*We have seen his glory*" may be a reference to the apostolic witness suggesting that the hymn refers to the moment when Peter, John, and James witnessed the Transfiguration of Jesus. There is much to say that this is an echo of the Transfiguration. The "*we*" may also apply to "*we who possess the faith of the apostles.*" The glory of Christ in this age is veiled except to the eye of faith; at his coming in his unveiled glory at the end of time, "*Every eye shall see him, even of those who pierced him*" (*Rev. 1:7*). It was only to his disciples that the Incarnate Word manifested his glory. (*Jn. 2:11.*) The fundamental biblical meaning of glory, "*doxa*" is "*the visible brightness of the divine presence;*" this visible brightness of God's presence in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, when he dwelt with men, is recorded in Exodus. This "*visible*" brightness of God's presence was not in this age withdrawn, but the Scriptures promised that it would be restored in the latter day: "*Greater will be the future glory of this house than the former . . .*" (*Hag. 2:7-9*). John claims that for the eye of faith, this promise is already fulfilled. The invisible God has been revealed in Christ. The Fourth Gospel makes considerable play upon the idea of "*seeing*" with the natural eye (reason) and "*seeing*" with the eye of faith. John denies that "*seeing is believing.*" He would say, rather, that believing is seeing.

As the Prologue draws to an end, it desires to indicate the Incarnation is the supreme religion even within the history of salvation. All that occurred before, in Moses and on Mt. Sinai, pale to insignificance in the light of the *“Word made Flesh.”*

John speaks of the Incarnation as, *“THE GLORY OF AN ONLY SON COMING FROM THE FATHER” (Ver. 14b)*. (In John’s writings, only Jesus is referred to as the Son of God; all the rest are *“children of God.”*) In chapter 17:22, Jesus speaks of having been given glory by the Father: *“I have given them the glory you gave me. . . .”* In chapter 5:44, Jesus attacks the Jews for not seeking the glory which comes from the One God: *“How can people like you believe, when you accept praise from one another yet do not seek the glory that comes from the One God.”* In other words, do not seek the Incarnate Word who came *“. . . filled with enduring love” (Ver. 14b)*.

The expression, *“enduring love,”* is born from the Greek words, *“charis,”* meaning *“gift,”* and *“aletheia,”* signifying *“truth.”* The unique usage of these words indicate an attempt to express in Greek, the Hebrew concept *“hesed”* and *“emet.”* In Exodus 34:6, we read this description of Yahweh when he establishes his covenant with Moses on Mt. Sinai: *“. . . the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and rich in ‘hesed’ and ‘emet’ . . .”* *“Hesed”* indicates God’s kindness in choosing Israel without any merit on the part of Israel, and God’s love for Israel expressed in making a Covenant with Israel. *“Emet”* expresses God’s faithfulness to his covenant promises. The Essenes of Qumran believed their religious community was a Covenant of Hesed.

Verse 16 is proof that the Word who had become Flesh was in truth filled with enduring love: *“Of this fullness we have all had a share”*; all mankind was invited to share in this fullness. The Incarnation was love following upon love. In other words, *“hesed”* following upon *“hesed”* – covenant following upon covenant – the New Covenant following upon the Mt. Sinai Covenant. *“FOR WHILE THE LAW WAS GIVEN THROUGH MOSES, THIS ENDURING LOVE CAME THROUGH JESUS CHRIST” (Verse 17)*. In John’s mind, the covenant of Mt. Sinai was not the eternal *“hesed”* and *“emet”*; the Incarnation was.

“NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN GOD.” Verse 18a clearly expresses the superiority of what has come through Jesus. The relationship of Moses with

God is contrasted with the relationship of Jesus with God. In Exodus 33:18, Moses requested to see God's glory, but the Lord says, ". . . *my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives*" (Ex. 33:20). John indicates Jesus' superiority by indicating that "*THE ONLY SON*" has not only seen God, but is ever at his side: "*IT IS GOD THE ONLY SON, EVER AT THE FATHER'S SIDE, WHO HAS REVEALED HIM*" (Ver. 18b). "*Ever at the Father's side*" literally is translated, "the one who is in the bosom of the Father." This expression connotes "affection." Some believe the reference to the Son at the Father's side is a reference to the Ascension. Thus, the whole career of the Word is sketched in the Prologue.

The word "*revealed*" as a verb has the meaning "to lead." Therefore, this could teach that Jesus leads men into the Father's bosom, into His affection, His divine love. Thus, although no one has ever seen God, the Only Son who is with the Father has led men into the Father's bosom. And so, the Word who was with God had come down to earth and become man in order to lead men back to God.

In truth, the Prologue is more than a hymn; it is an overture sounding the themes to be expressed throughout the Fourth Gospel.

CHAPTER 3

JOHN THE BAPTIST

INTRODUCTION

THERE WAS A MAN NAMED JOHN SENT BY GOD, WHO CAME AS A WITNESS TO TESTIFY TO THE LIGHT, SO THAT THROUGH HIM ALL MEN MIGHT BELIEVE BUT ONLY TO TESTIFY TO THE LIGHT, FOR HE HIMSELF WAS NOT THE LIGHT. THE REAL LIGHT WHICH GIVES LIGHT TO EVERY MAN WAS COMING INTO THE WORLD. (Jn. 1:6-7)

THE TESTIMONY JOHN GAVE WHEN THE JEWS SENT PRIESTS AND LEVITES FROM JERUSALEM TO ASK, "WHO ARE YOU?" WAS THE DIRECT STATEMENT, "I AM NOT THE MESSIAH." THEY QUESTIONED HIM FURTHER, "WHO, THEN? ELIJAH?" "I AM NOT ELIJAH," HE ANSWERED. "ARE YOU THE PROPHET?" "NO," HE REPLIED. . . . THOSE WHOM THE PHARISEES HAD SENT PROCEEDED TO QUESTION HIM FURTHER: "IF YOU ARE NOT THE MESSIAH, NOR ELIJAH, NOR THE PROPHET, WHY DO YOU BAPTIZE?" JOHN ANSWERED THEM, "I BAPTIZE WITH WATER. THERE IS ONE AMONG YOU WHOM YOU DO NOT RECOGNIZE – THE ONE WHO IS TO COME AFTER ME – THE STRAP OF WHOSE SANDAL I AM NOT WORTHY TO UNFASTEN." THIS HAPPENED IN BETHANY, ACROSS THE JORDAN, WHERE JOHN WAS BAPTIZING. ". . . I CONFESS I DID NOT RECOGNIZE HIM, THOUGH THE VERY REASON I CAME BAPTIZING WITH WATER WAS THAT HE MIGHT BE REVEALED TO ISRAEL. . . . BUT I DID NOT RECOGNIZE HIM. THE ONE WHO SENT ME TO BAPTIZE WITH WATER TOLD ME, 'WHEN YOU SEE THE SPIRIT DESCEND AND REST ON SOMEONE, IT IS HE WHO IS TO BAPTIZE WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.' NOW I HAVE SEEN FOR MYSELF AND

HAVE TESTIFIED, 'THIS IS GOD'S CHOSEN ONE'" (Ver. 19-34).

THE NEXT DAY JOHN WAS THERE AGAIN WITH TWO OF HIS DISCIPLES. AS HE WATCHED JESUS WALK BY HE SAID, "LOOK! THERE IS THE LAMB OF GOD." THE TWO DISCIPLES HEARD WHAT HE SAID, AND FOLLOWED JESUS. (Ver.35-37.)

Many themes within the Fourth Gospel are being expressed within the dramatic framework of a trial. A legal vocabulary, such as testimony, interrogation, confession and witness is prevalent throughout the Gospel. It may be called the TRIAL OF THE WORD: THE WORD vs. THE WORLD. The word of God has been spoken to men and the world has challenged the Truth of the Word. Perhaps we could say at this point, John the Evangelist is both a defense attorney and court recorder.

The Gospel opens with the interrogation and testimony of the first witness, John the Baptist. The Prosecution itself had solicited the testimony. We read, ". . . the Jews [the Pharisees in Ver.24] sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John, 'Who are you?'" Jesus himself later made references to this interview: "You sent messengers to John, and he gave his testimony to the truth: not that I depend on human testimony: no, it is for your salvation that I speak of this" (Jn. 5:33).

The very fact that the testimony of this man was sought, given and referred to by Jesus Christ, indicates something of the unique greatness and importance of John the Baptist. What kind of a man was this first witness?

St. Luke tells us that he came from a fine family and was an answer to prayers. His father, Zechariah, was a priest and his mother, Elizabeth, was a descendant of Aaron, the brother of Moses. Elizabeth was a cousin of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. The birth of John was foretold to Zechariah in the Temple by an angel:

But the angel said to him, "Zechariah, do not be afraid, your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you must name him John. . . . He will be great in the sight of the Lord . . . Even from his mother's womb he will be filled with the Holy

Spirit, and he will bring back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him . . . preparing for the Lord a people fit for him” (Lk. 1:13-17).*

At his birth, his family and their friends wondered, “*What will this child turn out to be?*” (Lk. 1:66*). On the day of his circumcision, his father Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied:

And you, little child, you shall be called Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way for him. To give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins; this by the tender mercy of our God who from on high will bring the rising Sun to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Lk. 1:76-79)*

The echo of these thoughts are recorded in verse 6 of the Prologue:

There was a man named John sent by God, who came as a witness to testify to the light, so that through him all men might believe – but only to testify to the light for he himself was not the light. The real light which gives light to every man was coming into the world.

The Evangelist emphasizes that although John has a unique greatness, it cannot be compared with the greatness of Jesus. Luke, also, makes this same point by following the birth of John with the birth of Jesus. The very fact that both evangelists found this necessary, again reveals something of the importance and power of John the Baptist.

The Scriptures clearly tell us that John, before birth, was marked for a special divine mission by God. Father Faber wrote of him: “*He had a blessed inability to attach himself to the things of the earth.*” Since the world and the son of Zechariah were incompatible, they divorced. St. Luke ends John’s infancy narrative with, “*He lived in the desert until the day when he made his public appearance in Israel*” (Lk. 1:80). The desert housed him; she bedded him in her sands; hid him in her caves; fed him from her meager store, locust and wild honey. And, God’s Presence was in the air he breathed. John was not just of the desert, he was a desert. Luke wrote: “*The child grew up and*

matured in spirit.” As the desert suffers no life within it to grow but its own, so John, son of Zechariah, had nothing, wanted nothing, permitted nothing to grow in him that was not planted and willed by God. And so, John the Baptist came to spiritual maturity.

THE ESSENES AND QUMRAN

John and God were not alone in that desert. They shared this wilderness with other godly men, the Essenes. In the Palestine of our Lord’s time, there were three important religious groups: The Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. The discovery of the Scrolls at Qumran in 1948 opened to the modern world a lifestyle and spirituality of 2000 years ago. Some 400 manuscripts of non-biblical material, giving us a rich cross-section of the literature of the time, was found. We have, for the first time, the original Hebrew or Aramaic text of some books preserved formerly only in Greek. Many books of the Bible or sections of them were found. Every book of the Old Testament was represented with the exception of Esther. Large pieces of Tobias and Sirach in their own original language were uncovered. Parts of certain apocryphal works of the Old Testament were discovered – the Book of Jubilees and the Testaments of the Patriarchs. The Book of Enoch was found.

Qumran is located below Jericho overlooking the Dead Sea. The Area is known as the wilderness, the Judean Desert. It is here John the Baptist lived, it is here where Jesus spent “forty days” preparing for his public ministry. At Qumran is the ruins of a monastery occupied by the Essenes from around 150 B.C. until June 68 A.D. Here, around two hundred members of the community lived. The Essenes were convinced that they were the sole elect, the sons of light, and that all other men were sons of darkness and would be condemned.

The discovery of the Qumran Scrolls has emphasized how strong and how alive, at this time, was the expectation of the Messianic Age. The Messiah was expected. These writings also reveal how diverse were the thoughts concerning the Messiah.

The Essenes defended their existence in the desert by a quotation from Isaiah, 40:3-5:

A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; The rugged land shall be made plain, the rough country a broad valley. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all mankind shall see it together.

The passage originally referred to the role of the angels like a modern bulldozer preparing a superhighway for Israel to return from Babylonian captivity to the land of Palestine. In the days of the Essenes, it had assumed a spiritual interpretation. Men withdrew from the world, the society of men corrupted by sin and darkness, to prepare their lives for the coming Messiahs. Under leadership of the Teacher of Righteousness, they lived a strict communal life given over to ascetical practices and devotion to the Scriptures. They considered themselves as a New Covenant Community serving as a means for the entrances of the Messiahs.

The Essenes earned their livelihood by labor. Each new member, admitted only after several years of probation, contributed his wealth to the treasures of the Community. They had all things in common. The Essenes refrained from the worship and sacrifice of the Temple because they did not recognize the legitimacy of the then Temple priesthood. The Essenes possessed great devotion to the Scriptures. They spent one third of each night in the study of the Scriptures. As the author of the Book of Sirach, they drew waters of wisdom from the well of Scripture to water the garden of their spirit. Sirach writes:

For deeper than the sea are her thoughts; . . . Now I, like a rivulet from her stream, channeling the waters into a garden, said to myself, "I will water my plants, my flower bed I will drench"; and suddenly, this rivulet of mine became a river, then this stream of mine, a sea. Thus do I send my teachings forth shining like the dawn, to become known afar off. (Sir. 24:27-30)

There is no reason to believe that all the Essenes lived at Qumran. The Jewish Historian, Josephus (who himself was once a postulant of the community but later left and became a Pharisee), tells us that there were groups of Essenes throughout the country. We do know that no sleeping quarters have been found in the Qumran buildings, and it is believed that they slept in the nearby caves but ate and studied at the center. It could

equally well be that Qumran was the center to which they came from time to time, rather than the residence of most of the community. Of their piety and austerity of life there can be no doubt. The Qumran Community was a very spiritual group; one of the finest flowerings of Old Testament spirituality.

We read in their Rule that there shall be established a community council consisting of twelve laymen and three priests. These men must be perfect, exact, and faithful in the observance of all that has been revealed by God. They must deal with all members of the community in a devoted and humble way.

By deeds of justice and purifying trials, their contrite spirits will make up for the guilt of Israel, atoning for the guilt of rebellion and the malice of sin. These men will form a spiritual temple – *“the holy of holies for Aaron.”* Their presence will be a sure and lasting foundation for the Holy Spirit within the community. Their lives of integrity and praise will be a sacrificial offering, sweet and acceptable to God – better than the burnt offerings of sheep and goats. Around these men will develop and grow the children of light. They will continue as an *“eternal planting”* . . . a reference to Isaiah 60:21*: *“Your people will all be upright, possessing the land for ever; a shoot that Yahweh has planted, my handiwork, designed for beauty.”* The community must continue on in existence according to the pristine rule until *“the coming of the prophet and of the messiahs of Aaron and of Israel”* (Is. 9:3-8; 10-11). (Three Messiahs: (1) Prophet like Moses; (2) Messiah of Aaron – a priestly messiah of the Aaronic-Zadokite priestly line; (3) The Messiah of Israel, the Son of David who was the traditional figure of the Messiah.)

After the destruction of Qumran in 68 A.D., many of them must have been brought into the Church. They would have brought with them their own way of speaking and something of their way of life. It is possible that the group of men converted by Paul at *Ephesus* (*“There were about twelve of these men”* [Acts 19:7*].) were a group of Essenes.

Some scholars believe that John the Baptist belonged to the Essenes. The passages about *“the voice of one crying in the wilderness”* and *“prepare the way of the Lord”* are thoughts common both to the Essenes and John the Baptist. Baptism with water was practiced by both. Of course, this does not prove John was an Essene. Even if he had been at one time, he would have been excommunicated for his preaching that called all sinners to repentance

and salvation. Qumran was a closed community. Their enemies, the sons of darkness, were not to be converted, but destroyed.

It is highly possible that John, during his maturing years in the desert, was influenced by the Essenes and that the matured man, John the Baptist, made a profound impression on many of the Essenes.

When the Spirit of the Lord moved him, John came plowing across a sea of sand like a steel ship girded for battle. He was like a desert wind . . . hot, dry, uncontaminated. Sent not to refresh and nourish, but to burn and purify. He was a torch fired by God an hour before the dawn. Not to illumine, but to enkindle and burn . . . to enkindle in the hearts of men a love for things above the physical, to burn away, with his penances and repentance, the chains that moored the human spirit in darkness and sin. His was not a vocation to possess men, but to dispossess the lives of men of spirits hostile to God.

John appeared at the desert edge – across the River Jordan – as barren and as stripped as the land that nourished him. As St. Mark wrote: *“John was clothed in camel’s hair, and wore a leather belt around his waist. His food was grasshoppers and wild honey”* (1:6). (In II Kings, we have this description of Elijah’s dress. *“Wearing a hairy garment . . . with a leather girdle about his loins”* (2 Kgs. 1:8). Jesus said, *“ . . . John appeared neither eating nor drinking, and people say, ‘He is mad!’”* (Mat. 11:18).

As we read in the Scriptures, he was a man sent by God. Jesus confirmed:

A prophet indeed, and something more! It is about this man that Scripture says, “I send my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way before you: a herald’s voice in the desert crying, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path!’” (Is. 40:3).

St. Mark writes: *“Thus it was that John the Baptizer appeared in the desert, proclaiming a baptism of repentance which led to the forgiveness of sins. All the Judean countryside and the people of Jerusalem went out to him in great numbers. They were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins”* (1:4-5).

The crowds asked him, “What ought we to do?” In reply, he said, “Let the man with two coats give to him who has none. The man

who has food should do the same.” Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what are we to do?” He answered them, “Exact nothing over and above your fixed amount.” Soldiers likewise asked him, “What about us?” He told them, “Don’t bully anyone. Denounce no one falsely. Be content with your pay” (Lk. 3:10-14).

When he saw that many of the Pharisees and Sadducees were stepping forward for this bath, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who told you to flee from the wrath to come? Give some evidence that you mean to reform. Do not pride yourself on the claim, ‘Abraham is our father.’ I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these very stones. Even now the ax is laid to the root of the tree. Every tree that is not fruitful will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mat. 3:7-10).

His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear the threshing floor and gather his grain into the barn, but the chaff he will burn in unquenchable fire! (Mat. 3:12)

Using exhortation of this sort, he preached the good news to the people. (Lk. 3:18)

The people were full of anticipation, wondering in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah. (Lk. 3:15)

Later, Jesus, coming from Galilee, appeared before John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to refuse him with the protest, “I should be baptized by you, yet you come to me!” Jesus answered, “Give in for now. We must do this if we would fulfill all of God’s demands” (Mat. 3:13-15).

Later, Jesus said of John, “John was a lamp alight and shining and for a time you were content to enjoy the light he gave” (Jn. 5:35). “I solemnly assure you, history has not known a man born of woman greater than John the Baptizer . . . If you are prepared to accept it, he is Elijah, the one who was certain to come” (Mat. 11:11-14).*

THE WITNESS

The Fourth Gospel opens with a three-day encounter with John the Baptist. The thoughts expressed here were summarized in verses six through nine of the Prologue: John is not the light; he testifies to the light; men come to believe in the light through his testimony.

John is presented primarily because of the importance of his testimony. He was a prophet sent by God to announce that the Kingdom of God was at hand. He was accepted by the people as such. But more than this, he was God's personal human representative to verify that Jesus is God's Chosen One. Secondarily, the testimony of John is presented to counteract the teachings of certain men that John was the Messiah and Jesus was John's disciple.

When the committee from Jerusalem questioned him, "*Who are you?*" he replies negatively, "*I am not the Messiah!*" They then asked, "*Who, then? Elijah?*" We know from the question put to Jesus, "*Why do the scribes claim that Elijah must come first?*" (Mk. 9:11), that the Rabbis taught Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Prophet Malachi had written: "*Lo, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day . . .*" (Mal. 3:23). This is confirmed in the Book of Sirach:

How awesome are you, Elijah! Whose glory is equal to yours? . . . You were taken aloft in a whirlwind, in a chariot with fiery horses. You are destined, it is written, in time to come to put an end to wrath before the day of the Lord . . . (Sir. 48:4-10).

The Book of Enoch (a religious work written in the second century before Christ but not considered scriptural) pictures the return of Elijah before the judgment and before the appearance of the great apocalyptic lamb that will destroy sin on the earth.

The dress of John the Baptist was like that of Elijah. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God was at hand and judgment would follow. Yet, he denied he was Elijah. Jesus said John was Elijah! Elijah was expected to return in person, in the flesh. John the Baptist accepted this belief. His conscious

awareness told him that he was John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. It would have been a conscious fraud for him to have claimed to be Elijah. Jesus realized that Elijah had returned in power and spirit in John. (*Lk. 1:17*.) In his humility, John did not see himself in this role.

John was then asked, “*Are you the Prophet?*” “No,” he replied. This question was asked because Moses had foretold that God would again raise up a prophet like himself. We read in Deuteronomy 18:18,19:

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him. If any man will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it.”

“*A prophet like you*” became known as “*the*” prophet. As Moses had established the governing laws of the community regarding judges, kings, priests, prophets, it was expected that “*the*” prophet would establish laws and solve legal problems as Moses had done. The Essenes at Qumran were told to cling to the Torah and the ancient laws of the community until “*the prophet*” – presumably the “*Prophet like Moses*” – came.

In Acts 3:22, Peter identifies Jesus Christ as the “*Prophet like Moses.*” Jesus Christ certainly assumed this role. He made laws; he changed legislation; he gave new directives:

You have heard the commandment imposed on your forefathers. What I tell you is . . . (Mat. 5:33).

“Then why did Moses command divorce and the promulgation of a divorce decree?” “Because of your stubbornness, Moses let you divorce your wives . . . I now say to you . . .” (Mat. 19:7-9).

The people commented that Jesus spoke as one having authority. (I’m sure four hundred years later, Mohammed saw himself as the fulfillment of this prophecy.)

The legalist from Jerusalem now inquired why John performed a messianic action as baptism if he did not fulfill a messianic role. John answered, “*I am a voice in the desert, crying out: Make straight the way of the Lord.*”

Though John does not identify with one of the three recognized messianic roles, he does see himself as fulfilling a messianic role. John knows his role is to prepare “*a way*” for the Messiah to come to his people. By his baptizing and preaching in the desert, he endeavors to open up the hearts of men, level their pride, awaken their desire for God and thus be prepared to receive the Messiah when he comes.

John defends his baptizing ministry by indicating that it was but a preparatory ritual of penance. He was preparing men to receive a baptism of the Holy Spirit from God’s chosen One who was already at hand. One of the purposes of John’s baptism was to reveal the Messiah. John testifies, “*The one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘When you see the Spirit descend and rest on someone, it is he who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit’*” (Jn. 1:33).

The Scriptures had clearly foretold a coming baptism that would bring inner regeneration. The Prophet Ezekiel writes:

Thus says the Lord God: Not for your sakes do I act, house of Israel, but for the sake of my holy name, which you profaned among the nations . . . I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities . . . I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees. (Eze. 36:22-28)

The Prophet Zechariah writes these prophetic words:

I will pour out on the House of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and petition; and they shall look on him whom they have thrust through, and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son, and they shall grieve over him as one grieves over a first-born . . . on that day there shall be open to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a fountain to purify from sin and uncleanness . . . I will also take away . . . the spirit of uncleanness from the land. (Zech. 12:10; 13:2)

The Essenes of Qumran taught that “*God will cleanse man through a holy*

spirit and will sprinkle upon him a spirit of truth as purifying water.”

When John the Baptist says, *“There is one among you whom you do not recognize – I confess I did not recognize him, though the very reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel,”* he expressed the concept of the *“hidden messiah.”* The popular traditional belief was that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of the House of David; but alongside this tradition, another developed – that the origin of the Messiah would be hidden. We hear the people saying about Jesus, *“We know where this man is from. When the Messiah comes, no one is supposed to know his origins.”* At this, Jesus, who was teaching in the temple area, cried out,

So you know me, and you know my origins? The truth is I have not come of myself. I was sent by One who has the right to send, and him you do not know. I know him because it is from him I come; he sent me. (Jn. 7:27-29)

Here, Jesus confirms this concept of the hidden messiah, but illustrates that it is not the natural origin of the Messiah that is unknown, but the divine origin. When Peter acknowledged that Jesus was *“the Christ, the Son of the living God,”* Jesus teaches that this was a divine revelation to Peter. What both John and Jesus are indicating is that Jesus will never be recognized by man without the grace of the Father. *“No one comes to me, unless the Father draw him.”*

THE SECOND DAY

In the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, on the second day, John gives his great witness of Jesus. We read: *“The next day, when John caught sight of Jesus coming toward him, he exclaimed,*

Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! It is he of whom I said, ‘After me is to come a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ‘ . . . I saw the Spirit descent like a dove from the sky and it came to rest on him.’ ‘ . . . It is he who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit . . . This is God’s chosen One’” (Jn. 1:29-34).

In these verses (29-33), the writer has John the Baptist express an entire

Christology. Jesus is revealed as one who takes away the sin of the world: He is a pre-existing being; He is the channel of the Holy Spirit and the Chosen One of God.

When John exclaims, *“Look!”* he is using a scriptural formula for revelation. A messenger of God sees a person and cries, *“Look!”* – then the seer reveals the mystery of the person’s mission. In the Old Testament, when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said to him, *“Look! Here is the man . . . who will rule over my people!”*

When John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the *“Lamb,”* he probably had in mind a popular Jewish symbolism in reference to the final judgment, in which the figure of a conquering lamb destroys evil in the world. . . . He is pictured as overcoming evil beasts by crushing them underfoot. Such a figure appears in the Book of Revelation: *“They will fight against the Lamb but the Lamb will conquer them, for he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings”* (Rev. 17:14). The picture of a destroying lamb fits in well with the preaching of John the Baptist: *“Who told you to flee from the wrath to come? Every tree that is not fruitful will be cut down and thrown into the fire . . . the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire”* (Lk. 3:7,9,17). John most probably beheld Jesus as the lamb raised up by God to destroy evil.

Nevertheless, the writer, John the Evangelist, probably beheld a different symbolism in the lamb. John may have well intended to teach that Jesus was the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. Isaiah uses a lamb as a symbol of the Suffering Servant: *“Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter . . . he was silent and opened not his mouth”* (Is. 53:7). This may especially be true in light of the fact that Jesus is pictured as the channel of the Holy Spirit. God says of his servant in Isaiah: *“Look! Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased. Upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations . . .”* (Is. 42:1). Again, we read in Isaiah: *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted . . .”* (Is. 61:1).

John the Baptist revealed the mystery of Jesus’ mission. Jesus will remove the sin of the world. In the Greek, this use of the singular *“sin”* carries a different meaning than the plural usage of *“sins.”* The singular signifies a *“sinful state,”* whereas the plural indicates, *“sinful acts.”* The mission of

Jesus is to remove the sinful condition of the human race. He is to remove not only sins, but the cause of sin.

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

The early Christian Community beheld Jesus as the Lamb who takes away sin through his death. Paul says, "*Christ, our Passover has been sacrificed*" (1 Cor. 5:7). In Revelations, John speaks of the Lamb as slain: ". . . *for you were slain. With your blood you purchased for God men of every race and tongue, of every people and nation*" (Rev. 5:6,9). In the Passion Narrative, John makes several references to the Paschal lamb and the Passover Feast.

In verse 31, John the Baptist stated "*the very reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.*" (Israel here does not mean the Jewish People, but the children of God, those who believe.) God informed John that, ". . . *when you see the Spirit descend and rest on someone, he is the one who is to baptize with a Holy Spirit*" (Ver. 33). He is the "*Chosen One of God.*" John the Evangelist understood the impact of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon a person – it marked him to be the Messiah, the Servant of Yahweh. Isaiah had written: "*But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him*" (Is. 11:1-2).

When John writes that he saw the spirit "*rest on him,*" he uses a word for "*rest*" – Menein, which expresses a permanent indwelling. . . . The Spirit would permanently remain with Jesus. This was an essential moment in the salvation of mankind. We read in Genesis that God withdrew his Spirit from man: "*My spirit shall not remain in man forever, since he is but flesh. His days shall comprise one hundred and twenty years*" (Gen. 6:3). Because of disobedience, sin entered the world and God withdrew his spirit.

At the Baptism of Jesus, the Spirit returned. When Jesus stepped into the waters for baptism, he who was without sin, was taking sin on himself – he identified himself with sinful humanity. Since the fruit of sin is death, Jesus committed himself, freely and willfully, to die for the sins of men. He did this because He understood this to be God's will. He would be obedient unto death. It was this obedience that confirmed him as God's Son: "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" It was this obedience that restored the Holy Spirit permanently to humanity in Jesus Christ.

THE THIRD DAY

All of the evangelists use the symbol of the dove for the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the hovering of the Spirit over the primeval waters in Genesis 1:2 suggested the hovering of a bird. Certainly John saw this as a new Genesis – the creative life of God was returning – it was hovering over the waters of baptism. Again in Genesis, it was a dove that signified to Noah that a new beginning was about to be inaugurated on the face of the earth. The waters of the flood had washed sin from the face of the earth. The Evangelist tells us, *“The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. As he watched Jesus walk by he said, ‘Look! There is the Lamb of God.’ The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus” (35-37).*

In the synagogue at Antioch Pisidia, Saint Paul preached:

As John’s career was coming to an end, he would say, “What you suppose me to be I am not. Rather, look for the one who comes after me. I am not worthy to unfasten the sandals on his feet.” When it was reported to John the Baptist that many of his disciples were leaving him to follow Jesus, he replied, “He must increase and I must decrease.”

He was quite content to be thus abandoned. He looked at Jesus and his disciples from a distance. He did what he was sent to do and that done, he stepped aside. At the end of it all, John gave love’s supreme testimony; he was imprisoned and then killed because he went on giving witness to the truth to the very end. He was imprisoned, beheaded and abandoned. When his death was reported to Jesus, we are told he left the crowd and went away to be alone . . . *“When Jesus heard this, he withdrew by boat from there to a deserted place by himself” (Mat. 14:13).*

John still preaches to us . . . not with words, but by example. His life is one of the shiniest examples of pure love and disinterested zeal. His delight was not to enjoy the personal presence of Christ, but to work for God and His Son. He was a saint and servant whose love was expressed by serving. He did what the Father wanted. The command of the Lord was his will. He took more delight in giving joy to Christ than in his own enjoyment of Christ. Of John, God could truly say, *“I have found a man after my own heart, who does all that I ask of him.”*

CHAPTER 4
THE FIRST DISCIPLES
INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Gospel relates a discussion between the disciples over a discourse given by Jesus. It occurs only a few hours before the death of Our Lord. They . . .

. . . asked one another, "What can he mean, 'within a short time you will lose sight of me, but soon after that you will see me'? And did he not say that he is going back to the Father?" They kept asking, "What does he mean by this 'short time?' We do not know what he is talking about" (Jn. 16:17-18).

Later that same evening, the disciples exclaimed:

"At last you are speaking plainly . . . without talking in veiled language! We are convinced that you know everything. . . . We do indeed believe you came from God." Jesus answered them, "Do you really believe? An hour is coming – has indeed already come – when you will be scattered and each will go his way, leaving me quite alone" (Jn. 16:29-32).

After Jesus' death and resurrection, he appears to the Apostle Thomas and says,

"Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe!" Thomas said in response, "My Lord and My God." Jesus then said to him, "You became a believer because you saw me. Blest are they who have not seen [visible signs] and have believed" (Jn. 20:27-29).

The Apostles came only to the fullness of faith after the Resurrection and

reception of the Holy Spirit. In chapter one of the Fourth Gospel, John recounts a few scenes in which one apostle after the other makes a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Within eleven verses, the belief of the early Church concerning Jesus Christ is expressed. John obviously uses, in the very first Chapter, this literary device to clarify what faith in Jesus implies.

FAITH IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

As faith is primary with John, it is of primary importance that we understand what he means by Faith. Being a believer (ho pisteiron) and being a disciple are synonymous. Faith is the primary factor in becoming a disciple, a Christian. John never uses a noun (pistis) to express faith. He uses the verb (Pisteuein) 107 times. In the rest of the New Testament, the noun “pistis” appears 243 times more than the verb. Faith for John is a verb because Faith expresses activity. What we do and to whom we are committed expresses our faith. John prefers the active verb because he believes faith to be more of an active commitment than a mental or spiritual disposition. Truly, belief must become incarnationalized.

Faith relates to a person. John speaks of “*believing in*” (pisteuein ein) a person. Thirty-one times John relates faith to Jesus (to believe in Jesus), three times to believe in the Name of Jesus, and two times to believe in the Father. Faith for John means to accept “*Jesus, Son of Joseph from Nazareth*” for what he claims to be: the revelation of God. It involves much more than trust or confidence in a Person, it demands a commitment to Jesus expressed by a dedication of one’s life to him. This commitment is not emotional, though it may be made with emotion. It is the surrender of one’s will to God through obedience to Jesus. It demands a willingness to respond to God’s demands as manifested by Jesus – it is perfectly expressed by perfect obedience.

“*To be baptized in His Name*” is to take a step by which one passes into the absolute ownership by Christ. Henceforth, allegiance is owed to Christ. It is not merely to accept the claim of Christ over one’s life by an intellectual assent, but to give allegiance and obedience to Christ. (There is no question that faith in Jesus implies being baptized – because Jesus demanded baptism.)

For John, there is no conflict between faith and works. To have faith in Jesus is the “*work*” demanded by the Father. “*This is the work of God: have faith in*

the One whom he sent” (Jn. 6:29).

The practical effect of faith is that one “*stands firm*” in one’s relationship to Jesus Christ. To stand firm implies to rely firmly upon him . . . the rains came, the winds blew, but the house did not fall for it is built upon rock. In the Old Testament, a war-horse symbolizes the firmness of faith. The man of faith must stand firm as the war horse: “*He jubilantly paws the plain and rushes in his might against the weapons. He laughs at fear and cannot be deterred; he turns not back from the sword*” (Job 39:21-22).

If one does not stand firm in the faith, one will not be made firm – will not receive the power to resist the enemy. The Lord said to Ahaz, King of Judah, “*Unless your faith is firm, you shall not be firm!*” (Is. 7:9). “*It is your faith that overcomes the world.*” We read in John’s First Letter: “*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God*” (1 Jn. 5:1). “*Everyone begotten of God conquers the world, and the power that has conquered the world is this faith of ours. Who, then, is the conqueror of the world? The one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God*” (1 Jn. 5:4-5).

“*When anyone acknowledges (by allegiance) that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him and he in God*” (1 Jn. 4:15). Remember, for John, faith in Jesus always means to stand firm in the will of God as revealed through Jesus Christ. This is the faith that begets eternal life.

TRUTH IN THE FORTH GOSPEL

According to John, to know God is to grasp ultimate reality, the final reality – life eternal. The Final Reality is what exists when all other things have passed away. This is “*The Truth*” . . . the reality that endures forever. “*Truth*” for John has the quality of eternal endurance – anything that passes away or ceases to be is but a shadow of truth. Truth is the real and complete state of affairs. Christ declares truth and He is Truth, the revelation of eternal reality.

Truth always implies more than a mental representative of actual reality. We must be grounded in truth. This means to be grounded in God. In the usual teacher-student relationship, a teacher can impart knowledge and the student can learn without much interpersonal involvement. Not so between Jesus and his disciples. To know the eternal truth, a disciple must not only believe the

truth Jesus teaches, but he must in some way be united to the Word who is Truth. Knowledge of God involves a personal union with Jesus Christ. Is this not why Teresa of Avila teaches that only in prayer can we truly come to know God? True prayer is union with God.

When John uses the word “*truth*” as an adjective (Alethes and alethanos) as in “*the true light*” (1:9), “*the true bread*” (6:32) and “*the true vine*,” it carries the meaning of the only real. In other words, the only real light, the only real bread and the only real vine. Remember “real” implies for John “*eternal*.” Therefore, he teaches us that Jesus is the eternal light, eternal bread, and the eternal vine.

In certain passages within the Gospel, John uses a particular Greek adjective for “*true*” (alethes). This word carries the meaning of truth despite the appearances of things. It is used in statements that are difficult to believe. Despite how the circumstance may challenge the sense or the intellect, the statement is true . . . it is eternally true! We find an example of this usage in 6:55: “*For my flesh is real food and my blood real drink.*” Again it occurs in the conclusion of the Gospel: “*it is this same disciple who is the witness to these things; it is he who wrote them down and his testimony, we know, is true.*”

Remember, John expresses the concept that only that which is of God is eternally true, the ultimately real . . . is going to last and endure. We read in I Jn. 2:16:

For nothing that the world affords comes from the Father. Carnal allurements, enticements for the eye, the life of empty show – all these are from the world. And the world with its seductions is passing away, but the man who does God’s will endures forever.

Since Satan is completely divorced from God, the Eternal Reality – Truth – is alien to Satan. He has no ground in Truth. He does not merely lie; he has become a lie – a denial of Divine Reality, of Truth and of Love. It is of his essence to be a lie.

SEEING IN JOHN

Jesus said to Martha, “*If you have faith, you will see the Glory of God.*” Jesus implies that faith imparts a spiritual vision. Call it the eye of faith. Faith sees

the hidden Presence of God. When Christ was on earth, those who had faith were able to see in Jesus, and all he did, the hidden Glory of God. They were able to apprehend and acknowledge God in the humanity of Jesus.

When John writes of “*seeing*,” he is speaking of “believing” in Jesus. He uses five different Greek verbs to express “seeing.” John deliberately used different verbs to indicate degrees of belief. Some people believe only what they see, what their senses present to them. Others are able to see beneath sense phenomenon and come to some in-depth insight, but still not to total understanding of what transpires. Some, by an intuitive vision, are able to penetrate into the depths and behold the divine reality. These are the ones with the faith that enables them “*to see the Glory of God.*”

Some examples of seeing (blepein) but not believing: Mary Magdalene “sees” the stone rolled back – she “sees” the gardener, but she does not “see” that Jesus has risen; she does not see the Risen Christ. The blind man “sees” men walking around like trees. That is all he sees.

Some men came to a belief (theorein) in Jesus, but their degree of faith was unacceptable to Jesus. It was not a saving faith. John expresses this belief in the following examples:

While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name, for they could see the signs he was performing. (Jn. 2:23)

“Sir,” answered the woman, “I can see you are a prophet” (Jn. 4:19).

A vast crowd kept following him because they saw the signs he was performing for the sick. (Jn. 6:2; also 6:19)

Some examples of intuitive insight acceptable to Jesus:

Do you believe [horan with ideim] just because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? (Jn. 1:50)

I solemnly assure you, we are talking about what we know, we are testifying to what we have seen, but you do not accept our

testimony. (Jn. 3:11. Also 3:32; 9:40; 14:7,9; 19:35,37 and 20:29)

In verse 16:16*, we have an example of two kinds of seeing: one expressing an inadequate faith, the other the fullness of faith:

In a short time, you will no longer see [theoria] me [lose their faith], and then a short time later, you will see [horan] me again.

The last indicates the fullness of faith coming with the Resurrection.

We have already observed how John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus. In his mind, “*the Lamb of God*” was equivalent to the kingly Messiah. When he cried, “*Look! There is the Lamb of God,*” it was the same as saying, “There is the Messiah.” John shared this insight with his disciples. His witnessing encouraged two of his disciples to follow Jesus. Tradition confirms John the Evangelist was one of these disciples. We know from the Synoptic account that he was one of the first four chosen by Jesus.

THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION

In verses 35 to 51, John presents the psychology of the Christian vocation. In the Synoptic Gospels, the apostles receive a direct call from Jesus. In the Fourth Gospel, we see both the human and divine forces operating in the “*call.*” The disciples’ vocations resulted partly from the influence of their teacher (John the Baptist), partly owing to family relationship, and partly owing to personal friendship. (You may already see as a disciple of Jesus, you are expected to witness to your students, your family and your friends. You may be obliged to pray, a goodly time, to the Father for them!)

We are told that two disciples, Andrew and John, began to follow Jesus. They did not know where Jesus was going or where they would end up. (One interesting thing about Christian Discipleship – it is full of surprises.) They followed Jesus because they had faith in their teacher.

When John uses the expression “*to follow,*” you may have already suspected it carries a deeper meaning than the obvious one. You are correct. John does not mean to walk along with or follow behind someone . . . to “*follow*” Jesus means to dedicate oneself to discipleship. In the Synoptic Gospels, we do see that the imperative call, “*Follow me!*” is a vocational call to Christian

Discipleship. John would not have us miss the reason why they follow Jesus. They accepted their teacher's testimony that Jesus was the Messiah. If he is the Messiah – the King – they must follow him. They owe him allegiance and obedience. Therefore, for John, belief that Jesus is the Messiah is an essential requirement for discipleship.

Jesus turns and inquires of the two would-be disciples, "*What are you looking for?*" These are the first words spoken by Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. In John's mind, these words are extremely important. In the Aramaic, the verb carries the meaning of "search." In John's mind, Jesus addresses all would-be disciples, "*What are you searching for?*" This question touches on a basic need of man – his hunger for God – his desire for union with God. St. Thomas Aquinas writes:

The profession of faith fittingly ends where all our desires culminate, namely, in eternal life: "and life everlasting. Amen." It is in eternal life that man is first united fully to God, for God himself is the reward and goal of all our toil. . . . The union means, furthermore, the perfect fulfillment of desire, for there each blessed soul will have what he longed and hoped for. In this life, no one can satisfy his longing, and indeed no creature could possibly satisfy it. Only God can satisfy it, and he does so in an infinite way. This is why we have no rest except in God, as Augustine says, "You made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

The proper motive for following Jesus is to fulfill the basic religious need of the spirit, union with God. We see in the Gospel that Jesus did not call every would-be follower. When a certain scribe said that he would follow Jesus anywhere and everywhere, Jesus merely replied that the Son of Man had no place whereon to lay his head.

The answer of the two disciples to Jesus' question must be understood within the same theological dimension: The disciples asked, "*Teacher, where do you dwell?*" "*Rabbi*" or "*teacher*" is a term used by John for those who do not yet understand fully or misinterpret Jesus. In this response, the verb "*menein*" is used, indicating permanent indwelling. What is being asked is, "What is Jesus' relationship with God?" It echoes man's search for the enduring and eternal reality. By their search, these two men acknowledge their need for

God and their desire for union with Him. In verse 18 of the Prologue, John answered the question: Jesus dwells in the bosom of the Father. When Jesus is satisfied that these two men possess the fundamental spiritual condition for discipleship, he replies with the challenge of faith: *“Come and see.”* Jesus calls them into discipleship. In John 15:16*, Jesus says, *“You did not choose me, I chose you.”* At another time, he said, *“Many [all] are called, but few are chosen.”*

Throughout the Fourth Gospel, the verbs *“coming”* and *“seeing”* will convey the concept of *“believing”*: *“Yet you are unwilling to come to me to possess that life” (Jn. 35).*

We read in verse 39: *“So they went to see where he was lodged, and stayed with him that day.”* Again, the Greek word implying an enduring relationship is used. True discipleship is not a flower that blooms for a day, but forever. Two essential qualities of discipleship are established: first, we must follow Jesus and that implies belief in him. Second, we must remain with him. Christian discipleship demands a permanent commitment. Only then do we see the Glory of the Lord and share that glory. It will be during this abiding relationship, this remaining with Jesus, that the disciple will come to faith in depth . . . to see his Glory and believe in Him. Later, Jesus teaches, *“If anyone would serve me, let him follow me; where I am, there will my servant be” (Jn. 12:26).* This is a promise of eternal union with God – of abiding in the Father’s love and affection eternally.

In the beginning, the disciples believed because of their faith in John the Baptist. Later, they came to believe because of their personal encounter with Jesus. The continual interpersonal relationship between Jesus and his disciples results in growth of faith. John illustrates this truth by the series of titles given to Jesus by the disciples: Rabbi, Messiah, Son of God and King of Kings.

John makes it clear being a disciple means being a missionary. We must witness to others (students, friends and family) and bring them to Jesus. We read: *“one of the two who had followed him after hearing John, was Simon Peter’s brother Andrew.”* The first thing he did was seek out his brother Simon and tell him, *“We have found the Messiah!”* (This term means Anointed.) We see Andrew has moved from *“Rabbi”* to *“Messiah.”* His stay with Jesus has deepened his insight. He now believed Jesus was the

fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy to David: "*Your House and your sovereignty will always stand secure before me and your throne be established for ever*" (2 Sam. 7:16*).

The hope of Israel rested upon this prophecy. The prophets confirmed this hope and clarified it:

For a child is born to us, a son given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, from David's throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever. (Is. 9:5-6)

For thus says the Lord God: I myself will look after and tend my sheep . . . I will appoint one shepherd over them . . . and be their shepherd. I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. (Eze. 34:11, 23-24)

But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; Whose origin is from of old, from ancient times. (Mic. 5:1)

It was obvious from the prophecies that the Messiah would be the great king of Israel.

In the Gospel of Matthew (16:16), it is Simon Peter who first acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah. At that time, Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter. This tradition is being somewhat observed in the Fourth Gospel. Simon's call to the discipleship is connected with the first confession of Jesus as Messiah. The changing of Simon's name is mentioned. Matthew explains that the changing of Simon's name to Peter is related to his mission in the Church. Peter is neither a proper name in Greek nor Aramaic. It symbolized his role as foundation stone. John stresses only that Jesus looked at him and, from this insight, came the name "*Rock*." An early Church writer, Origen, sees here a hint that Simon will take Jesus' place since Jesus, who is the rock, calls Simon "*rock*," even as Jesus who is the shepherd (*Jn. 10:11,14*) makes Simon a shepherd. (*Jn. 21:15-17*.)

We read that the next day Jesus called Philip. A logical sequence would imply that Peter brought Philip to meet Jesus. We do read that Peter, Andrew and Philip were all from Bethsaida. After Philip's call to discipleship we are told that he sought out Nathanael and told him, "*We have found the one Moses spoke of in the Law – the prophets too – Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth.*" Nathanael's response to that was, "*Can anything good come from Nazareth?*" Philip replied, "*Come, see for yourself*" (Ver. 45-46).

Nathanael is not mentioned by the other Evangelists. The name Nathanael means, "God has given." No doubt John intends Nathanael to serve as a symbol of Israel coming to Jesus. He is a prototype for many others who will follow Jesus. (Those whom His Father has given him out of this world.) Philip's witness implies that Jesus is both the Prophet-like-Moses and the Messiah. He places before Nathanael what many Jews found impossible to accept: Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth, is the Messiah. This is hard for Nathanael to accept. All Philip can reply is, "*Come and see,*" "*Come and believe.*"

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he remarked, "*This man is a true Israelite. There is no guile in Him.*" "*How do you know me?*" "*Before Philip called you,*" Jesus answered, "*I saw you under the fig tree.*" "*Rabbi,*" said Nathanael, "*You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.*"

The very fact that Nathanael is "*coming*" to see Jesus indicates an openness to believe in Jesus. We know Nathanael is not above prejudice, but he does not let his prejudice control his search for the truth – he still maintains a childlike openness to truth. This is all that Jesus needs. Man was made for truth; he longs for it and when he encounters it, he should naturally recognize it in the depths of his being. He may not be able to formulate the proper reasons for knowing truth, yet he still knows in his heart what is true. It is this world, under the dominion of Satan, that leads man from truth. It leads man to accept the false, the unreal, and thereby live a lie. Jesus expressed an important inner quality for the acceptance of truth when he said, "*This man is a true Israelite. There is no guile in him.*" In other words, Nathanael is a man without deceit or falsity. He is a simple man in the sense that the inner man and the outer man are one, they are the same. He is not one thing on the surface and another inwardly. Nathanael is open to the truth. He is just the opposite of Jesus' description of the Pharisees who on the surface were like beautiful monuments, but inwardly full of deadliness.

The deeper we look into this text, the more conscious we become of the symbolism involved. Jesus refers to Nathanael as the true Israelite. Again, this “*true*” implies the “*real*” Israelite, the eternally real Israelite. This, in the mind of John, is said in opposition to the unbelieving Jews who considered themselves as true Israelites because they were descendants of Abraham and Jacob. The popular interpretation of the name “Israel” was “the man who sees God,” which means the man of faith. Jesus implies that the “*man who sees God*” is the guileless man.

When we consider that Jacob was the first to bear the name “*Israel*” and he was anything but guileless (he was too much like his mother), we realize the importance of that adjective – “*true*” Israelite. Jacob and his descendants were not the “*eternal*” Israelites – those who truly see God. Recall Nathanael’s profession of faith – he acknowledges Jesus to be the “*Son of God*.” In John’s mind, this profession – “*Son of God*” – is not a figure of speech, it is not meant in some adoptive sense, but in the sense of the Prologue – Jesus is a pre-existing Divine Person. Therefore, the eternal Israelite is he who sees in Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God. Of such Israelites, Jesus is King. Nathanael caps his profession, “*Rabbi, you are the Son of God,*” with “*You are the King of Israel.*” A true subject acknowledging his true King. This symbolic meaning is further enforced when Jesus declares, “*I solemnly assure you, you shall see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man*” (Ver. 51). This is a clear reference to Jacob’s dream. We read in Genesis 28:11-22:

When he came upon a certain shrine, as the sun had already set, he stopped there for the night. Taking one of the stones at the shrine, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep at that spot. Then he had a dream: a stairway rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God’s messengers were going up and down on it. And there was the Lord standing beside . . . and the Lord spoke to Jacob. . . . When Jacob awoke he exclaimed, “Truly, the Lord is in this spot. . . . How awesome is this shrine! This is nothing else but an abode of God, and that is the gateway to Heaven!” . . . Jacob called that site Bethel [which means “House of God”] . . . and he said, “This stone that I have set up as a memorial stone shall be God’s Abode.”

The implication in John is that Jesus is himself the connection between heavenly reality and the earth, the gate of Heaven. Jesus has replaced the rock of Bethel. Jesus, as the Son of Man, has become the locus of divine glory on earth. He is the point of contact with heaven for the earth. The disciples are promised they will see this reality. It is to be fulfilled at Cana.

For John, Israel is not the Jewish nation, but the new humanity, reborn in Christ, the community of those who are “*of the truth*,” and of whom Christ is King – He is their inclusive representative: they are in Him and He is in them.

SON OF MAN

The last title ascribed to Jesus is “*Son of Man*.” This title is applied to Jesus by himself. (Found 12 times in John.) It was not considered a Messianic title at the time of Christ. The title has its roots in Ezekiel and in Daniel 7:13:

I saw one like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; when he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, He received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and people of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away; his kingship shall not be destroyed.

In Jewish history, the “*Son of Man*” is seen as a human symbol of God’s victorious people. The Son of Man is an idealized human being representative of redeemed humanity. All the Gospels agree that Jesus used this as a self-designation. In the Synoptic; there are three groups of Son of Man sayings: (1) those that refer to the earthly activity of the Son of Man like eating, dwelling, saving the lost; (2) those that refer to the suffering of the Son of Man; (3) those that refer to the future Glory and Coming of the Son of Man at the end of time. The majority of John’s references to the Son of Man concern future glory.

For John, Jesus, Son of Man, is much more than one individual among the many. He was the true self of the Human race – standing in that perfect union with God to which others can attain only as they are incorporate in Him; Jesus as the Son of Man is the mind, whose thought is absolute truth, which other men think after Him; Son of Man, Jesus is the true life of man,

which other men live by, sharing it with Him.

EPILOGUE

Since the virtue of faith is so essential to our Christian life, I would like to share some personal reflections with you. After many years in counseling, I have come to understand how true it is that if we do not recognize the problem – we reinforce the problem. With moral problems, the fruit on the tree is not always the fruit of the tree. It is often but a by-product serving as a subterfuge, a camouflage. How many moral wars are fought against Quotian Windmills? The longer I live, the more I believe disbelief is at the heart of many of our moral problems.

If Judas had really believed, could he have done what he did? Is the failure to give up our own wills – self-seeking in a myriad of ways – all these millions of infidelities to grace and Christian commitment, evidence that deep down we doubt? And perhaps we believe, “This is all there is!?” So we cling to our own wills and their selfish fulfillments because of lack of faith – the most deadly lack of all – and then we play the religious game of tagging our problems as pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, or sloth. These are bad, but not as bad as infidelity. The Lord can supply many things but, the Scriptures suggest to me, not a living, active faith.

Jesus put his finger at the heart of the problem when he said, *“O you of little faith. Why do you doubt?”* *“Jesus knew those who did not believe.”* Apparently, many of those did not know it themselves. We profess faith and often live lives of infidelity. We are too anxious for the present day rewards and satisfactions! Eternal rewards are too nebulous and uncertain for true concern; what others would think of our sins causes us more concern than what God thinks of them. As for a sentence of eternal damnation, as Scarlet O’Hara would say, “we’ll worry about that tomorrow.” Or, we delude ourselves into a false security: Jesus is Good – He loves me – He’ll save me. Do we ever stop to think the thought, “He may not be able to do anything about it!”? God does not decide our eternal destiny. It is decided by our own willful choice – that choice is being made daily. Judgment is not a condemnation by Jesus, but a declaration of what we are – saved or damned – what we have become by a life of faith or infidelity.

Is loss of faith at the root of loss of commitment to the priesthood and religious life? Our day has witnessed so many defections from priestly and religious commitment. A person I admired and respected for many years left the priesthood. I asked him, "What went wrong along the way?" I will share with you part of his response to me . . .

For over twenty-five years, I lived in the religious life and fifteen of them as a priest. In the beginning, things were not bad. I tried very hard to be a spiritual person. I did want to be a saint! Perhaps for all the wrong reasons, but the desire was there and so was the effort. As the years passed, something went wrong. I grew and matured in many ways. My natural talents deepened and brought me a measure of success . . . perhaps, the measure I was willing to have. As the outward edifice grew, deep inside, something was wrong. I labeled it sometimes as pride, another time as selfishness, then lust and finally sloth . . . there was plenty of evidence for any one of them.

Regardless of good intentions or resolutions, things did not change, only grew older and more ingrained. I had this feeling of building on sand and at any moment it would all fall in. . . . I prayed, but things did not fall into place. I could not regain my youthful desire and effort for sanctity.

Time dragged on and my problem dragged on. I tried to survive the best I could. For awhile, I had hope of a miracle, maybe a "second time around." And so it went on until one day, quietly and clearly, it came to my conscious awareness, 'Your problem is Faith!' It was too clear to argue with. Yet, I believed in God, in Jesus Christ and the redemption . . . all the academics of faith. But, deep down, I no longer believed in Heaven, Hell, Judgment, Eternal Reward. These beliefs got lost somewhere in the past. I don't even know when or where. I had lost my own faith while preaching to others. This loss had slowly changed my life and produced the fruit of spiritual indifference. How true faith is the foundation and when it begins to erode, it is only a matter of time before the edifice crumbles. Now, I can see how it all dovetails! So many nebulous and untouchable pieces of the puzzle fall into

place . . . even the conscious hostility of growing old became clear .
.. This is my life! This is my all!”

How well it is for us, dear friends, to keep before us these words of Holy Scripture: *“Take care, my brothers, lest any of you have an evil and unfaithful spirit and fall away from the living God.”* Encourage one another daily while it is still “today,” so that no one grows hardened by the deceit of sin. We have become partners of Christ only if we maintain to the end that confidence with which we began. Scripture says:

Today, if you should hear his voice, harden not your hearts as at the revolt. . . . 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. 3:12-19)

CHAPTER 5

THE WEDDING AT CANA

INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter of the Fourth Gospel, John presents Jesus of Nazareth as a Person in whom we may have the highest faith. John the Baptist acknowledged Him to be the Messiah. The Apostles confirmed that truth and professed even more, *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”* All true Israelites will arrive at such faith. Being of the truth, they hear the Voice of Truth. As Jesus Himself taught, *“Whoever is of God hears every word God speaks. The reason you do not hear is that you are not of God”* (Jn. 8:47). *“ . . . the reason why I came into the world is to testify to the truth. Anyone committed to the truth hears my voice”* (Jn. 18:37). The Father leads men to see and believe in His only Begotten Son. Jesus invites these men to be His disciples, to follow Him – to make a permanent commitment to Him. As a reward of a life of faith, these men would see the glory of God.

Before John introduces us to the public life of Jesus Christ, he illustrates how a believing group of men have already formed around Jesus. These are those chosen from the world by the Father and given to Jesus . . . the nucleus of a new Israel. They will one day judge the Twelve Tribes of Israel. It is a new Genesis. In the first chapter, John carefully indicates a period of seven days. God has risen from His rest and creates anew. A new spiritual creation has been inaugurated and a simultaneous regeneration of the old continuing until the Last Day. (It could be said the Christian Sabbath has not yet arrived.) Jesus said, *“My Father works and so must I . . . ”* and so must all His disciples, for they cannot be above the Master. As Christians, we celebrate the first day of the new creation, Sunday, not so much as a day symbolizing rest, but a day directed to praise, love, and glory of God. Symbolizing the life of the Messianic Kingdom when Jesus has restored all things to His Father, Sunday is the offering of the first fruits of a harvest already being reaped! When harvest time has ended, the reapers will see the Lord of the Harvest face to

face. John symbolically speaks of this in verse eleven of chapter two: *“Thus did he reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him.”* This verse most probably concludes the theme of the new creation.

SIGNS AND WONDERS

Many miracles are presented in the Synoptic Gospels. As studied previously, they are acts of divine power proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God and actually affecting the Reign of God by destruction of the power of Satan. John is much more reserved in his use of miracles. He enumerates seven miracles and speaks of them as signs. (A sign indicates an event that is both a symbol and channel of something greater than itself.)

1. The changing of the water to wine. (2:1-11)
2. Curing of the son of a royal official. (4:46-54)
3. Curing of a paralytic. (5:1-15)
4. Multiplication of the loaves. (6:1-15)
5. The walking on the sea. (6:16-21)
6. Curing of a blind man. (9)
7. The raising of Lazarus from the dead. (11)

Six of these miracles are either found in the Synoptic Gospels or are similar to them. Only the miracle of changing the water into wine belongs uniquely to the Fourth Gospel. The essence of the message of this miracle is as clear as a neon sign. Jesus performed the first of His signs at Cana of Galilee. *“Thus did he reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him. . . .”* This first miracle, called a *“sign,”* clearly relates to the six miracles to follow. We will discover many interesting elements in these seven miracles. They will continually encourage you to look back to the first sign to understand their significance and intention: They reveal the glory of Jesus – God’s Presence within Him – and lead men to believe in Him. Regardless of the interesting circumstances and edifying theological interpretations of these secondary elements of the first miracle (and all the rest of the miracles), we must bear in

mind that the sun and center of the narrative is always Jesus. John has told us he chose these “*signs*” in order to bring men to faith in Jesus and, thereby, to eternal life.

Jesus refers to his “miracles” as “*works*.” John sees God working through Jesus Christ, “*The Son has no power (dynamis) to do a thing by himself – he can do only what he sees the Father doing.*” Miracles are important in the ministry of Jesus as revelations of God’s Presence in the life of Jesus.

The word used for works, “*ergon*,” is found in the Creation account (Genesis 2:2) and in the history of the Chosen People. (Exodus 34:10; Pss. 56:5; 72:12; Deut. 3:24; 11:3.) It appears not only in John, but in Matthew (11:20) and Luke (24:19). Jesus, by using this expression, associated His ministry with creation and the miraculous intervention of God on behalf of the Chosen People. “*My Father is at work until now, and I am at work as well*” (Jn. 5:17).

John intends to express more than miracles by the expression “*works*.” The words of Jesus are works: “*The words I speak are not spoken of myself; it is the Father who lives in me accomplishing his works*” (Jn. 14:10). Usually, a discourse by Jesus follows each miracle in the Fourth Gospel. John seeks to tie the work and word together. Not only is God obviously acting through Jesus by His miracles, but God is speaking to His People through Jesus’ words. The miraculous deeds prove that the Word is neither sterile nor dead, but creative and alive. A word that will re-create the world. The miracle calls attention to the words of Jesus. Jesus summarizes His entire ministry as a work – in a sense, a miracle: “*I have given you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do*” (Jn. 17:4).

Although Jesus refers to his miracles as “*works*,” John speaks of them as “*signs*.” This use of the word “*signs*” emphasizes the symbolic nature of seven miracles presented. John does not emphasize the material aspects of the miracles but their symbolic aspects. He intends to draw the attention of the reader to the spiritual teaching following the miracle.

The use of signs to express God’s message is common in the Old Testament. The “*sign*” is not always of itself a miracle. In Ezekiel 4:1-3, God instructs Ezekiel to construct a miniature city under siege, “*This shall be a sign for the house of Israel.*” What the prophet presents in this make-believe form, is an event ordained by God to occur in the real world. Signs were God’s inspired

illustrations performed by the prophet as “signs” of something God is to do in the history of man. This Old Testament use of signs appears to direct John’s presentation of miracles in the Fourth Gospel.

We must not merely take the miracles at face value, but we must see their spiritual teaching in the Fourth Gospel. The miraculous sign is a revelation of something God is doing or will do in the lives of His people through Jesus Christ. In our study, we ought to bear in mind that John considers the whole ministry of Jesus as a divine sign. All the happenings within this ministry are teaching divine truths. This may be more obvious in such instances as the cleansing of the Temple and the washing of the disciples’ feet. Likewise, we ought to bear in mind as we search for the “*gold of truth*” in the signs, we no doubt are dealing with factual and historical instances. In other words, even if the miracle is narrated solely for its symbolic value, this must not lead us to believe that it never actually occurred.

The Pharisees demanded of Jesus “*signs*” as divine credentials. Jesus refused to satisfy their request. “*Teacher, we want to see you work some signs.*” He answered, *‘An evil and unfaithful age is eager for a sign! No sign will be given it but that of the prophet Jonah’*” (Mat. 12:38-39).

John demonstrates a distrust for signs. Even though people came to believe in Jesus *because* of the signs, the faith was often inadequate. Nevertheless, such believers have taken a step in the right direction. They are a far cry from the willfully blind we see in Matthew 12:23: “*All the crowd were astonished. ‘Might this not be David’s son?’ they asked. When the Pharisees heard this, they charged, ‘This man can expel demons only with the help of Beelzebub, the prince of demons.’*” In Numbers 14:11, the Lord laments, “*How long will they refuse to believe in me, despite all the signs I have performed among them?*” John echoes these words when he writes: “*Despite his many signs performed in their presence, they refused to believe in him*” (Jn. 12:37). Those who keep demanding signs in the Fourth Gospel are the willfully blind. We see them at Calvary taunting the dying Jesus:

The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders also joined in the jeering, “He saved others but he cannot save himself! So he is the King of Israel! Let’s see him come down from that cross and then we will believe in him. He relied on God; let God rescue him now if he wants to. After all, he claimed, “I am God’s Son” (Mat. 27:41-

43).

Only too well John knew men could see signs and wonders and persist in disbelief. If they did not believe Moses and the prophets, they would not believe even if someone were to rise from the grave. He did not trust signs and wonders to produce sufficient faith. As mentioned earlier: believing is seeing!

SIGNS AND SACRAMENTS

Many scholars, Catholic and non-Catholic, recognize the sacramental symbolism in the Fourth Gospel. As Dr. C. H. Dodd expresses:

He [John] has not chosen to speak directly about the sacraments, but for the Christian reader, the allusions are inescapable. Not only the symbolism of water and bread of life has its roots here, but also the vine-symbolism. In the Johannine statement, "I am the Vine" and "I am the Bread" are intended to give expression to the mysterious truth uttered in the words of Institution, "Hoc est Corpus Meum; Hic est Sanguis Meum."

Dodd maintains that the use in the early Christian Community of water, bread and wine in the sacraments made these inevitably symbols for the sacraments in the Fourth Gospel. (Most probably the "*discipline of the secret*" concerning the sacraments was already in force – knowledge of the sacraments was guarded from the pagans for fear of sacrilegious imitation.)

We will see, when we study the Crucifixion, that John's narration of water and blood flowing from the side of the dead Christ, was symbolic of Christ giving life through his death; from Jesus (the Risen Jesus), eternal life flows through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist – water and blood. For John the Christian, with a saving faith, beholds in the Sacraments a sign of God's Presence in the Christian Community. As the miracles were a sign of God's Presence in Christ, John would have us see the Sacraments as a sign of Christ's Presence in the Church. Proper belief in the Sacraments is a good gauge of whether man today possesses a faith that saves. A rejection of Baptism or the Eucharist, for John, was a sign of dangerous infidelity. When he exalts a faith that does not depend on "signs" ("*Blest are they who have not seen and have believed.*"), John is presenting the situation of the Christian

Community, wherein the Sacraments are among the chief channels of God's power and presence. This calls to mind the story related about St. Louis, King of France: It was reported to the King that a host had begun to bleed during a Mass at the Notre Dame Cathedral. He was urged to hurry and witness the phenomenon. He declined with, *"Let those go and see who need such things. I do not have to see a bleeding Host to know of my Lord's Presence in the Eucharist."*

THE WEDDING BANQUET

The introduction of the Fourth Gospel ends on the seventh day with Jesus, His mother and disciples attending a wedding. Such weddings lasted for seven days. Symbolically, seven expresses perfection, fullness. In this context, the seven-day wedding celebration may well express the glorious end of discipleship. We have already seen how John presented, in a time span of a few days, a lifetime of growth and service. The presence of Jesus and his disciples at a wedding is used by John to symbolically present the eternal Messianic banquet that celebrates the marriage of the Lamb. The image is strengthened when one understands that the friends of the bridegroom escort him to the wedding. The wedding at Cana certainly has the symbolic power to illustrate the eternal joys flowing from faith and allegiance to Jesus, King of Israel.

Within eleven verses, distracting elements are presented that stimulate the deepest theological speculation and nourish edifying meditation. How easy it will be to get lost in the example and the symbolism. Since the example itself is full of symbolism, it is like a treasure containing numerous individual jewels. The entire treasure may exist for a single purpose; nevertheless, each jewel contains its own beauty and individual value. How true the words of Scripture are, a Well of Wisdom, inexhaustible, deep.

When the Jews criticized the disciples of Jesus for not fasting as the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees did, Jesus defended their behavior. He referred to Himself as a bridegroom and His disciples as friends of the bridegroom and He informed the critics that friends of the bridegroom do not fast as long as they are with the bridegroom. Jesus saw Himself in the role of a Bridegroom on the way to the eternal wedding. Israel is the Bride. The

The Book of Revelations says, “*Happy are they who have been invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.*” In the Old Testament, a wedding symbolized the Messianic Age:

The shame of your youth you shall forget. . . . For he who has become your husband is your Maker; his name is the Lord of hosts; your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, called God of all the earth. . . . Though the mountains leave their place and the hills be shaken, my love shall never leave you nor my covenant of peace be shaken. (Is. 54:4,5,10)

St. Matthew teaches Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a banquet:

The reign of God may be likened to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the wedding, but they refused to come.

(Mat. 22:1-2)

The invited are many, the elect are few. (Mat. 22:14)

With this background and understanding, let us read chapter two, verses one through eleven:

On the third day, there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had likewise been invited to the celebration. At a certain point, the wine ran out, and Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no more wine.” [It was customary for the guest to bring or furnish the wine for the wedding . . . obviously, Jesus and his disciples had not done so.] Jesus replied, “Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me? My hour has not yet come.” [The very fact that Jesus’ reply to His mother referred to “my hour” implies some in-depth symbolism is involved.] His mother instructed those waiting on the table, “Do whatever he tells you.” [Despite the apparent negative reply, Mary expressed complete confidence in her Son.] As prescribed for Jewish ceremonial washings, there were at hand six stone water jars, each one holding fifteen to twenty-five gallons. “Fill those jars with water,” Jesus ordered, at which they filled them to the brim.

“Now,” he said, “draw some out and take it to the waiter in charge.” They did as he instructed them. The waiter in charge tasted the water made wine, without knowing where it had come from; only the waiters knew, since they had drawn the water. [A symbol of the disciples – obedient in faith – coming to know the origin of Jesus.] Then the waiter in charge called the groom over and remarked to him, “People usually serve the choice wine first; then when the guests have been drinking awhile, a lesser vintage. What you have done is keep the choice wine until now.” Jesus performed this first of his signs at Cana in Galilee. Thus did he reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him. (Jn. 2:1-11)

SYMBOLISM AT CANA

In the account, the two most obvious symbolic elements are water and wine. Water symbolizes purification and life. Wine is a symbol of celebration and joy. There is a difference in spirit when one drinks water and one drinks wine. Wine and an abundance of wine are symbolic of the Messianic Times. It especially indicated the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The changing of water into wine symbolically represents the changing of spirits within man by Jesus Christ. This will occur when Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit upon mankind. He becomes a new wine. He possesses a new spirit and therefore, he must live a new life. He must die to the life in the flesh, for he is a new creation in Christ. Jesus cautioned not to put new wine in old wineskins, but into new skins – a newness coming from repentance and regeneration through Baptism. It serves as a warning of trying to cling to the old and still have the new. Jesus indicates the results will be tragic . . . the new wine will burst the old wineskins.

We read there were six empty jars used for Jewish purification. This immediately brings to mind the purification of the Old Testament. (As the number of seven represented perfection, the number six represents imperfection.) By this detail, John calls attention to the imperfection of purification under the Law. Water being symbolic of the Holy Spirit and the six jars of purification being empty indicated the end of purification through the Law and the termination of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Old Covenant. Now the Spirit and purification will only come through Jesus. Jesus tells the servants to fill up the jars with water. They filled the jars to the brim, the point of overflowing. They contained around 120 gallons. As

the servants fulfilled the command of Jesus, the water became wine. Several thoughts rush into conscious awareness. The most obvious, wine, symbolizing Joy and the Presence of the Holy Spirit, is being given in abundance. Although a bit more subtle but nevertheless present, the wine certainly brings to mind the Last Supper, in which Jesus took the cup of wine and with words of consecration changed wine into His Blood.

. . . This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out in behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink this fruit of the vine from now until the day when I drink it new [the new wine of the Holy Spirit] with you in my Father's reign. (Mat. 26:28-29)

The true water of purification is the Blood of the Lamb!

Biblically, an abundance of wine symbolized the Messianic days:

On that day, I will raise up the fallen hut of David . . . the juice of grapes shall drip down the mountains and all the hills shall run with it. (Amos 9:11,13)

The Lord shall ransom Jacob; he shall redeem him from the hand of his conqueror. Shouting, they shall mount the heights of Zion, they shall come streaming to the Lord's blessings: the grain, the wine, and the oil. . . . They themselves shall be like watered gardens, never again shall they languish. Then the virgins shall make merry and dance, and young men and old as well.

I will turn their mourning into joy, I will console and gladden them after their sorrows. (Jer. 31:11-13)

In II Baruch 29:5, a pious Jewish work from the time of John, we read that in the messianic days, the harvest will be multiplied 10,000 fold – each vine 1,000 branches, each branch 1,000 clusters, each cluster 1,000 grapes and each grape about 120 gallons of wine.

When Jesus made use of the vessels of purification, John teaches of our Lord's readiness to make use of the Old order as far as possible. He came not to destroy, but to fulfill (and to fill to the brim.) When He can do so, He meets

human needs and satisfies them.

The Head Steward's ignorance of the source of the wine and thereby, his ignorance of the Holy Spirit and spiritual purification comes about because he does not know Jesus Christ. John contrasts this with the fact that the servants and, of course, His Mother knew. It is implied that such knowledge comes only to those who are obedient servants of the Lord. Interestingly, John does not use the common word for servant (slave), but the word "*deacon*," that signified a ministry within the Church.

In this narrative, John is telling the disciples that those who persevere in following Jesus in this life will one day be with Him at the Eternal Banquet and they will be there as the Bride of the Lamb. There, joy will be full and unending.

Let it be noted "*the mother of Jesus was there.*" Mary appears twice in the Fourth Gospel – in the beginning and the end. (One other time she is mentioned – 6:42.) Her Presence is highly significant.

MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

Mary must be seen in the Scriptures both as a person and a symbol. It is not uncommon for a person to be a corporate symbol. By this, we mean one person represents many people or all people. Adam and Eve are corporate symbols – a man and woman who represent all mankind. Jacob is such a symbol for the people of Israel. (In our day, Queen Elizabeth serves as a corporate symbol of the British people.)

From the earliest days within the Church, Jesus and Mary were pictured as a new Adam and Eve. In the minds of Church Fathers, they were the symbols of the New Creation, the New Genesis. The first Adam, as a representative of the human race, alienated the human race from God by sin. The second Adam, Jesus Christ, restored the human race to God's grace by his obedience unto death. Mary, by her obedience to God's manifest will – "*Behold the slave of God, be it done to me according to your will.*" – played an essential part in the Redemption by becoming the Mother of the Messiah. Just as Eve, by her disobedience, played an essential role in the Fall of Man. Mary, as the first to believe, accept, and follow Jesus, became a symbol of the redeemed people. By her untiring life of devotion and unconditional love of Jesus

Christ, Mary became the fitting symbol of the Church. The mature apostolic community, enflamed by the Holy Spirit, begets children for God through Baptism and nourishes them with the Eucharist and protects and directs them with her teaching. Because Mary personally embodies the grace and the vocation of the Church in its relationship to the Triune God, she symbolizes the Church. The Church must achieve, in a corporate way, what Mary – as a person – accomplished through her loving service to the humanity of Jesus Christ. Mary forever stands before the Church as a Guiding Star in its relationship with the Triune God. The Church beholds, in the achieved glory of Mary, her assumption into heaven, its own glorious future. Making Mary the symbol of the Church does not detract from her personal greatness, but proclaims it. The Mother of Jesus Christ is a woman of unsurpassing holiness and greatness.

John interprets Mary's presence at the wedding of Cana symbolically. She represents the Church. Her action sought to be interpreted in this light. She is concerned because the wine has run out. This is interpreted as a concern and a request for the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist – the first prayer of the Church for the Holy Spirit. Christ's reply to His mother is interpreted not as a refusal, but as a delay. It is not yet "*the hour*." For John, "*the hour*" is a particular period in the life of Jesus. It represents the time of His glorification – beginning with the Passion and ending with the Ascension and the Sending of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit – the New Wine – can only be given at the death of Jesus. The actual changing of the water into wine is a sign that the prayer will be granted.

When "*the hour*" does come, we see that Jesus calls Mary and the "*Beloved Disciple*" to the foot of the Cross and breathes forth His Spirit upon them – creating the Church – giving birth to it by His death. (Even though John writes that at Cana the disciples saw the glory of Jesus and believed in Him, in actual fact, it occurred on Pentecost, when they were filled with the new wine of the Spirit.)

At Calvary, Jesus declares His mother to be the Mother of the Beloved Disciple. John may well be the actual person involved here, but the "*Beloved Disciple*" is another corporate symbol. John, as the Beloved Disciple, represents all men and women who become "*beloved disciples*" through perfecting themselves in love of Jesus Christ. The great Protestant Scripture Scholar R. L. Lightfoot wrote:

When the hour is come, the Lord and His mother will indeed have much in common; for as a result of His word and action, she, who of all mankind, is the most closely linked with Him on the physical side; and he, who bears the unique title “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” are to become united; not so much by their common love for Him, as by His love for them, which will now become their life.

It is not our love for Jesus that makes Mary our Mother and Christians our brethren, but Jesus’ love for them in us. We may need to pray: “Jesus, love Mary and your brethren through me.”

The beloved disciple’s accepting Mary and Mary’s acceptance of him, symbolically represents the relationship between the disciples and the Church. A beloved disciple must accept and love the Church and the Church must nourish and protect the life of the beloved disciple.

Both Mary and John not only symbolized, but personally fulfilled the roles they symbolized. Mary received from her dying Son a unique ministry within the Christian Community, that of Mother of the Church – of the Christian Community. It is not without intent that Mary’s last recorded words on this earth were to the obedient servants: “Whatever he tells you, that you do!” Indeed, these are not only the words of our heavenly mother, but the heart and essence of the Church’s message throughout the Ages.

One becomes the “beloved disciple” by perfectly loving Jesus. Mary showed the way when she said, “Be it done to me according to your will.” Love is expressed in its surrender to the Divine Will. Obedience to God’s will is perfect when love is perfected.

In a practical sense, our relationship to the Church demonstrates our love or lack of it. We know the Church was established by God through Jesus Christ to be His abiding Presence on earth. To this Church, he gave all – including the teaching authority of Jesus. This authority is a ministry in the Church. It is not a ministry given to the entire body, but to a particular group. St. Paul makes this quite clear in his epistles. This ministry was given to the Apostles and their successors. He made Peter the foundation and shepherd of the Church – giving him (not the beloved disciple) the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. To His apostle, Jesus spoke these words: “He that hears you, hears

me . . . he that rejects you, rejects me and Him who sent me.”

If we fail the test of faith, we have problems with the Church. We will not accept its teaching authority in our lives. As night follows the day, we fail to stand firm in our commitment to Jesus Christ. When it becomes disagreeable for us to follow the will of God, the teachings of the Church, we follow our own will. Unfortunately, so unlike Mary, we love ourselves more than we love our God.

Our difficulty with the acceptance of Mary’s role and her proper place in the Christian Community is another one of those times when the problem is not the problem. The problem is not Mary; it is the Church! After all, if we had no problem with the Church, we would have no problem with Mary. The “*Beloved Disciple*” had no problem and no beloved disciple ever does. . . . To such disciples the Church says, “*Behold your mother!*” And whenever I behold my mother, she says, “*Whatever He tells you, that you do!*”

CHAPTER 6
THE HOUSE OF GOD
INTRODUCTION

When Jesus was twelve years of age, Mary and Joseph took him to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. As they drew near to the city, they had a magnificent view of the walled city and its glorious Temple visible for miles. The Temple gleamed all over with gold. Such a sight would stir any boy's heart. What sentiments filled the heart of Jesus when first, as a lad, he beheld His Father's House? Perhaps they would have found expression in the words of Psalm 122:

*I rejoiced because they said to me,
"We will go up to the house of the Lord."
And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem –
Jerusalem, built as a city with compact unity.*

*To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord,
According to the decree for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
In it are set up judgment seats,
seats for the house of David.*

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
May those who love you prosper!
May peace be within your walls,
prosperity in your buildings.
Because of my relatives and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you!"
Because of the house of the Lord, our God,
I will pray for your good.*

(Ps.122.)

The Temple (meaning the great house) had been erected on Mt. Moriah. Tradition identified this mount as the place Abraham prepared the sacrifice of Isaac. In King David's time, this hill was the property of Oman, who had a threshing-floor on the summit. When David's reign drew towards an end, he ordered a census to be taken. A pestilence resulted as a punishment for this sin of vanity. One day, David beheld, over the mount of Moriah, the destroying angel with his sword drawn against the city. David repented of his sin and purchased the hill from Oman. Here he raised an altar and offered sacrifice in atonement for his sins. (2 Sam. 24; 1 Chron. 21.) David promised to erect a temple to God, but being a man of blood, the honor was reserved for his son, Solomon. Before he died, he commanded his son to build the House of the Lord and David laid up material in abundance for this project. He wanted the House of the Lord to be so magnificent that it would be renowned and glorious in all countries. (1 Chron. 22:5)

The Temple was erected in 955 B.C. Its magnificence is described in chapters three and four of II Chronicles. On the day of its dedication, we read: "*When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the holocaust and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house.*" On that night, the Lord appeared to Solomon and said to him,

I have heard your prayer, and I have chosen this place for my house of sacrifice. . . . Now my eyes shall be open and my ears attentive to the prayers of this place. And now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever; my eyes and my heart also shall be there always. (2 Chron. 7:1-2, 12-16)

These promises were conditional. The Lord said to Solomon:

But if you turn away and forsake my statutes and commands which I placed before you, if you proceed to venerate and worship strange gods, then I will uproot the people from the land I gave them; I will cast from my sight this house which I have consecrated to my honor, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. This temple which is so exalted – everyone passing by it will be amazed and ask, "Why has the Lord done this to this land and to this house?" (2 Chron. 7:19-21)

Around 720 B.C. the prophet Micah warned:

Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel! You who abhor what is just, and pervert all that is right; who build up Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness! Her leaders render judgment for a bribe, her priests give decisions for a salary, her prophets divine for money. While they rely on the Lord, saying, "Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No evil can come upon us!" Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem reduced to rubble, and the mount of the temple to forest ridge. (Micah 3:9-12)

The Temple stood 368 years. Then the Prophet Jeremiah, seeing the handwriting on the wall, stood at the gate of the Temple and decried:

Hear the word of the Lord, all of you of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord! Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Reform your ways and your deeds, so that I may remain with you in this place. Put not your trust in the deceitful words: "This is the Temple of the Lord! The Temple of the Lord! The Temple of the Lord!" Only if you thoroughly reform your ways and your deeds . . . will I remain with you in this place.

(Jer. 7:1-7)

If you disobey me, not living according to the Law I place before you and not listening to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I send you constantly though you do not obey them, I will treat this house like Shiloh, and make this city which all nations of the earth shall refer to when cursing another. (Jer. 26:4-6)

Shiloh had been an earlier place of worship for Israel. Here, the Ark of the Covenant resided and here they celebrated their feast. Because of the sins of Israel, God abandoned Shiloh, and the Ark was captured by the Philistines. Excavation conducted in 1930-32 showed that Shiloh was destroyed about 1050 B.C. and abandoned for several centuries. Jeremiah employs Shiloh as an example to show that Yahweh has no respect even for places which are dedicated to His worship and that He can destroy Jerusalem as He destroyed Shiloh. The shock which this declaration caused shows the horror which the Israelites must have felt when Yahweh did not protect His own holy place.

The reaction to the prophecy was immediate.

When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the Lord bade him speak to all the people, the priests and prophets laid hold of him, crying, "You must be put to death! Why do you prophesy in the name of the Lord, 'This house shall be like Shiloh,' and 'this city shall be desolate and deserted'?" And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. (Jer. 26:8-9)

The Temple of Solomon was destroyed by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. During this destruction, the Ark of the Covenant disappeared and to this date has not reappeared. We read in II Maccabees that Jeremiah hid the Ark in a cave on Mt. Nebo and there it will remain until "God gathers his people together again and shows them mercy" (2 Maccabees 2:7).

In Babylon, Ezekiel foretells the reconstruction of the Temple and its future glory. In a vision, he was carried in spirit to Jerusalem and he tells us:

Then he led me to the gate which faces the east, and there I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east . . . I fell prone as the glory of the Lord entered the temple by way of the gate which faces the east, but the spirit lifted me up and brought me to the inner court. And I saw that the temple was filled with the glory of the Lord. Then I heard someone speaking to me from the temple, while the man stood beside me. The voice said to me, "Son of man, this is where my throne shall be, this is where I will set the soles of my feet; here I will dwell among the Israelites forever."

(Ezek. 43:1-7)

In 537 B.C., fifty years after its destruction, the reconstruction of the Temple began under Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah. It was probably the same dimensions and structure as the Temple of Solomon but greatly inferior in richness and beauty. In the minds of many, it left much to be desired. We read in Ezra, "Many of the priests, Levites, and family heads, the old men who had seen the former house, cried out in sorrow as they watched the foundation of the present house being laid" (Ezra 3:12). The prophet Haggai echoes the sentiments of the people: "Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem like nothing in

your eyes?" (Haggai 2:3). Through Haggai, an encouraging promise is given to the builders:

For thus says the Lord of hosts: One moment yet, a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all the nations, and the treasures of all the nations will come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. Greater will be the future glory of this house than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give you peace, says the Lord of hosts! (Haggai 2:6-9)

Apparently, this prophecy was fulfilled when King Herod began a renovation of the Temple around 20 B.C. Wishing to have his Hellenism and crimes forgotten and to render himself popular with the Jews, Herod conceived the bold idea of rebuilding the Temple on a larger scale, but in all its primitive splendor, at the same time preserving its traditional plan. He made it twice the size of Solomon's Temple. It covered about 35 acres. Ten thousand workmen were employed for the reconstruction. One thousand priests were trained in masonry and carpentry to build the holiest parts of the Temple to which only priests had access. The Temple was built of alabaster, stribium and marble. The courts were paved with different kinds of stones. Although the renovation was completed in about nine years, the beautifying and adorning of the Temple continued until 64 A.D. It was completed only six years before being totally destroyed by the Roman army. During the eighty-four years that the Temple was being built, ceremonies were not interrupted for even an hour.

During the feast of the Passover, over 125,000 pilgrims came to Jerusalem. On one occasion, among that throng was the Boy Jesus. There were eight gates leading into the Temple, including the two Huldab, or "mole" gates from the south, which passed underneath the royal Porch. To the east was the Gate of Susa – still visible as the Golden Gate walled up by the Byzantines. On entering the Temple, Jesus had to pass through a double gate covered with gold and silver. He found himself in the first and largest courtyard, the Court of the Gentiles, so called because foreigners had freedom of access to it. The Court of the Gentiles was bordered by colonnades on all four sides, forming a protective porch about 20 feet wide. The colonnades were approximately 40 feet high and, according to the historian Josephus, these pillars were of one entire piece of marble and the

roof was adorned with engraven cedar. The court of the patio was approximately 55 feet wide. The royal porch lay on the south side of the Court and porch of Solomon, on the east. As the Boy Jesus crossed the patio, he encountered a raised terrace with a balustrade entered by nine gates – four on the north and four on the south side and one on the east. At all these entrances, notices in Greek and Latin were sculptured upon the columns warning all uncircumcised under the pain of death, not to go past the Court of the Gentiles. (One of these columns is now in a museum in Istanbul.) The boy Jesus, being with his mother, would have gone up fourteen steps and entered through the east gate into the Court of Women. Beyond this court, women were forbidden. Here, in the Court of Women, were golden lamps with four golden bowls hanging over each. Here was the treasury. Jesus could see the sacred gold and silver vessels. Here also were the alms boxes for contributions. It was into one of these that the poor widow cast her two mites. The next court to the west was the Court of Israel or the Court of the Men, raised 15 steps above the Court of the Women. It was 280 feet by 202 feet. When Jesus and Joseph entered here, they would have to leave Mary behind. The entrance from the Women's court was through the Nicanor Gate known in Acts as the Gate Beautiful. The gate had been named after a generous Jewish donor from Alexandria. It was made of Corinthian bronze and shone like gold. It far exceeded all other gates in value. Here before this gate, Mary had presented the Infant Jesus to God. The court of Israel was the place of worshipers during the incense offering. It is probably the scene of the prayer of the Pharisees and of the disciples and of Paul's vision. From the Court of Israel, one passed into the Court of the Priests which surrounded the temple building. Into this area, Jesus was not permitted to enter. Directly between the gate of Nicanor and the Temple stood the altar of whole burnt offerings in the court of the priest. The altar stood where now may be seen a mass of native rock within the Dome of the Rock. To the left of the altar, a large basin, called the Brazen Sea, rested upon twelve bulls cast in bronze. Further steps led up to the actual Temple. The whole facade (150 feet square) was covered with gold (the thickness of a gold dinar) as was the wall and entrance between the porch and the sanctuary. On the roof were sharp spikes of gold to keep off the birds. From the beams of the porch hung gold chains. In the porch itself stood a marble and solid gold table. Between the porch and the Holy Place extended a golden vine, and to this were brought gifts of golden tendrils which the priests added to the vine, so that it was always getting larger. Above the entrance hung a concave mirror of gold which reflected the rays of the rising sun through the doorless main entrance of the

porch. It was a gift of Queen Helena of Adiabene. Many other votive offerings stood in the porch. Caesar Augustus had once given bronze wine vessels.

A priceless curtain, embroidered with a map of the known world, concealed from view what lay beyond, and no one except the priest on duty was allowed to go farther. It was here, in the section called "*the holy place*," Zechariah received a visitation from the Archangel Gabriel announcing the birth of his son, John. It contained the golden altar at which incense was offered and next to it stood the famous golden seven-branched candelabrum (later exhibited in a temple of Rome as one of the wonders of the world) and next to it stood the equally solid and even heavier golden shewbread table. Beyond the Holy Place and elevated above it and behind another large curtain lay the Holy of Holies. None but the high priest was allowed to enter here, and he only on the Day of Atonement. A stone designated the place where once the Ark of the Covenant had stood. The whole room was inlaid with gold. It was the curtain before the Holy of Holies that was rent at the death of Jesus, symbolically signifying the access of all peoples to God through the death of Jesus.

So great was the abundance of gold in Jerusalem and especially in the Temple that after the destruction of the city, the gold market in Syria was glutted and gold was worth half its former value.

No doubt the Boy Jesus received an awesome impression of the Temple – the sole place of His Father's presence. We know after this visit He failed to return to Nazareth with his parents. Three days later they found Him in Solomon's Porch arguing with the rabbis and amazing them with His questions and answers. Mary said, "*Son, why have you done this to us? You see that your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow.*' He said to them, '*Why did you search for me? Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?*'" (Lk. 2:48-49).

Truly, Jesus loved the Temple. He called it the House of God (Mat. 12:4; Lk. 6:4.), a House of Prayer (Mat. 21:13.) and the House of His Father. (Jn. 2:16.) The Temple was holy because God dwells in it, and sanctifies the objects it contains.

The importance of the Temple extended far beyond the boundaries of the city.

Since the reforms of Josiah (621 B.C.), the city was the only holy place in the world for Jews. Three times a year pilgrims journeyed there from over the world.

Often the Chosen People made a sorry return to the good Lord. The priests, who should have been leaders, dishonored God by offering imperfect and inferior sacrifices. Such behavior does not go unnoticed or unrewarded. We read in the Book of Malachi:

Oh, that one among you would shut the temple gates to keep you from kindling fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts; neither will I accept any sacrifice from your hands, For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, my name is great among the nations; And everywhere they bring sacrifice to my name, and a pure offering; For great is my name among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. (Mal. 1:10-11)

Today, the Church sees the sacrifice of the Mass as the perfect fulfillment of this prophecy.

CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

This background should aid us to better understand the sentiments and attitude of Jesus towards the Temple. And also, what a critical and dangerous position He placed himself in by His devastating revelations.

John opens the public ministry of Jesus by His sudden appearance in the Temple. Perhaps John had in mind the description in the Book of Malachi:

And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire, or like the fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying [silver], and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold or like silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord. Then the sacrifice of Judah and Jerusalem will please the Lord . . ." (Mal. 3:1-4).

How far Jesus has come from that boy of twelve. He comes in the spiritual maturity of his manhood. . . . He is God's Son entering His Father's House. The zeal of the prophets-past culminates in his spirit and emotions. The Divine displeasure with the worship of Israel incarnates itself. We read:

As the Jewish Passover was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple precincts he came upon people engaged in selling oxen, sheep and doves, and others seated changing coins. [It was forbidden by Jewish law to use coins with graven images upon them for the purchase of sacrificial animals; they could be exchanged for a small fee into the acceptable Tyrian coinage.] He made a [kind of] whip of cords and drove sheep and oxen alike out of the temple area, and knocked over the money-changers' tables, spilling their coins. He told those who were selling doves, "Get them out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" His disciples recalled the words of Scripture: "Zeal for your house consumes me" (Jn. 2:13-17).

With the reference "*the Jewish Passover was near,*" John would have us see the handwriting on the wall. Jesus drives from the Temple area all the animals of sacrifice. "*Get them out of here!*" A divine sign has been given. Temple worship and sacrifice is at an end. The Temple doors are to be closed. A new form of worship will replace the old. Soon, very soon, "*from the rising of the sun even to its setting his name will be great among the nations; and everywhere they will bring sacrifice to my name, and a pure offering.*" In His Son Jesus, all will be brought to perfection. The Lamb of God replaces Temple sacrifice that has endured nearly a thousand years. The Temple will come to an end. It will occur through the permissive Will of God but also from the willful actions of the Jews themselves. As rebellion brought an end to the first Temple, so it will cause the destruction of the present Temple. In the unfolding of this mystery we see how unwilling men freely accomplish the Will of God! Praise the Lord!

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPEL

This episode in the Temple occurs in the four Gospel accounts. John alone, for theological purposes, places it at the beginning of the public ministry. In the Synoptic Gospels, it occurs shortly before our Lord's death. It was an attributing cause of his death. We read in Mark: "*This came to the ears of the*

chief priests and the scribes, and they tried to find some way of doing away with him . . .” (Mk. 11:18).*

Mark reinforces the symbolic meaning of the cleansing of the Temple by placing the event between Jesus’ cursing a barren fig tree with “*May no one ever eat fruit from you again*” (Mk. 11:14*), and the drying up of the fig tree the day following the expulsion of the animals from the Temple. The fig tree symbolized the unbelief and the rejection of Israel. Following this account, Mark relates the parable of the wicked tenants of the vineyard who murder the Son of the Owner of the Vineyard in order to keep it themselves. This parable was directed at the priests. The parable concludes:

Now what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and make an end of the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this text of Scripture: “It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone. This was the Lord’s doing and it is wonderful to see”? (Mk. 12:9-11*)

Jesus is pictured as the cornerstone of a New Temple.

In Mark’s account of the event, Jesus speaks these words, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples, But you have turned it into a robbers’ den” (Mk. 11:17*). Is this not a complaint against the provincialism and narrowness of Judaism? Man limits God in this world. But worse still, he limits man’s access to God. Jesus complained that the Pharisees crossed the seas to make a convert and he ends not a son of God, but twice the son of the devil he was before conversion. We have seen from our introduction, the exclusiveness of the Temple worship – to a degree even Mary and Jesus were excluded. The complaint seems to indicate the Gentiles were permitted in the Temple compound, not for prayerful purposes, but for commercial. Isaiah expressed the attitude of the Lord:

Let not the foreigner say, when he would join himself to the Lord, “The Lord will surely exclude me from his people;” . . . the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord. . .becoming his servants . . . their holocausts and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

(Is. 56:3-7)

We have already mentioned that the parting of the curtain in the Holy of Holies at the death of Jesus was a symbol of the fulfillment of this prophecy.

St. Matthew closely follows Mark's account, but omits St. Mark's reference "for all peoples." He adds this line: "*There were also blind and lame people who came to him in the Temple, and he cured them!*" (Mat. 21:14*). Here Matthew indicates the mercy to be found in the New Temple when God will receive the afflicted of this world and restore them to health through Jesus. It should be noted – they came to Jesus in the Temple. . . .

St. Luke's account of the cleansing of the Temple is the shortest, but it is preceded by a most dramatic scene. Jesus approaches Jerusalem and came in sight of the city. Perhaps He remembered the boyhood experience when first He saw the holy city. Now there was no joy. Childhood expectation had been replaced by harsh reality. Tears filled the eyes of the Lord and sadly He prophesied:

If you in your turn had only understood on this day the message of peace! But, alas, it is hidden from your eyes! Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all around you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you – and all because you did not recognize your opportunity when God offered it!

(Lk. 19:42-44*)

THE FIRST PUBLIC SIGN

In the minds of the four Evangelists, the cleansing of the Temple was a symbolic action demonstrating the coming end of Temple worship. As the Scriptures indicate, this awareness only came following the death and resurrection of Jesus.

John's account of the event is the most detailed. It is presented as the first public sign performed by the Lord. In actual fact, the time sequence found in the Synoptic Gospels, after the triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, appears to be more accurate. As we see, it outraged the priests and only the support of the people kept them from arresting Him.

Some scholars believe that John combines two events: one occurring in the beginning of the ministry when Jesus, prophet-like, gives a warning of the coming rejection and the actual symbolic manifestation of this rejection, the cleansing of the Temple, occurring at the end of His public ministry. John, for his own purposes, presents a combination of the two at the beginning of our Lord's ministry. The logic of this will be seen later. He presents Jesus as replacing Temple worship.

In all the accounts, Jesus makes a whip and drives out of the Temple all those engaged in commercial business. Only force compels them to cease their activity. Of their own free will, they will not permit the Temple to be a House of Prayer, but will keep it commercial. This stubbornness and persistence in disobedience results in a complete rejection by God and a replacement of the old forms of worship.

When the disciples saw this action, they recalled the words of Scripture: *"Zeal for your house consumes me."* The line before this quote reads: *"I have become an outcast to my brothers, a stranger to my mother's sons."* The quote is followed by, *"and the insults of those who blaspheme you fall upon me"* (Ps. 69). These are all words of lament from the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. Jesus will suffer because of His zeal for His Father's House.

In all the accounts, the authorities demand to know by what authority Jesus has performed such actions. We read in John:

At this the Jews responded, "What sign can you show us authorizing you to do these things?" "Destroy this temple," was Jesus' answer, "and in three days I will raise it up." They retorted, "This temple took forty-six years to build, and you are going to "raise it up in three days?" Actually, he was talking about the temple of his body. Only after Jesus had been raised from the dead did his disciples recall that he had said this, and come to believe the Scripture and the word he had spoken. (Jn. 2:18-22)

In the Synoptic Gospels we read that the chief priests and elders of the people came to Him and said, *"What authority have you for acting like this? And who gave you this authority?"* Jesus promised He would answer their questions if first they would tell Him where John's baptism came from. Jesus put them in

a corner. They refused to give an honest answer. This demonstrated clearly that these men who had received God's authority, acted in His name, refused to accept God's authority in their own lives. They abused the authority of God for their selfish ends and refused to be submissive themselves to this authority and actually warred against God's authority when it was detrimental to their own selfish ambitions and fulfillments. This always remains a temptation for all human receptors of divine authority . . . to deify themselves! When humble and obedient Servants of Yahweh "*hear the word of God and keep it,*" they encounter the destructive and diabolic force of pride and rebellion – often in high places. When the obedient are called by God to bring authority to divine obedience, they are more often than not cursed and murdered as were John the Baptist and Jesus.

In John, the Pharisees demand a sign. He illustrates, from the very beginning, their inability to understand the words and deeds of Jesus. They always misunderstand. In the discourse to Nicodemus, Jesus will explain why.

The Jewish authorities failed to see that the cleansing of the Temple is in itself the sign. It foretold the coming destruction of the present Temple worship. They lacked the necessary vision to interpret the sign. In veiled language, Jesus offers them the supreme sign of the Gospel, His Resurrection. "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.*" The Jewish authorities themselves will produce the sign offered by the Lord. "*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, you will know that I am he.*" They will destroy the Temple of the Word made flesh, the Body of Jesus, and in three days Jesus will raise it up again. Since to produce this terrible sign, they must murder Jesus, the sign will be their judgment and condemnation. As always, they misinterpret: "*This temple took forty-six years to build, and you are going to 'raise it up in three days!'*"

THE NEW TEMPLE

In actual fact, the disciples failed to understand the sign. John records: "*Only after Jesus had been raised from the dead did his disciples recall that he had said this, and come to believe the Scripture and the word he had spoken*" (Jn. 2:22). Then they understood: "*Actually he was talking about the temple of his body*" (Jn. 2:21).

John illustrates in this episode, not only the passing of the Old Order in religion, but by what means the New Order will be inaugurated. It will flow from the death of Jesus. Jesus will die rejected by the builders who thereby condemn themselves. He will rise from the dead to become the foundation stone of a New Temple.

The statement that the shrine of the Lord's body would replace the Jewish Temple of Stone profoundly influenced the thought and spirituality of the early Christian Community. We glean these beautiful and profound truths from the teachings of St. Paul: "*Didn't you realize,*" Paul asked his new converts in Corinth, "*that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you? If anybody should destroy the temple of God, God will destroy him, because the Temple of God is sacred: and you are that temple.*" (1 Cor. 3:16-17*) "*The temple of God has no common ground with idols, and that is what we are – the temple of the living God.*" (2 Cor. 6:16*) To the Ephesians he wrote:

So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors: you are citizens like all the saints, and part of God's household. You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone. As every structure is aligned on him, all grow into one holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built into a house where God lives, in the spirit. (Eph. 2:19~22)*

Now you together are Christ's body; but each of you is a different part of it. (1 Cor. 12:27)*

Let us profess the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ the head. Through him the whole body grows, and with the proper functioning of the members joined firmly together by each supporting ligament, builds itself up in love. (Eph. 4:15-16)

THE DARK PROPHECY FULFILLED

We read in Mark:

As he was making his way out of the temple area, one of his disciples said to him, "Teacher, look at the huge blocks of stone and

the enormous buildings!” Jesus said to him, “You see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another – all will be torn down” (Mk. 13:1-2).

The terrible prophecy of Christ came true in the year 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was ransacked and the temple given to flames. The political-religious attempt of Bar Cochba, which culminated in a partial restoration of the Temple in the year 132, was in 135 frustrated by Hadrian who had a temple built on the site, dedicated to Jupiter, and he set up an equestrian statue of himself, to which was added soon after, the statue of his successor, Antonius Pius (138-161). Equally unsuccessful was the attempt of Julian the Apostate (361-362) to rebuild the Sanctuary of the God of Israel, for as soon as the enterprise was begun, the work was stopped by fiery eruptions from the soil. The Mount of Moriah was abandoned and the Christians looked on it as a spot cursed by God. The area of the Sanctuary was turned into a heap of rubbish and as such it remained till the arrival of the Arabs (691 AD.), when the historic Rock of Moriah, which according to the Moslems had been made holy by the presence of Mohammed, gave birth to one of the most important and most beautiful mosques of the Islamic world.

CHAPTER 7

BORN AGAIN

INTRODUCTION

We read in the Fourth Gospel:

While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name, for they could see the signs he was performing. For his part, Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all. He needed no one to give him testimony about human nature. He was well aware of what was in man's heart.

(Jn. 2:23-25)

According to John, Jesus demands a certain quality of faith in his disciples. This quality of faith is beyond the achievement of human nature. It is a divine gift. To illustrate the point, John uses Nicodemus as a man with insufficient faith. He is a scribe, a Pharisee, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He is one of the religious and intellectual leaders of Jerusalem. To understand the full import of the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, we need a little background information.

Being a Scribe placed Nicodemus, along with the nobility, in the upper class. A scribe achieved his position by his education. If a young Israelite desired to attain this status, he enrolled as a “*talmid*” (pupil) in the school of a rabbi. We know that Paul came from Tarsus to sit at the feet of a most famous man, Gamaliel. A close personal relationship existed for many years between the teacher and pupil. When the student learned to master all the traditional material and the halakic method, enabling him to make competent decisions in religious and judicial matters, he became a “*talmid hakam*,” a non-ordained scholar. When he reached the age of forty, he could, by ordination, be received into the company of the scribes as a “*hakam*” (an ordained

scholar). From this time on, he was authorized to make his own decisions on religious and ritual matters, to act as judge in criminal proceedings, and to pass judgment in civil cases, either as a member of the court or as an individual. He had the right to be called “*Rabbi*.” At the time of our Lord, the title was loosely applied, but later it came to be applied exclusively to scribes.

Scribes created the traditions derived from the Torah. Their decision had the power to “*bind*” or to “*loose*” for all times the Jews of the entire world. Because of their knowledge, key positions were opened to them in the administration of justice, in government and education. When a community was forced with a choice for nomination to the office of elder for a community, or “*ruler of the synagogue*,” or of judge, a scribe was preferred for the office. A larger number of important posts formerly held by priests and laymen of high rank, in the first century, had passed predominantly into the hands of scribes. Apart from the chief priest and members of noble families, the scribe was the only person who could enter the supreme court, the Sanhedrin, composed of seventy-two men. The Pharisaic party in the Sanhedrin was composed entirely of scribes.

The real power of the Scribes was derived from their secret knowledge – their esoteric teachings. Not all the teachings of the Scriptures were made available to all the people. The sacred writings of the Old Testament were not immediately available to the people. These were written in the “*sacred language*” – Hebrew – while the common language was Aramaic. At the time of the Lord, the leading scribes were still fighting against the spread of Aramaic translations of Scriptures. The story is told that a man brought a copy of Job in Aramaic to Gamaliel I in the Temple and Gamaliel buried it in a wall as a forbidden book. Scribes received these instructions:

The forbidden degrees may not be expounded before three persons, nor the story of Creation before two, nor the Chariot [the first chapter of Ezekiel] before one alone, unless he is a sage that understands his own knowledge. Whosoever gives his mind to four things, it were better for him if he had not come into the world – what is above? What is beneath? What was before time? And what will be hereafter?

In other words, thought and speculation on the heavens, the lower world,

eternity before creation of the world, and upon the last things (eschatology) was forbidden. In actual fact, writings on these subjects composed much of the scribes secret knowledge. Esoteric (or secret) teachings had as their object the deepest secrets of the divine being. Probably the holy name was part of this secret along with the marvels of Creation. Only in private, between the teacher and his most intimate pupil, would the matters written in Genesis and the first chapter of Ezekiel be made known and discussed. It is said they would be told almost in a whisper and while relating the most sacred vision of the Chariot, they would cover their heads as a sign of deep reverence.

These esoteric teachings were not isolated theological facts or religious occurrences, but highly developed theological systems and doctrines attributed to divine inspiration. One such was the teaching concerning the savior "*bar nasa*" (the Son of Man), often referred to by Jesus. Another was called the "*reasons of the Torah*." This explained what led God to establish these particular legal prescriptions for the Jews. It was argued that God's silence in Scripture concerning these "*reasons*" indicated it to be His will to leave the mass of people in ignorance concerning them.

Knowledge was kept secret either because of the sacred nature of its content or to guard against wrong use by the people. A prescription existed against reading certain expressions or stories of the Old Testament during synagogue services deemed offensive to good taste. Some of these could not even be read in Hebrew; others could, but could not be translated into Aramaic; others might be read only if certain "coarse" expressions were replaced by more acceptable expressions. Certain genealogical traditions likely to bring public disgrace to well known families were kept secret.

For all practical purposes, the halakah was a secret doctrine, as it could not be propagated by the written word. It was the "*secret of God*" and could only be transmitted orally from teacher to pupil. Only in the second century was it written down in order to counteract the New Testament.

(This practice was carried over into the New Testament. The writers of the Gospel distinguished the words of Jesus to the crowd and his words to his disciples . . . "*to you it is given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven.*" The silence of Mark on the Resurrection appears; the fact that all the Gospels avoid describing the Resurrection. Even in the first century, men began to

preserve the words of institution of the Eucharist from Sacrilegious misuse – most probably why they do not appear in the Fourth Gospel.)

This information enables us to better understand the social position of the scribes. From a social point of view, they were the successors of the prophets. From all corners of the world young Jews streamed, as Saul of Tarsus, to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of the masters whose teaching resounded throughout the Jewish world. Their words had sovereign authority. The Pharisaic communities, especially, gave their scribes unconditional obedience. Men rose in respect when the scribes passed in the streets wearing their long mantle reaching to the feet and provided with a long fringe. They were respectfully greeted as “*Rabbi*,” “*Father*” or “*Master*.” At banquets, the highest place of honor was kept for the rabbi – even over the aged or parents. In the synagogue, they had the seat of honor; he sat with his back to the cupboard containing the Torah, in full view of the people. The veneration of the rabbis is demonstrated that alongside the tombs of patriarchs and prophets, we find the tombs of the rabbis venerated and guarded with superstitious awe.

Again, we see something of the bravery of Jesus when He condemned the Scribes for imposing very strict religious laws on other people; while avoiding them themselves; building “*tombs of the prophets*” while ready to condemn to death men sent by God; keeping their learning secret and so cutting off the people’s access to the kingdom of God, while making no use themselves of their own knowledge; inordinate pride in dress, in salutations and in order of seating, particularly with regard to the synagogues. (*Lk. 11:46-52; 20:46*)

In keeping with this background, John presents Nicodemus, a leading rabbi, coming in the secrecy of night to hear Jesus. Nicodemus is presented by John not as a rabbi, but a talmid (a pupil), at the feet of the Divine Teacher to receive from Him the innermost mysteries of the kingdom of God: regeneration and redemption. Apparently, none of Nicodemus’ background had prepared him to understand these divine teachings. Nicodemus serves as an example that the Scriptures cannot be understood and properly interpreted regardless of intelligence and education without the Holy Spirit. Not only Christ and Nicodemus encounter each other in this instance, but it may well be an encounter between the Church and Judaism.

Nicodemus comes by night; perhaps a normal time for teacher and pupil to

meet for an intimate discussion; certainly a prudent time for a leading rabbi to encounter one such as Jesus. Night is too symbolic in John for us to miss that Nicodemus is coming out of the darkness in which his fellow Jews are immersed. Into this darkness the true light of the world will shine. Nicodemus represents those who see in Jesus unmistakable evidences of divine origin. He respectfully addresses the Lord, *“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God, for no man can perform signs and wonders such as you perform unless God is with him”* (Jn. 3:2). The statement concerning *“signs and wonders”* has led some scholars to place this scene at a later date in our Lord’s ministry. They see a logical connection between a meeting of the Sanhedrin in chapter seven and the meeting of Jesus with Nicodemus. We read in Chapter Seven:

. . . When the temple guards came back, the chief priests and Pharisees asked them, “Why did you not bring him in?” “No man ever spoke like that before,” the guards replied. “Do not tell us you too have been taken in,” the Pharisees retorted. “You do not see any of the Sanhedrin believing in him, do you? Or the Pharisees? Only this lot that knows nothing about the law – and they are lost anyway!” One of their own number, Nicodemus, spoke up to say, “Since when does our law condemn any man without first hearing him and knowing the facts?” Do not tell us you are a Galilean, too,” they taunted him. “Look it up. You will not find the Prophet coming from Galilee” (Jn. 7:45-52).

Some believe after this Nicodemus came to Jesus in the darkness of night to hear him and to know the facts. When the Sanhedrin meet again in chapter eleven and decide to destroy Jesus, Nicodemus is silent. He presents himself as a man of limited strength and insight. Does he not stand where the best of men stand without grace?

NECESSITY OF REBIRTH

In this scene, we have the first discourse given by Jesus. It is one of the major revelations of Jesus Christ – the necessity of human regeneration or rebirth. The loving shadow of the Most Holy Trinity falls across the scene revealing the Triune love of God for mankind. Verses three through eight refer to the recreating love of the Holy Spirit; verses eleven through fifteen reveal the sacrificial love of the Son; verses sixteen through twenty-one proclaim the

enduring merciful love of the heavenly Father.

The Divine Revelation is divided into two sections. Verses two through eight teach that man must be born again of the Holy Spirit in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Verses nine through twenty-one explain that this will be made possible through the *“lifting up”* of the Son of Man. And, rebirth will be offered only to those who believe in Jesus.

The discourse begins with Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night; it ends on the theme that men have to leave the darkness and come to the light. Nicodemus opens the conversation by hailing Jesus as *“a teacher come from God.”* How far this judgment is from the actual truth is illustrated in verses 16, 17 and 19. These verses indicate Jesus to be God’s only Son sent into the world as the Savior of the world and as the Light of the world. This is the quality of faith demanded by the Fourth Gospel. Nicodemus’ faith, based upon *“signs and wonders,”* is insufficient. He is right as far as he goes but he does not come to the radical Truth. He does not yet possess a saving faith. He fails to recognize the Divine reality confronting him in the Person of Jesus. He represents the limited vision of man unaided by grace. He can neither see beyond sense awareness nor understand what goes beyond that awareness. *“Flesh begets flesh.”* Jesus’ response touches the limitation of Nicodemus: *“No one can see the reign of God unless he is begotten from above.”* (Jn. 3:3).

Jesus raises the subject to a higher realm. Nicodemus has spoken from a sensible awareness but he must be raised to a supernatural awareness. The Reign of God has come in Jesus, but it is so opposed and different from anything of this world that a man cannot “see” the reign of God – he cannot experience, believe, nor accept this reign unless he is *“begotten from above.”* John’s use of the word *“begotten”* implies the reign will occur through a masculine principle from above (a Divine Principle). Nicodemus misunderstands Jesus to mean a person must be born again of a female principle, an earthly mother. He asks his first question, *“How can a man be born again when he is old?”* Jesus’ reply defines *“begotten”* to mean by water and the Spirit rather than by a human instrument. *“I solemnly assure you, no one can enter into God’s kingdom without being begotten of water and Spirit.”* (Jn. 3:5)

To Christian readers this is a clear reference to rite of initiation into the Christian Community, the Sacrament of Baptism that results in a reception of

the Holy Spirit by the new member. From time to time, the Church has decreed a passage of Scripture must be interpreted in a particular way. Verse five is one such passage. The council of Trent declared that this text refers to actual water baptism. It is a proclamation of the rite of Baptism as practiced by the Christian Church.

The necessity of rebirth or regeneration is explained by the Lord. He asks us not to be surprised “. . . *that I tell you, you must all be begotten from above . . . Flesh begets flesh, Spirit begets spirit*” (Jn. 3:6-7). The necessity of human regeneration or, in the words of Christian Theology, being baptized, is difficult for many to accept in its fullness. Because of the emotional and intellectual problems it creates, the doctrine of Limbo developed. It certainly encouraged infant baptism. It is easy to understand the necessity of hardened and notorious sinners needing regeneration in order to enter into union with God. But this doctrine does not stop there; it is extended to include all human beings from the first moment of personal conception . . . before a free breath is drawn or a thought conceived. It simply teaches that no human being, whether only three months within the womb of its mother or 100 years of age on this earth, at this point in creation, is fit for an eternal union with God. And furthermore, man, by his deeds, can never merit such a destiny.

This does not teach that all unbaptized are eternally lost. Scripture is silent on this point. It does maintain that those who willfully refuse to believe and those who willfully abide in serious sin will be lost. We read in verse 36, “*Whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure the wrath of God.*” The Scriptures do teach that God’s merciful love is extended to all his creatures and He wills the salvation of all men. This salvation must be reciprocally willed by all men who have the exercise and freedom of will. This is demonstrated by their willingness to accept God’s authority and direction in their lives. For enlightened persons, the Will of God consists in their accepting baptism, or at least not willfully refusing baptism. Water baptism is the ordinary means, established by Jesus, for rebirth in the Spirit. It certainly is logical to hold, in the light of God’s merciful love, that extraordinary means of salvation are available for those denied, through no fault of their own, the ordinary means. What are these extraordinary means? Your fantasies are as good as mine! Let us leave them to Heaven; for all God’s little ones – no matter their age – all is well.

Jesus teaches, through this doctrine, the essential alienation of man from God

through sin. All sin, from the first until the last, damages man's ability for union with God. We inherit at birth the burden of all past sin and by our sinful living, the burden grows heavier. Jesus assumed this burden and it committed him to the Cross and death.

We are all born men and women of the flesh. The Greek word for "flesh" is "sarx." It does not mean the human body, but rather it implies the entire human person alienated from God. Its end is death.

The Spirit is God's life – Eternal Life. Only from the Spirit flows the eternal life of God. If a human being is to share God's life, he must possess the principle, the source, of that life, the Holy Spirit, the Seed of Eternal Life. "*Spirit begets spirit.*" Without the Presence of the Holy Spirit within man, eternal life is possible. Let us recall that John means divine life when he says eternal life. Divine Life comes only through a rebirth in the Spirit. The gulf between flesh and spirit is absolute. A beautiful description of this doctrine is found in I Corinthians 15:44-50:

If there is a natural body, be sure there is also a spiritual body. Scripture has it that Adam, the first man, became a living soul; the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit. Take note, the spiritual was not first; first came the natural and after that the spiritual. The first man was of earth, formed from dust; the second is from heaven. Earthly men are like the man of earth; heavenly men are like the man of heaven. Just as we resemble the man from earth, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. This is what I mean, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; no more can corruption inherit incorruption.

The things of the flesh can be precisely measured and calculated, but Jesus teaches it is not so with the things of the Spirit. Its origin and activity is a mystery. The mysterious activity of the Holy Spirit is compared to the wind: "*The wind blows where it will. You hear the sound it makes but you do not know where it comes from, or where it goes.*" In the Greek, the word for wind and Spirit is "pneuma." In the Old Testament, the wind is the "*ruah,*" the breath of God. Whether it is Spirit or wind, its presence is manifested in its activity and its results; and such will be the characteristics also of the one spiritually reborn.

Nicodemus is bewildered. His Teacher has entered a realm he cannot enter. He is a man of the “*flesh*” judging by appearances and human insight. He asks, “*How can this be?*” With this question, we will leave Nicodemus. Perhaps he understood the answer. We later read when Jesus died:

Afterward, Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus (although a secret one for fear of the Jews), asked Pilate’s permission to remove Jesus’ body. Pilate granted it, so they came and took the body away. Nicodemus (the man who had first come to Jesus at night) likewise came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes which weighed about a hundred pounds. (Jn. 19:38-39)

Our Lord now speaks in His Name and that of the believing community. He warns Nicodemus and all like him that the truths now to be revealed must be received on the grounds of His testimony and will only be able to be verified from within. “*Whoever does accept this testimony certifies that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God.*” (Jn. 3:33-34) In the Prologue, John had taught that the children of God “. . . *were begotten not by blood, nor by carnal desire, nor by man’s willing it, but by God*” (Jn. 1:13). The gulf between flesh and spirit is spanned only from above. Man cannot merit heaven.

In order to save man, the Son of Man has descended from heaven into the sarx of man. It will be through this Incarnation that man will come to a rebirth into the pneuma, the Spirit. The Spirit of God returns into a human abode in Jesus Christ. Jesus will baptize with the Spirit resulting in the rebirth of the human person. Before this can come to be, the Son of Man must be “*lifted up.*” This expression for the early Church indicated the Ascension of the Lord. This ascension was seen in three stages: the ascension to the Cross, from the grave, and to the right hand of the Father. When this was completed, He would pour out his Holy Spirit.

Jesus uses a scene from the Old Testament to illustrate this truth: “*Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that all who believe may have eternal life in him*” (Jn. 3:14-15). We read in the Book of Numbers:

. . . the people complained against God and Moses, “Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in this desert, where there is no

food or water? We are disgusted with this wretched food [the manna]!” In punishment, the Lord sent among the people saraph serpents, which bit the people so that many of them died. Then the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned in complaining against the Lord and you. Pray the Lord to take the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people, and the Lord said to Moses, “Make a saraph and mount it on a pole, and if anyone who has been bitten looks at it, he will recover.” Moses accordingly made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole, and whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he recovered. (Num. 21:5-9)

The analogy is clear: anyone bitten by the deadly serpent of sin will surely die unless they look to the Cross of Jesus in faith. “. . . *Whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life.*” (Jn. 3:16) This is John’s first use of the words “*eternal life.*” It expresses the quality of life to be received by the believer, not the duration. He does not speak of everlasting life but of Divine life. Surely, everlasting life without divine love is Hell! The Book of Wisdom says: “*But not even the fangs of poisonous reptiles overcame your sons, for your mercy brought the antidote to heal them*” (Wis. 16:10).

When one reflects that being “*born again*” results from the birth and death of Jesus Christ, its only explanation is Divine Love. And so we read:

Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (Jn. 3:16-17)

God’s purpose is clear: salvation, not condemnation!

When John speaks of God’s love, he uses the Greek verb “*agapan.*” As with faith, John chooses to express love as an action. The meaning of agape, Christian love, is clear. It is expressed by God in the divine giving of His Son in the Incarnation and the sacrificing of His life on the Cross. No, God does not ration his love. “*The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him.*” (Jn. 3:35) Nor does He ration His gift of the Spirit. (Jn. 3:34) This encouraged St. Thomas Aquinas to write that the merits of the life and death of Jesus Christ are imparted to a newly baptized soul, just as if the soul itself

had merited them. No, there is no rationing of God's love and Spirit, only our limitations in receiving that love and the gift of the Spirit. The Body of Christ, the Church, is one of the essential means by which God has chosen to love mankind. A Christian grows and builds the Church through agape-love. The example of our heavenly Father and His Divine Son leave no doubt that Christian love must be expressed in a loving service that seeks the good of others.

Love is the life of the Spirit. Love is essentially an activity of the will. As long as love has no expression in action, it is unrealistic, a fantasy. Christian love does not necessarily clothe itself in loving feelings and emotions, but in good deeds. These deeds can be expressed without any feelings of love or any desire to love. They are more easily accomplished when accompanied by loving feelings and emotions but their presence does not argue for greater love. The opposite is often the truth. Acts of love can proceed solely from the will of a Christian who is determined to do good to others, regardless of how they feel. Such love may be very meritorious in the eyes of the Lord for it is devoid of all self-gratification. There are people whose emotions and feelings have been so blocked from childhood, they can never "feel" love for others, but they daily live heroic Christian lives by their loving deeds done in His Name and through His Spirit.

THE JUDGMENT OF LIGHT

One author has written: "*There is no book in the New Testament in which the contrast of love and hatred, life and death, light and darkness, truth and falsehood appears in such unrelieved sharpness as in this gospel*" (Lightfoot). Our Lord makes it clear that even though he has not come to judge the world but to save the world, His coming into the world, or the life of any individual, brings judgment. We are told:

The judgment of condemnation is this: the light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were wicked. Everyone who practices evil hates the light; he does not come near it for fear his deeds will be exposed. But he who acts in truth comes into the light, to make clear that his deeds are done in God. (Jn. 3:19-21)

The Incarnate Word is filled with life, love, and truth. His very existence is

the light revealing the nature of true love, of a godly life and of eternal truth . In the light of His life, people can know if they are loving and true and really alive. Those who seek life, love and truth will come unto His light, His Presence, that He may guide them out of darkness, error and death into the fullness of life, love and truth. A life given to selfishness, hatred, and dishonesty is a life dedicated to darkness and death. Such do not seek the Lord. In the Presence of Jesus, the Light of the World, the true self of every man is revealed.

In Chapter Three, John the Baptist gives his farewell witness to Jesus. Scholars agree this section is out of proper context. It would fit more comfortably following verse thirty-four in Chapter One. Verses thirty-one through thirty-six probably are a continuation from verse twenty-one.

HE MUST INCREASE

The farewell witness of John in chapter three continues the baptismal theme introduced with Nicodemus. The Baptism of Jesus is contrasted with the baptism of John the Baptist. John's baptism was one of repentance and the baptism of Jesus was one of regeneration. The spirit of John's baptism is a necessary spirit for the baptism of Jesus. A spirit of repentance is a necessary condition for the proper reception of Christian baptism. Such a baptism can only come from Jesus because of its heavenly origin. "*Spirit begets spirit.*" No doubt an appeal is being made to the sect still contending John to be the Messiah.

Once again, John serves as an admirable example for a true disciple of Jesus. We must realize that we are important in the apostolic ministry of Jesus. We are needed to bring souls to Jesus. All our knowledge, our virtue, our charm may be used to bring a soul to Jesus. Once this is achieved, our joy should be fulfilled. We must be content to see them growing more and more in love with the Lord and with less and less concern and need for us. Pure love always sings: He must increase and I must decrease! John, like Paul, like Moses, saw himself as a best man whose joy it is to bring the bride to the groom. (I'm afraid too often, in this spiritual realm, the best man wants to go on the honeymoon.) It was St. Augustine who beautifully paraphrased John's concept:

*I listen; he is the one who speaks
I am enlightened; he is the light
I am the ear; he is the Word.*

When John writes: “*The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him*” (Jn. 3:35), he expresses a favorite theme of this Gospel. To the Son, the Father has given: judgment (Jn. 5:22,27); to have life in Himself (Jn. 5:26); to have power over all flesh (Jn. 17:2); the divine Name (Jn. 17:11,12); glory (Jn. 17:22); and followers (Jn. 6:37; 17:6).

John closes this section with, “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure the wrath of God*” (Ver. 36). John expresses here the real sign of disbelief when he says, “*disobeys.*” Obedience is the other side of the coin of Faith. There is a strong logical connection between the way a man lives and believes. By the use of the present tense, John indicates not a single act, but a pattern of life.

Evil deeds and disobedience to God’s commands express themselves in a refusal to believe in Jesus and since this is the means to eternal life, “*whoever disobeys the Son will not see life.*” Disobedience encounters the enduring wrath of God. Here the present tense indicates that punishment has begun and will last . . . just as verse 18 stressed that the man who refuses belief is already condemned.

BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon a pagan named Cornelius and his household while Peter preached to them. What occurred was similar to Pentecost. Immediately following the experience, Peter encouraged Cornelius and his household to be baptized.

What Cornelius experienced is what today is popularly called “baptism in the Spirit.” It is not a sacrament and does not take the place of either the Sacrament of Baptism or Confirmation as indicated by the behavior of Peter.

Baptism in the Spirit is an experiential awareness of the Presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit in an individual spirit. For a Catholic, baptized and confirmed, it may be called a release of the Spirit within the conscious awareness of a person. A person experiences within his or her entire being a

divine sonship experience analogous to the baptismal experience of Jesus. *“This is my beloved Son!”* The person experiences the personal love of God for them in a very human way.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit usually results from a sincere desire to receive this baptism in order to change one’s life; to follow obediently the life of Jesus; to come into close union with the heavenly Father; and from the prayers and laying-on of hands of a Christian group who seek, with the petitioner, this baptism in the Spirit.

When received, it usually results in a spiritual conversion in which former obstacles to spiritual progress are removed and freedom from enslaving attachments, an intensification of love of God and neighbor flow, the spirit is strengthened in faith and hope and encouraged to spread God’s word and his Kingdom. Two notable signs that follow the baptism of the Holy Spirit are an intensified desire to pray and read the Scriptures.

At times, it results in special spiritual gifts or charisms given to an individual for the building of the Christian Community in loving service. If a soul who receives the spirit baptism perseveres in docility to the Holy Spirit and humble obedience to proper authority (the waterloo of many charismatics), these religious experiences are integrated into their religious life and are great means for their spiritual growth and progress.

If the experiences result in spiritual pride (demonstrated often through a spirit of rebellion and disobedience), the graces and gifts are perverted, the person becomes proud and devisive in the Christian Community. The end is spiritual chaos and oftentimes damaging to the Christian Community and unity.

Considering the blessings flowing from Baptism in the Spirit, it certainly is worth prayerfully seeking if we have the proper spiritual disposition.

CHAPTER 8

THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

INTRODUCTION

The baptismal success of Jesus Christ in Judea brought him to the attention of the Pharisees. The Lord thought it prudent to withdraw from the region into Galilee; Jesus and his disciples headed directly north through Samaria. Samaria, a part of Palestine, extended from the sea to the Jordan River. Jews intending to go to Jerusalem from Galilee had to cut through Samaria or go to the far east of Palestine and come through the Valley of the Jordan River.

Samaria lies deep in the heartland of the old Kingdom of Israel while Jerusalem lies at the heart of the Kingdom of Judah. Between the people of Samaria and Jerusalem, a hostility existed so ancient that many historians believe it demonstrates a division between the tribes of Judah and the tribe of Israel long before the time of David and Solomon.

We read that Jesus

... had to pass through Samaria, and his journey brought him to a Samaritan town named Shechem [located between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal], near the plot of land which Jacob had given to his son Joseph. (Jn. 4-5) The author of the Fourth Gospel does not wish the readers to miss the full import of what follows. He says, "Recall that Jews have nothing to do with Samaritans."

Who were the people of Samaria? The Jews considered them to be a mixed breed. After the deportation of the Jews to Babylon, the Jews who remained married with the Assyrian settlers brought into the area from Mesopotamia. These people introduced into the land the worship of five foreign gods.

When the Jews returned from captivity and, under the leadership of

Zerubbabel, began to rebuild the Temple, the Samaritan Community desired to aid in the reconstruction. We read in Ezra:

When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the family heads and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God just as you do, and we have sacrificed to him since the days of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, who had us brought here." But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the family heads of Israel answered them, "It is not your responsibility to build with us a house for our God, but we alone must build it for the Lord" (Ezra 4:1-3).

Understandably after this response, we read: *"Thereupon the people of the land set out to intimidate and dishearten the people of Judah so as to keep them from building" (Ver. 4).* They succeeded, by political negotiations, to stop the building of the Temple. *"Thus it was," we read, "that the work on the house of God in Jerusalem was halted" (4:24).* It is insinuated that the Samaritans plotted to kill Nehemiah, the governor, when he renewed the temple construction. *(Ne. 6:1-13.)* This resulted in a complete schism and separation that, except for a brief interval, would be final. This separation probably occurred before the Jews accepted the prophets and the sapiential books as Scriptures, for the Samaritans accepted only the first five books of the Bible as Scripture.

The Samaritans looked for the coming of a messiah called the *"Taheb"* (the Restorer) – but not for a kingly messiah from the line of David. Their concept of a messiah fits better the Prophet-like Moses. Later, the Samaritans built their own temple to Yahweh on the 2900-foot Mount Gerizim. This temple was a constant irritation to the Jews in Jerusalem. Finally, the high priest John Hyrcanus, in 128 B.C., led a military expedition into Samaria and destroyed the temple. From this time on, the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans was charged with hatred.

The Jewish Scriptures express their contempt for the Samaritans. We read in the Book of Sirach: *"My whole being loathes two nations, the third is not even a people. Those who live in Seir and Philistia, and the degenerate folk who dwell in Shechem" (Sir. 50:25-26).* The Jews referred to Shechem as a city of imbeciles. To revenge some act around 6 A.D., the Samaritans entered the

Temple in the middle of the night during Passover and strewed human bones in the porches and all over the sanctuary. This added fresh fuel to old hatreds.

Regardless of their Jewish background and traditions, the Samaritans were regarded as being on the level with Gentiles. If they joined the Jews, they had to be re-circumcised. "*Samaritan*" was a gross insult in the mouth of a Jew. In chapter eight, we will hear the Jews saying to Jesus, "*Are we not right after all, in saying you are a Samaritan, and possessed besides?*" (Jn. 8:48) Judaism forbade altogether any conversion of Samaritans. Rabbi Eleazar would say, "*He who eats the bread of a Samaritan is like one that eats the flesh of swine.*" He absolutely forbade the eating of bread made by Samaritans. There was no question of marriage between a Jew and a Samaritan. A Samaritan woman was considered "*from the cradle,*" as always impure in a very high degree, and as causing ritual impurity. Anything that touched her body was considered ritually impure.

Therefore, by the time Jesus came along, a very embittered relationship existed. When Galilean Jews took the road to Jerusalem through Samaria for the feasts, there were always incidents and sometimes even bloody encounters. Josephus records how, in 52 A.D., some Jewish guerrillas attacked the Samaritan villages in reprisal for the murder of one or more Galilean pilgrims who had been attacked and murdered along the northern frontier near the village of Ginae. (Jenin.)

When Jesus crossed Samaria, he could find no shelter, for he was going to the hated Temple in Jerusalem. He was refused even water to drink, showing the burning hatred of the Samaritans for the Jews. The ruin of their temple in Gerizim was a constant provocation. We read in Luke 9:51-56:

As the time approached when he was to be taken from this world, he firmly resolved to proceed toward Jerusalem, and sent messengers on ahead of him. These entered a Samaritan town to prepare for his passing through, but the Samaritans would not welcome him because he was on his way to Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, would you not have us call down fire from heaven to destroy them?" He turned toward them only to reprimand them. Then they set off for another town.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

In chapter four of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus will have a dramatic encounter with a Samaritan Woman. To truly appreciate this encounter, not only do we need to understand what it meant to be a Samaritan, but also to be a woman in the time of Jesus.

The rabbis asked these two questions that summarized the woman's position in the first century: "*What is the difference between a wife and a slave?*" And, "*What is the difference between a wife and a concubine?*" The accepted answers indicated very small differences existed between slaves, concubines and wives. In marriage, the girl had a contract that stated the fixed sum of money to be paid her in case of divorce or death of her husband. Up to the age of twelve-and-a-half, a girl had no legal rights to refuse a marriage arranged by her father. After twelve-and-a-half she did have a legal right to refuse a marriage. The father had even the right to sell his daughter into slavery. These parental rights led the daughters to be considered mainly as cheap labor and a source of profit. She could not inherit any wealth if a male heir existed. Education was solely for men. Rabbi Eleazar taught, "*If a man gives his daughter knowledge of the Torah, it is as if he taught her lechery.*"

Polygamy was permissible for man. A man could have three wives. Even in this century this custom had not vanished. H. Granquist stated in Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village that in 1927, in the village of Artas near Bethlehem, out of 112 married men, eleven had two wives and one had three. Therefore, almost one-tenth of the village practiced polygamy. Some believe that Jesus' words recorded in Mark 10:6-8 were an attack on this practice: "*At the beginning of creation God made them male and female; for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become as one. They are no longer two but one flesh.*"

The right of divorce belonged exclusively to the husband. The divorce law in Deuteronomy reads:

When a man, after marrying a woman and having relations with her, is later displeased with her because he finds in her something indecent, and therefore he writes out a bill of divorce and hands it to her, thus dismissing her from the house. (Deut. 24:1)

“Something indecent” was a rather indefinite phrase and different opinions existed on the matter at the time of Christ. The school of Rabbi Shamai and Rabbi Hillel were in dispute at the time of Jesus over its meaning. The school of Hillel explained it first as unchastity and secondly, as anything displeasing to her husband [such as burning the toast] gave him the right to put her away. This was the prevailing view in our Lord’s time. He Himself is drawn into this dispute:

Some Pharisees came up to him and said, to test him, “May a man divorce his wife for any reason whatever?” Jesus responded, “. . . let no man separate what God has joined . . . Because of your stubbornness Moses let you divorce your wives but at the beginning it was not that way” (Mat. 19:3-9).

In case of divorce, the children remained with their father. When there was a case of danger to life to a husband and wife, the husband must be saved first.

It was considered preferable for women, especially unmarried girls, not to ever go out of their homes. When going out in public, a woman’s face was hidden by an arrangement of two head veils and a headband on the forehead extending to the chin. Likewise, she wore a hairnet with knotted ribbons attached to it to conceal her features. It was considered so offensive for a woman to go out without her headdress and her face hidden that a husband had the duty to divorce her because of this conduct and was under no obligation to pay the money contracted at the marriage. Only in her wedding procession was a young lady seen with uncovered head and then only if she was a virgin, not a widow.

A man was forbidden to be alone with a woman (other than his wife), to look at a married woman or to greet her. If a woman conversed with anyone in the street, she could be divorced with no payment of money. A woman’s testimony was not acceptable in court matters. She had no right to bear witness because it was concluded from Scripture that she was a liar. (*Gen. 27.*) In general, at the time of Jesus, women were shut away from the general society, under submission to their fathers, then later their husbands. Their religious obligations were at a minimum. Only against such a background can we judge Our Lord’s attitude towards women. When he permitted women to be part of his company, he was knowingly overthrowing the

customs of his times.

Apparently, Jesus did not directly attack the social injustices of his day. That would have been like knocking the fruit off the tree – the fruit would grow back. It would have distracted from his true mission. In his own behavior, he ignored unjust legislation. He sought to change the hearts of men who create the social injustices. It was the tree he struggled to change. Men must be reborn if the tree is to bring forth good fruit.

When Jesus encounters the Samaritan Woman, being both a Samaritan and a woman, he meets a human being at the bottom of the social pile. In the scene that follows, John presents the drama of a soul struggling to believe in Jesus, to find God. The Samaritan Woman represents the human spirit alienated from its heavenly Father by sin and error.

“Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life.” (Jn. 3:16) The Son of God became the Son of Man in order to encounter human beings in a flesh-and-blood environment. There is nothing in our lives that may not be material for a religious experience. Jesus will meet us any place, any time. He expects to find us sinners. He comes to call the sinner. *“The sick need the physician.”* From the attitude projected by Jesus to the Samaritan Woman, it is evident He came to save and not condemn. *“God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” (Jn. 3:17)* The woman has a desperate need for salvation. No one knows it better than the Lord. He makes no moral judgment about her past life. The bare facts are stated. They speak for themselves. The Light shines into the darkness. The sinner has to recognize in Jesus (in the Church) that the Savior of the World encounters him or her. The sinner must be moved to seek from Jesus the *“living water.”*

The theme of water runs like a silver thread through the pages of this Gospel. Water is a necessity of life. In desert countries, “thirst” suggests one of the most painful cravings a man can experience. When this vital necessity is denied to the human body, it can become an agonizing experience, a prelude to a most painful death. The human spirit’s need for God has been compared to such a thirst: *“As the hind longs for the running waters, so my soul longs for you, O God. A thirst is my soul for God, the living God. When shall I go and behold the face of God?”* The prophet Jeremiah records this divine

complaint: “Two evils have my people done: they have forsaken me, the source of living waters; they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water” (Jer. 2:13).

LIGHT SHINING IN DARKNESS

In Chapter Four, we read: “*Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down at the well. [The well was located about 250 feet from the town of Shechem.] The hour was about noon [the sixth hour]*” (Ver. 6). This time-expression will appear once more in this gospel when Jesus, weary and dying from His redeeming journey, is lifted upon the Cross. (Jn. 19:14.) There are little refrains in Chapter Four prelude the Calvary scene and deliberately so, for the “*living water*” will only flow after the death of Jesus. The gift that will be offered to the woman at the well will cost the life of the Giver. In the offer of “*living water*,” Jesus expresses His infinite love for her.

And so we read as the weary Jesus rested, a Samaritan Woman comes to the well to draw water. It is a quiet hour around the well. Perhaps her coming at this time indicates something of her social situation, an outcast. According to the legal customs, Jesus was forbidden to speak to her. If He touched anything that had touched her, He was considered ritually impure. All these alienating things between Jews and Samaritans (legal customs, human prejudices and national hatred) made an encounter with Jesus impossible for the woman. She would not dare approach Him. Jesus immediately breaks down the barriers by asking her for a favor. He initiates a personal encounter with her. He places her in the superior position of a giver. From this superior position, she feels safe to respond. She is unable to rise above her environmental limitations and prejudices. She uses our Lord’s need to ridicule Him for having to humble Himself by asking a despised enemy for a favor: “*You are a Jew. How can you ask me, a Samaritan and a woman, for a drink?*” (Ver. 9) It made her feel good to look down on someone else for a change. (The Lord has entered her life; He has met her exactly where she is.) Her victory is brief. Jesus reverses the situation and betrays that the spiritual fulfillment of the woman is His real purpose. He issues to her a two-fold challenge: “*If only you recognized God’s gift, and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would have asked him instead, and he would have given you living water*” (Ver. 10).

The word used to express “*water*” would have indicated to the woman,

flowing water, like a mountain stream – a water so much more desirable than the captured, flat water in cisterns. The closest thing to “living water” around Shechem was Jacob’s well. This well was a hundred feet deep. Jesus now moves into the position of a potential giver and she a receiver. She recognizes Jesus to be different. She retreats from her former hostile attitude and respectfully and cautiously asks:

Sir [Kyrie-Lord], you do not have a bucket and this well is deep. Where do you expect to get this flowing water? Surely you do not pretend to be greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it with his sons and his flocks. (Ver. 1-12)

The encounter has been moved by Jesus from a natural and physical plane to a supernatural and spiritual level. The conversation is becoming more mystical and symbolic. John has changed the word expressing water from “living water” to flat, cistern water, indicating that now Jesus is here, the water in Jacob’s Well is no longer life-giving. The expressions “gift of God” and “living water” describes, both for the Jew and the Samaritan, the Torah. The Samaritan Woman could have caught the implication that this “living water” of Jesus was a replacement of the Law. Indeed, a claim to be greater than Jacob. That Jesus is the living Word of God escapes her. She still sees Jesus as imparting an Old Testament spirituality. John has indicated, by changing the word for water, that the Old Covenant has lost its spirit with the coming of Jesus. The reference to Jacob’s sons and flock drinking from the same source demonstrates its earthliness.

THE LIVING WATER

When Jesus offers the Samaritan Woman “living water,” He is not referring to Himself, but a spiritual gift to be given by Him to those who recognize “God’s Gift.” Chapter three identifies “God’s Gift”: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. . . .” To recognize God’s gift is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the World. The “living water” is the Holy Spirit communicated by Jesus to those who believe.

Jesus replied to the woman, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty; no, the water I give shall become a fountain within him, leaping up to provide eternal life” (Ver. 13-14). In the book of Sirach we read: “He who eats of me will

hunger still, he who drinks of me will thirst for more” (Sir. 24:20). Jesus contrasts his gift of the Spirit with the spirit of the Old Testament: He who “drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty.” He speaks of the water as “leaping up” to provide eternal life. The verb used to express “leaping up” conveys the quick movements of living being. The “living water” is a living Person, the Holy Spirit of God. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote: “water living and speaking in me, and saying to me from within, ‘Come to the Father.’” Man’s thirst for God will be quenched and fulfilled through the Presence of the Holy Spirit.

THE GIVER AND THE GIFT

The Samaritan Woman does not understand the deeper revelation involved in the conversation, but she is inwardly moved to accept part of the original challenge: *“Give me this water, sir, so that I shall not grow thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water” (Ver. 15).* She regards this gift as useful to her, not only to quench her thirst, but also to make life easier for herself. She hopes to avoid all future trips to the well. She reaches for the gift but has not yet met the first part of the challenge, to recognize the Giver. Only then will she receive the gift, for it will flow from her personal encounter in faith with her Savior.

All men desire the fruit of the Holy Spirit but not all desire the necessary means for obtaining this fruit, a loving union with God through Jesus Christ. A real religious life flows from an intense personal union with Our Lord, the Holy Spirit and the heavenly Father. True religion can never be reduced to a spiritual vending machine impersonally dispensing grace and salvation. It always demands a personal encounter with the Triune God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus endeavors to lead this woman to accept that first challenge: *“If only you recognize God’s gift, and who it is that is asking you for a drink” (Ver. 10).* He now forces her to make a decision about Himself. *“He said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and then come back here.’ ‘I have no husband,’ replied the woman. ‘You are right in saying you have no husband!’ Jesus exclaimed. ‘The fact is, you have had five, and the man you are living with now is not your husband. What you said is true.’” (Ver. 16-18)* We read in Chapter Three that those whose deeds are evil do not come near the light lest their deeds be exposed. The Light of Truth, Jesus Christ, brings the truth out of us whether

we try to disguise or deny it. In the light of Christ, His life and teachings, we see ourselves as we truly are – sinful human beings. Here we see that the truth is simply stated. There is no personal condemnation or judgment by Jesus. (How much more successful our efforts to convert sinners could be if we but followed the gentle Jesus.) The religious life of this woman reaches its crucial moment. Light has been thrown not only upon her sinful past, but on her empty, lonely present. Will she react? Hate the light and turn her back upon truth bringing upon herself a self-condemnation and judgment? Or, will she remain in its painful but healing rays? (Do not the Scriptures say that the truth will set us free?) She remains before Jesus but diverts those painful rays of truth from the personal life to something less personal. *“‘Sir,’ answered the woman, ‘I can see you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you people claim that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship God.’”* (Ver. 19-20) The best way to avoid a religious experience is to have a religious discussion! She uses this uncomfortable opportunity to put the controversial question of whether the right place of worship should be Gerizim or Jerusalem before the Lord. As a prophet, He should know.

Many scholars see the Samaritan Woman as an ideal representation of the religious situation of the Samaritans and the pagan world. The Hebrew word for “husband” is “ba al,” master, lord. This word was also used as a name for a pagan god. The Samaritans, in their search for God, had worshiped five pagan gods and now attempted to worship the true God, Yahweh, but He was not their “Lord” because of their erroneous and incomplete worship of Him. He was the God – Lord of the Jews.

The Samaritan Woman has begun to think on a spiritual plane although her motivations are still earthly. Jesus answers the woman directly, corrects her erroneous beliefs, and rules out the religious problem as being no longer relevant, important:

Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand, while we understand what we worship; after all, salvation is from the Jews. Yet an hour is coming, and is already here, when authentic worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth. Indeed, it is just such worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and those who worship

Him must worship in Spirit and truth. (Ver. 21-24)

IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

When Jesus speaks of worshipping the Father in Spirit and truth, we must not make the mistake that this means worshipping God in the inner recesses of man's own spirit; the Spirit is the Spirit of God, not the spirit of man. Christianity is not free from everything that ties men to times and places and ceremonies. A purely internal worship does not fit the picture presented to us of the praying community of Acts and the Eucharistic celebration of Corinthians. External worship is not being contrasted against internal worship. It is not the place but the manner of worship that is important. For John, "*truth*" is the eternal. Jesus is the truth whose entire being reveals the divine realities. The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus.

In short, the worship of the Father in "*Spirit and truth*" is to worship God in and through Jesus Christ who baptizes us in His spirit. "*It is just such worshippers the Father seeks.*" (Ver. 23) God can only rightly be worshipped as Father by those who possess the Spirit that makes them children of God. It is the Spirit that raises men above the earthly level and enables man to properly worship God. These are those "*begotten of the Spirit*" (Jn. 3:3).

The Samaritan Woman now indicates her willingness and longing to fulfill the Will of God, expressed when she says, "I know there is a Messiah coming . . . When he comes, he will tell us everything." Jesus replied, "I who speak to you am he" (Ver. 25-26). In this reply, Jesus reveals more than just His messiahship, but also His divine Sonship. He reveals to this woman the great mystery of His being. He does not have the same reluctance to make this revelation to the Samaritans as He does to the Jews. The Messiah was the Prophet-like-Moses who would instruct and direct them.

BIRTH OF AN APOSTLE

We read that the Samaritan Woman leaves her water jar behind. What she came seeking she now no longer needs. She becomes a symbol of the Church born again through spirit, giving witness to others about Jesus. She said to the people, "*Come and see someone who told me everything I ever did! Could this not be the Messiah?*" (Ver. 29) She gives her personal testimony. It encourages others to come to Jesus because of her. Even though her religious

knowledge and commitment are immature and incomplete, she brings not just one man but many to the Lord. Such as it was, it was adequate for the purpose. Having come to Jesus, they stayed with Him and through His words, many more came to belief. *“As they told the woman, ‘No longer does our faith depend on your story. We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this really is the Savior of the World.’”* (Ver. 42) This is the only such reference to Jesus in the Gospel. Obviously, John sees in the conversion of these men, a sign of the coming conversion of the Gentiles.

We read that on the return of the disciples, they *“were surprised that Jesus was speaking with a woman”* (Ver. 27). To be precise, they were shocked. What He was doing was contrary to all their moral and religious training. When the disciples urged Jesus to eat, He said to them *“I have food to eat of which you do not know”* (Ver. 32). As they misunderstood them, He explained, *“Doing the will of him who sent me and bringing his work to completion is my Food”* (Ver. 34). In this, Jesus is echoing the words of Deuteronomy 8:3: *“ . . . not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from . . . the Lord.”* Jesus teaches that just as eating bread nourishes and strengthens the body, so the Spirit is nourished and strengthened by accomplishing the will of God and bringing His work to completion. In bringing the Samaritan woman to salvation, John gives us a practical example of Jesus fulfilling the will of His Father. Jesus had been sent into the world to save sinners. This is His meat, His fulfillment and joy. Again, we have another Calvary refrain. The same Greek word for “completion” appears on the dying lips of Jesus expressing that the work given to Him by His Father was accomplished by His death on the Cross.

The Salvation of the world is God’s will. As Savior of the world, Jesus continues His mission. This mission continues daily in the Church until the end of time. Jesus tells His disciples, *“Do you not have a saying: ‘Four months more and it will be harvest!’? Listen to what I say: open your eyes and see! The fields are shining for harvest!”* (Ver. 35) Jesus tells his disciples now is the time for the harvest – not four months from now – not tomorrow but today! For a disciple God’s will is the salvation of all men; it should be his work, his fulfillment and joy. Our Lord directs his disciples’ eyes to the large harvest being reaped by the Samaritan Woman. He is the sower, she is the reaper. They will eternally rejoice together!

In chapter four, John has portrayed the steps by which a soul came to believe in Jesus. He also teaches the evangelical truth that the great harvest of the Church will not come from the Jews but from among the Gentiles. It is not men like Nicodemus, but the nonconformist Samaritan Woman who comes to a saving faith in Jesus. Through her apostolic activity, men come to see in Jesus the Savior of the World.

It is truly impossible to be a true disciple of Jesus and not be at heart an apostle. The Spirit will always be saying to us:

*Why I tell you,
Open your eyes
And look at the fields:
They are ripe for the harvest!*

CHAPTER 9

THE LIFE-GIVING WORD

INTRODUCTION

The Love of the Father sent His Son as the Savior of the world. Born as a child of a Jewish maiden, Jesus is a Jew; so *“salvation comes from the Jews.”* Jerusalem was the heart of his earthly home. Shortly after the beginning of his public ministry, the heart begins to grow cold. Soon it will disown and cast Him out. *“The foxes have lairs, the birds in the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere on which to lay his head.”* (Mat. 8:20) John prepares us for the inevitable. *“Jesus himself had testified that no one esteems a prophet in his own country.”* (4:44) St. Mark recorded the exact words: *“No prophet is without honor except in his native place, among his own kindred, and in his own house”* (Mk. 6:4). We had already heard in the Prologue, *“To his own he came, yet his own did not accept him”* (1:11). With the hostile attitude of the authorities expressed in the Temple, in his Father’s House, and the acceptance of Him in faith by the Samaritans, half-Jews, the fulfillment of the prophecy has begun. John now presents an encounter between Jesus and a pagan.

THE SECOND SIGN

With slightly different variations, the same scene appears in the Gospels of Matthew (8:5-13) and Luke (7:1-10). It is clear from these accounts that the *“royal official”* in John’s narrative is a Gentile who was highly praised by Jesus:

I assure you, I have never found this much faith in Israel. Mark what I say! Many will come from the east and the west and will find a place at the banquet in the kingdom of God . . . while the natural heirs of the kingdom will be driven out . . .”

(Mat. 8:10-12)

What now transpires is a sign of the coming conversion of the Gentiles to Jesus Christ.

Let us read the narrative as presented by John 4:46-54:

He went to Cana in Galilee once more, where he had made the water wine. At Capernaum, there happened to be a royal official whose son was ill. When he heard that Jesus had come back from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and begged him to come down and restore health to his son, who was near death. Jesus replied, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you do not believe." "Sir," the royal official pleaded with him, "come down before my child dies." Jesus told him, "Return home. Your son will live." The man put his trust in the word Jesus spoke to him, and started for home. He was on his way there when his servants met him with the news that his boy was going to live. When he asked them at what time the boy had shown improvement, they told him, "The fever left him yesterday afternoon about one." It was at that very hour, the father realized, that Jesus had told him, "Your son is going to live." He and his whole household thereupon became believers. This was the second sign that Jesus performed on returning from Judea to Galilee.

From Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee, the royal official makes a twenty-mile journey over the hills of Galilee to Cana. He comes in faith and need. He has never witnessed a miraculous sign by Jesus. He believes without seeing and appeals to Jesus to come and heal his dying son. Our Lord appears to lack his customary Compassion. (You might say that his visit is ill timed.) Our Lord responded, "*Unless you see signs and wonders you do not believe*" (Jn. 4:48). Or, in other words, unless faith is supported by signs and wonders, there is no faith!

John uses this narrative to teach a very difficult lesson. Obviously, it is not directed towards the royal official, as it fails to apply to him. It is to people of his day and to us, the readers, that he speaks. John witnessed many miracles in his time and he sadly noted that for the most part they failed to produce lasting disciples of Jesus Christ. He was suspicious of a faith that needs miracles to live by. He knew miracles manifested the glory of God and could

lead to increased faith if the proper internal disposition existed in the human spirit. It is not miracles he is against but the spirit that demands miracles in order to believe. Belief founded upon such a poor quality of faith has its foundation in the flesh, not the spirit: I believe when my eyes behold the concrete evidence, a miraculous occurrence.

Our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, our personal Savior, must never depend on whether he grants or denies a miracle in a time of need. If our faith needs such, and the compassionate Lord grants the request, John indicates it still will not lead us to a *“saving faith.”* Faith born of such *“signs and wonders”* often blooms no longer than a field flower. The heat of trials and tribulations wilt the memory of yesterday’s blessings. Such faith is comparable to people who deep down do not believe they are lovable; they can only believe it when actually being loved in some concrete way. Without constant assurances of love, they become desperate and despondent. They have no faith in their lovableness, only in the signs and wonders of love-hugs and kisses or whatever means love to them. The Old Testament confirms people can behold divine occurrences and refuse belief: God said to Moses concerning Pharaoh, *“ . . . despite the many signs and wonders that I will work in the land of Egypt, he will not listen to you”* (Ex. 7:3-4).

Our Lord’s attitude towards the royal official was similar to his attitude to the Canaanite Woman. Both of these people were Gentiles and Jesus’ earthly ministry was to the Jews. (The ministry to the Gentiles belonged to His Church.) Recall His words to that poor woman: *“It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs!”* (Mk. 7:27) The woman stood her ground and replied, *“Yea, Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table.”* Her faith won the day but her humility was certainly the foundation of her victory. The royal official, likewise, refused to accept a rebuff. He pleaded with Our Lord to come down and heal his dying child. Jesus refused to do it his way. Our Lord, in his own way, not only answered the prayer, but elevated the man’s faith to a higher degree. Jesus told him, *“Return home. Your son will live.”* As the narrative indicates, this is not merely a healing, but a restoration of life.

The royal official had come to bring Jesus to Capernaum so Jesus could lay his hand upon his son and cure him. His prayer was granted but the means by which he wanted it were denied. He had to return home empty-handed but not empty-hearted. His heart was filled with hope in the “word” of Jesus.

He moved into a higher quality of faith – one dear to the heart of John – *“The man put his trust in the word Jesus spoke to him.”* He believed in the word of Jesus. He believed the Word! *“Faith is confident assurance concerning what we hope for, and conviction about things we do not see.”* (Heb. 11:1)

The royal official *“was on his way there [home] when his servants met him with the news that his boy was going to live”* (Ver. 51). Belief in the Word of Jesus Christ produces eternal life. The Word is life-giving!

When John recalls for us, *“This was the second sign that Jesus performed,”* he is recalling to our minds the first miracle and its effect. *“Thus did he reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him.”* (2:11) He concludes this narrative with, *“He and his whole household thereupon became believers”* (4:53). A sign of the future harvest among the Gentiles has been given.

We have mentioned in a previous lesson that in the Fourth Gospel, a discourse usually follows a miracle. The discourse reveals the teaching of the miracle. We find John now presenting two miracles back-to-back, followed by a lengthy discourse in which we are taught that Jesus begets eternal life to those who believe in Him, and he grants life to whom he chooses.

THE THIRD SIGN

The sudden placing of Jesus back in Jerusalem indicates there has been a rearrangement of chapters. A more logical order would be for chapter six to follow chapter four, where Jesus is found on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Chapter five follows six, with Christ going to Jerusalem and withdrawing from Jerusalem in chapter seven, as he could no longer travel safely in Judea. So as not to separate our examples from our teachings, we will follow the present order found in the Fourth Gospel.

In Chapter Five, we read:

Later, on the occasion of a Jewish feast, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Pool there is a place with the Hebrew name Bethesda [House of Mercy]. Its five porticoes were crowded with sick people lying there blind, lame or disabled [waiting for the movement of the water]. [The pool with its five porticoes has been recently discovered in the area northeast of

the temple; the pool was 315 feet long and 220 feet wide.] “There was one man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus, who knew he had been sick a long time, said when he saw him lying there, “Do you want to be healed?” “Sir,” the sick man answered, “I do not have anyone to plunge me into the pool once the water has been stirred up. By the time I get there, someone else has gone in ahead of me.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk!” The man was immediately cured; he picked up his mat and began to walk. (Ver. 1-9)

The symbol of water reappears in this third miracle recalling the symbolic teaching of the water of Jewish purification at the wedding of Cana and the water in Jacob’s Well. The life-giving ability of water of the Old Testament is again emphasized. We are presented with the picture of a man lying next to a life-giving water. We are told for thirty-eight years he has been in this devitalized and crippled condition. The Torah was supposed to give life. But, for publicans and sinners, it did nothing. This man is representative of such men. He is too weak to make use of the healing remedy within his reach. There lie the healing waters but the cripple remains unhealed.

The man is not only crippled in body but in spirit. He is totally sick! Jesus knows his condition. He meets him where is – He asks the man, “*Do you want to be healed?*” In other words, do you have the will to become a healthy man? Here we see how human will can impede divine good will. God has made man free and God must always work within man’s freedom. When man rejects God in his life, God must respect that rejection even when it means man’s death and loss. Love always leaves the loved one free! In praying for healings and conversions, we must always bear this in mind. God will never act against the free choice of a man. Many people get sick and die because they will it – often on an unconscious level. Countless sicknesses result from bad willing (not necessarily sinful) on the part of human beings. If we cure the symptoms of sickness without curing the cause, it is wasted effort. In time, something worse will develop. Father Francis MacNutt, O.P., gives an example of a woman paralyzed because of resentment and bitterness. Only when she was able to forgive was the paralysis cured.

In this particular Gospel account, Our Lord indicates that the illness resulted from personal sin. “*Remember, now, you have been cured. Give up your sins so that something worse may not overtake you.*” (Ver. 14) It is important when

praying for healing that we pray for the right thing. We need to pray first for the spirit of discernment to know the source of the illness. Remember, more than not, the illness is not the fruit of the tree . . .

We may not deduce from chapter five that illness is always the result of personal sin. In Chapter Nine, Jesus corrects this error:

As he walked along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, was it his sin or that of his parents that caused him to be born blind?" "Neither," answered Jesus, "it was no sin, either of this man or of his parents." (9:1-3)

Bad willing, even in ignorance, will always have bad results. Sometimes the results are physical illnesses or emotional disturbances and at other times the effects are spiritual – the stifling and retarding of our love of God and neighbor. Serious sin places us back under the dominion of the Evil One. Only God knows what accidents, what tragedies have occurred in this life through human means empowered by the Evil One. Many innocent and good persons have suffered and died because of his influence over men. Number one was Jesus Christ!

Our Lord asked the man, *"Have you the will to become a healthy man?"* His reply was a feeble excuse for why he is the way he is. The man has not the will. (The Old Testament might show the way of life, but it was powerless to create the will to live.) This is not a case where the will opposes God, but where the will is so sick and weak it is completely debilitated. This is a case where there is needed deliverance! Jesus imparts to the sick man the will to live as well as the power to live. It flows from His words. This cure has nothing to do with the man's faith. He has no awareness of who cures him. Both narratives express the theme stated in verse 21, *"Just as the Father raises the dead and grants life, so the Son grants life to those to whom he wishes."*

From what follows, it appears this may well serve as an example of *"signs and wonders"* not producing a disciple. When the man discovers who cured him, we do not read that he became a disciple but rather, that he went and allied himself with the Lord's enemies. *"The man went off and informed the Jews that Jesus was the one who had cured him." (5:15)*

THE JEWISH SABBATH

We read in verse ten that the cure occurred on the Sabbath. *“Consequently, some of the Jews began telling the man who had been cured, ‘It is the Sabbath, and you are not allowed to carry that mat around.’”* We read in Jeremiah 17:21: if anyone carries anything from a public place to a private house on the Sabbath, intentionally, he renders himself liable to the punishment of premature death and stoning. Since the coming of Rome, the Jews had no longer the right to put anyone to death. This frustration probably only increased their destructiveness. The man cured reasoned that the authority of the one who had wrought the miracle would outweigh any legal restrictions. He responded, *“It was the man who cured me who told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk’” (Ver. 11).* What follows relates the real hardness of human hearts and the perversion of spirit resulting from legalism. A sufferer of thirty-eight years has spoken of being healed; there is no human response to this work of power and mercy. Their hearts are as cold as steel, their only concern is with a technical offense: *“‘This person, who told you to pick it up and walk,’ they asked, ‘who is he?’” (5:12)*

John tells us, *“It was because Jesus did things such as this on the Sabbath that they began to persecute him” (Ver. 16).* Obviously, Jesus was guided by a principle of action that violated the letter of the Law.

Since the Sabbath is such a bone of contention for the Jews with Jesus, a little background on the Sabbath will help our understanding of the situation. The Sabbath was a most important religious observance for Jews. The Book of Leviticus prescribed: *“For six days work may be done; but the seventh day is the Sabbath rest, a day for sacred assembly, on which you shall do no work. The Sabbath shall belong to the Lord wherever you dwell” (Lev. 23:3).* It became a day of religious assembly primarily in the synagogue. Keeping the Sabbath identified true Jews and marked them off from others. The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week in the Jewish Calendar. The word *“Sabbath”* derives from the Hebrew word meaning “rest” or “cease.” The observance of the *“seventh”* day as a day of rest was an ancient practice among the Israelites. We read in Deuteronomy 5:12-15 that it was orientated and directed towards the good of man:

Take care to keep holy the Sabbath day as the Lord, your God, commanded you. Six days you may labor and do all your work; but

the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, your God. No work may be done then, whether by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or ass or any of your beasts, or the alien who lives with you. Your male and female slave should rest as you do. For remember that you too were once slaves in Egypt.

Exodus 20:11 refers to God's resting from creating on the seventh day and established the theological basis of man's rest at the end of the week: *"In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord has blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."*

One observed the Sabbath by keeping it holy, and to violate the Sabbath was to profane its holiness. But keeping the Sabbath was not always understood in the same way. During the days of King David and Solomon, it was a day of rest from work of men, slaves, and animals and all buying and selling were prohibited. As the emphasis grew more upon the worship of the Lord and less and less upon a day of rest, the restrictions grew. We read the story in Numbers of a man being stoned to death for gathering wood on the Sabbath. (*Num. 15:32.*) After the exile, we are told that Nehemiah ordered the gates of Jerusalem to be locked at sundown of the Sabbath to stop commerce and marketing in Jerusalem on the Sabbath. (*Ne. 13:19-22.*) In the Maccabean period, self-defense was forbidden on the Sabbath, but when a few Jews were massacred while refusing to resist attack, they quickly changed the observances as being too rigorous: *"Let us fight against anyone who attacks us on the Sabbath, so that we may not all die as our kinsmen died"* (*1 Mac. 2:41*). With the rise to power of the scribes and Pharisees, the Sabbath restrictions grew more severe. It became incidentally a day of rest and essentially, a holy day dedicated to the Lord. Man lived to keep the Sabbath. The rabbis enumerated 39 forbidden activities and among these were the lighting of a fire, clapping of hands, slapping the thighs, visiting the sick. One could only walk a Sabbath day journey of about 2,000 feet. The discussions on keeping the Sabbath holy were at times ridiculous. It was even argued among Rabbis whether one could eat an egg laid by a chicken on the Sabbath. The Jews, especially the Pharisees, strived to keep themselves in a state of legal purity, or external sanctity, as a sign of their intimate union with Yahweh.

We know from the criticism of Jesus that they did this at the expense of the spirit. They kept the letter but lost the spirit of the law. For this reason, our

Lord says of such, they are like the beautiful tombs – all nice on the outside, but inwardly full of death. Our Lord observed the Sabbath – but in keeping with the view of Deuteronomy. He best expressed his teaching when he said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”* That is why the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Our Lord’s attitude towards the Sabbath caused bitter opposition from the Pharisees. Jesus indicated their prohibitions were mere human interpretations of the precept which is essentially for human welfare. Actually, they profaned the Sabbath by making it an excuse for not doing good to others. One reason they sought to kill him was because he failed, in their minds, to keep the Sabbath and encouraged others to violate it by his teachings and behavior. In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul teaches that the obligation of the Sabbath no longer binds:

No one is free, therefore, to pass judgment on you in terms of what you eat or drink or what you do on yearly or monthly feasts, or on the Sabbath. All these were but a shadow of things to come; the reality is the body of Christ.

John records that Jesus had an answer for his critics. The answer only added fuel to the fire. Jesus responded, *“My Father is at work until now, and I am at work as well”* (5:17). The theme reaches its highest theological level. John implies that the life-giving works which Jesus has performed on the Sabbath are instances of divine activity and are exempted from the Sabbath restrictions. The situation is summed up in these words: *“The reason why the Jews were even more determined to kill him was that he not only was breaking the Sabbath but, worse still, was speaking of God as his own Father, thereby making himself God’s equal”* (5:18).

THE TRIAL BEGINS

The trial of the Word is about to begin. Jesus’ defense will fall into two parts, essentially related. The first and main part of the defense will be within verses 19-30 (within which, verses 26-30 will largely repeat much of the thought in verses 19-25). The second part of Jesus’ defense will be within verses 31-47, wherein Jesus presents the evidence for his remarkable claims.

The rabbis actively debated the theme of God’s perpetual activity in the world. We read in Genesis that God rested on the seventh day. This

statement gave rise to much debate and speculation. When four eminent rabbis were asked if God observed His own law in regard to the Sabbath, they defended and justified God's operations on the Sabbath. The Jewish philosopher, Philo, maintained that the title, "*Living God*," implies that divine activity never wearies, but causes inferior creative agencies to cease, while He continues to create. The rabbis taught God rested from the work of creation, but not from the moral judgment of the universe. They identified three works of the Father on the Sabbath: life, death and judgment. Jesus identifies his activities as giving life to the dead and bringing judgment to all men.

The subject of the Sabbath fades into the background with Jesus' identification with the Father. Some scholars find the remains of a lost parable in verses 19 and 20, where Jesus told a parable of a son working as an apprentice to his father, perhaps in a carpentry shop. The boy imitates what he sees his father doing; he can learn only what his father teaches him. The conclusion of the parable is found in verse 21: "*Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and grants life, so the Son grants life to those whom he wishes.*" He wishes to give life to those who hear the voice of the Son of Man. "*I solemnly assure you, an hour is coming, has indeed come, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who have heeded it shall live.*" (5:25) Here, Jesus speaks of the spiritual resurrection of the spirit from the grave of sin. In verse 28, he refers to the physically dead: "*. . . for an hour is coming in which all those in their tombs shall hear his voice and come forth.*"

The divine power of judgment – to declare righteousness – has been given to the Son, in order that He may be honored as the Father is honored. The judgment of the Son is no secret: "*I solemnly assure you, the man who hears my word and has faith in him who sent me, possesses eternal life. He does not come under condemnation, but has passed from death to life*" (5:24). Speaking of the final judgment, he declared, "*Those who have done right shall rise to live; the evildoers shall rise to be damned.*" This echoes the words of the prophet Daniel: "*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace*" (Dan. 12:2).

We know from the conclusion of verse 18 that the Jews accused Jesus of making himself God's equal. Such an accusation in the pagan world would imply a Divine Man procreated by God who, in a special manner, shared in the Divine Nature. But to the Jews, such an accusation implied one setting

himself up as Lucifer – a rival to the One True God. Isaiah expressed such a spirit: *“I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will be like the Most High!”* (Is. 14:14)

To refute the claim that he saw himself as a *“second god,”* Jesus affirmed: *“I solemnly assure you, the Son cannot do anything by himself – he can do only what he sees the Father doing”* (5:19). Jesus does not deny his divine activity, but he attributes this activity solely to his unity with the Father. This unity consists of a total, unqualified obedience to the Father’s will. For this reason, every act performed by the Son is an act of the Father. In the fullest sense of the meaning, these are acts of God, for the will of God is fully expressed. The foundation of this divine unity is the Father’s love and the Son’s obedience.

THE DEFENSE WITNESSES

Upon what evidence does such an extraordinary claim rest? The Jews say to Jesus in chapter eight, *“You are your own witness. Such testimony cannot be valid”* (8:13). The rabbis held that no man can bear witness on his own behalf. Both Deuteronomy (17:6) and Numbers (35:30) demand several witnesses in legal matters (where capital punishment is involved). Jesus offers four witnesses, but when it is all said and done, the four are different aspects of the One Witness, the Father:

1. The first to bear witness is John the Baptist, a man sent by God.
2. The miracles produced by Jesus bear witness. These represent the Father inasmuch as they were given to the Son by the Father.
3. Jesus mentions His Father, Himself, has given testimony. This reference probably refers to the Father’s internal evidence within the minds and hearts of men. Inwardly, men would immediately recognize the Divine Truth in Jesus. We read in John 5:19-20: This is the testimony that God has given about His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself.
4. The final witness is Scripture, which comes from God and again, is the Father’s witness. Men may read the word of God, but unless the “Word” dwells within a man, the Scriptures have no power of conviction!

Divine testimony often fails to find human acceptance. This very failure serves as a judgment. God's self-disclosure appears before us in the Word made Flesh, the teachings of Jesus and the truths of the Scripture. Man does not believe these divine revelations unless empowered from within by the Holy Spirit. This is not an intellectual problem, but a moral problem. It lies at the heart of man's life and his love of God. Why is not the Spirit operative within man? Jesus gives two reasons. ". . . you do not have the love of God in your hearts" (5:42); and, "How can people like you believe, when you accept praise from one another yet do not seek the glory that comes from the One God?" (5:44). In the rejection of Jesus, one is actually rejecting the dedicating of one's life to God. This is what the message of Jesus demands. The refusal to hear God reveals the intrinsic selfishness of a human life. Our eternal judgment is what we have become in the Face of Divine Love – the Life-giving Word!

CHAPTER 10

THE LIVING BREAD

INTRODUCTION

In chapter six of the Fourth Gospel, the past and the future blend with the present. The scenes presented can only be understood by recognizing how the past and future truly mold the narration. The key to open the mystery of the chapter is verse four: *“The Jewish feast of Passover was near.”* The ancient Passover of the Jews, the celebration of Passover at the time of Jesus, and the Christian paschal celebration are the essential and blending elements. They present a subtle and complex portrait.

Within Jewish history, the Passover became the great national feast of Israel, celebrating the Jews’ establishment as the people of Yahweh. It was a ritual reliving their exodus from slavery. The account found in Exodus (Chapter Four through fifteen) was probably the reading from the ancient festival. Here, we are told how the tale must yearly be retold. In the beginning, the Passover was a festival banquet, but by the time of the composition of the Book of Deuteronomy, it had the aspects of a quasi-sacrifice. The place for the slaughtering and eating of the lamb was designated. We read in Deuteronomy:

You shall offer the Passover sacrifice from your flock or your herd to the Lord, your God, in the place which he chooses as the dwelling place of his name . . . You may not sacrifice the Passover in any of the communities which the Lord, your God, gives you; only at the place . . . of his name, and in the evening at sunset, on the anniversary of your departure from Egypt, shall you sacrifice the Passover. You shall cook and eat it at the place the Lord, your God, chooses; then in the morning you may return to your tents.

(Deut. 16:2, 5-7)

It was necessary to go to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration and it was held in the “*Abib*” (meaning “ripe grain”) – the month in which the barley harvest fell (March and April). The month was later to be called by the Babylonian name, “*Nisan*.”

In the time of Our Lord, as a preparation for the feast, a three-year cycle of prescribed Scriptures were read on the Sabbaths in the local synagogues. One group of readings from Exodus (chapters nine through sixteen) would cover a period beginning shortly before the first Passover and end with God’s sending the quail and manna. In this text, the grumbling of the people against God is noted and the explaining to them by Moses about manna: “*On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, ‘What is this?’ for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, ‘This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat’*” (Ex. 16:15).

A second group of readings came from the Book of Numbers (Chapters Six through fourteen). Herein is recalled the second Passover celebration. The people are still grumbling, “*Would that we had meat for food! We remember the fish we used to eat without cost in Egypt . . . But now we are famished; we see nothing before us but this manna . . .*”

“Why do you treat your servant so badly?” Moses asked the Lord. “Why are you so displeased with me that you burden me with all these people? Was it I who conceived all these people? Or was it I who gave them birth, that you tell me to carry them at my bosom, like a foster father carrying an infant, to the land you have promised under oath to their fathers? Where can I get meat to give to all these people? For they are crying to me, ‘Give us meat for your food.’ I cannot carry all these people by myself, for they are too heavy for me. If this is the way you will deal with me, then please do me the favor of killing me at once, so that I need no longer face this distress.” (Num. 11:4-15)

Here we see the work of all prophets: to bring people from where they are to where they should be . . . from an Egypt to a Promised Land. The life of Moses illustrates it to be an arduous task.

Likewise, readings from the Prophets accompanied the reading from the first five books of the Bible. In Our Lord's time, people would have heard these words of Isaiah read on the Sabbath around Passover:

The oppressed shall soon be released; they shall not die and go down into the pit, nor shall they want for bread. For I am the Lord, your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the Lord of host by name. (Is. 51:14-15)

All of you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk! Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy? Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare. Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life. I will renew with you the everlasting covenant. (Is. 55:1-3)

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts. For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it. (Is. 55:8-11)

All your sons shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children. (Is. 54:13)

Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea into a way for the redeemed to pass over? (Is. 51:10)

Then they remembered the days of old and Moses, his servant; where is he who brought up out of the sea the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who put his holy spirit in their midst?

(Is. 63:11)

These were some of the thoughts filling the minds of the people around the Passover feast and painting for them vivid dreams and fantasies about the Messiah and the coming messianic age. The theme of manna from heaven had been woven closely into the Passover motif. Jewish tradition held that manna fell for the first time on the 15th of April – the second month of the barley harvest, a date for celebrating the Passover for those unable to do so on the regular date. (*Num. 9:11.*) Manna fell for the last time on Passover eve. There was a popular expectation that the Messiah would come on Passover, and that the manna would begin to fall again on Passover (the Last Supper).

With this background of thought to give us light, we will study the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel. We should be able to see that even though Jesus created a ritual that was entirely new, it is linked in innumerable ways to the religious background of the Old Testament.

All the events within the chapter will take place in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee. This chapter will conclude the Galilean ministry of Jesus. We have already been informed that "*when he arrived in Galilee, the people there welcomed him. They themselves had been at the feast and had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem on that occasion*" (*Jn. 4:45*). Earlier, John remarked, "*While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name, for they could see the signs he was performing. For his part, Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all*" (*Jn. 2:23-24*). The Synoptic Writers had spoken of a successful Galilean ministry that mysteriously ended. John will explain not only the reason Jesus failed with the Galileans, but also why he failed with Judas, one of the Twelve.

THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES

Jesus has retreated to a somewhat deserted place. More than five thousand people followed him. With these people following Jesus into the desert, John recreates the Exodus scene with Jesus presented as the New Moses – but also much more than a Moses. The people followed Jesus because they witnessed the "*signs and wonders*" performed by Jesus. It had been the "*signs and wonders*" that had encouraged the Israelites to follow Moses out of Egypt. (It was the lack of them that encouraged them to grumble about him!)

The scene that follows had a close parallel in the Second Book of Kings:

A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing the man of God [Elisha, the servant of Elijah] twenty barley loaves made from the first fruits, and fresh grain in the ear. "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said. But his servant objected, "How can I set this before a hundred men?" "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha insisted, "For thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat and there shall be some left over.'" And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the Lord had said. (2 Kgs. 4:42-44)

We have been told the *"Jewish Feast of Passover was near."* Perhaps before another Passover celebration fell Jesus would be dead. The shadow of the Cross already falls across the Galilean hills. The time to complete his work is brief.

Jesus said to Philip:

"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" . . . Philip replied, "Not even with two hundred days' wages could we buy loaves enough to give each of them a mouthful!" One of Jesus' disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, remarked to him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and a couple of dried fish, but what good is that for so many?" (6:5-9)

Herein we see how undeveloped was the faith of the disciples. They expressed no faith in Jesus' power to meet such a need.

The presence of the barley loaves recalls both the Passover feast celebrated during the harvest of barley and also the Christian Eucharistic celebration. Bread made from barley was the bread of the poor. It was this type of bread that was first used by early Christians in the Eucharist. *"Jesus then took the loaves of bread, gave thanks, and passed them around to those reclining there; he did the same with the dried fish, as much as they wanted."* (Ver. 11) For the early Christian reader, this would immediately recall the Eucharistic celebration – the bread, the words, the actions (gave thanks = eucharistein) were all echoes of the Christian Eucharistic celebration. This is the only miracle recorded by all four Evangelists. The words used by St. Luke in his account are more Eucharistic. He writes, *"Then, taking the five loaves and the*

two fish, Jesus raised his eyes to heaven, pronounced a blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to his disciples for distribution to the crowd” (Lk. 9:16).

When they had had enough, he told his disciples, “Gather up the crusts that are left over so that nothing will go to waste.” At this, they gathered twelve baskets full of pieces left over by those who had been fed with the five barley loaves. (5:12-13)

The fishes are not mentioned because the bread is the important symbolic feature. Gathering the remaining crusts expressed the early Church’s attitude towards the Eucharistic bread. In the Didache, an early Christian work (C. 100 A.D.), we read this Eucharistic formula:

Concerning the broken bread, we give thanks (eucharistein) to you, O Father . . . as this broken bread was scattered on the mountain but was gathered up and became one, so let the Church be gathered up from the four corners of the earth into your kingdom.

In the gathering of the bread, we see not only a symbolism of Church unity but that the Twelve Apostles are the future custodians of the Eucharist and the distributors of this bread to the world.

The fact that more bread remained than began demonstrates the greatness of this miracle. A great sign has been given leading to a great revelation about Jesus Christ. The people have watched Jesus with anticipation. His deeds and their implications were widely discussed. The sign is interpreted in light of their expectations; it is misinterpreted. Their decision is made: “*This is undoubtedly the Prophet who is to come into the world*” (6:14). Jesus, like Moses, like Elijah, had fed the people miraculously. Indeed, he is the promised Prophet foretold by Moses. He must be compelled to assume leadership of His people.

Concerning the arrest of John the Baptist, the Jewish historian Josephus wrote: “*Herod feared that the great influence John [the Baptist] had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion.*” Herod arrested John. Galilee was Herod’s jurisdiction. Such a move by the people towards Jesus could give authorities the needed excuse to arrest Jesus as a dangerous political figure. “*Jesus realized that they would come and carry him*

off to make him king, so he fled back to the mountain alone.” (6:15) They sought to make him a King of this world. Later, he tells Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world!”

John himself wrote that the whole world is under the dominion of the Evil One. In Satan’s encounter with Jesus, he offered Him the Kingship of this world if He would worship him. It is the same temptation, but this time it comes from the people. The people do not express the will of God. We are told that Jesus “*fled*” in the face of temptation. The word used by John to express flight is a strong one; it carries the meaning of almost panic flight. Flight is often the only prudent course in the face of temptation. Often the advice given by the Scriptures is “*Flee!*” (The moth that loves the flame will sooner or later be consumed.)

WALKING UPON THE WATERS

The scene following the multiplication of the loaves and fishes seeks to correct the misinterpretation of the sign by the Apostles. St. Mark relates, “*They were taken aback by these happenings, for they had not understood about the loaves. On the contrary, their minds were completely closed to the meaning of the events*” (Mk. 6:51-52). We read, “*As evening drew on, his disciples came down to the lake. They embarked, intending to cross the lake towards Capernaum. [The Sea of Galilee is seven miles wide and twelve miles long.] By this time it was dark, and Jesus had still not joined them*” (6:16-17). What had occurred had separated the disciples from the Lord. They probably concurred with the peoples’ ambitions. Jesus did not trust himself to any of them.

John indicates that without the Lord’s presence, things are not well. It grows dark without the Light of the World. It goes from bad to worse: “. . . moreover, with a strong wind blowing, the sea was becoming rough. Finally, when they had rowed three or four miles, they sighted Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water” (6:18-19). From another account we know it was about 3:00 a.m. when they spotted Jesus. They had been struggling for about eight hours. The sight of Jesus frightened them. “*He told them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’*” Are they frightened because they have come face-to-face with the Divine Reality in Jesus Christ? Jesus has identified himself with the Divine Name, “*It is I – ego eimi.*” Their desire to take Him into the boat may well indicate their acceptance of the revelation.

Some of the Psalms beautifully express the Passover theme. Psalm 77 pictures the Lord leading the Israelites across the Red Sea: “*Through the sea was your way, and your path through the deep waters, though your footsteps were not seen*” (Ps. 77:20). Perhaps nothing better than Psalm 107 expressed what the Evangelist John seeks to teach by signs narrated in chapter six:

They went astray in the desert wilderness; the way to an inhabited city they did not find. Hungry and thirsty, their life was wasting away within them. They cried to the Lord in their distress; from their straits he rescued them . . . he satisfied the longing soul and filled the hungry soul with good things.” (Ps. 107:4-9)

They who sailed the sea in ships, trading on the deep waters, these saw the works of the Lord and his wonders in the abyss. His command raised up a storm wind, which tossed its waves on high. They mounted up to heaven; they sank to the depths; their hearts melted away in their plight. They reeled and staggered like drunken men, and all their skill was swallowed up. They cried to the Lord in their distress; from their straits he rescued them. He hushed the storm to a gentle breeze, and the billows of the sea were stilled; they rejoiced that they were calmed, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his kindness and his wondrous deeds to the children of men.

(Ps. 107:23-31)

The Psalm concludes with these words, “*Who is wise enough to observe these things and to understand the favor of the Lord?*” (Ver. 43)

John would have men understand that just as the works of Jesus Christ go beyond the works of any man, so the Person of Jesus Christ goes beyond that of any man. The Word has indeed become Flesh, but the Word was in the beginning with God and was God. We see the glory of God in Jesus Christ! Divine Presence active among us! Jesus is no Moses, no Elijah. These are but stars of the night that pale into insignificance in the presence of the Sun. Jesus demonstrated powers of creation in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. He demonstrated his Lordship of the Universe with his walking upon the sea and the controlling of the wind by a word. He does not need men to make him King. He is the Lord! He has come down, descended in the flesh,

in order that man may ascend to a higher realm of being. He came not to rule but to lead!

The defense given by Jesus in chapter five has been vindicated. John the Baptist witnessed, *“After me is to come a man who ranks ahead of me, because he was before me . . . This is God’s chosen One. No one can lay hold on anything unless it is given him from on high.”* This witness has been verified. These miracles proved the supremacy of Jesus and his union with the Creator. The Scriptures bear witness that these activities are divine and thereby testify to the divine Sonship of Jesus.

For John, now is the time of judgment. In the light of such works, men reveal where they are and what they have become. It is not a time for questioning Jesus but of listening in faith and obeying Him. (The spirit recognizes that Jesus is Lord.) *“My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.”* (Is. 55:8)

THE BREAD OF LIFE

In the following scene, John makes it clear that all present have witnessed the marvelous signs performed by Jesus. The people will interrogate the Lord but it is not He that is on trial, but they. We are told the encounter takes place in the synagogue at Capernaum: *“He said this in a synagogue instruction at Capernaum”* (Ver. 59).

Jesus is giving an instruction in the synagogue. The Scripture readings for the Passover Feast set the theme. Jesus immediately clarifies the situation. He begins with, *“I tell you most solemnly.”* (This always precedes a revelation.) Jesus looks into the hearts of these men and reveals what is there. As John had testified in chapter two, *“He never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him”* (Ver. 25*). These people may have consciously believed their search was religious – spiritual – but Jesus indicates that they are deluded. Theirs is a self-search. It reminds one of people who come for spiritual direction and have no spiritual life to direct. The highest motivation of these men at Capernaum is their own selfishness. It would be forgivable and even praiseworthy if their self-search was for their highest good. Too often the goal of effort is far beneath spiritual health and welfare. In verse twenty-six, the light shines into the darkness: *“You are not*

looking for me because you have seen signs but because you have eaten your fill of the loaves.” Our Lord is meeting them where they are and He endeavors to elevate them from mere physical and material concerns to a spiritual awareness: *“You should not be working for perishable food but for the food that remains unto life eternal [this is the real gift Jesus has come to give]; food which the Son of Man will give you; it is on him God the Father has set his seal”* (Ver. 27). (The signs Jesus performed were indeed heaven’s seal of approval.) Nicodemus witnessed, *“Rabbi, . . . we know you are a teacher come from God, for no man can perform signs and wonders such as you perform unless God is with him”* (Jn. 3:2). *“The food which the Son of Man will give is His very self.”*

Jesus speaks to the crowd about a work to be done. Their response indicates a mistrust in Jesus: *“What must we do to perform the works of God?”* (Ver. 28) They appear to be withdrawing from any personal relationship with Him. He counteracts with a demand for a personal commitment to Himself. He explains for them the work of God is a work of belief in the One whom God has sent and put His seal: *“This is the work of God: have faith in the One whom he sent.”* For John, faith is a work. It is the greatest work of God in man. A man cannot come to Jesus in faith unless the Father draws him. A living faith in a man reveals his submission to the Father. According to John, faith without works is a contradiction.

The crowds’ response to Jesus reveals the spiritual pride of the human heart. Man will establish the criteria for the acceptance of God. This is not a unique sin of the Jews of old; it is a universal malady. How often have we heard men and women proclaiming their disbelief in God, in Jesus (in the Church), because God has failed to “Measure-up” to their standards for acceptance and belief. I am reminded of a young girl in Juvenile Hall who informed a priest that she did not believe in God. He asked her, “Why did you decide not to believe in God?” She responded, “Because I prayed to get out of here before my birthday and He didn’t get me out!” Most people are not that honest and simple about their disbelief. I recall the story related about the late actress Tallulah Bankhead: Tallulah went each day for a whole month to St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York and lit a candle and said a prayer to get the part of Mildred in the play, “Of Human Bondage.” She lost the part and screamed, “There is no God!” For two whole weeks she was a confirmed atheist.

The crowd responded to Jesus:

So that we can put faith in you, what sign are you going to perform for us to see [believe]? What is the “work” you do? Our ancestors had manna to eat in the desert; according to Scripture, “He gave them bread from the heavens to eat.” (Ver. 30-31)

People of the world are challenged to believe in Jesus. Their response is that if you continually support their faith by some visible sign, they will believe. The sign demanded here is not a one-time miracle, but a daily miracle. (Paradoxically, if one has faith, he or she will see a daily sign – the miracle of the Eucharist.) We need not wonder what would have happened if Jesus gave them their sign. We still hear the echoes of the Old Testament grumbling, “*We are tired of this wretched food.*” Or in other words, “*We are tired of this wretched sign.*” (How many Christians have left the Eucharist table to find their bread other places!) As expressed by one great biblical scholar, Rudolf Bultmann:

This reference to the manna gives expression to man’s folly in imagining that he knows the “sign” by which the Redeemer is to be recognized – he has the criteria at his disposal to which the revelation must conform in order to gain recognition. Whereas in fact, God’s revelation destroys every picture which man’s desires make of it, so that the real test of man’s desire for salvation is to believe even when God encounters him in a totally different way from that which he expected. (St. John’s Gospel, p. 228)

To some scholars, verses 35 through 50 appear to be a homily given on verse 31: “*He gave them bread from heaven.*” Herein we find an example where understanding the words of Scripture have failed to convey the true meaning of the text. We read in Exodus 16:4, “*The Lord said to Moses, ‘I will now rain down bread from heaven for you.’*” Obviously this was a figure of speech. The Jews understood it literally. Our Lord now proceeds to give the true interpretation: “*I solemnly assure you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from the heavens; it is my Father who gives you the real heavenly bread. God’s bread comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*” (6:32-33).

Like the Samaritan Woman when she heard of God’s gift, the Jews responded, “*Sir, give us this bread always.*” Just as the woman misunderstood

the gift, so does this crowd. They were looking forward to a repeat of the manna from heaven. In the Apocalypse of Baruch we read, *“And he will come in the same time as when the manna will come down again from above, and they will eat of it.”* The rabbis taught that the Messiah will feed, like Moses, with manna and living water, the people of the messianic age. Jesus explains manna in an entirely different way. To the Jews’ request for bread, Jesus responded, *“I myself am the bread of life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry, no one who believes in me shall ever thirst”* (6:35). Again we see that the gift of bread is conditional: We must first accept Jesus.

Whoever wants something from Jesus must know that he has to receive Jesus himself. Whoever desires the gift of life must understand that Jesus is himself the gift he really wants. Jesus is the bread of life!

From the emphasis placed on believing in Jesus Christ, three times within this section the *“ego eimi”* formula appears as *“I myself am the bread of life”* (Verses 35, 48, and 51). The primary meaning of *“bread of life”* appears to be the teachings of Jesus. He is being presented as Incarnate Wisdom.

It was certainly not foreign from Old Testament thought to portray the word of God or divine revelation as bread to be eaten. Moses teaches:

He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your fathers, in order to show you that not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord. (Deut. 8:3)

The author of the Book of Wisdom prays *“. . . that your sons whom you loved might learn, O Lord, that it is not the various kinds of fruits that nourish man, but it is your word that preserves those who believe you!”* (Wis. 16:26). Proverbs speaks of Divine Wisdom as a *“tree of life to those who grasp her”* (Prov. 3:18).

What the crowd found so difficult to believe and accept was not the Eucharist, but the divine origin of Jesus. They kept saying, *“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? How can he claim to have come down from heaven?”* (6:42)

Jesus confirms that faith in Him is possible only through a free gift and an

interior instruction from the Father:

All that the Father gives me shall come to me. (Ver. 37)

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. (Ver. 44)

It is written in the prophets: "They shall all be taught by God . . . everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me" (Ver. 45).

Jesus affirms that the result of belief is eternal life:

Indeed, this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks upon the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life. Him I will raise up on the last day. (Ver.40)

Let me firmly assure you, he who believes has eternal life. (Ver.47)

A contrast is made between the Old Testament faith and Christian faith (faith of the synagogue with faith of the Christian community): *"Your ancestors ate manna in the desert but they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven for man to eat and never die" (Ver. 49-50).*

THE BODY AND BLOOD OF JESUS

The discourse to this point refers primarily and figuratively to the teaching of Jesus as the Bread of Life. For the Christian reader, there has been a secondary reference to the Christian Eucharist meal. The Greek word "*eucharisteras*" has already appeared twice, in verses 11 and 23.

It would have been strange if Jesus had not prepared men for the great gift of the Eucharist. It would be only logical to this author, John, that the sacrament of the Eucharist would appear in the conclusion of the Bread of Life Discourse. The preceding was a fitting preparation for the revelation that appears in verses 51-58:

"I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world." At this the Jews quarreled [suggests a

violent dispute] among themselves, saying, "How can he give us his flesh to eat?" Thereupon Jesus said to them, "Let me solemnly assure you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." [The universality and absoluteness of this statement have caused some churches to adopt the practice of giving the Eucharist to infants.] "He who feeds ["trogan" – a very strong word indicating eating in a realistic way; used by John to emphasize the realism of the Eucharistic flesh and blood. It is again used in 13:18: "Someone who shares my table rebels against me."] on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food ["alethes," expressing the genuine value of his flesh and blood as food and drink] and my blood real drink. The man who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the Father who has life sent me and I have life because of the Father, so the man who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and died nonetheless, the man who feeds on this bread shall live forever."*

It is impossible to understand these verses without a reference to the Eucharist! The famous Protestant biblical scholar, Rudolph Bultmann, writes:

These verses refer, without any doubt, to the sacramental meal of the Eucharist – where the flesh and blood of the "Son of Man" are consumed – with the result that this food gives "eternal life," in the sense that the participants in the meal can be assured of the future resurrection.

In verses 35-50, belief in Jesus is the main theme. This belief culminates and is perfected in verses 51-58, where the exclusive theme is that eternal life results from eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Jesus: It is no longer the Father who gives life, but the Son who has life in Himself. A new vocabulary is introduced: "eat," "feed," "drink," "flesh," "blood." There is no doubt the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is intended. The stress is on feeding upon the flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood. The only favorable meaning that can be given to such expression is the one found within the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Figuratively and poetically, "to eat someone's

flesh” expresses hatred in the Scriptures. In the Aramaic tradition, the devil is referred to as the “*eater of flesh.*” The drinking of blood was forbidden by Law (*Lev. 3:17; Deut. 12:23; Gen. 9:4.*) The language is so powerful it precludes any figurative interpretation or any over-spiritualizing of Holy Communion.

It is understandable that the doctrine of the Eucharist, as presented in chapter six, could not have been understood by either the crowd or the disciples. Such a clear reference to the Eucharist would have only been understandable within the context of the Last Supper. The words of the institution of the Holy Eucharist are not recorded by John. It is possible that verse 51 contains the Fourth Gospel’s form for the words of institution: “*The bread that I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.*” These words are very similar to those recorded by Luke used at the Last Supper: “*This is my body to be given for you*” (*Lk. 22:19*).

The words used by John may well be the original form of the words at the Last Supper. It is more probable that Jesus said “*my flesh,*” rather than “*my body.*” To eat “*my body*” would not have carried the total concept that flesh does. When accompanied with “*drink my blood,*” it encompassed the whole human person. John places the Eucharistic mystery in connection with that of the Incarnation. The word “*sarx,*” which John prefers to “*soma,*” recalls the Prologue: “*The Word was made flesh*” – Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

It is a good opinion that the Johannine material of the Last Supper was transferred and rearranged into a second discourse on the Bread of Life in order to clearly bring out and complement the Eucharistic message in chapter six. Whereas verses 35-50 stress the necessity of belief in Jesus, the Eucharistic insert emphasizes the necessity of eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Jesus. Here, back-to-back, we have demonstrated the two-fold Presence of Jesus: in the living word preached by the Church and in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. It makes clear that the gift of life comes through a believing reception of the Sacrament.

In these brief verses, it is most powerfully expressed that Jesus gives man a share in God’s own life. While the Synoptic Gospels recorded the Institution of the Eucharist, it is John who tells us what the Eucharist does for a Christian.

For John, the eating of the Eucharist is inseparable from faith in Jesus – who is the spiritual manna of the messianic age. The Incarnate Son of God is the reservoir and channel of all the riches of the divine life, which He receives from the Father: *“Just as the Father who has life sent me and I have life because of the Father, so the man who feeds on me will have life because of me”* (Ver. 57). Through the Eucharist, Jesus passes this life on to His disciples who, through Him, share the very life of God.

The Sacrament of the Eucharist opens the very life of God to the communicant. The Sacrament of the Eucharist opens the door to the most intimate and highest mystical union, without destroying the necessary distinction that must exist between persons. When Jesus says, *“I myself am the living bread”* (Ver. 51), we are taught that the Jesus of the Eucharist is the heavenly glorified Jesus. What we are saying here is that the Son of Man, whose flesh is vivified by the Spirit of God, feeds men with this vivified flesh and blood. The effects of such a communion are total! The Eucharist received in faith affects the whole being: body, soul and spirit. *“He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal and I will raise him up on the last day.”* (6:54)

John sees the gift of the Eucharist as being directly dependent upon Calvary. This gift presupposes the previous giving by Jesus of His entire self to all humanity. The body and Blood we receive had first to be given on the Cross for the life of the world. *“The bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.”* (6:51)

To have faith in the Word made Flesh is the foundation for faith in the Most Holy Eucharist. The believer asks, “Why not? Are we to put limits on the love of God for His people?” Disbelief in the divinity of Jesus Christ leaves no foundation for belief in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine.

One denial is the source of the other. We read: *“After hearing these words, many of his disciples remarked, ‘This sort of talk is hard to endure! How can anyone take it seriously?’”* (John 6:60) *From this time on, many of his disciples broke away and would not remain in his company any longer.* (John 6:66) We should note: It is His disciples who would no longer remain in His company. (The Book of Revelations give the mystical mark of the Anti-Christ as 666. This is the only scripture in the entire New Testament that bears this

number of 666. Of added interest is that the Bible was only divided into chapters and verses a few hundred years ago. To whom does John 6:66 refer?)

John stresses the importance of these beliefs in the life of Christians by having Jesus now turn to the remaining Twelve and saying to them, “*DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE ME TOO?*” (John 6:67) Simon Peter gives faith’s only possible reply, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe; we are convinced that you are God’s holy one.*” (John 6:68-69) Peter speaks for the Twelve; all but one – the one who did not love, did not believe – the one who would betray! “*Jesus replied: ‘Did I not choose the Twelve of you myself? Yet one of your is a devil.’*” (John 6:70) Once again John carries our minds back to the Last Supper.

CHAPTER 11

THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning to the end, the earthly life of Jesus is directed by the heavenly Father. This humble obedience demonstrated the holiness of the Son. Jesus knows the Will of God in His regard. The Holy Scriptures clearly expressed the Divine Will. When confronted with the temptations of Satan, Jesus overcame each temptation by clinging to the revealed Word of God. It was a lamp unto His feet in a world darkened through sin. Our Lord illustrates this truth in His conversation with the disciples on the road to Emmaus:

He said to them, "What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?" Beginning, then, with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them every passage of Scripture which referred to him. (Lk. 24:25-27)

It was God's will that Jesus give His life for the salvation of the world. Jesus was to die at a certain time and in a particular way. The human life of Jesus willfully and intelligently cooperated with this Divine Plan. He did not move in some spineless and mindless way, directed by a blind fate. No spirit of "Kismet" directed Jesus. As He understood the will of God, He marshaled all energies – intellectual, moral, physical and spiritual – to bring this plan to a perfect completion. He prudently guarded against a premature death or being forced into a situation that would jeopardize the Divine Plan. He knew such a plan depended on His willful cooperation. Not to do everything within human power would evidence a lack of willingness on His part. It was no mere "thy will be done," but a constant and deliberate struggle to insure that the Will of God be accomplished. He would die at Passover. He must remain alive for six more months. During this time, He demonstrated neither

cowardly behavior nor foolish bravery. As a great general, who in battle prudently estimates the resources of the enemy, Jesus takes calculated risks. The Lord never expects God to do what He as man has the God-given ability to do!

As we study Chapter Seven, we see the prudent strategy of Jesus. We read that He is now on the move; it is no longer safe to remain too long in one place. During the six months following the Bread of Life discourse, He *“moved about within Galilee. He had decided not to travel in Judea because some of the Jews were looking for a chance to kill him”* (7:1).

THE FEAST OF BOOTHS

The Jewish New Year came towards the middle of our autumn. With the beginning of the New Year came the eight-day celebration called the Feast of Booths. This feast, along with the Passover and Pentecost, had to be celebrated in Jerusalem. Josephus, the historian, tells us it was *“especially sacred and important to the Hebrews.”* This harvest festival coincided with the Canaanite grape festival of Shechem. It was a feast of rejoicing, celebrating a harvest completed and another year’s work finished. The feast commemorated the acquisitions of the Promised Land and the end of the long forty-year desert journey. The dedication of Solomon’s Temple had occurred during this festival and added to the solemnity of the present celebration. During the festival, all the participants lived in huts erected in the nearby fields, thereby, in a realistic way, tasting the life of their ancestors. The offerings during this feast consisted of a basket of harvest fruit and the recital of the saving acts by which Yahweh delivered His people from Egypt and led them to the Promised Land.

The autumn feast became an occasion for praying for rain. Rain falling during the festival was a good omen of early spring rain assuring good crops during the new year. The prophet Zechariah tells the people, *“Ask of the Lord rain in the spring season! It is the Lord who makes the storm clouds. And sends men the pouring rain, for everyone, grassy fields”* (Zech. 10:1). From the words of this prophet it may well have been interpreted that if the people did not attend the Feast of Booths, no rain would fall. *“If any of the families of the earth does not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King [during the Feast of Booths], the Lord of hosts, no rain shall fall upon them.”* (Zech. 14:17)

During the first seven days of the feast, a procession would go down to the fountain of Gihon on the southeast side of the Temple. The fountain supplied the water for the pool of Siloam. As the priest filled a golden pitcher with water, the choir chanted: *“With joy you will draw Water from the wells of salvation.”* As the procession proceeded back to the Temple, the people carried, in their right hands, a bunch of myrtle and willow twigs tied with palm (the same material used to construct the huts), and, in their left hands, a piece of citrus fruit as a sign of the harvest. When the procession reached the altar in front of the Sanctuary, the Levites proceeded around the altar waving the branches and singing, *“This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. O Lord, grant salvation! O Lord, grant prosperity!”* (Ps. 118:24-25) The priest then ascended the altar and poured the water through a silver funnel returning it to the earth.

On the first night of the feast, lamps and torches brightly illuminated the Temple area. Young maidens left the cloisters of their homes and performed ceremonial dances in the illuminated night.

THE BROTHERS OF JESUS

We read that the brethren of the Lord came and encouraged him to go up to the feast:

“You ought to leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples there may see the works you are performing. No one who wishes to be known publicly keeps his action hidden. If you are going to do things like these, you may as well display yourself to the world at large.”
(7:3-4)

These brothers of the Lord have been identified as James, Joseph, Simon and Judas. (Mat. 13:55; Mk. 6:3.) In Hebrew, the word *“ah”* covers masculine relatives of varying degrees: brothers, half-brothers, cousins, brothers-in-law. The Greek Septuagint uses *“adelphos”* to render all these shades of meaning. *“Adelphos”* is used in this text. An early Christian Father, Epiphanius, held these men to be sons of Joseph by a previous marriage. The Anglican biblical scholar, Bernard, states *“It is difficult to understand how the doctrine of the Virginity of Mary could have grown up early in the second century if her four acknowledged sons were prominent Christians, and one of them Bishop of Jerusalem.”* This is an example where the interpretation of the text of

Scripture must look to Church Tradition for a true interpretation. Without reference to Tradition, it would be uncertain whether these men were blood brothers, half-brothers or cousins. For anyone to conclude from such references that Mary was definitely their mother would indicate a dishonesty or ignorance – of course for a Catholic, heresy. Without a knowledge of Church Tradition, the most honest statement would be that the degree of kindred is uncertain! Jesus is the only one ever called, in the Scriptures, the Son of Mary.

These brethren of Jesus pressured him to go to Jerusalem and make a public display of great power – to stand forth boldly before the world and lay claim to his proper position. Here are the echoes of the third temptation in which Satan takes Jesus to the Temple and invites Him, if He is the Son of God, to display His power by hurling Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple. The temptation comes this time not from Satan but from relatives. One is reminded of the words of Jesus to Peter: *“Get out of my sight, you Satan! You are trying to make me trip and fall. You are not judging by God’s standards but by man’s”* (Mat. 16:23). The Scriptures forever teach God’s ways are not our ways. This teaching ought to make us suspect the spirits that move us; every pious thought and good idea does not necessarily flow from the Holy Spirit. Many spiritual lives and works have been destroyed by imprudent zeal not motivated by God’s grace, but man’s whim or the devil’s cunning. The Scriptures warn us: *“Test every spirit!”* The saints urge us to take all to prayer and council. Father Judge encouraged the Cenacle members, before making important decisions, to first write three reasons why they should perform the work and then three why they should not do it. These reasons they should take to prayer and council and only then, act! Most people get one good idea and they are off – not knowing for sure what direction they are going or whose team they are on. Flesh begets flesh! Spirit begets spirit!

These relatives of Jesus were very much of this world. They knew the criteria by which God, His Messiah, should present Himself in order to win acceptance. They had been impressed by *“signs and wonders.”* They wanted Him to likewise impress the world. John indicates such behavior results from a lack of faith. Since their wishes contradicted the Will of God, Jesus refused their request. (*“No!”* is an answer to prayers.) He tells them:

The world is incapable of hating you [What they had to say was in harmony with the spirit of the world. The world loves its own. They risk nothing!], but it does hate me because of the evidence I bring against it that what it does is evil. Go up yourselves to the festival. I am not going up to this festival because the time is not yet ripe for me. (7:7-8) Here is a veiled reference to the Crucifixion and death of Jesus. When the time is fulfilled, Jesus will go up to Jerusalem – to the Cross, to death!

It is not easy to be hated by those you love even for God's sake! During the last month of His public ministry, Jesus daily bore this bitter cross in order to be faithful to God. He bore the burden in His very being: What He is, what He does, what He teaches declares to the self-righteous man God's Truth. His revelation threatens the security and self-sufficiency of the world. In the light of the revelation, man could see how alien man's life from God was – from God's way – and how, in reality, he really hated God. What he thought to be the love of God within his heart was but a projection of his own self – a love of a god made to his image and likeness. This was a terrible revelation for man to bear and the hatred it revealed and released hurled itself towards the bearer of this revelation, the Light of the World: *"The world . . . does hate me because of the evidence I bring against it that what it does is evil"* (7:7).

The spirit of this feast had nothing in keeping with the Spirit of Jesus. It celebrated the harvest in the Promised Land. He could not keep the feast. He did not go up for the celebration of the festival. His work was not completed. He had yet to lead men to the true Promised Land, the Kingdom of God.

THE PROPHET IN THE TEMPLE

Jerusalem was expecting Jesus. It was in a ferment over Him. In truth, He was the talk of the town. The miracle at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath had been like a stick poked into a beehive. Jerusalem was divided over Him, yet people weren't ready to commit themselves to Him. The signs and wonders have not produced faith. Without a doubt, the authorities had loudly voiced their opinion of Jesus: *"Where is that troublemaker?"* The divergent opinions of the people were guardedly expressed. On the one side you heard, *"He is a good man!"* But on the other, *"Not at all – he is only misleading the crowd!"* From fear of the authorities, no one dared talk openly about Him. (7:13) The rumor had already spread that some Jews secretly

plotted to kill Jesus.

Jesus uses the advantage of surprise: Mid-way during the feast He appears in the Temple – not as a pilgrim but as a Prophet. He catches everyone off guard. This teaching is so powerful even his enemies are amazed. They know he had no formal education. They asked each other, *“How did this man get his education when he had no teacher [rabbi]?”* (7:15). Jesus informs them, as usual in regards to himself, they err. He had been a student, a Talmid. His great teacher, His Rabbi, was God: *“My doctrine is not my own; it comes from him who sent me. Any man who chooses to do his will will know about this doctrine – namely, whether it comes from God or is simply spoken on my own”* (7:16-17). The teachings of Jesus are so divine and godly that they may be recognized as such by men whose minds and wills are in harmony with the Spirit of God. If man seeks the will of God, his spirit will be in harmony with the Spirit of God – the Word of God will ring true in his heart. The righteous spirit hungers for the will of God. Doing the will of God is the food of the soul. It nourishes it, makes it grow, keeps it strong. (*Jn. 4:31-33.*) If we have no sympathy for the will of God and His rights over our lives, we will have no understanding of His will.

Jesus denies his teachings come from Himself. That would be a self-glorification. When a man teaches his own philosophy or ideas, he reveals himself. Jesus imparts to us the mind of the Father. The Jews’ amazement at His knowledge was a glorification of the Father. Jesus affirms He is God’s Apostle – sent by God. He does not speak His own thoughts and ideas, but God’s message. He is indeed a true Apostle – doing and loving the Will of Him who sent Him. *“ . . . there is no dishonesty in his heart.”* (7:18) In II Samuel 14:32, we read, *“If I am guilty, let him put me to death.”* With these thoughts, Jesus confronts the murderous plans of his enemies.

SPIRIT AND LETTER

In the Fourth Gospel, the Pharisees and Scribes prided themselves upon their knowledge and love of the Scriptures. They would use these Scriptures to refute and condemn Jesus. *“He who hangs upon a tree is cursed of God!”* Jesus would draw from the examples of their lives to prove they lacked the Spirit of God who gave the Scriptures. The Scriptures in the hands of such men became a murderous weapon to destroy the very Word of God Himself. This is a frightful concept and a terrible sacrilege. The Word of God, the

Scriptures, begets life and here it is perverted to produce death – the death of God’s own Son.

The word of God is a dynamic, holy entity, capable of creating and nourishing life. But it is a spiritual entity – it operates in a spiritual realm. It is not effectual in the realm of the flesh. Some erroneously attribute magical qualities to the Scriptures – chant enough Scripture over someone’s head long enough and he or she will be convinced and saved. That is superstition! St. Paul clearly teaches *“the natural man [man of the flesh] does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God. For him, that is absurdity. He cannot come to know such teaching because it must be appraised in a spiritual way”* (1 Cor. 2:14). In the Acts of the Apostles, we see the Lord encouraging Paul to continue preaching in Corinth because *“There are many of my people in this city”* (Acts 18:10). On the other hand, we hear these words to Paul while praying in the Temple: *“You must make haste. Leave Jerusalem at once because they will not accept your testimony about me”* (Acts 22:18). In Acts 16:7, we read that the Spirit would not permit Paul and Silas to preach in Bithynia (*“The Spirit of Jesus would not allow them.”*) Let us understand that only when God’s grace touches the heart can the Scriptures touch and convict a spirit. This is why we must pray first for those to whom we later witness.

In Chapters seven and eight, we witness an unholy war against Jesus with Holy Words. The Pharisees and Scribes accused Jesus of violating the Scriptures by healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus denies there has been a violation by citing the example of circumcisions being practiced on the Sabbath in order to keep the law of Moses, which decreed circumcision be performed eight days after birth - Sabbath or not. If this health practice of circumcision could validly be performed on the Sabbath, a healing, giving total health to a man, could even more validly be performed on the Sabbath. Jesus demands that men *“Stop judging by appearances and make an honest judgment”* (7:24).

Jesus endeavors to make these men honestly face themselves: *“Moses has given you the law [the Scriptures – thou shall not kill], has he not? Yet not one of you keeps it. Why do you look for a chance to kill me?”* (7:19). In their angry outrage with Jesus over the healing, the Jews consciously professed unbound devotion to Moses. Our Lord illustrates how truly alienated in their hearts from the spirit of Moses they have become, with their murderous

intentions to kill Him who comes to fulfill the Scriptures. If men failed to grasp the spirit that motivates the Scriptures, they are bound to persecute the man of the Spirit. They may fail to extinguish the Spirit, but history records their success in extinguishing the lives of the bearers of the Spirit.

These men deny their deadly plan and retaliate with “*Are we not right after all, in saying you are a Samaritan [a heretic], and possessed besides?*” (8:48). Jesus responds immediately to this terrible charge:

I am not possessed. However, I revere my Father, while you fail to respect me. I seek no glory for myself; there is one who seeks it, and it is he who judges . . . If I glorify myself, that glory comes to nothing. He who gives me glory is the Father, the very one you claim for your God, even though you do not know him. But I know him. Were I to say I do not know him, I would be no better than you – a liar! Yes, I know him well, and I keep his word. (8:49-55)

Jesus firmly denies any relationship with a demon. His life of Divine Reverence rules out such a thing. The life He leads glorifies God and is glorified by God. This life these Jews fail to revere and thereby, fail to show true reverence for the Father. Their conduct reveals the lie in their hearts. They lie to themselves. Truth has been fundamentally perverted within their spirits. For John, this indicates the reign of darkness – for lying and darkness are synonymous. They are under the dominion of the Evil One – obviously, they are the possessed ones! They were anxious to lay their destructive hands upon Him but the circumstances prevented it. Jesus wins a momentary victory. His very confrontation with the enemy is impressive.

People are impressed that Jesus is able to get away with it. “*Is this not the one they want to kill? Here he is speaking in public and they don’t say a word to him! Perhaps even the authorities have decided that this is the Messiah.*” (7:25-26) “*Many in the crowd came to believe in him. They kept saying, ‘When the Messiah comes, can he be expected to perform more signs than this man?’*” (Ver. 31) “*Some in the crowd who heard these words began to say, ‘This must be the Prophet.’ Others were claiming, ‘He is the Messiah.’*” (Ver. 40-41) Others responded to this: “*Still, we know where this man is from. When the Messiah comes, no one is supposed to know his origins*” (Ver. 27). Another objection was raised:

“Surely the Messiah is not to come from Galilee? Does not Scripture say that the Messiah, being of David’s family, is to come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” In this fashion, the crowd was sharply divided over him. (7:41-43)

The Pharisees overheard this debate about him among the crowd, and the chief priest and Pharisees together sent temple guards to arrest him.

Here, John indicates how human judgment fails to be honest because of its superficiality. Two human errors are illustrated here: first, man establishes, with his hidden Messiah, the criteria for the acceptance of God’s revelation; then, the mystery of God’s revelation, to gain human acceptance, must likewise be mysterious. The mysteries of God are not mysterious! They are simple and profound. That God must be mysterious is man’s criteria. God makes foolishness out of the wisdom of men. What the Jews know of the Scriptures is true, but their knowledge is unknowing. The irony of it is that what they know conceals the very truth they seek to know. Their knowledge prevents them from recognizing Jesus as the One sent by God. So ends all human reason applying itself without grace to the mystery of God and His revelation.

While teaching in the Temple area, Jesus overheard these discussions and responded, *“So you know me, and you know my origins? The truth is, I have not come of myself. I was sent by One who has the right to send, and him you do not know. I know him because it is from him I come: he sent me” (7:28-29).* Jesus indicates the superficiality of their knowledge. They have looked only at his earthly birth. The works He has performed should lead them beyond that scene. These deeds take them beyond a mere human conception. These works proclaim His union with the Father and thereby reveal his divine origin from the Father. Since the Jews fail to recognize Him who reveals and originates from the Father, they obviously do not know the Father.

The Pharisees respond with their Scriptural defense:

“You are your own witness. Such testimony cannot be valid.” Jesus answered, “What if I am my own witness? My testimony is valid nonetheless, because I know where I came from and where I am going; you know neither the one nor the other.” (8:13-14)

Jesus claims knowledge of His origin and His future – knowledge possessed by no mere man. This is Divine knowledge. The testimony of such a witness is true for it is a Divine Testimony.

The Jewish people are warned that the time of salvation has its limits. The truth will not shine in their darkness forever: *“Only a little while longer am I to be with you, then I am going away to him who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; where I am you cannot come”* (7:33-34). In the presence of his enemies, Jesus announces for the first time His speedy and irrevocable departure. His person will be withdrawn from them and they shall seek him in vain. They will seek him not in penitence or anger, but simply in distress. In other words, you will recall my words and works and wish once again to see if therein lay salvation. Jesus’ departure from the world means for the unbelievers – it is too late! His departure will be judgment! The time of revelation is passed. They will long for revelation but it will no longer be accessible to them.

Revelation is presented to man during a certain limited time of God’s own choosing. These divine revelations are not self-evident truths that can be grasped in all times. The light shines within a heart or human spirit for a limited time. A person is confronted with the challenge to believe. If rejected, there comes a time when it is too late.

Indeed, the Word is taken up again by the Christian Community. The revelation is again and again made present in time, but just as the concrete, historical revelation in Jesus was a limited event, so it will be with the preaching that proclaims it in a here and now!

When it is too late, when evil lives bear bitter fruit, they will look for salvation, but not in Jesus. In the realm of darkness they will search – some in drugged minds and pleasure-satiated bodies; others in the spiritual perversion of the occult: in the stars, in the tarot cards, the Ouija boards, in spiritism – they will search for and find their false Messiahs!

Yes, the Gospel truth tells us Jesus does go away. Salvation has its hour. *“If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”* (Ps. 95:7-8) *“In an acceptable time I have heard you; on a day of salvation I have helped you.’ Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation!”* (2 Cor. 6:2) But even when Our Lord warns men that this day of revelation will come to an end,

they see it as no concern of theirs – there is no sense of personal loss. Will he now go to those Jews dispersed throughout the Mediterranean World in hopes of having a better acceptance? Yes, in His Church, He will. They too will have their moment of grace, their opportunity for salvation.

Man has his day, but so will God! When God wills to bring His light into this world, it will shine, despite the combined efforts of hell and earth, devils and men. God will present salvation to the world whether the world wills it or not. For God wills it!

Verses forty-five through fifty in Chapter Seven give a good example of the frustration, hatred and irrationality created in men's lives by the immovable Divine Will:

The police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, "Why haven't you brought him?" The police replied, "There has never been anybody who has spoken like him." "So," the Pharisees answered, "You have been led astray as well? Have any of the authorities believed in him? Any of the Pharisees? This rabble knows nothing about the Law – they are damned." One of them, Nicodemus – the same man who had come to Jesus earlier – said to them, "But surely the Law does not allow us to pass judgment on a man without giving him a hearing and discovering what he is about?" To this they answered, "Are you a Galilean, too? Go into the matter, and see for yourself: prophets do not come out of Galilee." (7:45-52)*

The Pharisees and Scribes have prided themselves on their love of Scriptures and love of God. Jesus illustrates that their inability to accept Him demonstrates that they neither understand the Scriptures, nor do they love God. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. This fact is so hidden from their eyes that they view Him as a violator of the Scriptures and the Law. All that Jesus does is a reflection of the God they claim to love and worship. Yet, they hate Jesus. Therefore, there is no genuine love of God. The opposite is the horrible truth: They hate God. In Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, God destroys all men's fantasies and illusions about the divine, their goodness, their spirituality. This terrible revelation of itself is not a condemnation – it is a revelation of the state of human affairs. The revelation, this light shining in the darkness of human existence, is not meant

to produce despair but repentance. It is intended to turn men to Jesus who can deliver them from this terrible state of affairs. He has been sent not to condemn the world but to save the world. He is the Savior of the World. But alas, if men hate the light and prefer darkness – desire to be left in their illusions, it will be so! The Light will withdraw from their lives.

They will have sealed their judgment and assured their condemnation. “*On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light has come into the world, men have shown they prefer darkness to the light because their deeds were evil.*” (Jn. 3:19*) They refuse to acknowledge their evil – repent and come to Jesus to be saved. Rather they confirmed their evil stand by calling the light itself darkness, an unforgivable sin, and by their murderous desire to destroy the life of the Light of the World. As Jesus will clearly reveal in chapter eight, they have truly become possessed – children of Satan.

THE LIVING WATER

With his enemies swarming around him like mad hornets, our Lord stands up on the last day of the feast and with cool courage and enduring love cries:

If any man is thirsty, let him come to me! Let the man come and drink who believes in me! As scripture says: “From his breast shall flow fountains of living water.” He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

(Jn. 7:37-39)*

The readings for the Feast of Booths had recalled the wandering in the desert with its hunger and thirst. It recalled to memory how Divine Providence preserved the pilgrims on their way to the Promised Land: When they were dying of thirst, Moses struck a rock and life-giving water flowed in the desert. All these old reminiscences flooded the minds of the Jews during the festival. It encouraged them to pray for rain (living water) for their crops and future harvest. Our Lord sees all this and more. He knows the need of human spirit – the divine thirst in all men. He uses this dramatic moment in the festival to proclaim that their prayers and desires have been fulfilled in Him: Living water will flow from the Temple. This living water that quenches the souls of

men will be the Holy Spirit of God. It will flow from the Temple of Christ's own Body . . .

Jesus invites men to come to Him in their spiritual want and need. They will find fulfillment and satisfaction in the fullness of faith, and the refreshing energies of faith will always well up within to sustain and strengthen their earthly life and overflow from them. He who drinks of the Spiritual Rock becomes in turn himself a rock of living water to quench the thirst of others. A true disciple of Jesus will always have the spiritual food and drink to nourish his or her soul and enough will be left over to always give something to the hungry and thirsty they meet in this world: those whom God encounters through them!

CHAPTER 12

TRIAL IN THE TEMPLE

INTRODUCTION

Several themes appear within Chapter Eight of the Fourth Gospel. It gives the appearance of being a collection of fragmented sayings and events from the life of Our Lord. It may well be that the continuity of this chapter has been interrupted by certain inserts, and it is highly possible that certain Scripture fragments existed and were inserted into the Gospel for preservation. In our commentary on Chapter Seven, we drew upon material in this chapter. The theme of light that appears in chapter eight will be presented in our commentary on Chapter Nine where the thought reappears. What the original content of this chapter was, we may never know. Nevertheless, whatever has been inserted was not done so without rhyme or reason. The theme of judgment subtly runs through the entire chapter. Perhaps Chapter Seven, verse twenty-four expresses the prelude to this theme: *“Stop judging by appearances and make an honest judgment.”* Many of the delicate nuances of judgment have been briefly and subtly woven into the general theme. We will see Jesus as Judge and listen to His judgments; we will hear that He is beyond the judgment of men. We are presented with the erroneous judgments of men rising out of the darkness of unknowing. We have demonstrated the pride of the human mind that dares, from its environment of darkness – out of its blindness – to make judgments about the Light.

THE NATURE OF JUDGMENT

In the Old Testament, judgment (nispat) is that which is pronounced by a judge (sopet). A man has a case presented to a judge. When the judge proclaims the case to be righteous, judgment is had. The judgment on righteousness must then be recognized. It is the essential function of the judge to proclaim and acknowledge righteousness. To condemn is not the

primary purpose of a judge. As the widow in the Gospel pleaded with the unjust judge: *“I want justice [judgment] from you against my enemy”* (Lk. 18:3*). Judgment is vindication. The psalmist petitions Yahweh for judgment, for defense, and for vindication: *“Rise up, O Lord, in your anger; rise against the fury of my foes; wake to the judgment you have decreed.”* (Ps. 7:7) *“For you upheld my right and my cause, seated on your throne, judging justly.”* (Ps. 9:5) The judgment of Israel is a defense of Israel against foreign nations or a restoration to its former state. Isaiah preaches, *“Zion shall be redeemed by judgment, on her repentant ones by justice”* (Is. 1:27).

In the Fourth Gospel, judgment is very paradoxical. Jesus says, *“. . . I pass judgment on no man”* (Jn. 8:15). *“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world.”* (Jn. 3:17) *“The Father himself judges no one, but has assigned all judgment to the Son.”* (Jn. 5:22) *“I judge as I hear, and my judgment is honest.”* (Jn. 5:30) *“Even if I do judge, that judgment of mine is valid.”* (Jn. 8:16) *“If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I am not the one to condemn him.”* (Jn. 12:47) All these diverse thoughts come together for a unique concept of judgment. For John, the coming of Jesus into the world produces judgment. A man is judged in the primary sense of judgment by his belief in Jesus. He is righteous. A man is judged in the secondary sense by his disbelief in Jesus. He is condemned. Jesus refers to this judgment when He knows the hour of his rejection by the people is imminent: *“Now has judgment come upon this world”* (Jn. 12:31). Jesus is a Judge in the sense that His very Self is an object of decision: belief or disbelief. He does not come for the judgment of the unbelievers who will rise to a resurrection of judgment, but He comes to save those who believe and who will rise to a resurrection of life!

The events within chapter eight still occur within the Feast of Booths. In the previous chapter, we heard men reject Jesus as the Messiah because they knew His earthly origins: born of Mary of Nazareth in Galilee. They based their judgment upon appearances and their limited knowledge. They erred! Our Lord teaches, for a judgment to be honest it must be deep. It must not only reach the very being of a person, his very heart and essence – the very stuff that characterizes his being – but it must also possess the intelligence to analyze its findings. Facts of knowledge before dull minds are like pearls before swine. Remember the caution of Jesus to his disciples: *“Do not . . . toss your pearls before swine. They will trample them under foot, at best, and perhaps even tear you to shreds”* (Mat. 7:6).

Our Lord has warned us to “*stop judging by appearances and make an honest judgment.*” But when you consider the knowledge that is necessary and the intelligence needed to evaluate our findings, it’s no wonder the Scriptures tell us not to judge. Leave judgment to God. We are told if we do judge others, God will throw away the divine measurer and measure us by the same measure we have measured others:

*If you want to avoid judgment, stop passing judgment. Your verdict on others will be the verdict passed on you. The measure with which you measure will be used to measure you. Why look at the speck in your brother’s eye when you miss the plank in your own?
(Mat. 7:1-3)*

Remember, the essence of true judgment is to declare righteousness. More often than not our conscious judgment declares someone in the wrong. Subconsciously, we declare someone to be in the right – namely ourselves. These words to Jesus are better addressed to us: “*You are your own witness. Such testimony cannot be valid*” (Jn. 8:13). Often we may have recourse in mystical numbers: “Everybody says so” or, “They say.” (There is an old Chinese proverb which says, “*‘They say,’ are liars!*”) Jesus summed up human judgment: You look to each other and all you end with is combined ignorance, compounded darkness – You do not look to God, the true Light. (Jn. 12:42-43.)

Within this chapter, Jesus demonstrates that those who dishonestly judged him, failed to properly judge themselves. They base their judgment on appearances. From appearances, they judged Jesus could not be the Messiah. By their same standard they judged themselves to be children of Abraham. Jesus does not judge by appearances. He looks deep – far beyond their conscious awareness of themselves. He sees into their inner being, into their subconscious, and his honest judgment will be: They are not children of Abraham – they are children of the devil!

Verses fifteen and sixteen sound the same theme of chapter eight: “*You pass judgment according to appearances, but I pass judgment on no man. Even if I do judge, that judgment of mine is valid because I am not alone: I have at my side the One who sent me [the Father].*” Here we may glimpse the Jesus seen by John: He is always the spirit-filled Lord at the right hand of the Father even while sojourning as man on earth. The King of Kings! The Lord of

Lords!

We have already noted in the last chapter that the Jews, with a reference to the Scriptures, rejected the testimony of Jesus: *“You are your own witness. Such testimony cannot be valid” (8:13)*. Again it illustrates how the Scriptures, within closed minds and self-righteous hearts, do not open the way to truth, but are used to confirm error. They truly fulfilled the words of Jesus: *“You have eyes to see but see not; you have ears to hear with but hear not.”*

We shall present Chapter Eight as a trial: **THE PEOPLE VERSUS JESUS OF NAZARETH**. If Jesus is condemned in the trial, then we need to ask, who then has the *“nispat”* – who is the righteous one?

THE HORNS OF THE DILEMMA

Chapter eight opens with the sad account of the woman taken in adultery. This episode of Scripture has a unique history. Apparently, it only entered the Fourth Gospel at a much later date. The language of the narrative differs both in vocabulary and structure from that of St. John. In tone and quality it is more in keeping with the writings of St. Luke. The narrative may have originally belonged after Chapter Twenty-one, verse thirty-eight of St. Luke’s account. It was probably omitted from the copies of the Scriptures because it was difficult to reconcile the attitude of Jesus towards the woman with the early Christian Community’s stern penitential attitude towards adultery. Only when a more liberal penitential practice was firmly established did the story receive wide acceptance. St. Augustine suggests that the passage was removed from the Latin text by *“some who were of slight faith or rather hostile to the true faith,”* to avoid scandal. (*De conj adult. 11:17.*) St. Jerome included it in his Latin Vulgate version of the Scriptures because it was found *“in many Greek and Latin manuscripts in the Gospel according to John.”* It was likewise omitted from even more.

The passage was probably saved from oblivion and introduced into the Gospel according to John by an early Christian writer called Papias. Papias collected Gospel traditions that illustrated, in some concrete way, the teachings of Jesus. He applied this illustration to Chapter 8:15: *“You pass judgment according to appearances but I pass judgment on no man.”* The illustration was originally a marginal note by Papias that later copyists

incorporated into the text of John. In this way, it found its way back into the written Gospel in time to be acknowledged as inspired Scripture by the Church. It could be said it ended in the right Church but the wrong pew! This event appears to belong to the last visit of Jesus to Jerusalem and the position it occupied in St. Luke is perhaps historically correct. Nevertheless, even though the narrative may be textually out of place, it theologically fits well into the theme of judgment.

We read in Chapter Eight:

At daybreak, he reappeared in the temple area; and when the people started coming to him, he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees led a woman forward who had been caught in adultery. They made her stand there in front of everyone. "Teacher," they said to him, "this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses ordered such women to be stoned. What do you have to say about the case?" (They were posing this question to trap him, so that they could have something to accuse him of.) Jesus bent down and started tracing on the ground with his finger. When they persisted in their questioning, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her." A second time he bent down and wrote on the ground. Then the audience drifted away one by one, beginning with the elders. This left him alone with the woman, who continued to stand there before him. Jesus finally straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where did they all disappear to? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she answered. Jesus said, "Nor do I condemn you. You may go. But from now on, avoid this sin." (Jn. 8:2-11)

As indicated in verse six, guile and deceit motivated the scene as it had the question in the Synoptic Gospels: "Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or not?" This instance only compounded the evil of Our Lord's enemies because of the inhumanity involved. The character of men is often revealed by the means used to achieve their ends and goals. This time it is not a coin, a thing, but a human being who is treated as a thing and probably with less respect than was had for the coin. Some held the reason Our Lord bent down and wrote on the ground was to hide the emotion within his own eyes and on his face – he was so overcome by the disgust and shame of the whole affair! The motive

of the scribes and Pharisees was to place the Lord in between what has been called, *“the horns of the dilemma.”* Whatever way you go, you are entrapped.

According to Jewish morality, the sins of idolatry, murder and adultery were particularly evil. The rabbis taught that a Jew must be willing to die before committing such crimes. The concept of adultery in the Old Testament is not the same as our Christian concept of the sin. Adultery for a Christian is sexual intercourse between man and woman, one or both of whom is bound by marriage to another person. Adultery among the Hebrews was based upon the concept that a woman was the property of her husband. Only the rights of the husband could be violated. For a married man to have intercourse with an unmarried woman was not adultery. Both the wife and her lover could violate the rights of her husband and thereby both be subjected to the crime and penalty of adultery. The wife herself had no right which the husband himself could violate.

We read in Leviticus: *“If a man commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death”* (Lev. 20:10). And in Deuteronomy, we read: *“If a man is discovered having relations with a woman who is married to another, both the man and woman with whom he has had relations shall die. Thus shall you purge the evil from your midst”* (Deut. 22:22). A girl betrothed to another man could be guilty of adultery. (Deut. 22:23.) The punishment of adultery was death by stoning. It is indicated in both Ezekiel and Hosea that the adulteress was stripped naked before execution and probably had her hair cropped.

For any crime involving the death penalty, two witnesses to the crime, exclusive of the husband, were demanded.

The Pharisees tempted Jesus to make a decision. They deliberately presented this emotionally charged situation hoping to force Jesus to act one way or the other. In either case, they would win. If Jesus said not to stone the woman, he could have been accused of undermining the law of Moses and encouraging adultery. If He said she should be stoned, he would be encouraging civil disobedience against Rome, who reserved to itself capital punishment, and lose his image before the people as a compassionate person.

Jesus replied to their pestering, “*Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her*” (8:7). He thereby raised the matter from the realm of mere legal technicalities into the realm of moral reality. If men are to be the self-appointed executors of divine Justice, then they should be like God in the purity of their lives. There is no attack on legal punishment here. These men were not the duly appointed instruments of the law. Whether it was the attitude of Jesus or what he wrote on the ground that revealed to these men the depths of sinfulness in their own lives, they drew back in His Presence from claiming sinlessness. The accusers left convicted by their own consciences; beginning with the eldest who, having lived the longest, had sinned the most. Still bound by her sins, the woman stands alone before Jesus. St. Augustine says that two remained: “*Miseria*” and “*Misericordia*” – Misery and Pity! Jesus could have pronounced the sentence of condemnation. He did not; but neither did he acquit the woman of guilt. His words are not words of forgiveness. He deliberately defers judgment. She is given another chance: “*You may go. But from now on avoid this sin*” (8:11). He does not make light of the code of morality. He calls her action “*sin*.” He knows such conduct leads to broken hearts and lives. Jesus demonstrated a hope in the sinner that her future will be better than her past. The story remains unfinished.

Jesus Christ is the Savior – not the Condemner! Man condemns himself by his refusal to accept salvation from the Lord. Jesus neither condones the sin nor condemns the sinner. Every life carries within its inner self the seed of its own judgment! But a life is not rightly judged until it is completed. Jesus does not judge this woman because it is not the time for judgment, but a time for compassion. In a sense He tells her: I love you but I am neither pleased nor satisfied with you. I love you best too much to be satisfied with your worst.

COMPASSION FOR SINNERS

We who are professed disciples of Jesus must learn from the Master that our first attitude towards the publicly and socially disgraced is not the disgust and condemnation of the self-righteous, but the “*misericordia*” – pity of the loving Christ! We ought to ask, “What can I do to help?” “What can I do to enable this person to have a better future?” If another’s sins so disgust us, or touch us so personally that we cannot genuinely love the sinner, then for salvation’s sake, theirs and ours, let us keep away from them in word and

deed (touch them only with our prayers). Without love, we cannot be but destructive elements where healing ones are needed. This advice applies more often to members of our families than to strangers. For some people, we do not have the holiness needed to be a healing instrument. The greater the sinner the more holy needs be the instrument of God's grace to save them. The best, at times, is to leave them to Heaven, leave them to Divine Love! When faced with the spiritual sicknesses of our neighbor or ourselves, recall the words of Jesus, "*I have come not to call the just, but sinners. It is the sick who need the physician.*" Let us avoid getting over-involved with the legal technicalities of sin, repentance and reconciliation. In our day, in a most unique way, we encounter the Divine Physician in the Holy Eucharist. Our Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, has written, "*The Church, in fact, cannot have a different conduct towards men than that of the redeemer: she knows their weaknesses, has compassion on the crowd, receives sinners; but she cannot renounce the teaching of the law . . .*" (*Humanae Vitae*, p. 15). The Holy Father speaks of those entrapped in serious sin and unable to achieve the moral perfection demanded by Christian morality:

. . . let them implore divine assistance by persevering prayer: above all, let them draw from the source of grace and charity in the Eucharist. And if sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is poured forth in the sacrament of penance" (p. 19).

He encouraged priests to instruct sinners "*to have frequent recourse in a spirit of great faith to the sacraments of the Eucharist and penance, and never let them be discouraged by their weakness" (ibid., p. 21).*

THE DEADLY NATURE OF SIN

Jesus renders a very weighty judgment on sin when he says, "*I give you my assurance, everyone who lives in sin is the slave of sin. (No slave has a permanent place in the family, but the son has a place there forever.)" (Jn. 8:34-35).* Jesus does not imply that slavery results from committing a single sin or an isolated sinful act, but by living a life of sin. A person may fall through temptation and weakness and not commit himself to a life of sin. St. Paul writes to the Romans:

Do not, therefore, let sin rule your mortal body and make you obey its lusts. . . . You must realize that, when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are the slaves of the one you obey, whether yours is the slavery of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to justice. . . . When you were slaves of sin, you had freedom from justice. What benefit did you then enjoy? Things you are now ashamed of, all of them tending towards death” (Rom. 6:12, 16, 20-21).

A continual state of serious sin (“*tending toward death*”) is a dangerous situation because it can lead to a permanent separation from God. Jesus warns that the sinner’s place in the household is temporary. He who is a slave cannot be a Son of God. Whatever may be a sinner’s outward relationship with God, it can only last for a time. Permanent union with God must rest upon an abiding and essential foundation. For John, the abiding and the essential foundation is belief in the Lord. This implies much more than a simple acceptance of what He says to be true. It implies trusting oneself, in the fullest sense, to the Person of Jesus. It implies a readiness to put aside one’s own ideas, images and hopes . . . to wait patiently and openly for the Lord’s revelation and direction. In St. Paul’s mind, it involves becoming the obedient servant of the Lord!

To all us sinners, Jesus says, “*You belong to what is below; I belong to what is above. You belong to this world – a world which cannot hold me. That is why I said you would die in your sins. You will surely die in your sins unless you come to believe that I AM*” (Jn. 8:23-24) – unless you believe I am the Incarnate Divine Being come down from above.

St. John, in his first epistle, urges prayers for sinners: “*Anyone who sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly (apostacy – disbelief), should petition God, and thus life will be given to the sinner. . . . True, all wrongdoing is sin, but not all sin is deadly*” (1 Jn. 5:16-17).

To His believing disciples, Jesus now speaks. He knows some of these disciples are still in ignorance and bondage. Some have come to Him with old prejudices and a most imperfect faith. Fragile beginnings in faith, conserved and cultivated, will become foundations for knowledge and freedom: “*If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples; then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (Jn. 8:31-32). Regardless of the spiritual

conditions of our lives when encountering Jesus, the Lord promises that if our lives are daily directed by His teachings, they will grow, day by day, in truth; the growth in truth will finally lead to a freedom from all enslavement and bondage; we will be free with the freedom of the Sons of God (*Deo servire et libertas!*).

Sin is darkness. It is living the lie – a falsehood in action. Sin enslaves a soul within the realm of darkness. Jesus is Truth; therefore, Truth is living and personal. Jesus as Truth is the Light of the World. In verse thirty-two, “*truth*” is synonymous with Jesus or the Spirit of Jesus. Living our sinful lives within the healing radiance of God’s light, the Person of Jesus destroys the power of sin and its darkness. As the disciple incarnates through obedience the will of Jesus in his life, he experiences more and more freedom of a son of God. Only through union with Jesus can lasting freedom be gained. Jesus alone is free and abides unchangeable forever: “*That is why, if the Son frees you, you will really be free*” (*Jn. 8:36*).

The Son, not the Father, is portrayed as granting freedom. It is the Incarnate Son of God who communicated to redeemed humanity that which is His own.

Jesus dramatically illustrates within verses thirty-seven through forty-seven the cause and the bitter fruits of disbelief. Certainly, in the mind of John, there is no condition so serious as willful disbelief – it is a fountain of evil.

Jesus is teaching at the treasury in the Court of Women. A dark cloud of disbelief hangs over these men. Jesus gives another warning: “*I am going away. You will look for me but you will die in your sins. Where I am going you cannot come*” (*Jn. 8:21*). These enemies of Jesus respond in a terrible way: “*Does he mean he will kill himself when he claims, ‘Where I am going you cannot come’?*” (*Jn. 8:22*). Suicide was murder and it cut one off from the resurrection and eternal life; the implication is, “Is he going to Hell and that’s why we cannot follow him?”

These men were so blinded to their true spiritual state that they could see no need for the teachings of Jesus. His very implication that they were slaves and in need of redemption was offensive. These men and Jesus were not on the same level: “*You belong to what is below; I belong to what is above. You belong to this world – a world which cannot hold me*” (*Jn. 8:23*). Our Lord’s words imply that if you do not free yourself from this world, you cannot

follow Him – you cannot go where He is going. Jesus emphasizes that this teaching does not come from Him. On His own, He could say a lot in condemnation of them, but he keeps silent. Only what the Father directly speaks to Him does He reveal. The Heavenly Father speaks directly to them through His Son, Jesus. These Jews consciously profess to obey, worship, and love God, but they cannot hear His voice. Jesus beholds the sad irony of it all. If they were truly children of the Father, they would recognize the Father's words – they would hear and obey. The frightening tragedy of their spiritual lives becomes apparent. Words of salvation fall upon deaf ears.

They retort that salvation lies not in Jesus and His “dubious” Father, but in their being descendants of Abraham: “*Our Father is Abraham*” (Jn. 8:39). St. Justin Martyr (150 A.D.) taught that the Jews, as the seed of Abraham, expected to receive the Kingdom of God no matter what their personal lives had become. They relied upon God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to the whole world and God's chosen ones. (*Gen. 22:17-18; Ps. 105:6.*) In the epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul refutes this teaching by claiming that God's promise was to Abraham and his seed, being one person, namely Jesus Christ and not to his seeds, being many, namely the Jewish People. The promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus Christ and only those who are in union with Jesus can share in this blessing.

Jesus acknowledges the Jews to be of Abraham's stock. They descend from him in the flesh but there is more to it than that. . . . The Father reveals to Jesus the other side of the coin – their spiritual descent. Jesus reveals to them what he has seen in the Father's Presence:

I realize you are of Abraham's stock. Nonetheless, you are trying to kill me because my word finds no hearing among you. . . . If you were Abraham's children, you would be following Abraham's example. The fact is, you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which I have heard from God. Abraham did nothing like that. . . . Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.

Jesus now reveals to them the tragedy of their spiritual lives:

Were God your father you would love me, for I come forth from God, and am here. I did not come of my own will [obedience]; it

was He who sent me. . . . The father you spring from is the devil, and willingly [freely] you carry out his wishes. He brought death to man from the beginning [spiritual death], and has never based himself on truth; the truth is not in him. Lying speech is his native tongue; he is a liar and the father of lies. [They cannot bear to hear the truth any more than the devil can.] But because I deal in the truth, you give me no credence. Can any one of you convict me of sin? (Jn. 8:42, 44-46)

Here Jesus implies that sin is a lie – and those who sin are liars in deed – if not in word. If no sin can be found in Him, then there can be no lie in what He says or does. The measure of truth within a person is measured by his or her sinfulness. (This truth certainly makes plain what liars we humans are!) The answer to Jesus' questions is not obvious: "*If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me?*" (Ver. 46). Because a radical, diabolical possession has occurred, these men, in confrontation with Jesus, have willingly but unconsciously surrendered their souls to Satan. They have become his channels of evil while consciously believing themselves to be channels of God's grace. (Satan always deceives – it is his nature to do so.) Apparently, he came to them as an Angel of Light and because of their pride, he has alienated them from God and enlisted them into his service. The deception of deceptions! Men unconsciously serve him while consciously believing they serve God. The father of lies! Against such there is only one defense: "*Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart.*" "*Whoever is of God hears every word God speaks. The reason you do not hear is that you are not of God . . . I solemnly assure you, if a man is true to my word he shall never see death.*" (Jn. 8:47, 51)

THE LIGHT OF TRUTH

God has thrown the floodlights of truth upon their lives. They cannot bear this light. It fills them with hatred for its bearer. His words cannot penetrate the darkness that encircles them:

"Now we are sure you are possessed," the Jews retorted. "Abraham is dead. The prophets are dead. Yet you claim, 'A man shall never know death if he keeps my word.' Surely you do not pretend to be greater than our father Abraham, who died! Or the prophets, who died! Whom do you make yourself out to be?" (Jn. 8:52-53)

Jesus answered:

“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he might see my day. He saw it and was glad.” At this, the Jews objected, “You are not yet fifty! How can you have seen Abraham?” Jesus answered them, “I solemnly declare it: before Abraham came to be, I AM.”

(Jn. 8:56-58)

Jesus had already proclaimed (in verse forty-two) His divine origin and sonship when he said, *“I came forth from God, and am here.”* It is the will of His Father that He proclaim, at this point, His divine affiliation with the Father. What is so unbearable about this truth is what flows from it. Jesus’ revelation is true! They cannot accept these terrible truths about themselves; they cannot afford to believe – they could not have stood it. At that, they picked up rocks to throw at Jesus, but he hid himself and slipped out of the temple precincts.

We have beheld two tremendous revelations side by side: a revelation of darkness and a revelation of Glory. The revelation of darkness is a coin that reveals on the one side – the spiritual tragedy of these men and on the other, that the devil is the real enemy of Jesus. This truth will become more evident as Jesus’ final hour approaches. The Passion will be presented as the struggle to the death between Jesus and Satan. The death of Jesus is the main purpose of Satan. The Jewish leaders are but doing the work of Satan. This is dramatically presented in Judas, whom Satan entered into when he (freely) decided to betray Jesus.

CHAPTER 13

LIGHT OF LIFE

INTRODUCTION

A celebration called the Illumination of the Temple occurred during the Feast of Booths. As evening fell, four great candelabra were lit in the Court of Women. The Temple and the area surrounding Mt. Moriah were illuminated. The people sat in erected galleries, and all the night until the dawn, listened to sacred songs and watched the performances of sacred dances. The celebration commemorated God's providing light for their forefathers during their night journeys in the desert. The Book of Exodus recalls, *"The Lord preceded them, in day time, by means of a column of cloud to show them the way, and at night, by means of a column of fire to give them light. Thus, they could travel both day and night"* (Ex. 13:21).

Ancient man held light in great reverence. It nourished his life. The Egyptians worshipped the sun as a divine being called Ra. The Hebrews shared this ancient appreciation of light, although they carefully noted it to be a created energy. Frequently, they applied the concept of light to God: *"The Lord is my light and my salvation,"* cried the psalmist. (Ps. 27:1) Isaiah proclaims, *"Rise up in splendor! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you"* (Is. 60:1). *" . . . The Lord will be your light forever. . . ."* (Is. 60:19) The rabbis taught that the name of the Messiah was *"light."* For them, *"light"* was closely associated with God.

The celebration of Lights occurred on the first night of the Feast of Booths and some believe again on the last day. During this second celebration, Jesus proclaimed: *"I am the light of the world. No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness; no, he shall possess the light of life"* (Jn. 8:12). This proclamation reveals his messianic role.

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

The Scripture deliberately omits the article “the” or “a” before “light;” the inference being that no light exists in this world, neither greater nor lesser, other than Jesus. Jesus alone is Light. He is Light in a world darkened by the long shadow of sin. Jesus is not light for this world. He has not come to illumine the secrets of nature – enabling man to know all about everything. It is not a light that shines at the betting counter or upon the roulette table. Jesus illumines not the things of this world, but the people in this world. His brightness shines within the lives of men and women. Not within those whose eyes are upon this world seeking light (the know-how) to fill their hearts with its riches but upon those who seek light for inner illumination. Men and women who turn their eyes within – longing and seeking the Kingdom of God that is within a man. Jesus is Light of human life. His radiant beams shine within the minds, hearts and souls of men who want to know who they are, what they must become, and how to achieve it.

If we fit within this category of human beings, we must not bathe in the light like lazy lizards on a fence post. Recall, the true disciple “obeys every word.” “Whoever is of God hears every word God speaks . . .” (Jn. 8:47) “The light is among you only a little longer. Walk while you still have it or darkness will come over you. . . . While you have the light, keep faith in the light; thus you will become sons of light.” (Jn. 12:35-36) The light shines, briefly, within the acorn of your life. If the acorn does not break out of its shell and follow the light, it will soon be in darkness. If it remains in the darkness, it will die. Job lamented, “Oh that I were as in the months past! As in the days when God watched over me, while He kept His light shining above my head, and by His light I walked through darkness” (Job 29:2-4).

When John tells us the “Light shines in the darkness,” it is a symbolic and poetic way of expressing the Incarnation: “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” John sees Jesus like the Sun – rising out of the darkness of the East, bathing the entire world in light and warmth – the rays of His being are energizing and life-begetting.

By its very nature, sun is light. It needs no light outside of itself by which to see. No light in the world can light the path of the sun. In its light, all other lights are darkness. The sun passes through the world dispelling darkness. As the sun departs, darkness grows. The ancient man did not know where it

came from or where it went. If a man desired to travel safely, he traveled in the light of the sun. If he wanted work to be performed properly, he worked while he had the light. He was a man of the light!

In a world knowing both day and night, creatures of the night are begotten. These creatures prefer darkness – it is their milieu, their environment. They fear the light because it reveals them. They hate and hide from it. Their activities are performed properly only in the dark – they are destructive.

Many Scriptures in the Fourth Gospel see an analogy between the life of Jesus and the sun of Genesis: “. . . *the greater light to govern the day . . .*” (*Gen. 1:16*). John certainly teaches the revelation of Jesus must govern the lives of Christians. “. . . *keep faith in the light! . . .*” (*Jn. 12:36*) “*If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples.*” (*8:31*) “*Whoever is of God hears [obeys] every word God speaks . . .*” (*8:47*) As existence on this planet would be impossible without the sun, so spiritual life in the world is impossible without Jesus Christ, Light of Life. Exodus identifies the column of smoke and fire as the Lord Himself leading Israel. For the Christian, Jesus is this column of fire in the night to illumine, to guide, to warm; “. . . *No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness; no, he shall possess the light of life*” (*Jn. 8:12*). “*The light is among you only a little longer. Walk while you still have it or darkness will come over you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.*” (*Jn. 12:35*) We are told in Chapter Twelve that after this utterance, Jesus hid himself. When the sun hides behind the clouds, it still shines; but from all outward appearances, it is as if it were not – the day becomes darkened and chilled.

Our Lord’s response to the Pharisees in Chapter Eight, verse 14, may well have had the symbolism of the sun in mind: “*What if I am my own witness [light]? My testimony [light of truth] is valid [true light], nonetheless, because I know where I came from and where I am going [my rising and my setting]; you know neither the one nor the other.*” Just as the sun’s path, from the rising to its setting, is lighted by its own presence – seeing always its origin and its terminus – so Jesus is light of His own being, knowing completely the Alpha and Omega, beginning and ending, of His Being. In truth, a being of infinity – having no beginning and no ending.

Isaiah saw the Servant of Yahweh as such a light:

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit . . . a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

(Is. 42:1, 6-7)

From our view, Jesus is indeed the Sun – “*the greater light to govern the day.*” But from the humility of His own heart, Jesus beheld his Incarnate life more as the “*lesser light to govern the night*” (*Gen. 1:16*). He was a light reflecting, back into the darkness of this world, the rays of the departed Presence – the Father: “. . . *I only tell the world what I have heard from him the truthful One who sent me*” (*8:26*). “*I tell what I have seen in the Father’s presence . . .*” (*8:38*). “*You are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I have heard from God . . .*” (*8:40*). “*Whoever is of God hears every word God speaks . . .*” (*8:47*). “*I have not spoken on my own; no, the Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to speak . . . Whatever I say is spoken just as he instructed me.*” (*Jn. 12:49-50*)

John emphasizes how precious is every word spoken by Jesus. The true child of God does not desire to love only one or a few of them. He collects them all as jewels more precious than all the treasure of the world. Each is a direct message from the heart of God to the heart of his children – Heart to heart! The true child hears (obeys) every word He speaks. It is the sound of divine music entering the ear, touching the heartstrings, filling the Temple with praises of the Almighty Father. Yes, these divine treasures come to us in the clay of humanity – from the Word made Flesh – but for the eye of faith, the clay is transfigured with the glory of God that will one day transfigure the child of God:

In times past, God spoke in fragmentary and varied ways to our fathers through the prophets; in this, the final age, he has spoken to us through his Son. . . . This Son is the reflection of the Father’s glory, the exact representation of the Father’s being, and he sustains all things by His powerful word. . . . (Heb. 1:1-3)

THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING

In Chapter Nine, St. John masterfully narrates the birth of a child of light. The child of light will be illuminated against a background of growing

darkness in those who reject Jesus. The man in our narrative was born blind. He knew nothing of the experience of light. He realized his condition only through the testimony of others. He was as the blind six-year-old child recently seen on TV. The parents of the child recently won a court settlement against a Maryland hospital. Attendants at the hospital destroyed, at birth, the child's vision by too much oxygen. During an interview, the child appeared more concerned about his parents' inability to accept his blindness than by the fact that he could not see. He told his interviewer as he swung in his little swing, "My mother and father want me to see. But I cannot see! I don't know why I cannot see." He appeared to accept his own blindness, as did the man in the Gospel narrative.

This man, by his unfortunate physical condition, had been reduced to beg for a living. He probably sat by one of the Temple gates and begged for alms. We see later his neighbors asked, "*Isn't this the fellow who used to sit and beg?*" (*Jn. 9:8*). St. Matthew mentions that during the last days of Jesus, he cured the blind and lame within the Temple area. (*Mat. 21:14*) Regardless of his physical handicap, he appears to be socially accepted and adjusted. Blindness is an accepted fact in his life. He does not seek physical vision. It comes to him as a free blessing from God – an expression of divine power and mercy.

When the disciples of the Lord see the blind man, he becomes no more to them than a stimulus for a theological discussion: "*Rabbi, was it his sin or that of his parents that caused him to be born blind?*" (*Jn. 9:2*). Our Lord immediately zeroes in on the personhood of the blind man: "*It was no sin, either of this man or of his parents. Rather, it was to let God's works show forth in him*" (*Jn. 9:3*). We are told this suffering was permitted for the glory of God to be revealed. Apparently, God is not permitted to do this anymore. At least this is the impression given from many of the sermons on radio and TV. Christians who suffer today, suffer because of their sinfulness or lack of faith that keeps them from claiming the victory won by Jesus; their freedom here and now from physical bondage of suffering.

I'm afraid here we have that old human tendency to emphasize one divine truth at the expense of another to the detriment of revealed truth. Such a thing causes as much harm to the Christian community as heresy. I cannot but see here a spirit of deception and I wonder how many souls this spirit and these preachers have brought to despair by telling them they are in bondage

to physical illness because of a lack of faith. What great faith St. Therese of Lisieux and Francis of Assisi possessed! Therese died at twenty-four after several painful years of suffering tuberculosis, and Francis died nearly blind – he couldn't see Brother Sun anymore. I'm glad they did not believe such teachings as heard today. They understood, with St. Paul, the mystery of Christ-like suffering:

As we have shared much in the suffering of Christ, so through Christ do we share abundantly in his consolation. If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; and when we are consoled, it is for your consolation, so that you may endure patiently the same suffering we endure. Our hope for you is firm because we know that just as you share in the sufferings, so you will share in the consolation. (2 Cor. 1:5-7)

Paul knew some Christians vicariously suffer, as Jesus, for the sins of others. He spoke of the sufferings within His own life as filling up the suffering which lacked in the Body of Christ, the Church. The whole Book of Job tells us about an innocent man whom God permitted Satan to test through suffering. Some men suffer in the body because of personal sins. Some men suffer because they do not have faith in the Lord to deliver them. Some men suffer because physical suffering purifies their souls. Some men suffer because they are chosen and exceptional friends of the Lord – they overcome Satan with his own weapons.

In the case of the blind man, Our Lord deals with this case of suffering on an individual and personal level. And so must all cases of human suffering be individually and personally evaluated. One thing is true, God never causes evil. He permits it for one reason or another. A spirit of discernment is needed. If suffering has a lesson to teach, it would be wise to pray first to learn the lesson, before praying to be let out of school early. Truly, we may go from the frying pan into the fire. . . .

Both the disciples and the Pharisees had a narrow concept of suffering. Despite the teaching of Isaiah about the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, the sufferings of Jesus were lost upon them. Some Jews actually believed a man could begin to sin in the womb. Likewise, they believed in the pre-existence of souls before birth in a seventh heaven where they awaited birth. They believed that certain souls, before birth, were already good or evil. The Book

of Wisdom teaches: *“I was a boy of happy disposition; I had received a good soul as my lot”* (Wis. 8:19*). The Old Testament testifies to the suffering of children because of the sins of parents. *“ . . . I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers’ wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to their third and fourth generation.”* (Ex. 20:5) These two prevailing ideas about suffering motivated the question of whether the man had been born blind because of a prenatal sin or the sin of his parents.

A NEW CREATION

Jesus teaches this case of blindness serves as an opportunity for the works of God to be manifested. Jesus speaks of *“works”* rather than a work of God. He teaches that the works of God in this world must be accomplished within a limited span of time because the time of life on earth runs out – death comes and ends the opportunity for man to work: *“We must do the deeds of Him who sent me while it is day. The night comes on when no one can work”* (Jn. 9:4).

Jesus bends down and with his own spittle makes mud; he smears the mud on the eyes of the blind man. As difficult as it may seem today, to moisten the eyes with spittle was considered medicinal. In ancient time, the use of spittle in healing of certain diseases was a common practice. Nevertheless, the teaching in Genesis may have motivated the action of Our Lord. *“The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground. . . .”* (Gen. 2:7) Some see here the theme of creation. The man has never had sight; it is not a matter of restoring but creating sight where it never existed. It is a sign of a new creation or maybe the creative completion of man. The gift of sight will certainly open a new life to the man. He will be so completely different that people who once knew him will not be sure of his identity: *“Isn’t this the fellow who used to sit and beg?” Some were claiming it was he; others maintained it was not but someone who looked like him”* (Jn. 9:8). His activities were so different, it was hard to believe he was the same person. We can see in this sign John means to teach about the transformation occurring in men when Jesus comes, through the Holy Spirit, into their lives.

I once saw a woman acting rather peculiarly in Church. As the congregation recited the prayers, she held the book before her and was grinning at people in every direction. When she returned from communion, she moved her body along with no freedom of movement, as if it weighed a ton. Later, I learned

she had been blind for many years and had only a few days before been healed at a service conducted by Katheryn Kuhlman. Her body had not yet accommodated itself to her newly gained vision. I'm sure within a month someone may have asked, "Isn't that the blind woman who used to shuffle down the aisle of St. Therese's Church?" And someone would say, "No, it only looks like her!"

In the Gospel account, the man overheard the conversation of his neighbors and interrupted with, "*I am the one!*" He knows, despite appearances and actions, he is the same person. "*Ego eimi*" appears in this text. Is it intended to imply that something of the divine is now in this man? If he is a symbol of the baptized Christian, it may well be so. Even though he remains uniquely himself, he will never be the same as before. His neighbors asked him:

"How were your eyes opened?" He answered, "That man they call Jesus made mud and smeared it on my eyes, telling me to go to Siloam and wash. When I did go and wash, I was able to see." "Where is he?" they asked. He replied, "I have no idea" (Jn. 9:10-12).

The man, of course, had never seen Jesus. He was unable to see any "*signs or wonders.*" Perhaps he had heard of Jesus. He certainly heard the words of Jesus addressed to him. He was a blind man; it was not easy for him to go to Siloam, but he went in obedience to the voice he had heard. He washed in the water. His faith in the words Jesus spoke to him led him into a new creation. Now he sees but, as yet, not Jesus.

In Hebrew, the pool of Siloam is called "*Shiloh*"; it means "one who is sent." The theme of Jesus' being "*Shiloh*" sounds throughout the Fourth Gospel. He is the one sent by the Father. Certainly, the early Church saw in this narrative the picture of men, hearing the word of God and moved by grace, coming to Jesus through baptism and thereby, becoming new creations.

The beggar now has sight but he has never seen Jesus. He can only speak of "*the man that is called Jesus.*" He has had a profound experience and as yet, the full meaning escapes him.

The work occurred on the Sabbath; the neighbors of the man take him to the Pharisees in order to discover the significance of the healing. When the

authorities heard what the man had to say, a dispute broke out. Some said, “. . . *‘This man cannot be from God because he does not keep the Sabbath.’ Others objected: ‘If the man is a sinner, how can he perform signs like these?’*” (Jn. 9:16). “. . . *Surely the devil cannot open the eyes of the blind!*” (Jn. 10:21) *The man knows in his heart that these critics are wrong.*

What has been done for him is a divine work, it comes from God. Jesus has to be a messenger of God. The Pharisees address the man, “*‘Since it was your eyes he opened, what do you have to say about him?’ ‘He is a prophet,’ he replied*” (Jn. 9:17). Perhaps the action of Jesus had recalled the story of Elisha’s sending Naaman to wash in the Jordan and was cleansed of leprosy.

To the Pharisees, the solution was obvious: the man lies. As the light grows for one, the darkness overcomes the others. They decided to question the man’s parents. These parents feared the authorities. They had heard that the authorities planned to excommunicate anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. The parents had to live in this world; they couldn’t survive excommunication; they couldn’t afford to be drawn into this affair; they had too much to lose. The authorities put three questions to them. They answered two and sidestepped the third:

“Is this your son?” they asked, “and if so, do you attest that he was blind at birth? How do you account for the fact that now he can see?” The parents answered, “We know this is our son, and we know he was blind at birth. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we have no idea. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself” (Jn. 9:19-21).

The law held that the testimony of two witnesses was sufficient. The authorities had to accept that the man was their son and had been born blind. At the risk of being ostracized from society, the parents would not support their son – or Jesus.

God deals with us as individuals. He expects us to deal with Him as individuals. Our commitment to Him is personal and must be measured by the graces that are uniquely ours. What others do must never be the measure of what we do. The behavior of other men towards God can never be the proper criteria of our relationship with God. If necessary, as indicated in this narrative, a disciple must be willing to lose family, friends, and life itself in

order to be true to what God reveals to him and asks from him.

The man is recalled for further questioning. They have accepted the restoration of his vision – but not as a divine work. They suspect some conspiracy between the man and Jesus. The legal formula used, “*Give glory to God,*” implies he has not yet told the truth. They attempt to bully and to lead the witness: “*First of all, we know this man is a sinner.*” They based their presumption on the fact that Jesus had broken the Sabbath – for he had kneaded clay, an act expressly forbidden on the Sabbath. It is a presumption presumed as a fact. Only one person, the man born blind, has testified that Jesus performed this action; the law demanded two witnesses before a man could be accused of a serious crime. The thought behind the Pharisees’ actions was stimulated by Deuteronomy:

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer who promises you a sign or wonder, urging you to follow other gods, whom you have not known, and to serve them; even though the sign or wonders he has foretold you comes to pass, pay no attention to the words of that prophet or that dreamer; for the Lord, your God, is testing you to learn whether you really love him with all your heart and with all your soul. . . . But that prophet or that dreamer shall be put to death, because . . . he has preached apostasy from the Lord, your God. . . . (Deut. 13:2-6)

The man born blind does not accept the statement of the Pharisees. He confesses what he knows to be a fact. He tells the whole truth and nothing else but the truth: “*I do not know whether he is a sinner or not. I know this much: I was blind before; now I can see!*” (9:25). Hoping he will entrap himself, they ask him to repeat his story. He realizes they are no longer interested in the truth – only in confirming, by a false confession, their false opinion. He sarcastically replies, “*I have told you once but you would not listen to me. Why do you want to hear it all over again? Do not tell me you want to become his disciples, too?*” (9:27). (Be careful of people who have no openness to truth and use inquiry only as a pretext to draw you into disputes. They do not seek to know the truth but to destroy the truth. Regardless of what they call themselves, recognize from whom they labor! Ask yourself, “Is the truth in them? Are they open to the truth?” If the answer is “no,” it is wiser not to become involved with them.)

The man in the narrative stands up for truth and thereby identifies himself as a disciple of Jesus: *“You are the one who is that man’s disciple. We are disciples of Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man comes from”* (9:28-29). The man has had an extraordinary experience; these men try to destroy it. He can only draw on what he has experienced and knows in his heart. A man can know the truth beyond doubt and yet have no defense for the truth believed. The man gives his rebuttal. (The Pharisees finally admitted they did not know something, but it hadn’t stopped them from drawing certain and damaging conclusions from their unknown facts.)

You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not hear sinners, but that if someone is devout and obeys his will, he listens to him. It is unheard of that anyone ever gave sight to a person blind from birth. If this man were not from God, he could never have done such a thing. (9:30-33)

His argument is logical and scripturally sound. Psalm 146 says, *“The Lord gives sight to the blind . . .”* (Ps. 146:8). The thought runs through the Old Testament that God does not hear sinners: The psalmist says, *“Were I to cherish wickedness in my heart, the Lord would not hear”* (Ps. 66:18). We read these words in Isaiah: *“When you spread out your hands, I close my eyes to you; though you pray more, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood!”* (Is. 1:15). The prayers of the righteous are heard: *“The Lord is far from the wicked, but the prayers of the just he hears”* (Prov. 15:29). *“The Lord has eyes for the just and ears for their cry.”* (Ps. 34:16) *“He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.”* (Ps. 145:19) *“Beloved, if our consciences have nothing to charge us with, we can be sure that God is with us and that we will receive at his hands whatever we ask. Why? Because we are keeping his commandments and doing what is pleasing in his sight.”* (1 Jn. 3:21-22)

The man found the Word to defend Jesus – just as Jesus promised all his disciples would be able to do when they were brought before judges and men for his name’s sake. The Pharisees, unable to answer the man’s arguments, turn to attack the personal integrity of the man. All pretense of justice is dropped: *“What! You are steeped in sin from your birth, and you are giving us lectures?”* [They unwittingly admit he had been born blind and now can see.] *With that, they threw him out bodily*” (Jn. 9:34). He was excommunicated.

Excommunication was considered the severest punishment next to the death penalty. To be excommunicated was to be put into a position where no true Israelite would have any business of communication with the excommunicated person. He was socially dead. Excommunication was believed to exclude one from salvation.

Three times the man born blind confessed ignorance while growing in knowledge: Jesus is a Prophet (*Ver. 17.*); He has unique power (*Ver. 32.*) and He comes from God (*Ver. 33.*). Three times the Pharisees make confident statements of what they know about Jesus and are plunged more deeply into darkness.

The man finds himself all alone – cut off from his religion, his family and his friends. This is the price he paid for his loyalty to truth. Jesus comes to him. For the first time, he sees the Lord. Having recognized Jesus as a Prophet and one from God, he has come as far as he can within the limitations of his Jewish background. As yet, he does not see Jesus as His Lord and Savior. Before he can do this, he must be willing to leave all the old behind – he must go in faith where he has never yet gone. This step can only be made when Jesus Himself makes a self-revelation:

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” The man is completely open to receive the words of Jesus. Our Lord manifests Himself to him: “You have seen [believed] him,” Jesus replied. “He is speaking to you now.” “I do believe, Lord,” he said, and bowed down to worship him.”

(Jn. 9:35-38)

The verb used in the text describes the worship of God. The man is no longer alone. A new society is born, occasioned by this man’s excommunication from Judaism and inaugurated by Jesus’ presenting himself to this man as an object of divine faith. Membership in this new community is based upon confessing Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. The gift of faith is the true miracle being narrated – spiritual insight to behold in Jesus the Lord.

Jewish theology closely connected the coming of the Son of Man with judgment. The man born blind will not have a future judgment. His Judge stands before him and by his confession of faith; “. . . *He does not come under*

condemnation, but has passed from death unto life” (Jn. 5:24). The real miracle is the miracle of faith – the triumph of Light over darkness.

Jesus exclaims, *“I came into this world to divide it, to make the sightless see and the seeing blind” (Jn. 9:39). Some Pharisees asked, “You are not calling us blind, are you?” (9:40). Jesus replies that believing (seeing) and not believing (being blind) are fully voluntary actions for which each person must accept personal responsibility. Blindness or disbelief is an act of refusal. Jesus’ verdict is, “. . . your sin remains” (Jn. 9:41).*

The word used for *“remains”* implies *“eternal.”* Disbelief has eternal consequences. Our Lord teaches, *“The eye is the body’s lamp. If your eyes are good, your body will be filled with light; if your eyes are bad, your body will be in darkness. And if your light is darkness, how deep will the darkness be!” (Mt. 6:22-23).*

Jesus said to his disciples, *“You are the light of the world . . . your light must shine before men so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to your heavenly Father” (Mt. 5:14, 16). To the disciples of Jesus, the words of Isaiah are applicable: “I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Is. 49:6b).*

To all disciples of Jesus Christ, St. Paul writes:

There was a time when you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Well, then, live as children of light. Light produces every kind of goodness and justice and truth. Be correct in your judgment of what pleases the Lord. Take no part in vain deeds done in darkness; rather, condemn them. It is shameful even to mention the things these people do in secret; but when such deeds are condemned, they are seen in the light of day, and all that then appears is light. That is why we read: “Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Eph. 5:8-14).

Since Jesus is Light, the faithful acceptance of his teachings may be spoken of as *“following after Him.”* But the *“light,”* Christian truth, can never be just some thing. The Pharisees had truth but their spirits were divorced from the Spirit of Truth. Truth was a thing they possessed. Therefore, it was no longer alive within them and made them deadly. So it is with all who have the

facts of truth without the Spirit of Truth.

To have the *“light of life”* means to have Jesus, the Lord. What is the light a Christian possesses? The answer is: Jesus living in that Christian. *“The light that the believer has is always the light that Jesus is!”* (Lightfoot and Bultmann.) We never possess the Light of Truth unless Jesus abides in us and we abide in Him. Independent of Jesus, we possess no Light of Truth, no Light of Life.

In this world darkened by sin, in this human nature sharing sin’s darkness, the Person of Jesus is a veritable sun for the child of God. Jesus is hidden from this world. Therefore, the disciple of Jesus must sharpen his eyes and ears. The eye of faith is the lamp of the spirit revealing the Presence of the Lord and only the obedient ear hears His Word. He will always manifest Himself in this world to the obedient child of faith.

Soon in our study of St. John, Jesus will no longer speak to this world, but only to His disciples. Let us be prepared to hear *“every word God speaks.”*

CHAPTER 14

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

INTRODUCTION

Palestine is a pastoral land. Everywhere you see the shepherd and his sheep. The plateaus of Eastern Palestine and the mountains of the country offer good pasture for sheep. These animals can live off a light grass cover and sheep need be watered but once a day. Even the desert, after the winter rains, provides grass enough to pasture the sheep. Sheep and goats are the chief support for the pastoral people, furnishing milk, butter, cheese and meat.

The shepherd leads a nomadic existence leading his flock from one green pasture to another. From morning to evening, he guides his flock. His life is a solitary one; he was bred to it, leading sheep since childhood; he is comfortable being alone. A shepherd may have the same sheep within his flock for many years. Sheep are primarily raised for wool rather than for mutton as in other countries. The average person would only eat mutton during a festival. Sheep often have individual names and they all know the voice of their shepherd; the sound of his voice guides and assures them. They panic and flee from strangers.

Sheep are defenseless little creatures. They demand constant care and protection. An innate mechanism for survival has been bred out of them. If the shepherd does not guide them, they lose themselves and die of hunger and thirst or as prey to beasts. When evening comes and the weather is fair, they are herded into sheepfolds formed in the fields from stones. Such sheepfolds have no doors. The shepherd himself sleeps in front of the gate and no sheep can enter or leave without passing over his body. When the weather is inclement, they take refuge in nearby caves. Villages and towns have their sheepfolds. These are protected by a heavy door and only the caretaker holds the key. When several folds are herded together for the night, they are separated in the morning by the individual shepherds' giving their unique

calls. The sheep, knowing the voice of his shepherd, will separate himself from the rest and follow the voice of his own shepherd.

As a shepherd's life is simple, so are his possessions. He carries a srip, a purse-like bag hanging from the shoulder containing bread and cheese, and maybe olives and dried fruit. He has a weapon called a sling – used to hurl stones. It can be used against an enemy or used to hurl a stone in the front of the nose of a wandering sheep as a warning to turn back. It is said some can hit a hair with a stone. We read in Judges 20:16: “. . . *seven hundred picked men who were left-handed, every one of them able to sling a stone at a hair without missing.*” It was with such a sling that David slew Goliath:

Then, staff in hand, David selected five smooth stones from the wadi and put them in the pocket of his shepherd's bag. With his sling also ready to hand, he approached the Philistine. . . . The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog that you come against me with a staff?” . . . David put his hand into the bag and took out a stone, hurled it with the sling, and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone embedded itself in his brow and he fell prostrated on the ground.

(Ism. 17:40, 43, 49)

A shepherd carries both a rod and a staff. The rod is a club-like weapon used to protect the sheep from beasts and thieves. It hangs at the shepherd's waist. The shepherd's staff is a crook used to count, separate and pull sheep back into line.

The patriarch, Jacob, describes in words to his father-in-law, Laban, the life of a shepherd:

“In the twenty years that I was under you, no ewe or she goat of yours ever miscarried, and I have never feasted on a ram of your flock. I never brought you an animal torn by wild beasts; I made good the loss myself. You held me responsible for anything stolen by day or night. How often the scorching heat ravaged me by day, and the frost by night, while sleep fled from my eyes.”

(Gen. 31:38-40)

A shepherd's job is a responsible one. Much of the wealth of a man was tied

up in his flocks and herds. Even today a sheep is worth sixty dollars, a goat, forty dollars and a camel, four hundred dollars. We read in Exodus:

When a man gives a sheep or any other animal to another for safekeeping, if it dies, or is maimed or snatched away, without anyone witnessing the fact, the custodian shall swear by the Lord that he did not lay hands on his neighbor's property; the owner must accept the oath, and no restitution is to be made. . . . If it has been killed by a wild beast, let him bring it as evidence, and he need not make restitution for the mangled animal.

(Ex. 22:9-10, 12)

The prophet Amos speaks of the shepherd's snatching a pair of legs or the tip of an ear of his sheep from the mouth of the lion. (*Amos 3:12.*) Many tales are told of the bravery of shepherds in the face of wild beasts and thieves. David told Saul:

Your servant used to tend his father's sheep, and whenever a lion or bear came to carry off a sheep from the flock, I would go after it and attack it and rescue the prey from its mouth. If it attacked me, I would seize it by the jaw, strike it and kill it. (1 Sam. 17:34-35)

THE SHEPHERDS OF ISRAEL

Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, all the great patriarchs of the Jews, had been shepherds. The rabbis tell this story of Moses: Moses was guarding his father-in-law's flock when a little one ran away. Moses later found the lamb at a watering hole. He picked up the lamb and said, "*I didn't know you ran away because you were thirsty. You must be weary now.*" He placed the lamb on his shoulder and returned him to the flock. And God said, "*Because you have shown pity in leading back one of a flock belonging to a man, you shall lead my flock Israel.*"

In such a pastoral environment, it would only be natural for the outstanding characteristics of good shepherds to be protective, fearless, constantly vigilant, always leading the flock to life and nourishment. These characteristics would be projected into the idealized leader – the King and God. We find, in the Near East, the title of shepherd applied both to gods and kings. Hammurabi of Babylon was called a shepherd of his people. A god

named Shamas is addressed as shepherd. For the Israelites, Moses, the shepherd, leading the people of Israel to the Promised Land, was a pictorial representation of God; their Good Shepherd lovingly tending his flock. We read in the Scriptures: *“Through the ‘sea was your way, and your path through the deep waters, though your footsteps were not seen, you led your people like a flock under the care of Moses and Aaron” (Ps. 77:20-21). “But his people he led forth like sheep and guided them like a herd in the desert. He led them on secure and unafraid. . . .” (Ps. 78:52-53)* God appears in the Scriptures clothed in rich imagery drawn from the life of the shepherd. Genesis refers to God as the Great Shepherd, the Rock of Israel. (*Gen. 49:24.*) Again, the psalmist says, *“O shepherd of Israel, hearken, O guide of the flock of Joseph! From your throne upon the cherubim shine forth. . . . Rouse your power and come to save us” (Ps. 80:2-3).* Isaiah speaks of Yahweh: *“Like a shepherd, he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care” (Is. 40:11).* Jeremiah sees the flock of the Lord scattered and Yahweh speaks these words to him: *“He who scattered Israel, now gathers them together, he guards them as a shepherd his flock” (Jer. 31:10). “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply.” (Jer. 23:3)* The most well known and most beloved of all Psalms describes Our Lord as the Good Shepherd:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage.

(Ps. 23:1-4)

The Scriptures teach that God chooses men as his representatives to be shepherds of his flock here on this earth. In chapter three of Exodus, we read of the call of Moses to be shepherd of the flock of Israel. Moses rightly backs away from such an awesome task. Whatever may be the honor or glory of such a position, the pain and sacrifice demanded of a good shepherd far outweigh the other fringe benefits. Only love of God or man could lead a man of good spirit and right mind to assume the position of Shepherd of the Flock. Sheep may be dumb, but they are docile. People may be as dumb as sheep when it comes to knowing where nourishment for their souls lie, but there the analogy ends! To complete the picture of man, you will have to bring in other

subjects of the animal kingdom: mules and donkeys, foxes and monkeys, mud hens and magpies, snakes and alligators . . . in other words, you will need a veritable Noah's Ark. If this isn't in keeping with your fantasies about what the Lord's Flock is really like, recall the words of the Good Shepherd, Moses, some years later:

"Why do you treat your servant so badly?" Moses asked the Lord. Why are you so displeased with me that you burden me with all these people? . . . If this is the way you deal with me, then please do me the favor of killing me at once, so that I need no longer face this distress. (Num. 11:11, 15)

We even hear the Lord Himself saying to Moses:

"You and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt are to go up from here to the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I would give to their descendants . . . I will send an angel before you to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I myself will not go up in your company, because you are a stiff-necked people; otherwise, I might exterminate you on the way." When the people heard this bad news, they went into mourning, and no one wore his ornaments. (Ex. 33:1-4)

When Moses' life comes to an end, Joshua is chosen by God to be the chief shepherd. We read in Deuteronomy:

Then Moses summoned Joshua and in the presence of all Israel, said to him, "Be brave and steadfast, for you must bring this people into the land which the Lord swore to their fathers he would give them; you must put them in possession of their heritage" (Deut. 31:7).

Now Joshua, son of Nun, was filled with the spirit of wisdom, since Moses had laid hands upon him; and so the Israelites gave him their obedience, thus carrying out the Lord's command to Moses. (Deut. 34:9)

Following the death of Joshua, the destiny of Israel was guided by twelve heroes called Judges. These men God raised up to shepherd his people until

the institution of the monarchy. Of these twelve men, Samson was the most colorful. Following these twelve came two other men, Eli and Samuel. They appeared to have ruled the entire nation of Israel. Samuel was the instrument for the establishment of the monarchy: *“When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the Lord assured him, ‘This is the man of whom I told you; he is to govern my people’”* (1 Sam. 9:17). Later, because of his disobedience, God rejects the leadership of Saul and commands the reluctant Samuel to anoint another:

How long will you grieve for Saul, whom I have rejected as king of Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen my king from among his sons. (1 Sam. 16:1)

When Samuel arrived in Bethlehem and Jesse presented his sons to him, Samuel took one look at Eliab and was certain he would be the future king.

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart.” . . . [Finally] Samuel asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” Jesse replied, “There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Send for him. . . .” Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy; a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. The Lord said, “There – anoint him, for this is he.” Then Samuel . . . anointed him . . . and from that day on, the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David. (1 Sam. 16:7, 11-13)

We read in Psalm 78:

And he chose David, his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob, his people, and Israel, his inheritance. And he tended them with a sincere heart and with skillful hands he guided them.

(Ps. 78:70-72)

In his role as Shepherd, David was to sin and bring affliction upon his people. We read,

When David saw the angel who was striking the people, he said to the Lord, "It is I who have sinned; it is I, the shepherd, who have done wrong. But these are sheep; what have they done? Punish me and my kindred" (2 Sam. 24:17).

(The Messiah, kin of David, would indeed suffer for the sins of many.)
David's son Solomon was chosen as his successor.

Following David and Solomon, leadership deteriorated. The title, shepherd, was given to whichever rulers had authority over the people. The prophets make it only too clear how the later shepherds failed in their responsibilities: ". . . *the shepherds rebelled against me . . .*" (Jer. 2:8) are the Lord's words to Jeremiah and ". . . *yes, the shepherds were stupid as cattle, the Lord they sought not; therefore, they had no success, and all their flocks were scattered*" (Jer. 10:21). "*Lost sheep were my people, their shepherds misled them, straggling on the mountains; from mountain to hill they wandered, losing the way to their fold. Whoever came upon them devoured them. . . .*" (Jer. 50:6-7)

Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the Lord. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people: You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds. I myself will gather the remains of my flocks from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to the meadow; there they shall increase and multiply. I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing, says the Lord. Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; As king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. . . . This is the name they give him: "The Lord our Justice. (Jer. 23:1-6)

"I will appoint over you shepherds after my own heart, who will shepherd you wisely and prudently." (Jer. 3:15)

Again, we hear the prophet Ezekiel preaching God's testimony against the shepherds of Israel and His Promise to once again shepherd his own sheep:

Thus the word of the Lord came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. . . . Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been pasturing themselves! Should not shepherds, rather, pasture sheep? You have fed off their milk, worn their wool, and slaughtered the fatlings, but the sheep you have not pastured. You did not strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured. You did not bring back the stray or seek the lost, but you lorded it over them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and became food for all the wild beasts . . . my sheep were scattered over the whole earth, with no one to look after them or to search for them. . . . Thus says the Lord God, I myself will look after and tend my sheep . . . I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark . . . I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest . . . the lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal . . . I will appoint one shepherd over them to pasture them, my servant David; he shall pasture them and be their shepherd. I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I, the Lord, have spoken.

(Ezk. 34:1-24)

All of this and more is the needed background to understand chapter ten of the Fourth Gospel. Our Lord testified that the Pharisees and scribes now occupied the seat of Moses and they commanded obedience to their authority. He recognized that they held authority. This authority they misused in excommunicating one who was but following the voice of the True Shepherd of Israel. One more little sheep has been driven away. But the end of these evil shepherds over the Lord's flocks is at hand, for the Good Shepherd is on the scene. The seeking out of this abandoned and lost man has revealed Jesus to be the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy: "*Thus says the Lord: I swear I am coming against these shepherds. I will claim my sheep from them and put a stop to their shepherding my sheep . . .*" (Ezk. 34:10).

Jesus declared that he came into this world to divide it. Through the words of the Prophet Ezekiel, God foretold, "*I will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats . . . you push with side and shoulder, and butt all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them out. I will save my sheep . . .*" (Ezk. 34:17, 21-22). This prophecy is about to be fulfilled. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will divide Israel. Those who believe Jesus is the

Messiah, the Son of God, the Davidic Shepherd sent by God, as foretold by the prophets, will be separated from the Jewish Nation. Symbolically, this occurred in Chapter 9 in the narration of the man born blind.

The man before his encounter with Jesus, despite his physical blindness, was well integrated into this world. He only began to have problems living in the world after Jesus came into his life. His physical blindness was only a symbol of the spiritual darkness in which his life was lived. Obviously, there was a sincerity and openness to truth within the man. Theologically, he cooperated with the graces received. The Father, through Jesus, performed a work within this man's life. The man recognized the work as divine and its agent as one sent from God. As he pondered and discussed what happened, his faith in Jesus solidified. He was ready to follow Jesus. Jesus revealed Himself to the man as the Messiah, the Lord. His faith was firm in Jesus – without hesitation, he expressed his faith by adoration. He followed Jesus as sheep does his Shepherd! A Christian was born!

Others do not accept Jesus. They remain confirmed in their way. Jesus has been run through their little hearts and minds, weighed in the balance and according to their standard, He is found wanting. They do not heed his voice for they are not His sheep . . . they do not belong to God. In this manner, Jesus is Judge and He brings Judgment into every man's life.

FALSE SHEPHERDS OF ISRAEL

As the Shepherd sent from God, Jesus stands in the midst of the flock of Israel. He calls out, *“I myself am the bread of life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry, no one who believes in me shall ever thirst”* (Jn. 6:35). The Chief priests, the scribes and Pharisees appear as evil and false shepherds. They warn and threaten people not to believe in Jesus: *“He is his own witness.” “His witness cannot be true!” “He is a Samaritan, a heretic!” “He is mad!” “He is possessed!” “By the Prince of devils He casts out devils!”* The people are divided: some side with the Pharisees, some, as Nicodemus, are not certain, some believe but are afraid to follow Jesus, as Joseph of Arimathea; but some, such as the man born blind, leave all things to follow the voice of His Shepherd, the Word of God.

In a parable, Jesus sums up the difference between Himself and these self-appointed Shepherds of Israel:

Truly I assure you: Whoever does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a marauder. The one who enters through the gate is shepherd of the sheep; the keeper opens the gate for him. The sheep hear his voice as he calls his own by name and leads them out. When he has brought out [all] those that are his, he walks in front of them, and the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. They will not follow a stranger; such a one they will flee, because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. (Jn. 10:1-5)

These men, who are the Shepherds of Israel, who sit upon the Chair of Moses, have usurped this authority. They were not called by God to lead his people – they are no better than thieves and bandits. Their selfish motivations have led them to assume positions of authority. On the other hand, the One sent by God to Shepherd His sheep, they reject, because He threatens their security. They seek to kill the real Heir. Jesus is the Shepherd proclaimed by all the prophets. The words of Moses are recalled to mind:

May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind set over the community [synagogue] a man who shall act as their leader in all things, to guide them in all their actions; that the Lord's community may not be like sheep without a shepherd.

(Num. 27:16-17)

THE GOOD SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL

It is suggested in Mark 6:34, where Jesus has pity on the crowd who are like sheep without shepherds, that He saw Himself in this role described in Numbers. The prophet, John the Baptist, stands at the door of the sheepfold. He recognizes in Jesus the True Shepherd of Israel. He opens the gate to Him:

“Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ . . . The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus” (Jn. 1:29, 37).

“ . . . The sheep follow him because they recognize his voice” (Jn. 10:4). The man born blind does not accept the Pharisees' decision. He fails to hear in them the sound of Truth.

Our Lord calls these men “*thieves*” and when he says they come “*only to steal and slaughter and destroy*” (Jn. 10:10), He reveals for whom they labor; their self-gratification is not the end of the story, it is only the means by which Satan duped them into accomplishing his work. But in the end, they are hired and used by him and when he, the wolf, appears to snatch and scatter the flock, since in truth they are not real shepherds, they get out while the getting is good. False Shepherds are always off to safer, greener and more serene pastures in search of fatter sheep to fleece. (From time to time, it is not unknown for them to carry off a cute little sheep from the flock.)

Jesus refers to Himself as a gate: “*My solemn word is this: I am the sheepgate*” (10:7). Here is taught the importance of his own physical being, the Word incarnate, for the salvation of souls. Through this monument of sin, standing between God and man, there is only one gate through which a man can enter into a genuine, personal relationship with God. That gate is the Person, Jesus Christ. “*Through him we have access to the Father.*” (Eph. 2:18) Jesus recalls to our minds that just as the body of the Shepherd, sleeping across the gate of the sheepfold in the field, keeps the sheep safe by his own body, so the body of Jesus will be the door by which we enter the Kingdom of God and through the body we find security and safety. “*We can go in and out*” signifies a life made secure and safe. There is no need for fear – peace reigns.

IT IS WINTER

The shadows of the Passion loom darkly over chapter ten. The coming encounter with evil will reveal Jesus to be the True Shepherd. The verses that follow indicate strongly that Jesus becomes a gate for us by his physical death:

I came that they might have life and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep . . . for these sheep I will give my life. . . . The Father loves me for this: that I lay down my life to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down freely . . .” (Jn. 10:10-11, 15b, 17-18).

Jesus moves freely to fulfill the will of God. He will die in order to become the sheepgate – the gate to the Heavenly Jerusalem God. By His obedience, unto death, He will snatch His sheep from the jaws of eternal death! Yes, the

gate is Jesus Christ – but Him Crucified!

Another great truth hovers closely in the background and we ought not to move on without a glimpse of it: The Church is the mystical Body of Jesus – when we enter the Church through Baptism, we enter the Body of Jesus – as long as we remain in this body, “we can go in and out.” We are truly safe and secure from the evil one.

The analogy of a shepherd with his sheep hints at the intimacy existing between Jesus and His disciples. From the standpoint of Jesus, the relationship is individual and personal: “. . . *he calls his own by name and leads them out*” (Jn. 10:3). This same theme is being expressed in St. Luke’s account of the one Lost Sheep. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep who are safe and goes seeking the one lost. It is suggested here that Jesus feels a personal responsibility for each sheep. Jesus has been placed over the flock by His Father. Each sheep has been given to him by his Father. He must one day account to His Father for every individual sheep. Later, he tells the false shepherds, “. . . *No one will snatch them from my hand*” (Jn. 10:28). The fact that Jesus calls each sheep by name suggests the intimate knowledge existing between Jesus and his disciples. Biblically, to know a person’s name implied an in-depth understanding of the person. A person’s name was intended to express the essential characteristics of the person. This is not so with us, whose names more identify us than express who we are. We have an example of names expressing a person’s nature in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Each little man was called by a name expressing his nature. It is said in Heaven we will be called by a true name: one may be known as St. Joy-Bell and another as St. Humpty-Grumpty!

In truth, the analogy between shepherd and sheep falls too short to adequately express or even hint at the relationship existing between Jesus and His disciples. Jesus expresses the true heart and essence of this relationship when He says, “*I know my sheep and my sheep know me in the same way that the Father knows me and I know the Father*” (10:14-15). Such a mutual knowing can only flow from those sharing a mutual source, a mutual nature! The true intimacy between Jesus and his disciples will flow from the disciples’ sharing in the very spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus tells us, “*I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must lead them, too, and they shall hear my voice. There shall be one flock, then one*

shepherd” (Jn. 10:16), he prophesied the conversion of the Gentiles. His future flock would consist of both Jews and Gentiles – they would compose the True Israel. For this to come to pass and for the flock to share in the fullness of life, the Good Shepherd must lay down His Life. The word John uses to express “good” here is special. “*Kalas*” adds to goodness the quality of loveliness. There is indeed a quality of beauty and loveliness about Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

The scene changes in chapter ten, but the mood remains the same, only becoming colder and darker. It is the Feast of Dedication, Hanukkah, commemorating the recovery of the Temple from the Syrians in 165 B.C. and reconsecration of its altar to God by Judas Maccabeus. It is popularly called the “*Feast of Lights*,” from the custom of illuminating homes and streets. It falls in December around our Christmastime. Jesus is walking in Solomon’s Portico, an area sheltered from the winter wind and warmed by the sun. The Jews gathered around him and said, “*How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you really are the Messiah, tell us so in plain words*” (Jn. 10:24). The literal translation of “*keep us in suspense*” means, “take away our life [psyche] – our breath of life.” Perhaps John wishes to imply their lives are truly at stake.

The public life of Jesus is rapidly drawing to a close; perhaps the scene is intended to sum up the situation at this point. Two questions are asked by the Jews: “*Are you the Messiah?*” and, “*Are you making yourself out to be God?*”

Jesus responds to their first inquiry: “*I did tell you, but you do not believe . . . you refuse to believe because you are not my sheep*” (Jn. 10:25-26). Jesus, in many ways, has professed to being the Messiah. His very claim to being the Good Shepherd is such an example. His method teaches the correct notion and concept of the Messiah. We know many misconceptions existed. If he openly proclaimed to be the Messiah, He would have immediately been categorized into one of the false messianic roles existing in people’s minds. By His wise and prudent method, He not only corrected the misconception of His role, but likewise, revealed the mystery of the Messiah’s nature and person.

It is part of John’s message that Jesus is the Son of God, a divine Person; but he firmly denies that Jesus made Himself God. The Jewish leaders said to Jesus, “. . . *you who are only a man, are making yourself God*” (Jn. 10:33). For John, Jesus never makes Himself anything; everything that He is stems

from the Father. He is not a man who makes himself God, but He is the divine Word who has become man! *“Do you claim that I blasphemed when, as he whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?” (Jn. 10:36)*

Jesus’ method of teaching the secret of his own nature is based upon the principle that action flows from the essence. The same principle is expressed concretely in the words, *“by their fruits you will know them”* – the fruit produced is in keeping with the nature of the tree: evil actions flow from an evil heart; good deeds flow from a good spirit; divine words flow from God. *“. . . Even though you put no faith in me, put faith in these works, so as to realize what it means that the Father is in me and I in him.” (Jn. 10:38)* When the presentation of Jesus is all said and done, he claims not only to be the Good Shepherd, but the Divine Shepherd! *“The Lord is my Shepherd.”*

At this time, Jesus withdrew across the Jordan to an area near the wilderness. His public life was fast drawing to a close. He warned those false shepherds that even though they would strike the Shepherd and scatter the sheep, His sheep would not be lost. The Good Shepherd *“. . . will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark” (Ezk. 34:12)*. Paul expressed beautifully, *“. . . Neither death, nor life, neither angels . . . nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, Our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39)*.

For John, disbelief is a free, deliberate act. Men have their own image of God and His Messiah. Men refuse to accept a God or a Messiah that does not fit the image they have fashioned. God does not conform to this image nor does the Messiah. God became man and this was unthinkable – unforgivable. The Messiah came eating and drinking, suffering and dying and that was too human to be acceptable. It demonstrates the extent human beings can go to, in insisting that everyone and everything conform to the accepted image fashioned by their minds and hearts – not only man, but God. This is reminiscent of a lady that still has a dollhouse but no one can see it – for her heart is the dollhouse. She has her tiny little concepts of what is faith, hope, charity – her measure is so small that 90% of what is faith, hope and charity escape her. Most people will find no place in the dollhouse of her heart. . . .

Only very little things fit within.

*God became a little child to enter the doll house of her heart –
But Jesus could not stay –
You see, she had room enough for a cradle, but not a Cross.*

Men and women keep dollhouses in their minds and hearts – most are too small for a real God or a maturing Christian person.

The theme of the Good Shepherd does not end in Chapter Ten. It reappears in Chapter Twenty-one, where the Good Shepherd chooses his dear disciple, Simon Peter, to be the visible Shepherd of His flock – as Moses did Joshua and as David appointed Solomon. It is in Peter and his lawful successors that the Good Shepherd continues to guard his flock from the evil one. *“I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear and tremble.” (Jer. 23:4)*

As the visible procession of St. Peter’s successors passes through the centuries, one invisible presence always permeates and resides in every age – Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd who will visibly come again one day to judge the living and the dead!

CHAPTER 15

THE LORD OF THE LIVING

INTRODUCTION

Many ministers and missionaries are so busy in the ministry and on their missions they never have time to make friends – “friendly to everyone but a friend to no one!” Friendship is an unfortunate casualty of their lifestyle, rather than a thing willed by them. It is a misfortune. Aristotle taught that friendship was the greatest good and the highest form of love. Friendship is a mutual communion in a love that seeks above all the good of the beloved. It is not merely one person doing good for another. Friendship involves some degree of in-depth relationship in which there is a mutual sharing between two persons. Friendship, in order to be genuine, requires some psychological and emotional maturity or else it will be used as a means to satisfy the selfish needs of the parties involved. This is not friendship.

It is gratifying to know that Jesus had time to make friends. This is even more gratifying when one understands that Jesus reflects the love of God. It reveals that the God who would save us would also be our Friend!

The real sad thing in the life of many ministers and missionaries is that they are so busy working for the Lord, they never have the time or the energy to be a friend to the One they love, the Lord. This is being too busy! This is often the same sad situation existing between husbands and wives and parents and children. (One can be a friend without being an “ole buddy.”)

THE FRIENDS OF JESUS

It is a comfort for the friends of the Lord to know that the Son of Man, who had not where on to lay his head, had friends who invited Him to rest and refresh himself within the loving environment of their homes. It is St. Luke who first tells of such friends: Martha and Mary. They lived in Bethany in a

village about two miles east of Jerusalem. Luke relates that Martha welcomed Jesus to her home. She had a sister named Mary who seated herself at the Lord's feet and listened to his words. Martha, who was busy with all the details of hospitality, came to him and said, "*Lord, are you not concerned that my sister has left me to do the household tasks all alone? Tell her to help me!*" (Lk. 10:39-40). It may surprise you to read that some friends of the Lord (some Christians) would even tell God how to run His business! Jesus is not acting the way Martha thinks He should act. She thinks He should be concerned about her doing all this work alone and with the way her lazy sister is behaving, and takes it upon herself to make the necessary adjustments: She reminds Jesus of his obligation to encourage Mary to help her. She is a little miffed by all the work to be done – with being unable to enjoy all the conversation – with that sister of hers acting as if there were nothing to do but sit and listen to pearls of wisdom from the Master. What hurt her feelings the most was the Lord's indifference. With the exception of all the Marys, there is not a woman in the world who wouldn't have been in sympathy with Martha's action. I'm sure if she aired her feelings out the back door, the good neighbors would have advised, "Go tell Jesus to send Mary out into the kitchen to help you!" No doubt about it, Martha was task-oriented. Jesus seemed to imply this was more from choice than necessity.

There are folks who must always be doing something. (If you are always on the run, you cannot always be running to something. Sometimes you are running away from something!) People like Martha love people indirectly – they must love by doing something. Martha was one of those external perfectionists who knew exactly where everyone must be and what they should be doing. God help man and Himself when they get out of line. It reminds a person about the old nun who remarked on her golden anniversary as a nun: "*After living 50 years with saints, I know now why Jesus spent all his time with sinners!*"

Jesus lovingly replied to Martha, "*Martha, Martha, you are anxious and upset about many things; one thing only is required. Mary has chosen the better portion and she shall not be deprived of it*" (Lk. 10:41-42). As we have read, Mary sits at the feet of Jesus listening to his words. She is absorbed in the Word, in the Word Incarnate. Both women loved Jesus. Both chose to express their love in different ways. Jesus loved both Martha and Mary. Mary's love is the more perfect: "*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, The Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart,*

and with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4-5). Mary’s attentiveness to the Person of Jesus symbolically expresses this perfection of Divine Love. When our Lord tells Martha that she was anxious and upset about many things, He reveals the imperfection of her faith and love. Anxieties and upsets reveal a lot of selfishness mixed up in her love and immaturity of faith. He teaches Martha that only one thing is essential, love of God. “Seek you first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and the rest will be added.” Jesus does not tell Martha not to care about things, but not to be anxious and upset. One has the feeling that His point was, for the time being, lost upon her. She probably returned to the kitchen and in the midst of a few tears, complained to herself how even God was inconsiderate of her! No one appreciates all she does!

THE SEVENTH SIGN

When next we hear of Martha and Mary, things have changed in the life of the Lord. Hostility towards him grows. During the Feast of the Dedication, the Jews nearly stoned him to death. For safety, he journeyed across the Jordan, beyond the jurisdiction of the Pharisees, to the place where John had originally baptized. Many of the disciples of John came to believe in Jesus: *“Many people came to him. ‘John may never have performed a sign,’ they commented, ‘but whatever John said about this man was true.’ In that place, many came to believe in him” (Jn. 10:41-42).*

Here Jesus received a message from Martha and Mary informing Him that their brother, Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, was very ill. John makes it very plain: *“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus very much” (Jn. 11:5).* (It is of archaeological interest that a tomb dating back to the first century was located near Bethany with these three names upon it.) Martha, Mary and Lazarus were disciples and friends of Jesus. Even though Jesus does not act as men think a friend should act, He nevertheless loves them very much, in His own Divine way, and the friends of Jesus will have their faith tested. In the end, if they have trusted Him, they will never be disappointed. He will finally wipe all the tears from their eyes.

If Lazarus had not died, his sisters would not have witnessed the Lord’s conquest of death, the last enemy, and therefore, they would not have experienced the final and fullest revelation of God. Jesus reveals, by his delay, his deepest and truest love for His friends.

John would have us see in Martha, Mary and Lazarus, symbols of the personal love of Jesus for all his friends. Martha and Mary wanted Jesus to come in order to keep their beloved brother from death. They represent the early Christians' longing for the Second Coming in order to escape death, in order not to have to see death. Of course, this is precisely why Jesus has come!

The two sisters are aware of the personal danger involved in Jesus' returning to Bethany. They do not ask Him to come, but simply inform him of the situation. They leave the rest up to Him. (Martha should have known better.) They trust He will come in time. Jesus deliberately delays. Lazarus dies and the sisters face the apparent indifference on the part of Jesus to their loss and sorrow. Indeed, their faith in His personal love for them is being tested. The readers have been assured it is not a lack of love or a matter of indifference on the part of Jesus.

From the very beginning, John teaches Jesus' deeds are not directed by family, friends or enemies. Neither are they directed by His own desires. From His Alpha to His Omega – from the First Coming until the Second Coming – always and in every way, the Father's Will directs the doings and not-doings of Jesus Christ! The Glory of God is His one end.

The Scriptures tell us that God created all things for His glory. Jesus lived, died and rose from the dead for the Glory of God. Any true friend of the Lord, any sincere disciple, must above all, seek the glory of God – whether it be in living or dying. Thy will be done! Thy Glory come! When things do not occur as we expected or hoped, a disciple must believe that what has been permitted to be is for the greater honor and glory of God. What occurs is not only what is good, but the best for us. God loves us enough to will the best for us even when we would be satisfied with less!

Jesus delays his trip to Bethany because it is God's will. The physical death of Lazarus will occur. God will use his death to teach Martha, Mary and all the friends of Jesus a profound and overwhelming truth: true friends of Jesus have already passed from death to life. They cannot truly die – they are eternally alive – here and now and forever! Physical death is no more than a rest for the body. The person is with the Lord.

Our Lord said to His disciples:

This sickness is not to end in death; rather, it is for God's glory, that through it the Son of God may be glorified. . . . Our beloved Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him. . . . Lazarus is dead. For your sakes I am glad I was not there, that you may come to believe. In any event, let us go to him.

(Jn. 11:4, 11-15)

The disciples are reluctant for Jesus to go to Bethany. They sense this trip spells death for the Lord. Jesus makes it clear that He must go if Lazarus is to pass from death to life. Jesus freely accepts death in order to give life to His disciples. The Good Shepherd goes seeking the lamb carried off by the wolf. He will bring the lamb back to life, but the Good Shepherd must lay down His life in order to do so. His death will forever be a memorial of His undying love for His friends – a shining star of hope when they must face the dark valley of physical death.

The disciples protested, “*Rabbi, with the Jews only recently trying to stone you, you are going back up there again?*” Jesus answered, ‘*Are there not twelve hours of daylight? . . .*’ (Jn. 11:8-9). This is a work that must be accomplished within a given time. The work of God must be accomplished while the time is available. The time of life on earth passes quickly and disciples must not lose the opportunity to accomplish the purpose of life – the glorification of God.

Many things are left undone or unsaid. We wait too long to do or say them. Opportunities to act or speak pass. Father Judge told the Cenacle members, “. . . *the only good we can take out of this life is the good we have accomplished.*” To this may be added that the only evil that may haunt the hour of death is the good we could have done but did not do. Our Lord warns: “*Walk while you have the light!*” He not only speaks, but acts; He heads for Bethany. The disciple Thomas responded to this, “*Let us go along, to die with him*” (11:16). Is this a hint that disciples must be willing to share in the sufferings of the Master? Thomas may have been a bit despairing but nevertheless, he had perseverance. He wouldn’t quit – even when he saw no reason to hang around!

The death of Lazarus occurred four days before Jesus arrived in Bethany. Jewish tradition believed the spirit (nepes) remained close to the body for

three days; the soul completely departed when the body began to decay. On hearing of Jesus' arrival, Martha went to meet Him. Things had not gone according to her hopes. Once again, Jesus hadn't performed according to her expectations, and again, her words carried an implied criticism of his behavior: "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would never have died*" (11:21). (Have friends ever endeavored to make you feel guilty for not living up to their expectations of you? Jesus suffered the same thing!) In her next words, Martha reveals the imperfection of her faith in Jesus: "*Even now, I am sure that God will give you whatever you ask of him*" (Jn. 11:22). Martha beheld Jesus to be a prophet – one close to God. Jesus was a channel of God's power into this world. She did not behold in Him the Lord of Life. Whatever she expected from Jesus, it was not what He had to give. Jesus says to her, "*Your brother will rise again*" (11:23). Martha's response is in keeping with her religious background: "*I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day*" (11:24). For a practical woman like Martha, such a belief offered precious little comfort.

Martha's response to Jesus reflects the belief concerning death as it had evolved among the Jewish people. The primitive beliefs of Israel about death were still prevalent. These had been implied in the Sadducees' encounter with Jesus. In the Old Testament, the prevalent concept about death is that it is final. The Jewish concept of human life determined their concept of death.

The ancient Hebrews believed a human person to be a body animated by the spirit, rather than a unique spirit incarnated in the flesh. Man is clay, which lives by the breath of God. Life is not man's property. "*Life*" is proper to God. Man yields up life when God recalls the breath of life. The title of "*living*" is applied primarily to Yahweh: "*My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God*" (Ps. 84:3). "*The Lord is true God, he is the living God, the eternal King.*" (Jer. 10:10) The very name of "*Yahweh*" implied the "*living-one*" – the one who causes life. Psalm thirty-six recalls, "*For with you is the very fountain of life, and in your light we see light*" (Ver. 10). "*To see light*" implies to live. The Book of Deuteronomy declares: It is Yahweh alone who gives life. (Dt. 32:39.) To live one must seek Yahweh: "*For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: Seek me, that you may live*" (Amos 5:4). The way to life is to seek the good and not the evil: "*Seek good and not evil, that you may live; then truly will the Lord, the God of hosts, be with you as you claim*" (Amos 5:14). Vigor in body, power and function was life for the Hebrews. It implied the capacity for pleasure, which accompanies the exercise of vital functions

and the proper integration with the world and with one's society. For the Hebrews, the ideal life was to live to the fullness of years with undiminished powers. It was said a man lived to be 110 or 120 when this was achieved. These numbers symbolically expressed the fullness of life. Primarily, such a life was not merely physical or biological, but religious. The good things in life came from God. Health and vigor ultimately rested upon the proper integration of the human will with the Divine Will.

When Dathan and his friends were swallowed up in an earthquake for their rebellion against Moses, they are said to have gone down to Sheol alive, a particularly horrible death for its suddenness. (*Num. 16:30.*) If one's last years are embittered by grief, one is said to go down to Sheol in sorrow. (*Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31.*) Job says, "*One dies in his full vigor, wholly at ease and content; His figure is full and nourished, and his bones are rich in marrow. Another dies in bitterness of soul, having never tasted happiness. Alike, they lie down in the dust, and worms cover them both*" (*Job 21:23-26*). For the Jews, death was the end. The basic good is life on earth, for without it, no other good is possible. So we read in the Scriptures: ". . . a living dog is better than a dead lion" (*Eccl. 9:46*).

When the person died, the "*spirit*" departed. The Hebrews knew of no vital activity that survived death. The deceased continued to exist as a "*self*" (*nepes-soul*) in some nebulous and dark fashion, but a "*soul*" was incapable of any activity.

Sheol was the abode of the dead. To go to Sheol was to die. The grave was the gate of Sheol. According to the psalmist, no one can deliver himself from Sheol: "*What man shall live, and not see death, but deliver himself from the power of the nether world [Sheol]*" (*Ps. 89:49*). Job says, "*As a cloud dissolves and vanishes, so he who goes down to the nether world [Sheol] shall come up no more*" (*Job 7:9*). Psalm 88 implies that Yahweh does not remember the dead – they lie in regions dark and deep and God works no wonders for the dead. (*Ps. 88:5-13.*)

Despite the general belief, we do see that contact with dead spirits was sought. Saul conjured up the dead Samuel through the witch of Endor (*1 Sam. 28:8-15.*), and Isaiah speaks of Judah making a covenant with Sheol. (*Is. 28:15, 18.*) Such dealings were forbidden and considered evil. It is regrettable but true that some blind guides leading the blind have used such

references as a rebuke and used them to discredit the holy Christian practice of praying to the saints. This is a blasphemous application of the Scriptures and an attack on the revealed doctrine of the Communion of Saints. Christian saints are vital parts of the Mystical Body of Christ. Jesus does not consider the life of a Christian as distinct from his own life. Jesus has willed to minister to the members of the Church through the Body. If I can beseech a Christian to help me here on earth without any infidelity to my Lord, what kind of faith is it that would tell me that I do injury to the Lord by asking a Christian in Heaven to help me? What kind of Christian faith is it anyway that believes Christians are more powerful in an imperfect state here on earth than in heaven? Jesus taught that Christians, faithful over little things on this earth, would be over much in the Kingdom of God. We know that St. Therese of Lisieux left this world proclaiming, *"I'll spend my heaven doing good on earth!"* But I'm sure if one doesn't want her help, she'll not butt in where not wanted . . . loving people are that way.

The Israelites, as all primitive people, pondered the problems of good and evil, life and death, light and darkness. As their concept of Yahweh developed, the idea of his victory over all evil began to grow. Faith in God began to demand that God conquer death as well. Certain psalms expressed this hope:

Therefore, my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body, too, abides in confidence; because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world [Sheol], nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption. You will show me the path of life.

(Ps. 16:9-11)

But God will redeem me from the power of the nether world [Sheol] by receiving me. (Ps. 49:16)

Scholars can find no real traces of a belief in the immortality of the human soul in the Scriptures until the second century before Christ. It first appears in the Book of Daniel. The development of these beliefs appears to be a product of the Alexandrian Jews. Certainly the Greek thoughts on the immortality of the human soul influenced them. The words of Martha express the development of this belief by the time of Jesus: *"Yes, I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day"* (Jn. 11:24). Jesus Himself had defended this belief in an argument with the Sadducees: *"As to the fact*

that the dead are raised, have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob'? He is the God of the living, not of the dead" (Mat. 22:31-32).

With the development of this belief, Sheol became a place for the wicked only. The righteous are taken into Paradise – a place of peace and rest. The place of punishment became known as Gehenna instead of Sheol.

Gehenna was the valley which divided ancient Jerusalem (Zion) from the hills to the south and west. This valley had an unholy reputation. Within the valley was a site called Tophet (meaning fireplace); on this site existed a shrine to Molech – at which human sacrifices were offered. Isaiah used the term "*Gehenna*" to mean fireplace – the place where corpses are burned. Jeremiah cursed the valley and foretold it would be a place of horror. (*Jer. 7:32; 19:6.*) In Jewish literature, Gehenna became a place symbolic of punishment after death. (*Assumption of Moses [10:19]; Ap. of Baruch [59:10].*) In Esdras (*7:36*), it is described as a furnace of fire and torment, which lies in the sight of Paradise. In I Enoch, it appears as a valley of burning fire in which the impious are burned like straw. (*54:1; 48:9*) The Jewish rabbis spoke of it in their writings as a pit of fire and a place of punishment of the wicked.

It was not necessarily an eternal punishment. Some believed the wicked would be annihilated and others believed they would be released.

The word "*Gehenna*" appears seven times in the New Testament. It is called a place of fire (*Mat. 5:22; 18:9*), unquenchable fire (*Mk. 9:43*), a pit into which people are cast (*Mat. 5:29; 18:9; Mk. 9:45, 47; Lk. 12:5*), a place where the wicked are destroyed, body and soul – perhaps expressing the concept of annihilation. (*Mat. 10:28.*) The Pharisees are called Sons of Gehenna. (*Mat. 23:31.*) Sinners are punished in fire which is eternal (*Mat. 18:8*), a place prepared for the devil and his angels. (*Mat. 25:42.*) In the Book of Revelations we read that the worshipers of the beast shall be tortured with fire and brimstone. The final destination of the wicked is the pool of fire, which is the second death. (*Rev. 19:20; 20:9-15; 21:8.*) It is to be noted that St. Paul refrains from using all such language when he speaks of the afterlife. It suggests that the apocalyptic imagery found in the New Testament ought to be understood as imagery and not as theological affirmations about the afterlife. Paul definitely teaches that when it comes to heaven and its joys, no image is

sufficient to describe it. The New Testament firmly establishes the truth that judgment and punishment come after death. The ultimate destiny of the good and evil are not the same. The details of the afterlife are only disclosed in imagery.

Jesus encourages Martha not to look at Sheol or Gehenna, but to turn her eyes upon Him: *“I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life . . .”* (Jn. 11:25-26). Jesus tells Martha that for those who believe in Him, death has no power to destroy life. Death is but the gate to eternal life. When Jesus identifies Himself as the Resurrection, He expressly implies the life to come will be attainable only through death. First of all, Jesus Himself must die in order to be the Resurrection unto life. Second, a disciple must be willing to die in order to live. (St. Paul speaks of baptism as a death to the old man.)

Jesus asks Martha if she believes. Her answer implies she now recognizes Him as the Lord: *“Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God; He who is to come into the world”* (Jn. 11:27). This profession of faith is not followed by any sign of adoration by Martha, which indicates her faith is yet imperfect. For John, faith is a verb and its fullness of expression is found in praise and adoration. (At any rate, even if Martha has come to fullness of faith, she, at this point, is not all that happy with God!)

Martha informs Mary, *“The Teacher is here, asking for you”* (Jn. 11:28). Immediately, Mary goes to Jesus. The Jews follow her thinking she is going to the tomb to weep. John symbolizes here that, for the Jews, the only end of death is sorrow and tears. And so it is for all who fail to find in Jesus the Resurrection and the Life. A difference in Mary’s behavior is noted. She falls at the feet of Jesus. Apparently, her relationship with Jesus has perfected her faith. She makes the same statement as Martha, but one senses a difference: *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would never have died”* (Jn. 11:32). Mary leaves all in His hands. Martha couldn’t resist doing a little directing – perhaps it indicates the differences between perfect and imperfect faith.

A most revealing scene occurs:

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had accompanied her also weeping, he was troubled in spirit, moved by the deepest

emotions. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Lord, come and see," they said. Jesus began to weep, which caused the Jews to remark, "See how much he loved him!" But some said, "He opened the eyes of that blind man. Why could he not have done something to stop this man from dying?" Once again, troubled in spirit, Jesus approached the tomb.

(Jn. 11:33-38)

The Fourth Gospel is too symbolic for us not to see the whole mystery of the redemption being presented to us. Jesus does love us. He can do something about men having to die. He can die and save us from death . . . but not without cost. There are echoes of the Garden of Olives in those words: *"Troubled in spirit, Jesus approached the tomb"* – His own tomb!

John tells us Jesus is profoundly moved at the sight of human suffering. Scholars differ as to how to translate what transpires. The words used by John appear to express a Man suddenly overcome with the passion of anger to the degree it shakes His body and forces a cry of distress from His lips (Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass from me!). If anger is being expressed, it is directed towards sin and Satan's having begotten this devastation and suffering and death upon humanity. Jesus weeps for the sufferings of humanity. God weeps! Never, after hearing of the tears of Jesus, should we believe God is indifferent to human misery and suffering.

To the nonbelievers, the tears of Jesus indicate he has come to an end of his power. (It is nonbelievers that put ends to His power!) To others, the death of Lazarus and the death and sufferings of all the friends of God indicate divine indifference and lack of love. *"Why could he not have done something to stop this man from dying?"* The existence of evil always suggests that suffering and death are incompatible with a God of Love. Therefore, since suffering and death do exist, then God doesn't exist or love doesn't. In the face of such mysteries and temptations, a disciple must do as Jesus did: Cling to the Word of God! *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . . that the world might be saved through him."* (Jn. 3:16-17)

The sorrow of Jesus does not stop with tears, but He willingly dies to free man from sin and death. The sufferings and death of Jesus, the Son of God, destroy the lie that suffering and death annihilate a God of Love!

Jesus moves to perform the seventh sign – the greatest sign of all. Now his disciples will know that from His death flows their eternal life. And, from their physical death flows nothing more than a change of life. The seventh sign confirms Jesus to be the Resurrection and the Life!

Jesus commands that the stone be removed from the tomb. But Martha has arrived in the meantime and assumes command:

“Lord, it has been four days now; surely there must be a stench!”
[Her interference reveals her lack of faith in Jesus’ judgment and her reliance upon her own.] Jesus replied, “Did I not assure you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God displayed?”
(Jn. 11:39-40)

The answer to the question is that Martha did not really believe. Was she so busy listening to her own thoughts that she could not hear what anyone else was saying – even God? (Why Martha was not married should be no mystery!) It must be remembered that Jesus loved Martha. At least He did! Martha, we know, is impressed by action. She is about to be impressed!

They then took away the stone and Jesus looked upward and said: “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know that you always hear me but I have said this for the sake of the crowd, that they may believe that you sent me.” Having said this, he called loudly, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, bound hand and foot with linen strips, his face wrapped in a cloth. “Untie him!” Jesus told them, “and let him go free” (Jn. 11:41-43).

We should recall the words of Jesus in chapter five:

Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and grants life, so the Son grants life to those to whom he wishes. I solemnly assure you, the man who hears my word and has faith in him who sent me, possesses eternal life. He does not come under condemnation, but has passed from death to life. I solemnly assure you, an hour is coming, has indeed come, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who have heeded it shall live.
(Jn. 5:21, 24-25)

St. John encourages the Christians of his day not to be overcome by the fact that their loved ones die before the Second Coming. They, themselves, will probably die before that day. Death should be no great scandal for them. Through their faith, they live the unending life of God. Their loved ones enjoy the presence of the Lord and their bodies but rest in the sleep of death. One day, Jesus will call those bodies from the grave – just as He called the body of Lazarus; but these bodies will not be bound to death as was the body of Lazarus, signified by the linens and wrappings of death. They will rise as Jesus did – glorious and immortal!

The resurrection of Lazarus and the death of Jesus are deliberately tied together. John desires his readers to clearly understand that Jesus died in order to give life. This teaching he endeavors to illustrate by connecting the resurrection of Lazarus with the death of Jesus. A disciple must not miss the significance of the death of the Lord: “. . . *I lay down my life . . . no one takes it from me; I lay it down freely . . . I came that they might have life and have it to the full*” (Jn. 10:17-18, 10).

The resurrection of Lazarus caused many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary to believe in Jesus. Some of the others went to the Pharisees and reported what Jesus had done. A meeting of the Sanhedrin was called by the chief priests and the Pharisees.

The Sanhedrin was the supreme council of the Jewish Nation. It consisted of seventy-one members composed of three classes of elders: the elders of the chief families and clans; the high priests – former high priest and the elders of the four high priestly families (mostly all Sadducees); and the scribes who were mostly Pharisees. The power of the Sanhedrin at the time of Jesus was limited to Judea and excluded Galilee. Rome withheld from the Sanhedrin the power to pass the death sentence, but the Council did have the power to arrest and maintain a police force. When the Council met, it sat in a semicircle with two clerks in front of it: one to record the votes of acquittal and the other to record the votes of condemnation. When a capital sentence was involved, there were special regulations to be observed. The arguments for acquittal should be heard first and no one speaking in favor of the accused could give unfavorable evidence. Sentence could not be passed except on the testimony of two witnesses. Each member voted by rising in the sight of all,

beginning with the youngest. A sentence of acquittal could be pronounced on the same day, but the sentence of condemnation had to be delayed until the following day.

We read in the Fourth Gospel:

. . . that the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we to do," they said, "with this man performing all sorts of signs? If we let him go on like this, the whole world will believe in him. Then the Romans will come in and sweep away our sanctuary and our nation." One of their number named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, addressed them at this point: "You have no understanding whatever! Can you not see that it is better for you to have one man die [for the people] than to have the whole nation destroyed?" (He did not say this on his own. It was rather as high priest for that year that he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation – and not for this nation only, but to gather into one, all the dispersed children of God.) (Jn. 11:47-52)

Evil gathers its own momentum: we read "*. . . the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus too, because many Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in Him on account of Lazarus . . .*" (Jn. 12:10). They would later seek to kill all the "Lazaruses." In the logic of their minds, since there was no resurrection, they were all perpetrators of a fraud!

Caiaphas speaks his words from a natural level . . . he speaks from the flesh, but he holds a divine office. Despite Caiaphas' personal alienation from God, his words are still used by the Lord to manifest the truth to Israel: Jesus will die for the New Israel. John includes the Gentiles within the Prophecy. It is his purpose, within the Fourth Gospel, to encourage them and to teach them, by their acceptance of Jesus, that they are part of the New Israel. The Gentiles are the fulfillment of the prophecies foretelling of the gathering of the dispersed children of Israel. Later, we hear Jesus proclaiming, "*And I – once I am lifted up from the earth – will draw all men to myself*" (Jn. 12:32). We are assured in I John 2:2, "*He is an offering for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for those of the whole world.*" In the Old Testament, the Gentiles are often pictured by the prophets as streaming toward the holy hill of the Temple. The fulfillment of this prophecy is seen in the hill of Calvary and the Temple upon it. We have seen from Chapter Two that Jesus' body will one

day replace the Temple of Jerusalem. Against this Temple we are assured, the Gates of Sheol will never prevail!

The end draws near. The *“hour”* approaches. Jesus goes freely forward to encounter death. His life is not something anyone takes; it is a gift He will give! Six days before the Passover, Jesus deliberately returns to Bethany. A banquet is given in his honor by those who are the recipients of his love.

Indeed, we can see that Martha has changed. The situation remains the same: Martha serves at the banquet and Mary is doing her own thing. The difference is that Martha is now content to serve and she is content with her sister Mary and with the Lord. In the example of Mary, we learn that intense love leads to exquisite charity. Mary produces a most expensive perfume – its ingredients came from Africa and India – the entire content is lavishly poured upon the feet of Jesus. We are told that the entire house was filled with the sweetness of the perfume. The perfect love of the Lord ends, always, in a most exceptional love of the Body benefiting the whole Christian Community – as the lives of all the saints teach. As Mary anoints the feet of Jesus, Our Lord beholds a symbolic prophecy: Mary anoints his body for burial! Deeds of love never go unnoticed by heaven: *“Wherever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what she has done will be told in her memory”* (Mk. 14:9).

For the Christian Church, Mary is forever the symbol of the loving response flowing from a beloved disciple to the Lord who loved us so much He gave His life that we might live. Mary’s gift was extravagant, administered in humility with total unconsciousness of self. It is called genuine love of the Lord. Such love fills the world with sweet memories and renders it a more godly place!

CHAPTER 16

GRAIN OF WHEAT

INTRODUCTION

As the sun displays itself in dazzling beauty moments before darkness, so Jesus, in godly glory, triumphantly appears in Jerusalem shortly before His death. Jesus proceeds towards Jerusalem from Bethany accompanied by a great crowd. Word reaches Jerusalem – He is coming! The people gathered palm branches and proceeded toward Bethphage, a village near the summit of the Mount of Olives. When Jesus saw them coming to greet Him, He sent his disciples for a young donkey. The disciples *“led the animal to Jesus, and laying their cloaks on it, helped Him mount. They spread their cloaks on the roadway as he moved along”* (Lk. 19:35-36). The words of Zechariah were being fulfilled: *“Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, Meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass”* (Zech. 9:9). On the Mount of Olives, the crowds meet like two great waves and proceed as a sea of praise towards Jerusalem. Those preceding Him, as well as those who followed, cried out, *“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”* *“Blessed is the reign of our father David to come!”* *“Hosanna in the highest!”* *“Hosanna to the Son of David!”* *“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest . . .”* *“Blessed is the King of Israel!”* (From Jn. 12:13; Mk. 11:9-10; Mat. 21:9, 15; Lk. 20:28.) Luke tells us, *“Coming within sight of the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If only you had known the path to peace this day; but you have completely lost it from view!’”* (Lk. 19:41-42).

“As he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred to its depths, demanding, ‘Who is this?’ And the crowd kept answering, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee’” (Mat. 21:10). The Pharisees, like brooding vultures, stood by despairingly. God wrung from their bitter hearts prophetic words: *“See, there is nothing you can do! The whole world has run after him”* (Jn. 12:19). Some of the Pharisees said to Jesus, *“Teacher, rebuke your disciples.”*

He replied, “if they were to keep silence, I tell you the very stones would cry out” (Lk. 20:3-40). Jesus clearly confirms, “This is the day the Lord has made” (Ps. 118:24). It is out of human hands. The Father wills to glorify His Son!

During the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Booths, the words of Psalm 118 were prayed by all the people. On Palm Sunday, the thoughts of this psalm echoed in the minds of the people:

Open to me the gates of justice; I will enter them and give thanks to the Lord. This gate is the Lord's; the just shall enter it. I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have been my savior. The stone, which the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. O Lord, grant salvation! O Lord, grant prosperity! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; we bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Join in procession with leafy boughs up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I give thanks to you; O my god, I extol you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his kindness endures forever. (Ps. 118:19-29)

The Synoptic Gospels tell us that the Palm Sunday procession ended in the Temple. As the prophet foretold, the Lord would suddenly appear in His Temple. St. Mark writes: “He entered Jerusalem and went into the temple precincts. He inspected everything there” (Mk. 11:11). He appears as Lord. Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus immediately drove out all those engaged there in buying and selling. And even children, to the outrage of the chief priest and scribes, were shouting out in the Temple precincts, “Hosanna, to the Son of David!” Although “Hosanna” is an acclamation of praise, in the Hebrew it means “Save us.” “Do you hear what they are saying?” they asked him. Jesus said to them, “Of course I do! Did you never read this: ‘From the speech of infants and children, you have framed a hymn of praise?’” (Mat. 21:16) The Synoptic Gospels presented a picture of the messianic King who comes to claim His Capital and Temple. Though Jesus is presented as the Messiah, John gives a different interpretation. We certainly know the events of Palm Sunday were hidden from the disciples’ eyes when they occurred that day. Even though Jesus deliberately performed symbolic actions foretold in the Scriptures, these actions were misinterpreted by the people and the disciples:

“At first, the disciples did not understand all this, but after Jesus was glorified, they recalled that the people had done to him precisely what had been written about him” (Jn. 12:16).

For John, the triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem was a recognition of His messiahship . . . He was the Messiah! Apparently, the Spirit of God swept through the hearts of the people and they knew Jesus to be the Messiah. But, always, the moment of divine inspiration must be distinguished from the moment that follows it – the moment wherein man responds to the inspiration. This moment may not be divinely inspired. It may well be motivated by the human spirit of man or even perverted by the evil one. The Jews recognized the Messiah and immediately interpreted his role according to their expectations. John indicates this misunderstanding by the Jewish people when he mentions the crowd’s going out to meet Jesus carrying palm branches.

The knowledge of Jesus’ being the Messiah immediately aroused national enthusiasm among the people. The palm symbolized their nationalism. Later, the palm would appear on their coinage minted during the second revolt of 132 A.D. When Simon Maccabeus recaptured the citadel of Jerusalem in 142 B.C., we read: “. . . *The Jews entered the citadel with shouts of jubilation, waving palm branches, the music of harps and cymbals and lyres, and the singing of hymns and canticles, because a great enemy of Israel had been destroyed*” (1 Mac. 13:51). The Greek word used by John for palm occurs only in the Septuagint Bible in the above quote from the Maccabees. The expression that the crowd “*came out to meet him*” is a Greek expression for the joyful reception into a city of a ruler. John wishes to leave no doubt in the people’s minds that Jesus was their kingly liberator coming to destroy the great enemies of Israel.

All this is true, but not in the realm of Jewish expectation. Jesus will destroy the great realm of darkness – He will destroy the true enemies of mankind: sin and death, the power of Satan. For John, the true interpretation of the role of Jesus is found in the words of Psalm 118: “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*” The coming of Jesus is the coming of Yahweh. Jesus reinforced this teaching by performing a symbolic gesture that demonstrated the mission and the nature of the Messiah. The teaching would be lost upon the crowd. When Jesus called for the colt to ride, He sought to correct this

misconception that He comes as a national liberator – a political messiah. The prophet Zechariah had foretold:

Your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, meek, and riding . . . on a colt . . . He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the warrior's bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you, for the blood of your covenant with me, I will bring forth your prisoners from the dungeon. (Zech. 9:9-11)

A king bent upon war approached a city riding in a war-chariot or upon a war-horse. A king coming in peace rode upon a donkey.

The title given by the crowd, “*King of Israel*,” recalls the words of the prophet Zephaniah:

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! . . . The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you have no future misfortune to fear. . . . The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior Yes, at that time I will deal with all who oppress you; I will save the lame, and assemble the outcasts; I will give them praise and renown in all the earth . . . (Zeph. 3:14, 15, 17, 19).

In the Gospel of John, the resurrection of Lazarus stimulated much of the enthusiasm of Palm Sunday. Jesus' appearance as the King of Peace recalling the great prophecies connected with this title, sought to teach the people that the miracle of Lazarus was a sign of a gift of life for people all over the world, not a sign of national glory for Israel.

The prophets foretold that one day the Spirit of Yahweh would fill Jerusalem and people would stream from the ends of the earth to find peace within her. Jesus confirmed this on Palm Sunday when he proclaimed in the Temple: “*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*” (Mk. 11:17). Matthew tells us, “ . . . *the blind and the lame came to him inside the temple area and he cured them*” (Mat. 21:13-14).

Our Lord came to fulfill the spiritual destiny of Israel, a catholic destiny bringing salvation to all mankind. But the people, entrapped by the smallness and earthliness of their own desires, were completely absorbed in national pride and longed only for a Messiah giving them national victory and exalting them to world conquest. They completely misinterpreted the destiny of their own nation. They were God's people! They had a divine destiny! Their failure to see this caused the tears of Jesus on Palm Sunday: *"If only you had known the path to peace this day; but you have completely lost it from view"* (Lk. 19:41-42). For two thousand years, they have sought this peace, forever teaching us that when man seeks his peace beyond the will of God, he creates his own restlessness and distress!

The Jews had the Scriptures; they knew the words of the Prophets. Yet they still missed *"the path to peace."* The events of Palm Sunday illustrate, once again, that only God can interpret God – only the spirit of God can properly interpret the Bible! The spirit of man must be tuned to the Spirit of God in order to properly hear the Word of God!

John swiftly brings the activities of Palm Sunday to a climactic conclusion. The words of the Pharisees: *"See, there is nothing you can do! The whole world has run after him"* (Jn. 12:19), are directly followed by a scene verifying these words:

GLORIFICATION OF JESUS

Among those who had come up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. They approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and put this request to him: "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Philip and Andrew in turn came to inform Jesus. (Jn. 12:20-22)

Perhaps John teaches us here that the Gentiles will come to see Jesus – believe in him – come to him – through his apostles and disciples. Whether these particular Greeks ever saw Jesus, we are not told. We do know that they desired to see Jesus. The desire *"to see"* Jesus must be interpreted *"to believe"* in Jesus. This desire was of paramount importance to Jesus. This seemingly unimportant request signaled the arrival of the moment for which Jesus had come into the world. His hour had arrived!

I know my sheep and my sheep know me . . . for these sheep I will

give my life. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must lead them, too . . . The Father loves me for this: that I lay down my life to take it up again. (Jn. 10:14-17)

Jesus was the King, the Good Shepherd, anointed to die. Before these sheep could come to Him – believe in Him – He must first be lifted up: “*And I – once I am lifted up from earth – will draw all men to myself*” (Jn. 12:32). The hour for Jesus to assume and manifest His universal Kingship had arrived. Paradoxically, it was the hour for him to die. The King of Israel must die in order for the Kingdom of God to be born! His death would realize the great salvation foreseen in the Book of Revelations:

I saw before me a huge crowd, which no one could count from every nation and race, people and tongue. They stood before the throne and the Lamb, dressed in long white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, “Salvation is from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb!” . . . These are the ones who have survived the great period of trial; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:9-10, 14)

The very moment the Greeks desire to see Jesus, Our Lord proclaims:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. . . . My soul is troubled now, yet what should I say – Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name! (Jn. 12:23, 27-28)

In the Fourth Gospel, “*hour*” designates a unique and significant period in the life of Jesus Christ. The meaning of “*hour*” is best expressed when John writes: “*Before the feast of Passover, Jesus realized that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father*” (Jn. 13:1). In other words, the “*passover*” of his own life from earth to heaven. Jesus’ return to the Father through His passion, death, and resurrection is His hour. The hour begins Palm Sunday and ends Easter Sunday. The salvation of the Greeks, symbolizing the coming of the Gentiles, can only flow from the death and resurrection of Jesus. The request of the Greeks indicates to Jesus that now is the hour. The goal of the hour is the glorification of Jesus – His return to the Father.

The Hebrew word for glory is “kabod.” When the Scriptures speak of the glory or “kabod” of God, two important elements are essential to this: first, the invisible God must become visible, and second, God must become visible in acts of power. Moses told the Israelites that they would see the glory of God. The glory of God was seen in the daily manna that fed them and in the column of smoke and the pillar of fire guiding them both day and night through the desert.

The Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as the glory of God: First, that Jesus as the Word is God Incarnate; He is the invisible God made visible in the humanity of Jesus. Second, because it teaches that all the signs, deeds and words of Jesus are acts of divine power, it is the Father acting through Jesus. Our Lord looks upon His “*hour*” as the moment of glorification of His Father and Himself. The acceptance of death by Jesus is a supreme act of obedience to the Will of the Father. Jesus chose the Will of His Father over the living out of His physical life. He places the Divine Will above His own human will, and thereby, demonstrates His love for His Father above Himself. Therefore, His supreme act of obedience unto death on the Cross makes visible His love of God. Since only through the death of the Divine Son of God could atonement for sin be made and reconciliation be achieved between God and mankind, the Father revealed His infinite love for mankind by sending His only begotten Son to save the world. The death of the beloved Son reveals – makes visible – the depths of God’s love for mankind.

When Jesus prays, “*Father, glorify your name!*” – what does He mean? Throughout the Fourth Gospel, Jesus has been revealed as “*ego eimi*” – the bearer of the divine name. To glorify God’s name is to glorify Jesus Christ. This means that the true nature of Jesus will be made visible through visible manifestations of divine power. This means we must be able to look upon the horrible face of the crucifixion and see shining through all the horror, the loving Image of God.

Jesus consents to His own death when He prays, “*Father, glorify your name!*” Jesus will be glorified through His death. There can be no resurrection to life unless first there is death to life. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead reveals Him to be the very Lord of Life, the Son of the Living God.

In his first epistle, John writes, “*God is love.*” In order for Jesus to be

revealed as God's Son, He must be revealed as love. In a most special way, Jesus' suffering and death reveal this divine Sonship. How is the true nature of God manifested in the sufferings and death of Jesus? The shedding of the Blood of Jesus was atonement for sin and opened the door for union with God. Jesus dies that we might live eternally. He makes visible that the very love God bears us fills His very Heart. He told us that the greatest love is expressed by the greatest gift – the giving of one's own life that another may live. By Jesus' total submission to the Father's will in obedience unto death – *"Thy will be done!"* – Jesus reveals a supreme love of the Father above all things. Truly, we have redemption through love. Jesus is revealed as Divine Love. Jesus is Agape! Jesus is perfect, as His heavenly Father is perfect: He lets the sun shine and rain fall upon the good and evil.

In the Fourth Gospel, there will be no agony in the Garden; but the echoes from the Garden of Suffering may clearly be heard. Love is not always nice or easy! *"My soul is troubled now."* (Jn. 12:27) Here, the human life of Jesus instinctively draws back in fear when facing the impending encounter with Satan entwined in the suffering and death ahead of Him. The temptation is to draw back and seek deliverance: *"... should I say – Father, save me from this hour?"* Jesus overcomes the temptation, for He beholds in His sufferings and death the divine plan for salvation. He courageously commits himself to death: *"Father, glorify your name!"* A Voice proclaims that the Will of God has been done and will be done on earth as in Heaven: *"I have glorified it, and will glorify it again"* (Jn. 12:28). On three occasions, a voice has sounded from heaven acknowledging Jesus Christ: at the Baptism of Jesus; at the Transfiguration of Jesus (neither is mentioned in John); and this third instance recorded by John. Each time it has followed either an implicit or explicit acceptance of death by Jesus for the sins of men.

Jesus foresees, from His loving submission to death, Satan's hold over man will be destroyed: *"... now will this world's prince be driven out . . ."* (Jn. 12:31). It would be a better translation to say "cast down." The lifting up of Jesus will result in the "casting down" of the prince of this world – Satan. St. Paul refers to him as *"god of this world"* (2 Cor. 4:4*). *"... the rulers of this world of darkness. . ."* (Eph. 6:12) On the other hand, John teaches that by the lifting up of Jesus all men will be drawn to Jesus: the Jewish rabbis spoke of conversion as *"to draw"* or *"to bring near"* to the Torah. They taught that the natural desire of loving men was to draw other people to the Torah so that they too could share in the knowledge of God. John sees the natural love of

Jesus drawing all men to Himself in order that they may “know” the Father.

For these reasons, although the human nature of Jesus experiences fear in the face of death, His spirit joyfully embraces it. *“It was for this I came to this hour.”* (Jn. 12:27)

A GRAIN OF WHEAT

We have a magnificent commentary on the glorification of God – on Christ’s concept of life and death – sandwiched between verses twenty-three and twenty-seven of Chapter Twelve: *“I solemnly assure you, unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit”* (Jn. 12:24). From the humility of His own heart, Jesus sees His human life as this grain of wheat that must forget itself – and die. *“From His death will flow life to all men. It will produce much fruit by becoming the bread of life. Whoever eats that bread will live forever.”* (Jn. 6:58) *“ . . . the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.”* (Jn. 6:51)

In this short parable, Jesus teaches the destiny of human existence: its productivity or its nonproductivity. The Master teaches that dying produces fruitfulness and not to die means to remain barren and sterile. The parable harshly insists that only through death does fruitfulness come. Lest we think it applies only to Jesus, we are immediately informed: *“The man who loves his life loses it, while the man who hates his life in this world preserves it to life eternal”* (Jn. 12:25).

We must not gather from this that the Scriptures teach self-hatred. This text really concerns self-preference. When the Scriptures desire to express the preference of one thing over another, or one thing to another, it refers to it as loving one and hating the other. In other words, we are being taught that the person who prefers his natural life over his spiritual life will lose both his spiritual and physical life. The man who prefers his spiritual life over his natural life will preserve his natural life for life eternal. Moses expressed this teaching concretely when he placed before Israel God’s commandments. To obey these commandments meant to choose good; to disobey these commandments meant to choose evil. He told them, *“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live”* (Deut. 30:19). The choice of good and evil is daily

before every man. The world we live in and the natures we possess encourage us to make many choices. When these choices are contrary to the revealed will of God or the Spirit of God within a man, we have two ways we can go: We can go our way which now becomes evil, a way of death; or, we can cross our way out and go God's way – here is the choice of good and life. For a real disciple of Jesus Christ, there are daily many such “crossings-out” of our wills. They all amount to a disciple's carrying his daily cross. In the Gospel according to Mark, immediately following Our Lord's first announcement that he must die, we read: *“Whoever would preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will preserve it”* (Mk. 8:35).

Both Mark and John indicate that Jesus has given a call to all disciples to willingly imitate Him by suffering and dying. (Those Christians who advertise that Christian life ought to be nothing here and now but a “happyville” filled with ding-a-ling Christians are a bit premature. It is still a vale of tears – the Second Coming hasn't come!) Mark has Jesus saying, *“If any man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and follow in my steps”* (Mk. 8:34).

John alone teaches another dimension of Christian discipleship. He is called to be a servant of Jesus Christ: *“If anyone would serve me, let him follow me; where I am, there will my servant be. If anyone serves me, him the Father will honor”* (Jn. 12:26). Certainly, the great saints were great servants of Jesus. Now we know who is really responsible for having these men and women honored in the Christian Church: Jesus' Father! *“If anyone serves me, him the Father will honor.”*

Quite clearly, John indicates why all that Palm Sunday enthusiasm dissipated so rapidly. The shadows of the Cross loomed so vividly: *“We have heard it said in the law that the Messiah is to remain forever. How can you claim that the Son of Man must be lifted up?”* (Jn. 12:34). Jesus made it perfectly clear He could not assume the role of a political Messiah – the role He must assume was that of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. He would be lifted up – crucified! Unthinkable! Unimaginable! Unbelievable! Unacceptable! The crowd rejected Jesus. They left Him and searched to find one to fulfill their dreams – they went seeking their false messiah. They abandoned the Messiah to the mercilessness of his enemies – the road was now clear for them to destroy Jesus.

One last time, Jesus warns the people to come to the light before being swallowed by the darkness. *“The light is among you only a little longer. Walk while you still have it or darkness will come over you.” (Jn. 12:35)*

John closes the public ministry of Jesus with a beautiful summary of his teachings – the teachings that Jesus had loudly proclaimed during His ministry:

Whoever puts faith in me believes not so much in me as in him who sent me [Faith in Jesus is Faith in God]; and whoever looks on me is seeing him who sent me. [To see Jesus is to see God – the invisible God is made visible.]

I have come to the world as its light to keep anyone who believes in me from remaining in the dark. [In the very Person of Jesus, man has the light of life.]

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I am not the one to condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save it. [Jesus is the Savior of the World.]

Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words already has his judge, namely, the word I have spoken – it is that which will condemn him on the last day. [To know Jesus and to reject Him is to reject God – to choose life without God – to choose death!]

For I have not spoken on my own; no, the Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to speak. [To hear the Voice of Jesus is to hear God speak – To know the will of God – Jesus is the totally obedient Son – He constantly kept His heart tuned to the Voice of God – to hear every word that came from the love of God. Jesus knew these words were words of eternal life.]

Since I know that his commandment means eternal life, whatever I say is spoken just as he instructed me.

(Jn. 12:44-50)

And so ends the Public Ministry of Jesus!

Concerning the success of this ministry, John sadly writes: *“There were many, even among the Sanhedrin, who believed in him; but they refused to admit it because of the Pharisees; for fear they might be ejected from the synagogue. They preferred the praise of men to the glory of God!”* (Jn. 12:42-43). They preferred to be thought holy rather than to be holy!

If men’s hearts are not right, it leads to spiritual blindness and moral cowardice. No one can ever hope to see the truth that is not willing to accept the consequences which its acceptance may bring. Continual unwillingness to believe results in the atrophy of the very faculty of faith. One moves from a stage of ‘will not’ believe to a stage of “cannot” believe!

To illustrate, dramatically, the theme of the passing of the light out of this world, Jesus hides himself. The next time the crowd looks upon him, they will look upon a man of suffering. Jesus upon the Cross will forever remain a scandal and stumbling block to them. His life will forever appear foolish and a waste in the eyes of the world.

Only when one can see that Resurrection flows from crucifixion and death, then only, can one believe the life of Jesus and His teachings to be Supreme Wisdom by which one may live.

CHAPTER 17

THE BOOK OF GLORY

INTRODUCTION

The closing words of Chapter Twelve concluded the public ministry of Jesus. The following chapters of the Fourth Gospel (13-21) comprise the Book of Glory. The teachings are directed to the believing community of whom the *“Beloved Disciple”* serves as a personal symbol of the ideal Christian. He will be pictured, during the Last Supper; reclining on the bosom of the Lord – symbolizing that the intimate relationship existing between the Father and His Son now exists between Jesus and His disciples. In the opening Prologue, we have been told that Jesus, the Word, is ever in the bosom of the Father – or ever at the *“right hand”* of the Father. During the Last Supper, the Beloved Disciple sits at the right hand of Jesus – reclining upon His bosom.

The Book of Glory opens within the Cenacle. We read in St. Luke that Jesus told Peter and John:

“Go and make the preparations for us to eat the Passover.”
“Where do you want us to prepare it?” they asked. “Listen,” he said, “as you go into the city, you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him into the house he enters and tell the owner of the house, ‘The Master has this to say to you: Where is the dining room in which I can eat the Passover with my disciples?’ The man will show you a large upper room(cenacle) furnished with couches. Make the preparation there” (Lk. 22:8-12).

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The Greek word for the *“upper room,”* in which the Last Supper was eaten, is

“Cenacle.” This Cenacle, after the Passion, became the refuge and the center of reunion of the disciples. Here, the apparition of the risen Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit took place. An ancient tradition relates that Mary lived here after the death of her Son. A stone from within the house and upon which she lay to die was still venerated up to 63 A.D. Tradition tells us that the home originally belonged to the mother of John Mark, the Evangelist. The Cenacle is known in history as the *“Mother of all the Churches.”* Bishop Epiphanius, a native of Palestine (310-403 A.D.), basing himself on documents of the 2nd century, writes:

Hadrian found the city entirely razed to the ground and the Temple of God destroyed and trampled upon, with the exception of some houses and a certain small Church of the Christians, which had been constructed in that place, in which the disciples, after the Savior was taken up to heaven from Mt. Olivet, betaking themselves, mounted to the Cenacle.

The Cenacle is located on Mt. Sion, part of the ancient city of David. Tradition places the tomb of David adjacent to the Cenacle. A basilica was erected there by the Archbishop John around 386 A.D., incorporating the tomb of David into the Church of the Cenacle.

When John opens the thirteenth chapter, Jesus and the disciples are already in the Cenacle. John deliberately omits any reference to the Twelve, even though several of them are named. John would have his readers see the Lord and His community of disciples gathered together. To this community of disciples, Jesus speaks and ministers. A Passover-type celebration is in progress. According to custom, it was a meal eaten while reclining upon couches – symbolizing the Jews’ freedom from slavery. The couches were arranged in a horseshoe shape, with the table of food in the middle. Those reclining at table leaned upon their left hand and ate with the right. It appears that Jesus reclined at the top table with the Beloved Disciple, probably John, occupying the favorite position to the right of Jesus. The most honored guest sat to the left of the host. Judas probably occupied this position – either because he was Treasurer of the community or because Jesus sought to express his love for him in a particular way – making a last effort to win him over.

This community represented the success of the public ministry of Jesus. They

heard His voice and followed. Upon them the future mission of Jesus would fall. The night before He died, the group did not look too promising. Judas already had the intention to betray Jesus. We know he had been infuriated when Mary poured the perfume over the feet of Jesus: *“Why was not this perfume sold? It could have brought three hundred silver pieces, and the money have been given to the poor”* (Jn. 12:5). Jesus was forced to defend Mary: *“Let her alone. Why do you criticize her? She has done me a kindness”* (Mk. 14:6). John relates that Judas *“did not say this out of concern for the poor, but because he was a thief. He held the purse, and used to help himself to what was deposited there”* (12:6). In the Synoptic accounts, the anointing followed the triumphant entrance into Jerusalem when Jesus rejected the role of a political messiah, a king of this world. Both Mark and Matthew relate that immediately following this instance over the perfume, Judas Iscariot went off to the chief priests and said, *“What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?”* Mark tells us they were jubilant over the proposition. They paid him thirty pieces of silver – thirty shekels. It was the price the Law fixed for the life of a slave. (Ex. 21:32.) Judas *“accepted, then kept looking for an opportunity to hand him over without creating a disturbance”* (Lk. 22:6).

Matthew related that the chief priests *“plotted to arrest Jesus by some trick and kill him; but they said, ‘Not during the festival, for fear of a riot among the people’”* (Mat. 26:4-5). This was before the visit of Judas. His treachery made it possible for them to arrest Jesus in the darkest night and destroy Him before the feast.

Judas offers us a terrible meditation. Did all this evil flow from a love of money? If so, it is a frightful example of the truth: *“No man can serve two masters. Either he will hate one and love the other or be attentive to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”* Through the spirit of avarice, Satan gained mastery over the heart of Judas. St. Luke writes that, before the visit to the high priests, *“Satan took possession of Judas, the one called Iscariot, a member of the Twelve”* (Lk. 22:3). John confirms this possession in Chapter Thirteen. By the time Judas arrived in the Cenacle, his hidden hatred for the “other” had formulated a treacherous plan of betrayal.

FEAST OF PASSOVER

In the Synoptic Gospels, the Lord celebrated the Last Supper on the Eve of Passover. In the Fourth Gospel, it occurred the day before. According to this

arrangement, Jesus will be led to death at the time the Passover lambs are being led to slaughter in the Temple. The Passover feast will begin only when Jesus is dead and in the Tomb.

John would have his readers recall that the first Passover of the Jews took place in Egypt before their deliverance from slavery. The feast celebrated that anticipation of the saving event to occur that night in Egypt. The feast was eaten in faith and hope that the Angel of Death would pass over the house marked with the blood of the lamb. And so, the New Passover is first celebrated in faith and hope while in the “Egypt” of the Old Law – under the slavery of sin. The great deliverance from the enslavement of sin and death is anticipated by a dinner in which a new Passover lamb, the Lamb of God, whose blood, a sign of salvation, is consumed by the disciples – the symbol of the New Israel. In this feast, the Lamb is consumed in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The New Passover is celebrated on the night in which the power of the Angel of Death is destroyed.

It is possible that John’s date of the Last Supper is correct. Jesus may have celebrated the feast a day before Passover, for He was aware, due to the treachery of Judas, He would be dead by Passover. It is John’s customary method to use historical events uniquely to present his profound teachings.

The underlying theme of the Book of Glory is expressed in the opening verse of Chapter Thirteen: “*He had loved his own in this world, and would show his love for them to the end*” (Jn. 13:1). The love of Jesus is extended across his entire public ministry by the use of the verbal form “*had loved.*” His entire public ministry had been a ministry of love for his disciples. When John writes, “. . . *he showed his love for them to the very end,*” the love expressed is a definite act. It refers to “*His*” hour. From this hour will forever flow eternal love to the beloved disciples.

The very presence of Judas in the Cenacle was a death symbol. Therefore, “. . . *Jesus realized that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father . . .*” (Jn. 13:1). He said to His disciples, “*I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*” (Lk. 22:15). The institution of the Eucharist, although not mentioned by John, takes place at this time. Luke relates that following the Eucharistic celebration, the disciples had a verbal fight over who should be considered the most prominent and the greatest among them. At this point, Jesus breaks into the conversation with: “*Earthly*

kings lord it over their people. Those who exercise authority over them are called their benefactors. . . . Yet I am in your midst as the one who serves you” (Lk. 22:25, 27).

If we took Jesus out of that first Cenacle gathering, what would we have? The answer to that question will tell us what we will have today when we leave the Lord out of our families, our social gatherings and our religious cenacles.

THE WASHING OF THE FEET

John tells us that Jesus was fully aware of His divine origin; that He had come from God and was going to God, the Father who had handed everything over to Him. Nevertheless, He now rose from the meal and took off His cloak. With this action, John symbolically recalls the great mystery of the Incarnation. Paul said of Jesus:

Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, 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, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6-8)

John relates that Jesus now picks up a towel and ties it around his waist symbolizing his role as a slave. *“He poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel he had around him.” (Jn. 13:4-5)* The washing of the feet of another was the lowly task of a slave. A Jew was forbidden to demand such a service from a Jewish slave.

The disciples’ feet were dirty from the dusty road. They did not have slaves to do this service. Because of their rivalry with each other and the concern for their self-esteem, they certainly would not wash each other’s feet. It simply would never have occurred to them. Jesus performs this humble service of a slave for them. He pours the water; He washes their feet; He wipes them dry. He does this complete service alone. This act of humility must have touched their hearts, washing away much of their envy and bitterness. He prepares their hearts to listen to His words. Apparently, Our Lord is never willing to speak to His disciples when their hearts are filled with

enmity for one another.

Jesus, washing the feet of His disciples, presents a picture of profound humility. It is more than a picture of humility. It is a prophetic action symbolizing the deepest act of humility ever to be enacted. The dialogue between Jesus and Peter reveals to us that much more is involved:

Thus he came to Simon Peter who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You may not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand. Peter replied, "You shall never wash my feet!" "If I do not wash you," Jesus answered, "you will have no share in my heritage." [The expression "no share in my heritage" is powerful: the Greek words "echein meros" mean "to share with" or "be a partner with." It means more than fellowship; it is used to translate in Septuagint "heleq," the Hebrew word describing the God-given heritage of Israel. In actual fact, Jesus is telling Peter he will have no part in his eternal reward.] "Lord," Simon Peter said to him, "then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus told him, "The man who has bathed has no need to wash [except for his feet]; he is entirely cleansed, just as you are; though not all." (The reason he said, "Not all are washed clean," was that he knew his betrayer.) (Jn. 13:6-11)

THE JUDAS MYSTERY

It was not accidental that John prefaced the washing of the feet with "*The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to hand him over,*" and concluded the instance with another reference to Judas – the living symbol of death for Jesus. The washing of the feet is a symbol of the death of Jesus. It symbolized the utter abasement of Jesus in death on the cross. The washing of the feet prophetically foretells the forgiveness of sin flowing from the death of Jesus. The blood of Jesus, alone, will wash away the sins of men. He is the Lamb of God who can take away the sin of the world.

The real dialogue between Jesus and Peter is now evident: Peter tells the Lord that He cannot die for him. Peter will not let Him. Our Lord informs Peter that if He does not die for him, he will be cut off from the Kingdom of Heaven forever. Once before, Peter had reacted strongly to a prophecy concerning

Jesus' death. He was called "*Satan*" for his misguided zeal. Through the example of Peter, the Lord teaches His disciples they must not be scandalized because of His death. It is necessary for their salvation.

Most scholars agree that the Sacrament of Baptism and its necessity for salvation are also symbolized in the washing of the feet. The pouring of the water, the washing and cleansing of the disciples, its necessity for sharing in the Lord's heritage – the Kingdom of God – are too representative of Baptism not to have been intended. We know the cleansing of the soul is effected through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier. Water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' pouring the water upon His disciples symbolizes His pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon His community through His death. We are taught that salvation flows entirely from the death of Jesus on the Cross. All human beings can do is bring their sin-filled lives to Jesus in faith.

MESSAGE TO THE CHILDREN

When John tells us, "*After he had washed their feet, he put his cloak back on and reclined at table once more*" (Jn. 13:12), he may be telling us to behold our Glorified Lord Who has died for our sin and has again assumed His Lordship at the right hand the Father. Perhaps we are to understand that the teachings we are now to hear are spoken to us from Heaven by Our Lord in His glory. They will carry a much deeper meaning. . . .

If our Glorified Lord is saying to His community, "Do you understand what I just did for you?" He intends for us to contemplate His sufferings and death. He says, "*You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Lord' and fittingly enough, for that is what I am.*" Jesus, the very Lord of heaven and earth, has become our very own Rabbi. He taught us not only with words, but also with deeds:

But if I washed your feet – I who am Teacher and Lord – then you must wash each other's feet. What I just did was to give you an example: As I have done, so you must do. I solemnly assure you, no slave is greater than his master; no messenger (apostle) outranks the one who sent him. (Jn. 13:14-16)

The message (addressed only to His disciples!) is quite plain and simple: Jesus lived and died to save us. If we are His disciples and apostles, we must be willing to live and die for the salvation of others. We are not allowed to be

merely receptors of divine goodness and salvation. Jesus demands we become dispensers of goodness and salvation.

Yes, the message is quite clear and simple, but not so the application. Many obstacles stand between knowing good and accomplishing good. The personal and unique application of this doctrine within the life of each disciple is essential for Christian happiness. The early gathering in the Cenacle does not project a vision of happiness. Their happiness depends upon their understanding the Way and their willingness to follow the Way. Unfortunately, it demands a blind faith in their leader; because the path He walked does not appear to be a way to happiness – but to sorrow. Jesus tells His disciples, “*Once you know all these things, blest will you be if you put them into practice*” (Jn. 13:17).

From the beginning, Jesus knew Judas intended to betray Him. Regardless, Jesus reached out to Judas in total love. He seated Judas close to Him, symbolizing the friendship He desired to have with him. He gave Judas His Body and Blood as both Luke and John indicate. He humbled Himself to wash the feet of Judas, to die for Judas, and yet, He indicated that “*not all are washed clean*” (Jn. 13:11). Herein lies a terrible truth: Man freely accepts or rejects the atonement of Jesus Christ. If Jesus is rejected, a man’s sins remain – he will die in his sin. Judas remains unmoved by the love of Jesus. The moment of decision arrives: Judas must repent and accept Jesus or he must be separated from the flock. He must be recognized for the enemy he has become. Jesus prepares the apostles for the shock and scandal of betrayal: “*He who partook of bread with me has raised his heel against me*” (13:18). Jesus quotes the words of Psalm 41. The verb in the Psalm expressing “*partook of bread*” is deliberately changed by John to the verb used in Chapter Six for the eating of the Body of Jesus. He emphasizes Judas’ reception of the Eucharist. The phrase “*has raised his heel against me*” expresses contempt for a person. Jesus held Judas in love, but Judas held Jesus in contempt!

“*Jesus grew deeply troubled.*” It is a moment of great distress for Him. The same angry emotion floods His spirit as on the day He contemplated the death of Lazarus and the Sorrow of Martha and Mary. It was an anger directed towards the evil dominion of Satan and sin that made this dominion possible. In His disciple, Judas, the dominion of Satan triumphed by the possession of his very heart. The wolf had entered into the most intimate circle of Jesus’

friends and was about to carry one away. In the face of Judas' own perverted will, Jesus is helpless. In the eyes of St. Augustine, Judas, himself, had become a veritable wolf. Satan, too, was present at the first Cenacle meeting – and actively so! Jesus now announces: *“I tell you solemnly, one of you will betray me.”* Apparently, Judas kept his intentions and feelings secret from the community. He was not a suspect. When the disciples heard the prophecy of treason, they were all overcome with the awareness of their own weaknesses and the possibility that they would fulfill the prophecy. Each was filled with self-doubt and wondered if he himself was the one. Only one was sure where he stood with Jesus – Judas, the traitor! Peter, some distance from the head table, signaled to John to ask Jesus to identify the traitor.

He leaned back against Jesus' chest and said to him, “Lord, who is he?” Jesus answered, “The one to whom I give the bit of food I dip in the dish.” He dipped the morsel, then took it and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. (Jn. 13:25-26)

It was a sign of preference and esteem for the guest when the host offered him a bit of food. One last gesture of love is given; one last appeal to turn back is made. Judas firms his will against the Lord. He totally alienates himself from Jesus. At this moment, *“Satan entered his heart” (Jn. 13:27)*. Judas will now serve his new master.

Satan blends his own hatred with that of Judas, empowering him to accomplish this supremely evil deed. Later, Satan abandons Judas to bear the overwhelming guilt of his crime alone – a guilt human frailty is unable to bear. Judas is lost to Jesus. Jesus turns to him and dismisses him from the Cenacle, from his company: *“Be quick about what you are to do” (Jn. 13:27)*. *“No sooner had Judas eaten the morsel than he went out.” (Jn. 13:30)* John closes the terrible scene simply with, *“It was night!”*

When one leaves Jesus, he abandons the light. As one moves away from the Lord, the darkness grows. The only Light is within the Cenacle! The night has come that puts an end to the visible presence of Jesus upon the earth. With the departure of Judas, the countdown has begun. Jesus knows the time of death is at hand: *“Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him” (Jn. 13:31)*.

THE NEW COMMANDMENT

With the departure of Judas and Satan from the Cenacle, Jesus is free to pour out his final message of love. Since the glorification of Jesus culminates in His return to the Father, the hour of departure and farewell has arrived. Jesus addresses the disciples as “*my little children*” for the only time in the Fourth Gospel. The expression well conveys God’s fatherly attitude towards the disciples of Jesus. Likewise, it fits well within the Passover motif – where the father explains to a little child the events of salvation. He will respond to questions within the hearts of the Christian community. These questions will be proposed by representatives of the community: Peter, Thomas, Philip and Jude.

Our Lord begins:

My children, I am not to be with you much longer. You will look for me, but I say to you now what I once said to the Jews: “Where I am going, you cannot come.” I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another. (Jn. 13:33-35)

Jesus must first walk the road to glory alone. It involves a face-to-face encounter with Satan and death. The disciples are neither prepared for one nor the other.

The period of Jesus’ personal presence in the world has come to an end. His disciples will long for the past when He was at their disposal. No matter how much they long for those “good ole’ days,” those days cannot be recalled. He meant it when He said, “*The light is among you only a little longer.*” The past and the present are no guarantee of the future: “*Some flowers bloom only for a day.*”

It is impossible for them to measure the sadness, the loneliness and the despair to be experienced when isolated from Jesus. They “have grown accustomed to His Face.” A great love or a wonderful gift is often only properly appreciated when lost. Up to this point, the disciples’ relationship with Jesus has been centered on themselves. Their spiritual lives were filled with what Jesus did for them – how He filled their days and nights. Their

lives were like satellites around His Person – warming and bathing themselves in His Presence – held in course by their attraction to His beauty. The departure of Jesus, the disappearance of the “sun” of their lives, would throw them back upon their individual selves. If His ministry had succeeded with them, now was the hour to prove it. They had greedily absorbed His love, His light and His life.

Now the burden would fall upon these Cenacle members to make Jesus present in the world and in the lives of other persons through the flowing of His energy, His Presence through the Agape – love of the Christian community! Would they now live listless lives filled with ghostly memories of the past, using the past as an excuse to deny the future; spending their time telling any who would listen about their shattered dreams: “We were hoping that He was the one who would set us free”? Would all energy for living be consumed in self-sorrow over personal loss? Would every tear and drop of sympathy be conserved for self – a myrrh to pour over personal wounds, shrinking their souls into veritable islands of sadness? Would they merely forget Him as one does a misadventure or a bad investment? Would they live as if He had never lived nor touched their lives? Or, would they take their eyes off their little needs and fulfillments? Would they come to see what He had given them, what He had taught them in those years together, that He had taught them, in words and deeds, how to live, how to be men – men of God; how to find purpose, fulfillment, and joy in earthly existence? Would they come to know the refinement and exquisiteness of His love for them so they would never settle for less for themselves? Would they go out into the night running after Him? Would they search for Him and never rest until they rested in Him? Would they find His path and race along it, knowing He was the prize at road’s end? Whatever the answer would be, whatever their lives would become would be determined by their personal response to that farewell command: *“Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another”* (Jn. 13:34-35).

Their eyes were centered upon their actual existence and they were anxious. Our Lord asks them to raise their eyes and look with hope to their future, the existence that should be. Their despairing gaze into the past is redirected to the future, which comes and lays its obligation upon them. The care of oneself is changed into a care for one’s neighbor. The past was for the sake of the future! They are offered freedom – a freedom promised to faith: to be

freed from the past, the world, to be freed from self – the most enslaving of all slavers.

The disciples experienced the love of Jesus during His personal presence among them. If He is to remain with them, it can only be through His love. Only by loving do the disciples keep alive the Presence of Jesus and remain in union with Him. It is the ongoing and inner experience of Jesus' love that empowers and motivates the love of the disciples. In this sense, Jesus essentially lives again in the world – not personally – but in the community.

This commandment of Jesus is always new – even two thousand years later – because “newness” is of its essence. The love of Jesus continually recreates a new order, a new world.

Love is so much of the essence of the Christian community that it is the only true criteria of a disciple of Jesus. Those outside the community ought to note the difference between themselves and a Christian group. The difference should be the presence of Jesus' love, which the world cannot receive. Those who have any knowledge of the essential character of Jesus ought to be able to identify the group as disciples of Jesus. If we have to tell people that we are Christians, it is probably because, in actual fact, we are not Christians, but just “so-called” and self-proclaimed! Therefore, true Christianity is not achieved by knowledge of Jesus or by external membership in a Church, but in Christian Discipleship which adheres to the commandment of the Master: *“Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another”* (Jn. 13:34-35). We will discuss this commandment at greater length in our next lesson.

Different aspects of Christian Discipleship are clarified at this point. The Talmids (pupils) have gathered in the Cenacle around their great Teacher-Rabbi, Jesus Christ. Certain problems faced by the disciples are presented to the Lord in the form of questions to which He will reply. Peter is the first to propose a question. He has the problem of trying to understand why he cannot follow Jesus here and now:

“Lord,” Simon Peter said to him, “where do you mean to go?” Jesus answered, “I am going where you cannot follow me now; later on you shall come after me.” “Lord,” Peter said to him, “why

can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you!” “You will lay down your life for me, will you?” Jesus answered. “I tell you truly, the cock will not crow before you have three times disowned me!” (Jn. 13:36-38)

Peter desires to follow Jesus right here and now! He feels he is really ready to die in order to be with Jesus. He thinks following Jesus is a matter of human heroism. What is truly involved in following Jesus is victory over self, the world and the devil. These victories are not within human power to accomplish. Peter must learn this lesson, as must all disciples. Peter does not really believe that he is not capable of victory. He listens to his own feelings, rather than to the words of Jesus. He is led not by grace, but by his own fantasies about himself and his evident desire to be heroic. He will only learn the hard way. He will have to endure the bitter and utterly embarrassing situation of denying Jesus Christ. Peter’s good desires and willingness to face death are truly essential ingredients within the spirit of a disciple, but following Jesus is much more than a matter of human heroism. In fact, it is not even a matter of human heroism – it is a matter of faith in the victory of Jesus Christ and a humble submission to His will and a patient waiting for His Grace, His call of *“Come follow me!”* The victory of Jesus must flow through His disciples. Only the Lord can truly say, *“I have overcome the world! I have overcome the Prince of Darkness!”*

Our Lord reassures Peter and all His disciples: *“ . . . later on you shall come after me.”* First, our divine David must face Goliath (Satan) alone. He must first conquer Satan and death and, only then, will it be possible for His disciples to follow Him. He encourages us: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me” (Jn. 14:1).* He knows his disciples will be discouraged because they will put faith in themselves and they will have no greater success than Peter had. The only foundation for victory will be to have absolute and total faith in the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. It takes time to learn this lesson. The Lord is patient, but too often the disciple is not. His heart becomes troubled. He despairs and gives up. Jesus reassures each and every disciple:

In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places; otherwise, how could I have told you that I was going to prepare a place for

you? I am indeed going to prepare a place for you, and then I shall come back to take you with me, that where I am you also may be. (Jn. 14:2-3)

The House of the Father is the Temple wherein the glory of God dwells. We have learned from John that Jesus replaces the Temple. Jesus is the “*Father’s House*”! “*Many*” implies all. There is “*room*” enough for every disciple in the heart of Jesus. In other words, Jesus is open to accept and welcome every one as His friend. Through our friendship with Jesus, we may be reassured about our relationship with God the Father. It is a relationship established in peace and love through Jesus.

When our Lord speaks of preparing a place for us, it is to be understood that the preparing is taking place in the disciple. All within the life of each disciple is being used by the Lord to prepare that disciple for everlasting union with Jesus and the Father. Our Lord prepares the disciples to dwell with Him and the Father. When that preparation is complete, He will come for that disciple. Some see this as the time of physical death. In the meantime, it ought to be a comfort that the Lord does not expect any of us to be a Peter, John, Paul, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Sienna – but our own individual and unique self: “*In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places . . . I am indeed going to prepare a place for you. . . .*”

After their three years of close association, Jesus presumes His disciples understand the plan of salvation. He tells them, “*You know the way that leads where I go*” (Jn. 14:4). He had encouraged them to be firm in their relationship with Him: “*Have faith in me.*” The Hebrew word for faith, “*mn,*” expresses firmness. Thomas replies, “*We do not know where you are going. So how can we know the way?*” (14:5)

Thomas represents the uncertain disciple; the one who always feels insecure in his relationship with the Lord. His knowledge and experience appear insufficient for a real commitment – a bit more proof is needed. Thomas does not lack sufficient evidence for faith in Jesus. He has a problem, but probably not the one proposed by his mind. His uncertainty probably stems from his emotional makeup. If he seeks to quiet his insecurities by seeking further evidence and proof, it will be an unending quest adding not a drop of faith or confidence to his life. He is like the person who has all the rudiments of Drivers Education and all that remains is to drive the car. The Thomas-type

prefers to take one more lesson. The problem is not intellectual or spiritual, but emotional. He must act against his emotions. Disciples who have such problems need to brush aside their fears and uncertainties and make the leap of faith. They need to be more like the wife who found herself stranded on a dark, lonely road with a husband too intoxicated to drive the car. She knew how to start and steer a car, but not how to stop a car (it was a gearshift model). What did she do? She drove the car to town and drove around the town until she ran out of gas. By that time, she had all the help she needed. Half the police department were trailing her suspicious car.

Thomas feels he needs something more. He centers his faith upon his own existence and looks for certainty and guidance from personal knowledge and experience. The response of Jesus informs Thomas that he needs nothing more – but nothing less – than his faith-love relationship with Jesus. The spiritual security of Thomas must rest not on what he knows or who he is, but upon who Jesus is: *“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no one comes to the Father except through me” (14:6).*

Thomas’ first difficulty is now removed. He knows where Jesus is going. Jesus returns to the Father, to Heaven, to Eternal Bliss. It is clear that the goal of discipleship is union with the Father. For a disciple, this spells salvation. Jesus makes it very clear that this goal can only be achieved through Him. Jesus is the only Way!

“Truth” and *“Life”* are but descriptions of the Way. For John, truth is the eternally Real; Jesus is the enduring Reality. To establish one’s life upon Him is to build upon the Eternal Rock – truly, to have a piece of the Rock forever! Since the Being of Jesus is grounded in truth and permeated by this truth, His very Life and Person are Light of Truth guiding a disciple along the Way. For the Evangelist, “life” (zoe) implies eternal existence, the life possessed by the Divine Being. Jesus reveals Himself to be the unique and only road to authentic Being and existence.

In the Old Testament, *“truth”* and *“way”* are synonymous: *“Teach me O Lord, your ways, that I may walk in truth” (Ps. 86:11).* Jesus is the fulfillment of the psalmist’s prayer. The Way of Jesus – going His Way – is to *“walk in truth.”* It is the Way of the Lord! In the Old Testament, the way of truth was a way of life lived in conformity with the Law. The Way, according to the holy men of Qumran, demanded separation from the world, living in the desert, and

making straight the way of the Lord by the daily study of the Scriptures and by absolute obedience to the Law. For Qumran, this was the Way of Truth and Life.

John does not present Jesus as a moralist. Although Jesus is the supreme Teacher of humanity, He is not a teacher in the sense of teaching a student who may then dispense with, or even surpass, the instructor. The very Person of Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. A man's personal relationship with Jesus determines his final destiny. A relationship of salvation depends on a loving and enduring affiliation with Jesus. To withdraw from Jesus is to lose the Way. Never can there come a day in the spiritual life of a human being that he does not need Jesus in order to live a godly life and to arrive at the godly goal of eternal union with God. "*The Way*" is never a matter of academic knowledge about Jesus, but rather of a person's union with Jesus.

For insured eternal life, Jesus must determine the life one lives and must become the foundation upon which one's existence is based. It is a life that finds its purpose, direction and power in the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ!

CHAPTER 18

FAREWELL ADDRESS

INTRODUCTION

In Chapters Thirteen through seventeen of the Fourth Gospel, John presents the disciples gathered around Jesus in the Cenacle for the last time. It appears that John would have us behold the Glorified Lord speaking from eternity to His disciples. Certain of the disciples, as Community representatives, present particular problems facing the Christian Community to the Lord. Peter's question brings to conscious awareness that the ability to follow Jesus is not a matter of human heroism, but of "call" and divine grace. Thomas' question and its answer teach the disciples that the very Person of Jesus is the Way. The Christian life finds its purpose, direction, and power from and within the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ.

SHOW US THE FATHER

The psalmist tells us the spirit of man longs for the living God. Moses concretely expressed this sentiment when he requested to behold the face of God. The request of the disciple Philip echoed this desire: "*Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us*" (Jn. 14:8). Apparently, Philip expected more than the experience of Jesus from his discipleship. The response of Jesus informs all disciples that He is not only the Way, but the veritable end and Goal of religious experience. Jesus replied to him:

Philip, after I have been with you all this time, you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. So how can you say "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not spoken of myself; it is the Father who lives in me accomplishing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe [me] because of the works I do. (Jn. 14:9-11)

Jesus insists that a disciple realize that He does not bring His disciples to a revelation of God – He is the revelation of the Father to humanity. To demand more than Jesus is a failure to believe or understand Jesus' revelation. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega of divine experience. All true divine experiences must be grounded in the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ. One must never look beyond Jesus to see God. To do so means to miss God! This is what John means when he speaks of believing in His Name. The results of such a faith are revealed by Jesus: *“I solemnly assure you, the man who has faith in me will do the works I do, and greater far than these . . . whatever you ask in my name I will do. . . . Anything you ask me in my name I will do”* (Jn. 14:12-14).

This quality of faith produces wonders. It brings a disciple into such conformity with Jesus that the Father expresses Himself through the disciple as He did through Jesus. Truly, this is the secret of the saints! The lives of the saints picture human beings living extraordinary lives. We hear their witness: *“Of myself I am nothing – I’m the weakest of human beings – the lowest!”* We behold the exalted virtues of their lives and though we hear their words, we do not believe their testimony. After we fail to be able to imitate their lives, we conclude they are cut from a superior cloth than ourselves. We settle for spiritual mediocrity!

We have missed the whole heart and essence of Christian belief. It is never merely academic, but always active in a most concrete way. It implies such a unity of our lives with that of Jesus that the only expression describing Christian existence is in the words of St. Paul: *“I no longer live but Christ lives in me.”* The very spirit of prayer is *“not my will be done but thine.”* The spirit of the disciple is completely docile to the Spirit of God and a perfect instrument of God's grace and glory! This is what is meant to ask in His Name. Yes, it means much more than the use of the Name of Jesus in prayer requests – it implies such a union of the disciples' lives with the Person of Jesus that for the disciples to pray is for Jesus to pray. To pray thus in His Name is always an infallible prayer, for it seeks but the Will of God!

LORD, WHY NOT TO THE WORLD?

The disciple Jude questions, *“Lord, why is it that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?”* (Jn. 14:22) Jude's concern expresses a worry of many

latter-day disciples: Why do some men receive the grace to believe in Jesus and others do not? God's love is universal and He wills the salvation of all men, yet all men do not come to the Lord. What goes wrong along the way? An answer is given: All men behold in Jesus a revelation of truth and goodness. It may appear as supreme human perfection but in truth, it is Divine Reality manifested through the humanity of Jesus. When a human being has a confrontation with Jesus Christ, he reacts to this in the depths of his being. Jesus attracts or repels him! This reaction of itself reveals man's true nature – whether he is open or closed to God. Verse twenty-four in Chapter Fourteen reveals that men in this world do not see God within Jesus because they do not love what they do see in Jesus! Regardless of what their conscious awareness may be of themselves or how they appear to others, they do not love God. To such, God does not reveal Himself or His Son.

How important it is that when presenting Jesus to others – children or adults – we endeavor to present Him as a Person most worthy of human love and imitation. Otherwise, we may be a contributing element to their disbelief. In the spirit of St. Luke, we ought to present Him as the human Ideal. Love of Jesus leads to divine faith: “. . . *he who loves me will be loved by my Father. I too will love him and reveal myself to him*” (Jn. 14:21). “. . . *we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him.*” (Jn. 4:23)

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF JESUS

To these disciples in the Cenacle, Jesus delivers His last will and testament:

My children, I am not to be with you much longer . . . I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another.

(Jn. 13:33-35)

Since the disciples cannot follow Jesus as he leaves this life, they receive a command that, if obeyed, will keep the spirit of Jesus alive among them as they continue their lives in the world. The theme of the Commandment recurs frequently in the last discourse. We read in Chapter Fifteen: “*This is my commandment: Love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends*” (Jn. 15:12-13). And in verse seventeen: “*The command I give you is this, that you love one another.*”

In the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments have a setting in the Covenant between God and Israel at Mt. Sinai – they were the stipulations Israel had to observe if they were to be God’s Chosen people. The Commandment of Love is the Law of the New Covenant: *“This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another.”*

When the evangelist writes of the love between the disciples, he uses the verb *“agapen.”* As with faith, he indicates the active element of love. For John, Jesus *“had loved”* – Jesus *“loved”* and a disciple of Jesus must constantly be a *“loving”* person! *“Agapen”* is used 141 times in the New Testament and appears 71 times in the writing of John.

An Irish lad has 20 different ways in Gaelic to tell a lassie he loves her. In English we have only one. The Greeks have four words for love: *storge*, *eros*, *philia* and *agape*. *“Storge”* expresses family love. It is used for the love of a parent for a child and the child’s love for the parent; it expresses the love of brothers and sisters and relatives. *“Eros”* expresses love that is predominantly on the physical side and always involves sexual attraction. This word does not appear in the New Testament, probably because at the time of the writing of the New Testament, the word was a synonym for *“lust.”* *“Philia”* is used to express the highest quality of natural love. It includes the physical side of love, but also much more – it describes a warm, intimate, tender relationship that involves the body, mind and spirit. It is a word used to describe true friendship – the highest kind of human love.

It is a love that has its limitations. Aristotle writes that as beauty fades, often friendship (*philia*) fades. *“Agape”* hardly appears in secular Greek writings. Some see it as a word coined by Christians to express a new quality and attitude towards others born in the Christian Community and flowing from the power of the Holy Spirit’s Presence.

Jesus clearly taught that the love of His disciples was not to be patterned after human love, but after divine love:

You have heard the commandment: “You shall love your countryman but hate your enemy.” My command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father, for his sun rises on the bad and

the good; he rains on the just and the unjust. If you love those who love you, what merit is there in that? Do not tax collectors do as much? And if you greet your brothers only, what is so praiseworthy about that? Do not pagans do as much? In a word, you must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt. 5:43-48)

In the Christian Community, “agape” emerges as unconquerable good will that will never seek anything but the good of its fellow man. It is a spirit that is neither conditioned nor curtailed by what other people do, what their attitudes may be or who they are. Agape proceeds from the nature of the lover rather than from any merit in the beloved. The Christian who has experienced God’s love while still a sinner should let his spirit be transformed by the experience: *“Beloved, if God has loved us so, we must have the same [love] for one another” (1 Jn. 4:11)*. A disciple must have Christian Vision – see persons as God sees them, as objects of Divine Love for whom Jesus died. If a Christian esteems others as Jesus esteemed him – a being worthy of love – his attitude is one of self-giving love that seeks only the good of the beloved.

One of the distinguishing qualities of Christian love lies precisely in its ability to love not only the unloved, but the unlovely and unlovable. It is not Christian love if we wait until others love us. No one needs to merit a Christian’s love!

“Agape” is a total response of the personality. It begins in the will, permeates the mind and heart and clothes itself in emotions and affections. It is not something that happens to us, but is willed into existence. Agape gives the power and determination to love people we do not like (most of the people we do not like are those who are not like us or else those who are like us but don’t like us.)

Agape-love goes beyond the power of human love. It is love beyond the reach of the good pagan. Yet, salvation is impossible without it. Before its command, the human spirit is reduced to repentance and dependence upon Jesus for salvation. In this context, we can see that love is more than a commandment – it is a gift. Agape is possible only through the operation of the dynamic love of the Spirit of Jesus within the Christian Community. Like all other divine gifts, it comes from the Father through Jesus to those who believe in Him. We read in Romans 5:5: *“The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”* The New

Commandment of Love is possible for the Christian of good will!

In the Fourth Gospel, the command “*to love one another*” refers to love between Christians. Today, our ideal of love is love for all mankind, flowing from the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all men, and based on the Scriptures: that God created and loves all. This is not the concept that John expresses. For John, God is Father only to those who believe in His Son and who are begotten as God’s children by the Spirit in Baptism. The “*one another*” that the Christian is to love is correctly defined in I John 3:14 as “*our brothers*”; that is, those within the Community.

The New Testament concept of Agape-love is not something soft and sentimental. It never makes the mistake of thinking that to let a person do as he likes is to love him. The New Testament is clear in that there are times when anger, discipline, rebuke, punishment and chastisement are part of love. St. Paul even demanded excommunication from the Christian Community out of love for the eternal welfare of another.

ANOTHER PARACLETE

The imminent departure of Jesus from the world leaves the disciples fearful and apprehensive. They have heard His last will and testament. They must continue His Presence on earth by establishing a Community of such love that His Spirit would remain alive among men. Likewise, they must bear witness to Jesus in the world. The impossibility of the task overwhelmed them. They began to sink into sadness as leaden despair weighed their spirits down. Jesus immediately moved to reassure them He would not abandon them or leave them as so many orphans. Only for a little while would they be alone. If they persevered in loving discipleship, He would soon return and their sadness would dissipate and be replaced by unending joy.

His return would be in a manner entirely different than expected. (The divine is always the human unexpected!) His Presence among them would be in a mode more spiritual, more personal and more powerful than had been his former physical presence among them. Jesus tells his disciples, “*If you love me and obey the commands I give you, I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete – to be with you always*” (Jn. 14:15-16). The “*you*” in this statement equals the Christian Community – the Church.

“Paraclete” is a Greek word and no one English word expresses the meaning conveyed by the Greek. St. Jerome carried the word over into the Latin Vulgate rather than try to translate it. In the Greek, it can express the legal concept of a defense attorney – one who is brought in as a spokesman or intercessor for another. In the Fourth Gospel, the *“Paraclete”* appears as a personal Agent intimately associated with the disciples as a great Friend who consoles, helps and guides them. He appears, in relationship to the world, as a prosecuting attorney that convicts the world of sin and injustice because of its treatment of Jesus.

We are aided by the Scriptures in our understanding the role and nature of the Paraclete when we are told that Jesus *“will ask the Father and he will give [us] another Paraclete.”* This implies that Jesus Himself was a Paraclete. In his first epistle, John speaks of Jesus as a Paraclete (Intercessor) – an offering for our sins in the Presence of the Father. (*1 Jn. 2:1-2.*) The Scriptures speak of the divine origin of the Paraclete and Jesus – both proceed from the Father and are sent by Him into the world. The Divine Nature and Presence of both are visible only through faith. They lead the believers to truth. Neither Person speaks on His own; He speaks only what He hears. Both give witness to Jesus and convict the world of sin by Their Presence. The Paraclete is identified as the Holy Spirit. (*Jn. 14:26.*)

Therefore, in some special sense, the Holy Spirit appears as another Jesus. He comes only when Jesus departs. The Paraclete is the presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent. Not because there is not a distinction between the Person of the Holy Spirit and Jesus, but rather because of their natures. They both bring the Divine Presence – the Father’s love – into the lives of men. In this sense, Jesus returns to His disciples in the Paraclete!

John indicates the personal separation between Jesus and the Paraclete when he teaches that the Person of Jesus will be in Heaven with the Father, while the Person of the Holy Spirit remains on earth in the Christian Community. These distinct roles of Jesus and the Paraclete are distinguished by John. God’s only Son saved us by meriting our salvation by his death on the Cross. The Holy Spirit accomplishes our salvation by sanctifying the disciples of Jesus. The Holy Spirit did not come that we would be angelized as if being human was an error; He came that we would be sanctified. *“This is the will of God, your sanctification.”*

The Holy Spirit's coming into the world was an act of Jesus' love for his disciples. The coming of the Holy Spirit was the crowning glory of the Redemption accomplished by Jesus. His Coming depended upon the death of Jesus. This is why Jesus must leave in order for the Spirit to come. Only when sin had been atoned for, could the heavenly Gift of the Paraclete be given. Only those sharing in the redemption of Christ share in the Holy Spirit. He cannot be given to the world. A Christian need not stand looking toward the heavens for the coming of the Son of Man – a Christian must look within, for in the Paraclete, Jesus is present within all believers until the end of time.

It is the Father and the Son who send the Holy Spirit. His Presence is a witness of the loving union between heaven and earth. We read a beautiful description of this truth in the twenty-second chapter of Revelations:

The angel then showed me the river of life-giving water, clear as crystal, which issued from the throne of God and of the Lamb and flowed down the middle of the streets. On either side of the river grew the trees of life which produce fruit twelve times a year, once each month . . . Nothing deserving a curse shall be found there. The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be there, and his servants shall serve him faithfully.” (Rev. 22:1-3)

The very Presence of the Holy Spirit within the Community proves Jesus to be with the Father. He promised, when He returned to the Father, to send the Holy Spirit. The truth of His life and teachings have been verified. The disciples are made firm in their commitment to Jesus.

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as the expression of their essential love. He is substantial love of God personified. The Paraclete is Divine Love existing as a Person. Sanctity is nothing but the love of God. He is the Sanctifier because He pours out the love of God into our hearts. This Spirit of Love makes discipleship a reality. He creates within the human spirit a taste for the things of God. The Holy Spirit is Himself the Gift of Peace. Peace is neither a thing nor a condition, but a Presence – the Person of the Holy Spirit. He is Peace, because the Spirit of His Love produces unity between God and human heart. What sin has divided, the Holy Spirit unites.

As the Spirit of Truth, He is Inner Enlightenment within the Community,

recalling to mind the teaching of Jesus, and He guides the Church into a fullness of understanding of the Divine Revelation given by Jesus. The Holy Spirit furnishes the needed knowledge to answer the enemies of Jesus. He fortifies the hearts of the disciples with courage to be a witness for Jesus.

The Presence of the Holy Spirit within the Community and His divine activity through the Community serves as an indictment against the world. *“When he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin, about justice, about condemnation.”* (Jn. 16:8) Since the world can neither receive the Holy Spirit nor see Him, this promised work must be accomplished within the disciples – the Christian Community.

The disciples had witnessed the trial and condemnation of Jesus as a criminal – a sinner. His ministry ended with an apparent victory for his enemies. The whole episode certainly left the disciples badly shaken in faith. The coming of the Holy Spirit into their lives changed all this. They now beheld the Glorification of Jesus. The world had condemned itself in its condemnation of Jesus. It hates the Light because its way is evil. The disciples behold in the death of Jesus the implied hatred of God. There is enmity between God and the world! The falsity of the justice of this world is seen in the condemnation of Jesus by the world and by the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God. The world that destroyed the life of Jesus will not believe in Jesus. It will receive its just due and perish in its sins.

The very reception of the Holy Spirit, following upon the promise of Jesus, convicts the disciples of His victory over death and that He now abides at the right hand of the Father. His work is continued in this world through the Presence of the Holy Spirit. The power experienced by the disciples within their own souls and through their ministry reveals that Satan, the prince of this world, has been condemned – has been overcome by Jesus Christ. They truly experience in their own lives that Jesus has overcome the world.

The bringing to life of a Christian Community confronting the world as Jesus, becoming the Light of the world – a Light that darkness cannot extinguish, witnesses to the victory of Jesus. The life of the Church daily glorifies both the Father and the Son. Truly, the work of the Christian Community is the work of Jesus. It can be no other!

Jesus had said to his disciples, *“I tell you the sober truth: It is much better for*

you that I go” (Jn. 16:7). In time, they understood this truth.

Only through the internal Presence of the Holy Spirit did they come to fully understand the Lord and His life. They begin to experience a spiritual maturity in their own lives – in truth, the Spirit makes them children of God.

The fulfillment of the New Commandment was made possible only through the Presence of the Spirit of Love: *“Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:2).*

Although love often clothes itself in feelings and emotions, these are not of the essence of Christian love. Uninformed people often believe that if they do not feel love, love is absent. This is not necessarily so because love is primarily an operation of the human will. Being loving and being emotional about it are not the same thing. A person is being loving when he wills good for another and seeks to accomplish this good, to the best of his ability, regardless of the feelings involved. A person may feel physical and emotional disgust towards another person and yet remain loving towards that person – he or she still seeks to accomplish only what is good for the other. When love rises above contrary feelings and emotions, it purifies and strengthens itself. It resembles the Lord who shed drops of blood in order to abide in love.

To say love is of the will brings to our awareness the relationship between love and obedience. When the will chooses good, it exercises the power of love. The person towards whom our good will is directed is the recipient of our love. When I will good for another, I actively express my love for that person. When I will good for myself, I actively express self-love. Proper self-love is a virtue.

Many people, all their lives, are loving persons; they do good for themselves and others and not evil. This is a good foundation for a Christian life, but of itself, it does not qualify one as a holy person in the Christian sense. What does Jesus demand of His disciples? – That they die to self. This means dying to self-willing. Jesus asks his disciples to give up a good, not an evil. He asks that we no longer follow our own wills, regardless of how good their direction may be. He asks that we imitate Him and give humble submission of our wills to the heavenly Father. He taught us to pray, *“thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.”* We are told to set aside what we will and choose what God wills. When this becomes a permanent habit for a Christian, we then habitually

love God above all things. This is the only love God will settle for. He warns that if we prefer anyone's will above His – father, mother, brother, sister, wife, husband, child, friend or self – we are not worthy of Him. We will God – we love God – every time we deliberately choose the Will of God over our will or that of another. Remember, it does not matter how we feel – the presence of nice feelings neither add nor subtract from the act of love. Jesus did not feel loving on the Cross. He was Love!

We love Jesus only when we deliberately fulfill His Commandment. Love means obedience. Only to the obedient is the Holy Spirit promised. To the disobedient, only a simulation of the Holy Spirit is given to confirm them in their disobedience – the subtle and deceptive work of the Evil One!

We have only to look at our Spirit of obedience to know the motivating spirit of our lives. All men need to appeal to the obedience of Jesus for salvation and atonement for their unloving lives towards the Father. Obedience proves Love! When we obey Jesus, we prove our faith in Him and express our love for Him. We are a comfort to Him. Certain wonderful effects flow – the Father loves us – we become “friends” of Jesus and we live, on this earth, joy-filled lives:

You will live in my love if you keep my commandments, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and live in his love. All this I tell you that my joy may be yours and your joy may be complete . . . You are my friends if you do what I command you.

(Jn. 15:10-12, 14)

It has been said, “Joy is the infallible sign of God's Presence.” (Teilhard de Chardin.)

A disciple must live in love as Jesus lived in love. Jesus lived in love by his obedience to the Father. A disciple lives in love by his obedience to Jesus.

I AM THE VINE

Jesus describes the relationship between Himself and His disciples by comparing it to a Vine and its branches:

“I am the true vine and my Father is the vine-grower. He prunes

away every barren branch, but the fruitful ones he trims clean to increase their yield. . . . Live on in me, as I do in you. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me and I in him, will produce abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:1-5).

As Jesus beholds His disciples in the Cenacle, they are one with him. He warns them never to separate from Him. Jesus is the Vine of Eternal Life and the disciples, the branches, can only have life by abiding in Him. To abide in Jesus means to obey Him.

The Vine symbolized Israel, who had been planted and cultivated by the Father. The prophets constantly spoke of the unfruitfulness of the vine, calling Israel a “*wild vine.*” When Jesus spoke of Himself as the True Vine and His disciples as His branches, He pictures the new and eternal Israel. As the True Vine, (the word “*true*” carrying the concept of the “*eternal*”), Jesus presents Himself as the one and only Source of eternal life. Through this Vine flows the very Life of God.

Our Lord recognizes the disciples present intimate relationship with Himself – they are presently safe and secure – but He warns them that they must remain in Him (once saved, not necessarily always saved). They must continue, always, as His disciples. But, over and above being disciples, they must bear fruit. His disciples must be fruitful. Jesus told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be given to them “*. . . if you love me and keep my commandments*” (Jn. 14:15). This Spirit of Love – the Spirit of God flowing through the obedient disciple – produces works of love through the life of the disciple. The Beloved Disciple produces much fruit to the glory of the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Our Lord speaks of branches bearing no fruit. Some see this to be a reference to the Jews who refused to believe, but others say no, it only refers to a type of disciple. Some disciples do remain fruitless. Evidently, their own wills block the Holy Spirit. They give lip service but no obedience to God. Some may produce a great deal of leaves and foliage, but no heavenly fruit. The good they produce proceeds from their own natures (their wills) and not from grace – not from the operations of the Holy Spirit. Their “*good*” works do not remain – there is nothing godly about them. They remain disciples

because they enjoy communicating with the godly, but they have no spirit.

They remind one of so many students who went to Mater Dei High School. These students were contemptuous of the moral and religious teachings of the school, but preferred to remain in the school because of the safe and secure environment it offered them. Many of their lives today give no evidence of a Christian education. Scriptures warn the fruitless and the sterile that destruction awaits them. Certainly, it will not be the evil you did – but the good you omitted – that will haunt your deathbed!

Jesus' calling himself the "*true vine*" in the context of the Last Supper, intentionally awakens within the disciples' minds – and later, the readers' minds – the Eucharistic Celebration. Both Mark and Matthew referred to "*the fruit of the vine*" during the Eucharistic Celebration. (*Mk. 14:25; Mt. 26:29.*) In one of the earliest Christian works, the Didache (9:2.), we read as part of the Eucharistic blessing, "*We thank you, Our Father, for the holy vine of David, your servant, which you reveal to us through Jesus your servant.*"

The words of Jesus, "*He who remains in me and I in him,*" are truly echoes of "*the man who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him,*" and, "*The man who feeds on me will have life because of me*" (*Jn. 6:56, 57*). When Jesus says, "*I am the real vine,*" the thought expressed is not that far from "*This is my blood.*"

The Eucharistic Celebration is a memorial of the death of Jesus. In dying, Jesus bears eternal fruit. He commands His disciples not only to recall his death by a re-enactment of the Last Supper but, by His bidding them to receive His Body and Blood, He draws them into His death – the death that gives life.

It is hard to deny the implications that if a disciple shares in the life of Jesus, he must also share in His death – a death that is redemptive – bearing much fruit. Our Lord immediately foretells the sufferings, the persecutions, the hatred and even the death that will come to the disciples for no other reason than they are disciples of Jesus. They will do precisely to the disciples what they have done to Jesus. Only love can make discipleship bearable. Our Lord encourages the disciples to grow in love – love to the degree that a disciple will lay down his life.

The Eucharistic Communion symbolizes both the faith and love demanded by discipleship. It not only symbolizes this faith and love, but its worthy reception actually expresses loving faith, nourishes and conserves it and brings a disciple to Christian maturity. A disciple, as often as possible, receives the Eucharist in order that he may abide in Jesus and Jesus may abide in him – that he may bear fruit that endures. *“He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (Jn. 6:54) “. . . the man who feeds on this bread shall live forever.” (Jn. 6:58)*

We were created for the glory of God. We are told that by being both a disciple of Jesus and a fruitful disciple, we fulfill the purpose of our existence: *“My Father has been glorified in your bearing much fruit and becoming my disciples” (Jn. 15:8).*

The faithful, loving disciple possesses great power over the heart of God. This is why the saints are the great benefactors of this world. *“. . . you may ask what you will – it will be done for you.” (Jn. 15:7) “. . . all you ask the Father in my name he will give you.” (Jn. 15:16)*

Jesus has given His last Message – spoken His Last Word to His disciples. The Word comes to us from eternity. It abides forever. As St. James teaches, *“Humbly welcome the word that has taken root in you, with its power to save you. Act on this word. If all you do is listen to it, you are deceiving yourselves” (Jms. 1:21-22).*

CHAPTER 19

OUR ETERNAL HIGH PRIEST

INTRODUCTION

St. John the Evangelist erases the lines between time and eternity while Jesus is in the Cenacle. We are in the eternal present. Never are we more conscious of this than during the priestly prayer of Jesus. Jesus pours out His Spirit before the Father. This moment has been called the Holy of Holies of the New Testament. We are permitted to hear the communion of the Son with His Father. Perhaps we hear only the echoes of His Heart, but it is enough!

In Chapter Seventeen, John records the only lengthy prayer of Jesus. There is no end of discussion concerning this passage. Some believe this prayer existed as the Prologue did in the early Church – as a hymn sung during the Eucharistic celebration in which verse three served as the antiphon: *“Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ.”* A very similar prayer is found as a Eucharist prayer in the Didache, a work many scholars place as contemporary with the Fourth Gospel.

The composition of this hymn stems from the teaching of John the Evangelist. It is not a prayer recorded verbatim by the apostle, but one expressing the sentiments in the Heart of Jesus during His last earthly hours. Such sentiments left their indelible impression upon the spirit of the Evangelist. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he was able to verbalize, for all mankind, the holy sentiments within the Heart of Jesus Christ.

We read in the Old Testament that, when the life of Moses drew to an end, he gathered the family of Israel around his person; he gave his farewell message and offered for the people, as a final prayer, a hymn called the *“Canticle of Moses.”* After his prayer, Moses separated himself from the people and climbed alone to the top of Mt. Nebo. Here, he saw the Promised Land he would never enter because of his infidelity. Another – Joshua – would lead

the people into that land. The name “Joshua” implies “savior” – as does the name “Jesus.”

This epithet was written of Moses: *“Since then no prophet has arisen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He had no equal in all the signs and wonders the Lord sent him to perform . . .”* (Deut. 34:10:11). In a way even more sublime, the Evangelist would write this of Jesus.

The figure of Moses has never been absent from the Fourth Gospel, never appearing as a superior person to Jesus, but rather as a man serving as no more than a shadow of the Lord. The Farewell in the Cenacle purposefully recalls the memory of Moses. The true Promised Land is in view. Moses had climbed the Mount alone and had to die before his people could enter the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. The sin-stained life of Moses was a barrier and obstacle to his people in gaining their promised inheritance. Jesus will now climb the Mount alone and behold the Kingdom of God. His very person becomes the Way into the Kingdom by which all his disciples may enter. Yes, here in the Cenacle is One greater than Moses!

In his first epistle, John writes, *“ . . . if anyone should sin, we have, in the presence of the Father, Jesus Christ, an intercessor who is just. He is an offering for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for those of the whole world”* (1 Jn. 2:1-2). John portrays Jesus as the eternal High Priest. Paul expresses the same concept when he speaks of Jesus *“ . . . who is at the right hand of God and who intercedes for us”* (Rm. 8:34).

In the Book of Sirach, we read of God’s consecration of Moses: *“For his trustworthiness and meekness, God selected him (consecrated him) from all mankind”* (Sir. 45:4). *“To consecrate,”* means literally *“to make holy.”* Since God is Holy, it implies being set aside for God – for His work. God instructs Moses to consecrate his brother Aaron and his sons as priests. We read in Exodus: *“ . . . Anoint and ordain them, consecrating them as my priests”* (Ex. 28:41). *“ . . . Give instructions to make such vestments for Aaron as will set him apart for his sacred service as my priest.”* (Ex. 28:3)

Jesus speaks of His Father as consecrating Him and sending Him into the world. (Jn. 10:36.) He, likewise, speaks of consecrating Himself for the sake of His disciples: *“I consecrate myself for their sakes now, that they may be consecrated in truth”* (Jn. 17:19). According to the New Testament, God

consecrated Jesus to be the High Priest of the New Covenant. We read in the Book of Hebrews, “. . . *holy brothers who share a heavenly calling, fix your eyes on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we acknowledge in faith, who was faithful to him who appointed him*” (Heb. 3:1-2).

Concerning the high priest of the Old Testament, these same Scriptures relate:

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. Even Christ did not glorify Himself with the office of high priest; he received it from the One who said to Him, “You are my son: today I have begotten you;” just as he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, according to the order [the line] of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:1-6).

This Scripture recalls the words of Psalm 110, written by King David and referring to the coming Messiah:

The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool.” The scepter of your power the Lord will stretch forth from Zion: “Rule in the midst of your enemies. Yours is princely power in the day of your birth, in holy splendor; before the daystar, like the dew, I have begotten you.” The Lord has sworn and he will not repent: “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 11:1-4).

In Israel, only a man from the tribe of Levi and from the house of Aaron could serve as High Priest. Aaron was anointed priest of God by his brother Moses. His priesthood was permanent. Aaron would remain high priest throughout the Old Covenant through his personal descendants. This priesthood was hereditary. Jesus has no natural claim to priesthood, being born in the tribe of Judah and not Levi. But we see that King David foresaw that his descendant, one from the tribe of Judah, the Messiah, would be not only king but priest. David speaks of the Messiah as being a high priest in the type and order of Melchizedek.

The name “*Melchizedek*” carries us far beyond the days of the priesthood of Israel. We are taken back to the days of Abraham when, as a nomad lord, the father of the future nation of Israel wandered through the promised land. Abraham is returning from victory over his enemies and suddenly the man Melchizedek appears before him. We read in Genesis:

Melchizedek, king of Salem (peace), brought out bread and wine; and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words: “Blessed be Abram by God Most High . . . who delivered your foes into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Gen. 14:18-20)

Melchizedek makes this one appearance. There is no reference to his origin or his ending. He becomes a symbol of an eternal priest, having no beginning or ending. He is acknowledged to be a high priest of God. When Abram gives tithes to Melchizedek, he acknowledges his superiority. This action of Abraham symbolizes this line of priesthood to be superior to that of Israel. As the descendants of Abraham, all Israel paid reverence to Melchizedek in Abraham. When the New Testament refers to Jesus as a priest “*according to the order of Melchizedek,*” it infers an eternal priesthood given by God superior to any other. It implies a change in the religious worship of God. The Scriptures tell us:

The matter is clearer still if another priest is appointed according to the likeness of Melchizedek: one who has become a priest, not in virtue of a law expressed in a commandment concerning physical descent, but in virtue of the power of a life which cannot be destroyed . . . The former commandment has been annulled because of its weakness and uselessness, for the law brought nothing to perfection. But a better hope has supervened, and through it, we draw near to God. This has been confirmed by an oath . . . Thus has Jesus become the guarantee of a better covenant.

(Heb. 7:15, 16-21,

22)

The offering of bread and wine at the Last Supper by Jesus recalls to mind His priestly role according to the line of Melchizedek. Concerning this priesthood of Jesus, the Scriptures tell us:

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the

heavens (into the holy of holies), Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession of faith. 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. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16)

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself up unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God!

(Heb. 9:13-14)

Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; now he waits until his enemies are placed beneath his feet. By one offering he has forever perfected those who are being sanctified. (Heb. 10:12-14)

. . . 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 forever lives to make intercession for them. (Heb. 7:24-25)

In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to God, who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; 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. 5:7-10)

THE PRIESTLY PRAYER OF JESUS

Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, prays within the Cenacle before the historical culmination of His sacrifice upon Mount Calvary. Divinity and timelessness make the prayer more one of union than of petition. Jesus prays aloud and thus brings His disciples into union with His own Spirit. It is, at the same time, a prayer of intercession to the Father and a prayer of revelation to the

disciples. (How truly a person reveals himself in prayer. It is with good reason that some people guard against publicly praying aloud. In time, it exposes your soul.) Jesus did pray aloud to the Father and His prayer reveals His love and concern for the glory of His Father, for his apostles, and lastly, for all disciples coming to believe in Him through the ministry of the apostles and their successors. Jesus prayed. Truer still, Jesus prays for you and me! (We pray to Jesus, but have we ever personally asked Him to pray for us to the Father, other than in some hastily concluded liturgical formula?)

Once, when the disciples asked Our Lord to teach them to pray, He taught them *“The Our Father”* or *“The Lord’s Prayer.”* The spirit of the *“Our Father”* fills the priestly prayer of Jesus. Jesus addresses His heavenly Father:

Father, the hour has come! Give glory to your Son that your Son may give glory to you . . . I have given you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. Do you now, Father, give me glory at your side, a glory I had with you before the world began.

(Jn. 17:1, 4-5)

Jesus prays from the Cenacle, but from the tone and tenses of the verbs, He appears to be already in a state of ascension to the Father. The human Life of the Lord has visibly manifested the Loving Presence of the Father. God, through Jesus, is revealed as the Loving Father of all mankind. The absolute obedience of Jesus to the Father’s will has made possible the revelation of the Father through the human existence of Jesus. In Jesus, we behold the realization of *“thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”!* Within the earthly humanity of Jesus, God’s reign has come as a result of his total obedience. God’s Will is done on earth (in Jesus) as in heaven! Jesus affirms, *“I have given you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.”*

In a most special way, Jesus glorified the Father by the works He accomplished in obedience to the Father. This indicates why John insists that Christian faith and love are verbs, not nouns! They must never be reduced to be only creeds or theories, but always incarnated in human deeds and activities.

Jesus speaks of the glorifying work accomplished through his ministry: *“I*

have made your name known to those you gave me out of the world” (Jn. 17:6). Indeed, the petition has been fulfilled: “Holy be thy Name”! The psalmist sang: “I will proclaim your name to my brethren” (Ps. 22:23). To make one’s name known in the Semitic sense is to reveal the personality of the Person, the very heart and essence of his being. Jesus sums His entire revelation in the words, “I have made your name known,” for it implies not only to reveal God’s nature to men, but to bring men into a personal union with God, to bring them into eternal life. The Book of Wisdom teaches: “For to know you well is complete justice, and to know your might [name] is the root of immortality” (Wis. 15:3). Jesus fulfills the prophets’ dreams: “I will give them a heart with which to understand that I am the Lord. They shall be my people and I will be their God” (Jer. 24:7). “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord’s glory . . . ” (Hab. 2:14).

From verse three, we are made aware that the knowledge of God is not without correct doctrinal belief: To gain eternal life, one must not only love and obey the Father, the only true God, but one must believe and confess Jesus to be the Son of God. Jesus appears in the Fourth Gospel bearing the divine name, “*Ego eimi.*” Truly, Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us!

The earthly ministry of Jesus has brought the disciples to faith in Him: “. . . *They have known that in truth I came from you, they have believed it was you who sent me*” (Jn. 17:8). The disciples have responded to Jesus with obedience: “. . . *they have kept your word*” (Jn. 17:6). These men, gathered around Jesus in the Cenacle, were given to Jesus by the Father: “*I have made your name known to those you gave me out of the world. These men you gave me were yours*” (17:6).

It would be difficult to picture any of these apostles being made general managers of any successful business corporation in this world. It may even be difficult imagining any of them being made a bishop in the Church today. And yet, what do we hear and see: “*I entrusted to them the message you entrusted to me, and they received it*” (Jn. 17:8)? What a meditation we have here on confidence in God! (How long will it really take to learn: “My ways are not your ways”?) What God had entrusted to Jesus, Jesus, with full confidence, entrusted to men possessing little more than faith and good will.

When Jesus prays: “*Do you now, Father, give me glory at your side, a glory I had with you before the world began?*” (Jn. 17:5), He speaks of the Divine

Loving Union existing between the Father and Son – “. . . *the love you bore me before the world began*” (Jn. 17:24). He who “. . . *emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men . . . known to be of human estate*” (Phil. 2:7), would once more become the “. . . *aura of the might of God and a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty . . . the refulgence of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness*” (Wis. 7:25-26). This prayer would be fulfilled when the glorified Jesus sends the Holy Spirit, who, according to Wisdom, “. . . *renews everything while perduring; And passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets*” (Wis. 7:27). What greater glorification of Jesus could there be than the sending of the Holy Spirit?

From the first part of our Lord’s priestly prayer, we are instructed that disciples will glorify their Father because His Kingdom will come through the disciples’ completing the work Jesus has given them. This work will be to make God’s name known to persons in this world. Jesus entrusts to his disciples the message entrusted to Him: “*Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ*” (Jn. 17:3). John teaches in his first epistle that to refuse to believe this message identifies the very spirit of the antichrist.

PRAYER FOR THE DISCIPLES

Jesus prays for His apostles. Their discipleship has been a glorification of Jesus: “*It is in them that I have been glorified*” (Jn. 17:10). This was especially true after the coming of the Holy Spirit. The visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples witnessed to the divinity of Jesus.

Jesus prays for the safety of the apostles in this world. “*I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to guard them from the evil one.*” (Jn. 17:15) “*As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.*” (Jn. 17:18) The apostles must remain in an unbelieving world. Since they belong to Jesus and the world belongs to Satan, the position of the apostles is a dangerous one. They will live in a hostile and deadly environment. As long as the disciples are in the world, they will live in a state of tension. How well Our Lord knows from the example of Judas that the apostles are not immune to their environment!

The hostility of the world is primarily directed against Jesus and not towards

His disciples. The world will endeavor by one means or another to seduce the disciples from Jesus Christ. Temptations of the most subtle and deceptive natures will be used. Each personal weakness of a disciple will be exploited. Only later, as the disciples persevere in their commitment to Jesus, will more overt methods be used, such as persecution, affliction and death. Only through the Spirit of Jesus will disciples find immunization from the deadly spirit of the world! Jesus prays to the Father, *“Protect them with your name which you have given me”* (Jn. 17:11). St. Luke tells us of the personal prayer of Jesus for Peter. We know how successful the prayer was! If the apostles remain in Jesus, they will be saved; their commitment to Jesus will not be lost. They will persevere and endure. St. Paul magnificently expressed the apostles’ conquest of the world:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? As Scripture says: “For your sake, we are being slain all the day long; we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered.” Yes, in all this we are more than conquerors because of him who has loved us. For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, Our Lord.

(Rm. 8:35-39)

The apostles must remain in the world because their mission is in the world. They are sent not to condemn the world, but to save the world – to bring men to the saving knowledge of the Father, the only true God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

In every age, there are men and women who belong to the Father. They must hear the Word of God. They must see the Light of the World. This is accomplished by the witness of the Christian Community. Its apostolic witness and activity in the world are essential for the salvation of men. As Paul teaches, faith comes through hearing about Jesus, hearing the Gospel, from the preaching ministry of the Church. Of course, this obligation is not fulfilled by preaching from a pulpit on Sundays. This is not of itself a witness to the world. Jesus continues His work of salvation in the world through the

continued activity of the Holy Spirit within the disciples. A true disciple is not saddened by the persecutions of the world. Their perseverance, despite trials and tribulations, proves and strengthens their commitment to Jesus. It is, therefore, a cause of joy for them. We read in the Acts that the apostles rejoiced when they were found worthy to suffer for the Name of Jesus!

The apostles will find protection in the Divine Name: *“O Father most holy, protect them with your name which you have given me.”* This does seem to indicate that the Divine Name carries a certain power within itself, not in some magical or superstitious way, but its use always implies a commitment and a union with the Divine Person of Jesus! The Scripture tells us, *“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the just man runs into it and is safe”* (Prov. 18:10). When Jesus was being arrested, we have a powerful demonstration of the Divine Name. When the Lord responded to his captors, *“Ego eimi,”* *“I Am He,”* they fell back and to the ground. Lives of saints testify to the power of God’s Name and that of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. St. Paul preached that at the Name of Jesus every knee in heaven and on the earth and under the earth shall bend and *“every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: Jesus Christ is Lord!”* (Phil. 2:10-11). Peter confirms that there is no other Name under the heavens by which men may be saved.

Our Lord prays that his apostles will be consecrated in Truth. They are to be set aside, as Moses and Aaron were, for a special mission in the world. They are set aside for the work of God. Jesus prays for their holiness, an essential quality for successful apostles and disciples. Their holiness comes through the Word, through their acceptance and obedience to the command of Jesus. The apostles are holy – for they have obeyed Jesus. As they abide in His Word, they will abide in holiness while in the world. To be *“consecrated in Truth”* means to be holy through obedience. Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (of holy obedience), Jesus prays for the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. The Holy Spirit creates a docility within man to the will of God. He counteracts the poison of pride. The Holy Spirit will keep the apostles obedient to the Word of God – obedient to Jesus!

When Jesus says, *“I consecrate myself for their sakes now, that they may be consecrated in truth”* (Jn. 17:19), He speaks of his own holy obedience. As Paul teaches, *“It was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross”* (Phil. 2:8). The holiness of the Son is revealed upon the Cross, for it was an obedience until death. It was to make all other

holiness possible! From this act of holy obedience, the Holy Spirit was given to the Christian Community. *“When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself – they will know that I am!”* Recall the words of Jesus at the Feast of Booths: *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me; let him drink who believes in me. Scripture has it: ‘From within him rivers of living water shall flow.’”* John the Evangelist immediately concluded: *“Here he was referring to the Spirit, whom those that came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit as yet, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (Jn. 7:37-39).* When Jesus prays: *“I consecrate myself now,”* it is the prayer of the High Priest offering Himself in death for the atonement of sin and the salvation of men. *“I will lay down my life for my sheep.”*

The Father in Heaven heard the prayer of Jesus. The apostles will be kept safe in the world from the Evil One. They will deliver the message; the Good News entrusted to them. They will be His witnesses to all people. Their lives will bear fruit. People will come to Jesus through their apostolic ministry. Jesus now prays for all disciples won through the apostolic ministry of the Christian Community. At present, the Community within the Cenacle is one with Jesus. Through their loving relationship with Jesus, the Love of the Father flows into their lives and they are one with God and with each other. For a brief moment, it is the Kingdom come on earth. It is heaven incarnated and Peace perfumes the Cenacle. It is a prophetic vision mirrored briefly in this first gathering in the Cenacle. This moment will not endure, for the Presence of Jesus must withdraw. Therefore, Jesus prays for unity among believers and for a reunion one day with Himself, a reunion that will know no departures, no good-byes: *“I pray also for those who believe in me through their word . . . that the world may believe that you sent me . . . Father, all those you gave me I would have in my company where I am, to see this glory of mine which is your gift to me . . .” (Jn. 17:20-21, 24).*

PRAYER FOR FUTURE DISCIPLES

Jesus prays for those who will, in the future years, come to believe in Him through the work of the apostles and their successors. We know this belief demands a personal commitment to Jesus and obedience to His commandment. It likewise demands a recognition that Jesus is the Son of God. One cannot be a Christian and deny the Divine Sonship of Jesus Christ.

The importance of the disciples in the conversion of men is indicated when

John stresses that men come to believe through the efforts of the apostles. Even though the Holy Spirit is given, it must be remembered He is given to the disciples of Jesus, and He operates through their lives. Disciples are the personal instruments of grace in this world. Apparently, it is God's Will to work through the Body, the Christian Community. This emphasizes the importance of our own lives for the salvation of other people.

It is reminiscent of the story about Father Judge, the Founder of the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate. He went to the train station in Columbus, Georgia, to meet a Cenacle member arriving from Baltimore, Maryland. He asked the young lady, "*Who sat next to you on the train?*" She replied, "*Some man.*" Father asked her, "*What did you tell him?*" She replied that she hadn't talked to him. Father Judge responded, "*You mean you sat all those hours next to that man and you never once mentioned God to him?*" She replied, "*Father, I'll never see the man again. There was no point in talking with him.*" He replied, "*Oh, yes, my child, you will, on the Day of Judgment, and he may point a finger of accusation towards you!*" Yes, indeed, as Pope Paul VI has said, "*We are all responsible for our times and our brothers!*"

Remember, the Holy Spirit was not sent into the clouds. He's not floating above the heads of men and women. He resides within the spirits of human beings and He depends upon their willing cooperation with Him in order to touch the lives of men and women in this world. There are many men and women in the world who will hear the Word of God and be saved, but they must first "hear" the Word of God and there must be tongues that will teach or preach the Word.

PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Jesus prayed for unity among his disciples. The model of this unity is a divine one: "*. . . that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us . . .*" (Jn. 17:21). If Jesus prayed to the Father for unity, then obviously such unity comes from God and not from the operations of men. Christian Unity is a divine sign to the world of the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ. It is His glorification in the world. Christian disunity is a scandal robbing God of glory and impeding the salvation of men and the Coming of God's Kingdom. Christian unity for John the Evangelist is not simply human fellowship or harmonious interaction of Christians – even pagans can do that! Christian unity demands Christian Community

patterned after the Union between the Father and Son. Not only is it patterned after their Union, but empowered by the love flowing from the Divine Union, the Holy Spirit. Our Lord emphasizes this truth when He says, *“I have given them the glory you gave me that they may be one, as we are one”* (Jn. 17:22). Certainly the Holy Spirit is the source and cause of the glory of Christian Unity. Disunity is the work of man; Unity is the work of the Holy Spirit. It will come to be, as all things will for which Jesus has prayed. The prelude of Christian Unity will begin when the Spirit of Divine Love finds entrance into obedient Christian hearts!

When Jesus says, *“I have given them the glory you gave me,”* it implies that He has poured out the Holy Spirit upon those who believe. Jesus teaches that a divine union between members of the Christian Community is possible: *“ . . . that they may be one, as we are one – I living in them, you living in me”* (Jn. 17:22-23). The Holy Spirit has been given in order to create Christian Unity. As Paul wrote, *“The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”* (Rm. 5:5). This unity is blocked by the pride and disobedience of Christians.

Unity is intended as a two-fold divine witness to the world: that Jesus comes from God and that God loves the disciples of Jesus as God loves His only begotten Son. We who experience the love of God know this, but the world can never come to know the love that God offers them unless men and women of the world are able to see *“how these Christians love one another.”* Today, even some pagans give a better example than Christians. Someone once said that in the early days of the Church, pagans threw Christians to the lions, but today, the Christians do it all themselves.

In the sixties, the youth of our country were seeking such a witness. We failed them! En masse, they rejected the Christian Communities and flocked into sub-cultural communities offering a semblance of brotherly love. Where did the disenchanting and disillusioning of the seventies go? Perhaps we lost a generation, a future! God be merciful to us because the Spirit of Love, the Holy Spirit of God, finds so little room in the Christian Inn! The world sees little evidence that the *“love of God has been poured out into our hearts.”*

Regardless of the cost of discipleship, keep before your eyes the final end of your discipleship. *“Father, all those you gave me I would have in my company where I am, to see this glory of mine. . . .”* (Jn. 17:24) Jesus has prayed that his

disciples will be with Him in the eternal Kingdom of God. That prayer has been heard! It will come to be! Jesus keeps careful watch over his own. He loses only those who will to be lost, who choose to follow the way of Judas. For those who perseveringly follow the Way of Jesus, Paul says that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him. (*See 1 Cor. 2:9.*) Paul assures us that the sufferings of this world cannot compare with the reward awaiting the faithful disciples.

Our Lord ends His priestly prayer with the assurance of His abiding and ever increasing love for his disciples. He will continually pour His grace and love into the hearts of men until the end of all ages; bringing men to faith and offering them a place at the eternal banquet: *“To them I have revealed your name, and I will continue to reveal it so that your love for me may live in them, and I may live in them” (Jn. 17:26). “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me. In my Father’s house, there are many dwelling places; otherwise, how could I have told you that I was going to prepare a place for you? I am indeed going to prepare a place for you, and then I shall come back to take you with me, that where I am you also may be.” (Jn. 14:1-3)*

“COME THEN! LET US BE ON OUR WAY!” (Jn. 14:31)

CHAPTER 20

BEHOLD THE MAN

INTRODUCTION

The Passion of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ begins in the eighteenth chapter of the Fourth Gospel. John presents the Passion of Jesus as Our Lord's finest hour – an hour of great glorification. Jesus moves with majesty and power to encounter, confront and conquer the forces of evil. It will be the *"hour of darkness,"* and amidst its darkness, only Jesus is Light. Jesus stands alone before the world. Before His Presence, the world is on trial. When the trial ends, the world stands condemned! Three men: Peter, Annas and Pilate, appear as symbolic representatives during the trial. (If one looks closely at these portraits, one may see his own reflection!)

Jesus leaves the Cenacle to keep His appointed destiny. John carries the readers' minds back through the history of the Old Testament. He informs us that, *"He [Jesus] went out . . . across the Kidron Valley . . ."* (18:1). This reference recalls the flight of David from his rebellious son, Absalom. King David takes this same route when his own royal power is threatened. We read, *" . . . Up! Let us take flight . . . and the king crossed the Kidron Valley"* (2 Sam. 15:14, 23).

Jesus is presented as the New David going forth to establish His kingdom. A reference to Jesus as the New David has been made by quoting Psalm 41:10 during the Last Supper: *"Even my friend, who had my trust and partook of my bread, has raised his heel against me."* This refers to Ahithophel, King David's counselor, who conspired with Absalom against the king. In John 13:18, Jesus says, "What I say is not said of all, for I know the kind of men I choose. My purpose here is the fulfillment of Scripture: 'He who partook of bread with me has raised his heel against me.'" Judas is the new Ahithophel betraying the New David.

When Jesus reaches the Garden of Gethsemane, He assumes a more ancient and fundamental role. John does not name the garden. He simply writes, “*There was a garden there, and he and his disciples entered it*” (Jn. 18:1). It is simply “*a garden.*” It suggests a new Garden of Eden into which Jesus, as another Adam, enters to confront the ancient serpent, Satan. It is in a garden that the two ancient foes prepare to meet each other: man in the Person of Jesus, the New Adam; and Satan in the person of Judas. As soon as the New Adam enters the Garden, his adversary is mentioned: “*The place was familiar to Judas as well (the one who was to hand him over), because Jesus had often met there with his disciples*” (Jn. 18:2). John has prepared us to see Satan in Judas. He has already informed us that Satan had entered Judas. Jesus Himself in Capernaum had referred to Judas as a devil: “*“Did I not choose the Twelve of you myself? Yet one of you is a devil.’ (He was talking about Judas, Son of Simon the Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was going to hand Jesus over.)”*” (Jn. 6:70-71). Regardless of who may be the acting characters within the Passion of Jesus, Satan is present and battles Jesus through these human instruments.

Dietrick Bonhoeffer once wrote:

The Bible is not like a book of edification telling many stories of men’s temptation and their overcoming. To be precise, the Bible tells only two temptation stories: the temptation of the first man and the temptation of Christ, that is, the temptation which led to man’s fall, and the temptation which led to Satan’s fall. All other temptations in human history have to do with these two stories of temptation. Either we are tempted in Adam or we are tempted in Christ . . . the tempter is to be found where there is innocence and only where there is innocence – where there is guilt, he has already gained power. . . . Innocence means clinging to the Word of God with pure, undivided hearts. . . . The time of temptation, in the biblical sense, is not a time of combat or testing of strength, but the loss of all strength but God’s Word!

How different is the Garden of Eden from the Garden of Olives! The first reflects the love and beauty of God, and the second cloaks all in the darkness of sin and evil; one holds the work of God’s love through His Word, and the

other, the work of Satan's hatred through his partner, man, by his alienation from the Word of God.

The arrest of Jesus in the Garden is John's dramatic overture to the passion. The theme is expressed in these words: "*Jesus knew perfectly all that lay ahead of him.*" Jesus stands as the Light of the World awaiting the approach of "*the darkness,*" "*a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower*" (Jn. 1:5*). Jesus remains in complete control of the situation until the very end.

Out of the night they come, "*with lanterns, torches and weapons.*" The narrative pictures Judas and his accomplices as children of the darkness – not knowing where they are going, stumbling because the Light is not in them. We read that "*Judas took the cohort as well as guards supplied by the chief priests and the Pharisees*" to the garden to arrest Jesus. He comes with a veritable army to arrest one man. This army is composed of both Romans and Jews. This has led many to believe that Rome had more to do with the death of Jesus than is implied in the Scriptures. The cohort could not have been present at the arrest of Jesus without the consent of Pilate. They had no need to search for Jesus with their lanterns and torches; Jesus assumed the initiative.

[He] stepped forward and said to them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus the Nazarene," they replied. "I am he," he answered. (Now Judas, the one who was to hand him over, was there with them.) As Jesus said to them, "I am he," they retreated slightly and fell to the ground. (Jn. 18:4-6)

This dramatic effect flows from the pronouncing of the Divine Name, "*Ego eimi*"! Armies fall before the power of Jesus! Here we are allowed a glimpse of the victorious outcome of the long struggle, now just beginning, between Satan and the New Adam.

The forces of darkness cannot exert their will upon Jesus until He consents to it. To His captors, Jesus issues orders as to servants. He will allow his capture, suffering and death for the glorification of His Father and the salvation of man:

The Father loves me for this: that I lay down my life to take it up

again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down freely. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. This command I received from my Father (Jn. 10:17-18).

Jesus put the question to them again; "Who is it you want?" "Jesus the Nazarene," they repeated. "I have told you, I am he," Jesus said. "If I am the one you want, let these men go" (Jn. 18:7-8).

As the New Adam, Jesus displays a unity with His disciples. He does not use his power for himself, but for those whom he loves. This sparing of the disciples fulfills the promise made in the Cenacle:

I kept those you had given me true to your name. I have watched over them and not one is lost except the one who chose to be lost. I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to guard them from the evil one. (Jn. 17:15)

John points out that this gift of physical safety granted to the disciples is but a symbol of their eternal salvation, which will come to them through the Name of Jesus. ". . . (This was to fulfill what he had said, 'I have not lost one of those you gave me.') (Jn. 18:9).

Simon Peter represents the disciples' reaction to the arrest of Jesus:

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the slave of the high priest, severing his right ear. (The slave's name was Malchus.) At that, Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back in its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?" (Jn. 18:10-11)

John clearly presents two portraits for comparison: a portrait of Jesus and one of Peter, the representative disciple. The behavior of Peter is contrasted with that of Jesus. Our Lord reveals that He would impede His arrest with divine power if He so willed, but He allowed Himself to be arrested and bound. With good intentions and a certain degree of human heroism in the face of such odds, Peter strikes the first blow for the Kingdom of God by cutting off the ear of Malchus. (This instance makes one wonder how often God has had to undo the work of well-intentioned disciples before the Divine

Plan could truly unfold.) We are presented with a picture of misguided zeal flowing from a complete lack of insight as to the real meaning of the Lord's Passion. It recalls the scene from the Gospel of St. Matthew when the Lord first related to the disciples the suffering He would endure:

From then on, Jesus (the Messiah) started to indicate to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly there at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and to be put to death, and raised up on the third day. At this, Peter took him aside and began to remonstrate with him. "May you be spared, Master! God forbid that any such thing ever happen to you!" Jesus turned on Peter and said, "Get out of my sight, you satan! You are trying to make me trip and fall. You are not judging by God's standards, but by man's" (Mt. 16:21-23).

The scene in the Garden echoes once again, *"You are not judging by God's standards, but by man's" (Mt. 16:23). "Put back the sword. Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?"* Jesus does not merely accept the cup of suffering, but He resists any attempt to deprive Him of it. It is the role of Satan to separate man from the will of God. *"Then the soldiers of the cohort, their tribune, and the Jewish guards arrested Jesus and bound him. They led him first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year." (Jn. 18:12-13)*

"Simon Peter, in company with another disciple, kept following Jesus closely." (Jn. 18:15) John tells us that Peter *"kept following Jesus closely."* Peter loves Jesus, but it is not enough. Jesus tells him, *"... I am going where you cannot follow me now; later on you shall come after me." 'Lord,' Peter said to him, 'why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you!'" (Jn. 13:36-37).* Peter neither understands himself nor the forces to be conquered before he can follow Jesus. Our Lord knows Peter will follow his own will and desires. He will be disgraced. *"You will lay down your life for me, will you?" Jesus answered. 'I tell you truly, the cock will not crow before you have three times disowned me!'" (Jn. 13:38)*

In the next scene, Jesus stands before Annas. This man had held the office of high priest from 6 to 15 A.D. Traditionally, this office was held for life. Under the Romans, it became a political pawn bestowed upon men able to cooperate satisfactorily with their conquerors. Four sons of Annas later

became high priests. At the time of the arrest of Jesus, Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, was high priest; an office he was to hold for eighteen years, until the deposing of Pilate from office. Undoubtedly, the old man Annas remained a most influential power – perhaps the real power. Annas was an extremely wealthy man. From his religious position, he had been able to amass a fortune. All animals offered in sacrifice had to be without blemish. It was always easy to discover a blemish and reject the animal. Animals could either be purchased outside the Temple area or within it. Those purchased within the Temple were guaranteed to be without a flaw. These animals all belonged to the House of Annas. The place of purchase within the Temple was known as the Bazaars of Annas. This was a means to exploit the people, for a pair of doves, which sold for 4 pence outside the Temple were 75 pence within the Temple. The House of Annas is historically notorious. We read in the Talmud: *“Woe to the house of Annas! Woe to their serpent’s hiss! They are High Priests; their sons are keepers of the treasure; their sons-in-law are guardians of the Temple; and their servants beat the people with staves.”*

When Jesus drove the animals and money-changers out of the Temple, he personally attacked the vested interests of the House of Annas and indirectly branded Annas and his family as *“thieves.”* Even though Annas and Caiaphas were religious leaders of Israel, they were incapable of dealing justly with Jesus. They could not serve two masters. They loved money, not God. Though they were men consecrated to God by their ordination, they were men who willingly served the lord of this world!

The trial of Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas is a pretense. They have already condemned Him without even hearing the evidence against Him. Nicodemus protested against the illegality of the procedures. Jesus stands convicted before Annas. He is merely being interrogated – in order to gain information to be used before Pilate.

The two questions put to Jesus by Annas concerned His disciples and His teachings. Both could have had political and religious implications. On the religious level they may have reflected the charge that Jesus was a false prophet. This is believed to be the real charge against Jesus. An ancient Jewish reference, Talbab, Sanhedrin 43a, relates that Jesus was executed for practicing sorcery and exciting Israel to apostasy. The marks of the false prophet given in Deuteronomy 13:2-6 and 18:20 are that he leads others astray and he falsely presumes to speak in God’s name. According to Luke,

this is the first accusation before Pilate: *“We found this man subverting our nation, opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar, and calling himself the Messiah, a king”* (Lk. 23:2).

Jesus stands up to his interrogators and denies nothing. Jesus defends himself by appealing to the openness of his ministry: *“I have spoken publicly to any who would listen. I always taught in a synagogue or in the temple area here all the Jews come together. There was nothing secret about what I said”* (Jn. 18:20). With this defense, Jesus indicates their violation of Judaic justice. In Jewish law, a man could be condemned of a capitol offense only on the testimony of two witnesses and never on his own testimony.

“Why do you question me? Question those who heard me when I spoke. It should be obvious that they will know what I said.” At this reply, one of the guards who was standing nearby gave Jesus a sharp blow on the face. “Is that the way to answer the high priest?” he said. Jesus replied, “If I said anything wrong, produce the evidence, but if I spoke the truth, why hit me?”

(Jn. 18:21-23)

(When the morality of Jesus conflicts with a man’s method of making money and enriching himself, the Annas in him will begin to reveal itself.)

At the same time as Jesus defends himself, we see that the disciple Peter is unable to handle his situation. Peter, who has heard these teachings of Jesus, denies he knows the Teacher. We read:

All through this, Simon Peter had been standing there warming himself. They said to him, “Are you not a disciple of his?” He denied it and said, “I am not!” “But did I not see you with him in the garden?” insisted one of the high priest’s slaves – as it happened, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had severed. Peter denied it again. At that moment, a cock began to crow.

(Jn. 18:25-27)

There is a tradition that says, in later years, when the enemies of Peter would see him walking through the street, they would imitate the crowing of the cock.

When Peter denied being with the New Adam in the garden, he cut himself off from the salvation that flowed from the unity with Jesus. Truly, Jesus was never more alone in this world than at the moment He was disowned by His disciple. Indeed, Jesus was ashamed of Peter. We are told He was being led through the courtyard to the house of Caiaphas at this moment. He turned and looked at Peter! Fortunately for his salvation, Peter was ashamed of himself.

Three accounts tell us that he wept, and Matthew and Luke add, "*bitterly.*" When his words, "*I am not!*" re-echoed in his heart, did he hear their full significance? Jesus had answered, "*I am,*" signifying the fullness of life, of godliness, and Peter had said, "*I am not!*" To be not of Christ is to be not of life. In the mind of John, if one was not His disciple, one was not! Or one was on the way to being nothing! Jesus had said, "*without me you can do nothing!*" In John's mind, without Jesus we could not truly be anything!

John tells us that at daybreak they brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the praetorium to Pilate. Pontius Pilate, appointed prefect by Rome, represented the political power of the world. During the reign of Herod the Great, all Palestine had been under the reign of Herod. Rome made Herod King of the Jews. At his death, Herod divided the kingdom among his three sons: Antipas, Philip and Archelaus. Archelaus ruled over Judea and Samaria. He ruled so unjustly that the Jews themselves petitioned Rome to appoint a prefect over the province. Pontius Pilate ruled over this province from 26 to 36 AD.

A good amount of information about Pilate comes to us from Jewish writings. The picture presented in the Scriptures is much more favorable. Josephus wrote of Pilate's political blunders and his atrocities. Before the trial of Jesus, the Jews had already forced Pilate, on two different occasions, to back down on a stand he had taken. His political undoing came after the death of Jesus in 35 A.D. Pilate cruelly crushed a small revolt among the Samaritans who were regarded as loyal friends of Rome. The Roman delegate in Syria intervened and Tiberius ordered Pilate back to Rome. Perhaps the Scriptures' more sensitive picture of Pilate represents the effort of the early Church to survive in a Roman world. As we see from Acts, the first great enemies of the Christian Community were not the Romans, but the Jews.

Pilate may have cooperated with the chief priests in putting a possible

troublemaker under temporary arrest during a dangerous festival period. No doubt the episode of Palm Sunday was known to him and he had a man arrested whom he feared to be a revolutionary. Now that the Jewish leaders presented Jesus to him as a prisoner, he had to follow the legal format of an official trial. A record would be kept, and Pilate had to protect himself from later charges of misconduct in legal matters.

Pilate now finds himself acting as judge in the case involving Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Before the trial ends, Pilate is placed on trial and stands condemned. Perhaps in this instance we see most clearly why Jesus is Judge.

The trial is not a matter of the people versus Jesus, but the world, symbolized by the Jewish leaders, versus Truth embodied in the Person of Jesus. It is truly a war between hell and heaven. The world is the dominion of Satan; Jesus is the dominion of God. The men represent a world alienated from the Father through submission to evil. Jesus, as God's Presence on earth, reveals to the world the extent of its alienation from its Creator and its affiliation with evil. The world demonstrates its satanic rebellion against God by its projected hatred against Jesus, the image of His Goodness.

Pilate desires to remain neutral. He maneuvers in order not to become involved with Jesus. He refers the person of Jesus back to the Jewish leaders and then later to Herod. When this fails, he is forced to confront Jesus. He sees the reality of the situation: Jesus is innocent and has been delivered up out of envy and hatred. At this point, he knows in his heart who is innocent and who is guilty. He seeks to avoid the responsibility of this knowledge. To decide for Jesus is to decide against the Jewish leaders. This may not be to his advantage. He seeks to avoid making a personal decision in favor of Jesus by asking the Jewish people to decide in favor of Jesus, instead of Barabbas.

The world loves its own; they choose Barabbas. They have made their decision about Jesus: He must die. Pilate must decide. It is not merely a matter of acknowledging what is truth and right. This Pilate does: "*Speaking for myself, I find no case against this man*" (Jn. 18:38). He must personally choose what is right. (As a little girl said, "You must not just say, 'No,' you must do 'no!'") Pilate understands the choice to be made and he expresses it when he says, "*Do you not know that I have the power to release you and the power to crucify you?*" (Jn. 19:10). He knows that he ought to decide in favor of Jesus and release Him. He has the power to do so; it will be a decision for

the truth; perhaps even a decision for God. He felt a certain fear when the Jews opposed to Jesus told him, *“He must die because he made himself God’s Son.”* Pilate decided to compromise! Too late will he discover that to compromise the truth is no compromise, but a decision against truth – a choice of evil.

John describes with subtle irony the encounter of Pilate with the Jewish leaders. They have most seriously violated the Law in their unjust condemnation of Jesus. Yet they scrupulously observe the laws of ritual purity. They will use Pilate to destroy their enemy, but are extremely careful not to be guilty of ritual impurity that would keep them from eating the Passover lamb: *“They did not enter the praetorium themselves, for they had to avoid ritual impurity if they were to eat the Passover supper. Pilate came out to them”* (Jn. 18:28).

The trial will be enacted upon two stages. One stage is the courtyard before the praetorium. This stage, resounding with lies, injustices and hatreds, represents the world and its power. The second stage is within the quiet of the praetorium where Jesus awaits. Here, there is calm and reason. This stage represents the soul of Pilate. John depicts Pilate passing from one stage to the other, symbolizing the inner struggle within the soul of the man. As he grows in knowledge of Jesus’ innocence, the pressure of the world grows to condemn Jesus.

Pilate opens the trial with the expected legal formula: *“What accusation do you bring against this man?”* Apparently, he already knows the charge. The Jewish leaders insolently reply, *“If he were not a criminal we would certainly not have handed him over to you.”* Pilate retorts, *“Why do you not take him and pass judgment on him according to your law?”* *“We may not put anyone to death,”* they answer and reveal their expectations. (Once Jesus enters into a man’s life, no one else can deal with Jesus for us.) They desire that Pilate put the accused to death for them. To make this easy for him, they accuse Jesus of a crime against the state.

Pilate returns inside where the atmosphere is calm. He summons Jesus before him and asks, *“Are you the King of the Jews?”* When there is no openness to truth, Jesus remains silent before his enemies and accusers. He responds to Pilate, *“My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my subjects would be fighting to save me from being handed over to the*

Jews. As it is, my kingdom is not here” (Jn. 18:36). Jesus assures Pilate that He is no political threat to Roman rule. Jesus speaks about His Kingdom and not Himself. He distinguishes between a political kingdom and spiritual kingdom. His Kingdom does not belong to this world, but belongs to the realm of the Spirit – rather than that of the Flesh. Jesus does not deny that His Kingdom will affect this world, but He denies it uses the means of this world to establish its reign over men.

The theme of Jesus’ kingship dominates the entire trial. Pilate asks, “*So, then, you are a king?*” Jesus does not refuse to be known as a King, but He knows the concept can convey an improper conception of His kingship: “*It is you who say I am a king.*” This answer is a reluctant “yes” that demands clarification: “*The reason I was born, the reason why I came into the world, is to testify to the truth. Anyone committed to the truth hears my voice*” (Jn. 18:37).

Only what is true has to do with the Kingdom of Jesus. The “*truth*” for John is the ultimately real – that which endures when all else passes away. It is equivalent to the heavenly Kingdom. When Jesus says He came into the world to testify to the Truth, He indicates His life to be a veritable revelation of the Divine Reality. The man committed to the eternal hears the voice of Jesus. This means he listens with understanding and acceptance. The man of truth obeys Jesus Christ. St. John writes in his first epistle: “*Little children, let us love in deed and in truth and not merely talk about it. This is our way of knowing we are committed to the truth . . .*” (1 Jn. 3:18-19). Only those who belong to the truth can understand in what sense Jesus has a Kingdom and is a King.

Jesus now personally challenges Pilate to recognize the truth: “*Anyone committed to the truth hears my voice.*” Pilate’s response, “*Truth! What does that mean?*” reveals his soul. He has no commitment to truth.

Pilate had already proven himself to be a political pragmatist in his previous encounters with the Jews. He used whatever means necessary to obtain his immediate goals, regardless of the injustice and immorality involved. Pilate has a popular prisoner on hand; a true revolutionary against Rome who only recently committed murder during an uprising in Jerusalem. The man was Barabbas and he had been sentenced to die. There was a custom to release a condemned man on Passover to commemorate the Jews’ freedom from

slavery. Apparently, the Jews had already petitioned for his release. Jesus could be useful to Pilate. Jesus was no threat to Rome. The fact of his innocence was of little importance at this point. Pilate had no intention of releasing Barabbas. He would force the Jews by one means or another to accept the release of Jesus:

Pilate went out again to the Jews and said to them, "Speaking for myself, I find no case against this man. Recall your custom whereby I release someone to you at Passover time. Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" They shouted back, "We want Barabbas; not this one!"

Pilate violates the innocence and the dignity of Jesus. His goal (to release Jesus and execute Barabbas) is good, but his means are evil. Evil begets evil. He is caught in his own web and will become a perpetrator of evil beyond human imagination. (There is always more implied evil effected in our sins than we even consciously dream of.) John tells us that "*Pilate's next move was to take Jesus and have him scourged*" (Jn. 19:1).

Scourging a prisoner prior to crucifixion was common practice. Death came slowly to the crucified, as crucifixion damaged no vital organs. The victims usually lived several days; eventually dying from suffocation, exposure and deprivation. Scourging was a severe penalty and hastened the death of the victim. A long leather whip, studded with pieces of lead and bone, was used. It ripped a man's flesh to bits. Few men remained conscious during the ordeal, and some died. Jesus silently bore this and the mockery that followed:

The soldiers then wove a crown of thorns and fixed it on his head, throwing around his shoulders a cloak of royal purple. Repeatedly, they came up to him and said, "All hail, king of the Jews!" – slapping his face as they did so. (Jn. 19:2-3).

Perhaps Pilate anticipated that Roman brutality against an acknowledged innocent man would so stir the pity and outrage of his fellow countrymen that they would demand his release. At any rate, after such an ordeal, Jesus would be no immediate threat to anyone. Pilate underestimated his opposition. He had no awareness of the powers involved. Regardless of his motivation, Pilate's behavior was criminal. All justice and integrity had been abandoned. He had taken a hellish road and he would find no exit.

Pilate made a mockery of Jewish dreams and expectations. He brought Jesus before the people, crowned in thorns and clothed in royal purple, and enthroned Him as a mock king! Pilate presented Him to the people with the words, *“Look at the Man!”* (Jn. 19:5). No one knew the exact implication of these words. Was it said in cynicism or admiration? For the Greeks, it was a title applied to their “dream” man, the “ideal,” the “perfect man.” For the Jewish, it could carry a messianic implication. We read in the Book of Zechariah:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Here is a man whose name is Shoot, and where he is he shall sprout, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. Yes, he shall build the temple of the Lord, and taking up the royal insignia, he shall sit as ruler upon his throne. The priest shall be at his right hand, and, between the two of them, there shall be friendly understanding. The crown itself shall be a memorial offering in the temple of the Lord . . . And they who are from afar shall come and build the temple of the Lord, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you.

(Zech. 6:12-15)

“As soon as the chief priests and the temple guards saw him they shouted, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’” This was a rejection not only of Jesus, but of Pilate’s plan. Pilate became exasperated with the Jews: *“Take him and crucify him yourselves; I find no case against him”* (Jn. 19:6). With this, Pilate sought to end the matter. The Jews knew Pilate had no intention of doing what they desired. They now altered their tactics. They knew where he was personally vulnerable. *“‘We have our law,’ the Jews responded, ‘and according to that law, he must die because he made himself God’s Son’”* (19:7). Now that, for which they really desired His death, comes out into the open. For John, this accusation is also false, in the sense that it implies an usurping of divinity by Jesus. Jesus did not make himself God’s Son. He is the Son of God!

It had always been the policy of Tiberius, the Emperor, to respect the people’s religious customs whenever possible. Pilate had already been reported to Rome for one such violation. Pilate had brought certain shields into the holy city with the name of Tiberius the Emperor inscribed upon them. The Emperor was regarded as a god and his name was displayed for reverence in the holy city. Pilate refused to remove them. The Jews reported the matter to

Tiberius and he ordered Pilate to remove them.

At that time, Pilate had the support, in Rome, of Aelius Sejanus, a close and powerful friend of Tiberius. Pilate owed his appointment as governor to the influence of Sejanus. Sejanus lost favor with the Emperor in 31 A.D. What if Caiaphas and Annas sent an emissary to Rome with charges against him? It could cause an investigation of his entire governorship. With no support in Rome, it could be politically disastrous for Pilate.

Pilate grows fearful. He had tried to avoid all personal involvement with Jesus. He has endeavored to use Jesus to his own political advantage. Now his own inner fears and uncertainties about Jesus force him to truly face Jesus: *“Where do you come from?”* There is no answer. No answer is given where there is no openness to acceptance.

Now is the hour of Judgment! Pilate reminds Jesus of his power over Him and Jesus responds as Judge over Pilate. Pilate is accused of misusing his God-given powers. *“ . . . he who handed me over to you is guilty of the greater sin.”* (Jn. 19:11) Pilate has not hated the truth as the Jewish leaders had, but, on the other hand, he has made no commitment to the truth. His commitment is indifference. In truth, it is impossible to be indifferent to the truth. Jesus' judgment increases his fears.

These men noted Pilate's fear. They play upon it: *“ . . . they shouted, ‘If you free this man, you are no “Friend of Caesar.” Anyone who makes himself a king becomes Caesar's rival’”* (Jn. 19:12). The matter is now reduced to that of Pilate's loyalty to Rome. Pilate becomes the accused and a victim of blackmail.

From Roman history, we know that certain men received the honorary title *“Friend of Caesar,”* in recognition for their loyalty and service to the Emperor. Some believed Pilate had received this title and the Jews now threaten him with it. The Emperor was harsh in dealing with disloyalty. As Tiberius grew old, he secluded himself on the isle of Capri. He jealously protected his authority and dealt cruelly and forcefully with anyone claiming kingship. Pilate would not risk a charge of protecting a man claiming to be a king. Pilate had failed to listen to the voice of Jesus, so he must inevitably finish in the service of this world.

John realized that in the rejection of Jesus, the Messiah, the implied rejection is of the covenant between Israel and God. The only accepted King of the Jews was Yahweh and His anointed one. As Isaiah expressed, *“O Lord, our God, other lords than you have ruled us; it is from you only that we can call upon your name”* (Is. 26:13). John used the last scene of the trial to dramatize an awful truth. When these Jewish leaders proclaimed the half-mad Caesar of Capri as their king, they renounced their status as God’s people. At the very moment, when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple area to celebrate the Old Covenant, the trial ended.

We read:

“Pilate heard what they were saying, then brought Jesus outside and took a seat on a judge’s bench at the place called the Stone Pavement – Gabbatha in Hebrew. (It was the Preparation Day for Passover, and the hour was about noon.) He said to the Jews, ‘Look at your king!’ At this, they shouted, ‘Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!’ ‘What!’ Pilate exclaimed. ‘Shall I crucify your king?’ The chief priests replied, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’ In the end; Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified” (Jn. 19:13-16).

The official death sentence was expressed to the accused: *“Ibis ad Crucem!”* *“You shall go to the Cross!”* There are too many reflections of the denying disciple, of Annas, of Pilate in all men. Jesus must go to the Cross to save us all from what we are.

The Prophet Ezekiel received this revelation from God:

My servant David shall be prince over them . . . their prince forever, I will make with them a covenant of peace; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and I will multiply them, and put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling shall be with them. (Ezek. 37:24-27)

For the Evangelist John, this terrible hour is the moment of the final apostasy of Israel. The rejection of Jesus is a rejection of Yahweh.

Five days earlier, all Jerusalem had proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of David,

King of Israel. Pilate, a representative of the most powerful political kingdom on earth, had proclaimed, to the very end, that Jesus was King of the Jews. He had been crowned and robed and now he would be enthroned. Jesus would reign from the Cross.

*Now has judgment come upon this world,
now will this world's prince be driven out,
and I – ONCE I AM LIFTED UP FROM EARTH –
WILL DRAW ALL MEN TO MYSELF.*

(John 12:31-32)

CHAPTER 21

THE ENDURING LOVE

INTRODUCTION

The crucifixion of Jesus carries us deep into the incomparable mystery of Divine Love. Human hearts and minds are stunned before this incomprehensible scene. It is God's way and not man's! Man calls crucifixion "*the most cruel and terrible penalty*" (Cicero), and the "*most wretched of deaths*" (Josephus). The Scriptures write, "*cursed is he that hangs upon the tree.*" The crucified are the most wretched of man and the cursed of God. And yet, the beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, died upon the Cross under a curse. The crucifixion of Jesus indeed manifests the depths of evil flowing from the sins of men. Only Jesus, as the Lamb of God – as the sacrificial Lamb offered on the altar of the Cross – could take away the sin of the world.

St. Luke expressed the scandalous effect of the Crucifixion when the disciples, on the road to Emmaus, commented, "*We were hoping that he was the one who would set Israel free*" (Lk. 24:21). Faith and hope in Jesus were destroyed by this death. Faith and hope revived only when the disciples came to realize it had been foretold in the Scriptures that Jesus had to suffer all these things in order to enter into his glory. (Lk. 24:27.) This is why, whenever the evangelists tell of Jesus' death, you hear the refrain "*according to the Scriptures.*"

There is a scene to be recalled from the Book of Genesis about the Crucifixion of Jesus. It serves well as a backdrop for Mt. Calvary:

Then God said [to Abraham], "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you." . . . Thereupon, Abraham took the wood for the holocaust and laid it on

his son Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two walked on together, Isaac spoke to his father Abraham, "Father!" he said. "Yes, son," he replied. Isaac continued, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the holocaust?" "Son," Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust." Then the two continued going forward. (Gen. 22:2, 6-8)

Jewish tradition relates that Isaac, carrying the wood for his own sacrifice, rested the burden on the hill of Moriah. This was where the Temple of Jerusalem would later be built. It was here, too, that another Isaac would pick up the wood of the Cross that was to be the altar of His sacrifice. As Abraham had accompanied his son to the end, so the Father's love walks beside the Cross of His Son. *"God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust." "Behold the Lamb of God!"*

John simply tells us, *"Jesus was led away, and carrying the cross by himself, went out to what is called the Place of the Skull [in Hebrew, Golgotha]" (Ver. 17).* There was a tale told among the Hebrews that the spot marked the place where Adam had been buried. *"There they crucified him and two others with him; one on either side, and Jesus in the middle" (Jn. 19:17-18), thus fulfilling the words of the Prophet Isaiah.* *" . . . He surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and he shall take away the sins of many and win pardon for their offenses." (Is. 53:12)* A criminal, condemned to crucifixion, was nailed or tied to the crossbar with his arms spread out, and the bar lifted into place on the vertical beam; the feet were fastened with nails or a rope; the body rested on a peg (sedile) that jutted out from the post. Rome forbade the execution of Roman citizens in such a manner.

KING OF THE JEWS

Jesus is now enthroned.

Pilate had an inscription placed on the cross, which read, "JESUS THE NAZARENE THE KING OF THE JEWS." This inscription, in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek was read by many of the Jews, since the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. The chief priests of the Jews tried to tell Pilate, "You should not have written, "The King of the Jews." Write instead, "This man claimed to be

King of the Jews.” Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” (Jn. 19:19-22)

All the Gospels mention the inscription, but only John attributes the title to Pilate. In John’s narrative, Pilate appears to be present on Calvary. The place of condemnation was the fortress of Antonio, adjoining the temple property. The traditional palace for the residence of the governor was approximately 50 yards from Calvary. Pilate could have seen the whole episode from his palace. The idea that Pilate was present at Calvary stems from the fact that none of those who address Pilate are said to have gone to him.

All the Gospels agree that the charge of being a king was inscribed against Jesus. Only John turns the charge into a worldwide proclamation of kingship and enthronement. For John, Pilate, as representative of the greatest political power on earth, proclaims to the world that Jesus has been enthroned as King. The proclamation was written in the language of the Jews and in the languages of the world, Greek and Roman. The insistence of the Jews – that it be rewritten – reveals the serious implication in the inscription. The refusal of Pilate to change the title affirms the Kingship of Jesus, despite all efforts of his enemies to stamp it out. Many see this as a sign that the Kingship, denied by the Jews, will later be acknowledged by the Gentile world – a fulfillment of the prophecy: *“And I – when I am lifted up – will draw all men to myself.”*

THE ETERNAL PRIEST

The next scene of the Passion presents Jesus on the Cross as the eternal priest of the New Covenant. We read:

After the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them four ways, one for each soldier. There was also his tunic; but this tunic was woven in one piece from top to bottom and had no seam. They said to each other, “We should not tear it. Let us throw dice to see who gets it” (Jn. 19:23-24).

This action recalls the words of Psalm 22: *“They have pierced my hands and my feet . . . they divide my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots” (Ps. 22:17-19).* The seamless garment is symbolic of the priestly garment worn by the high priest. Jesus is presented not only as King, but as High

Priest. Josephus describes the ankle-length tunic of the high priest as one long woven cloth, not composed of two pieces. The Book of Exodus speaks of the linen tunic of the high priest as “*a woven piece*” (Ex. 39:27). These priestly garments were so important in the minds of the people that both Herod and Pilate kept them under lock and key to demonstrate their control over the people. The priests were granted permission to wear them only on festival occasions. In the Book of Revelations, Jesus appears robed as High Priest: “*I saw seven lamp-stands of gold, and among the lamp-stands, One, like a Son of Man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a sash of gold about his breast*” (Rev. 1:13). We have already noted that the Book of Hebrews pictures Jesus going to his death as High Priest. On Calvary, Jesus is both the sacrificing Priest (“*No one takes my life from me, but I willingly lay down my life*”) and the sacrificial Victim – the Lamb of God. The Wood of the Cross is the sacrificial altar on which the sacrifice of atonement is made:

. . . that by his death, he might rob the devil, the prince of death, of his power, and free those who, through fear of death, had been slaves their whole life long . . . therefore, he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God on their behalf, to expiate the sins of the people. (Heb. 2:14-17)

St. Peter writes:

Realize that you were delivered from the futile way of life your fathers handed on to you, not by any diminishable sum of silver or gold, but by Christ’s blood beyond all price: the blood of a spotless, unblemished lamb chosen before the world’s foundation and revealed for your sake in these last days. (1 Pet. 1:18-20)

The early Christian Community beheld, at the death of Jesus, their eternal high priest entering into the Holy of Holies, the Presence of the Father, carrying His own Precious Blood sacrificed for the sins of men. Here, He remains to make intercession for all sinners until the end of time.

The earthly life of Jesus draws to the end. John told us that He loved his own to the very end. Jesus now demonstrates his loving concern for the Christian Community:

Near the cross of Jesus there stood his mother, his mother's sister Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. Seeing his mother there with the disciple whom he loved, Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, there is your son." In turn, he said to the disciple, "There is your mother." From that hour onward, the disciple took her into his care. (Jn. 19:25-27)

The Mother of Jesus is presented twice in the Gospel of John. Mary first appeared at Cana and now she appears at Calvary. The two presentations equalize and balance. For many Christians, Mary is involved only in the birth of Christ. They would like to leave her there! In the Fourth Gospel, Mary appears at Cana and Calvary. She is present at the Alpha and the Omega of His public ministry. The Scriptures place her at the beginning and the end of His earthy Life. In the beginning of the Gospel, in the accounts of Matthew and Luke, she appears as chosen by God, to be the Mother of the Messiah. At the end of the Gospel in the account of John, she appears as chosen by the Messiah to be the Mother of the Church.

We read in St. Luke: *"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leapt in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out in a loud voice, 'Blest are you among women and blest is the fruit of your womb'"* (Lk. 1:41-42). We are clearly informed here by the Holy Spirit that both Mary and Jesus are blessed! When some sentimental person attributed Mary's blessedness to nature, giving natural birth to Jesus, Jesus quickly corrected the illusion and He personally revealed the source of His Mother's blessedness when He said, *"Yea, rather blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."* The Scriptures have already confirmed that she is the most blessed of all women and now Scripture tells us why. She was the most obedient of all women to the word of God; she most perfectly fulfilled the Will of God. Whatever heaven or man may have called her, the only title by which she has ever identified herself has been, *"Behold the slave of God!"* Her total and utter loyalty to the Father qualified her to be the worthy Mother of a Messiah who would be obedient unto death on a Cross.

Obedience implies adhering to the Word of God. It is the role of the Tempter to separate man from the *"Word"* – the Will of God. Satan succeeded with Eve, but failed with Mary. She extinguished all the darts of the Evil One by her humble obedience to the Word of God.

The first book of the Bible speaks of *“the Woman”*: *“I will put enmity between thee and the woman.”* Between Satan and the woman, there would exist a gulf, a separation. This does not refer to Eve. She ended the separation; she closed the gulf by her sin. By her disobedience to God, she entered into the dominion of Satan. The last book in the Scripture, Revelation, recalls the Woman of Genesis. It describes a war between Satan and the woman and her seed. It relates the inability of *“the great dragon”* to touch the Woman. Both at Cana and Calvary, John deliberately refers to Mary as *“Woman,”* identifying the Mother of Jesus as the Woman of Genesis and Revelation.

Mary has a role in the Christian Community that must be recognized and accepted, in order to be at peace in the fullness of revelation and to enjoy the fruits that flow from the *“obedience to the truth.”* Mary is part of God’s Plan and not man’s plan. It is not God, but man, to his own detriment, who has decided Mary has no role to play in the Christian Community.

If the humble handmaiden of the Lord is presented as a rival claimant to the honor and glory due to Jesus, it should be clearly evident to be the work of the enemy. All teachings of the Christian religion are to be tested against divine revelation. The Scriptures tell us that Mary is the handmaiden of the Lord, the slave of God, blessed among women for she has believed, full of grace, mother of the Lord; her last recorded words were, *“Do whatever He tells you”* (Jn. 2:5).

In the light of Scripture revelation, it is blasphemous to place her in the role of the Adversary – Satan. Jesus never said that Mary was a stumbling block on His way, an obstacle in His path. Who presents her today as a detractor of Jesus? A rival to His Love? None but Satan and those he seduces and deceives into error, into being his ministers of defamation of the Mother of Jesus! What is more subtle and devilish than to do all this in the Name of Jesus?

May the Blood of Jesus defend us from such evil. May we always obey the dying command of Jesus and behold in the Woman, Mary – Our Mother! May she who crushed Satan’s proud head with her humble spirit defend us from the Evil One.

THE NEW EVE

With this preparation, let us now turn to a consideration of St. John's presentation of Mary at Calvary. His two presentations of Mary, at Cana and at Calvary, balance each other. The events at Cana symbolically demonstrated the comparison between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in which the Holy Spirit would be given in abundance. Mary's petition had been interpreted as the first prayer for the Holy Spirit and for the gift of the Holy Eucharist. The refusal by Jesus of Mary's intercession implied she had no role in his public ministry, but that she would be given a role when His "*hour*" arrived. John deliberately recalls the Cana scene by a repetition of vocabulary: "*his mother,*" "*woman*" and "*hour.*" John indicates something profound is taking place by using a Scriptural formula of revelation: "*Here is your son*" and "*Here is your Mother.*"

John has already used this formula within the Fourth Gospel. As previously indicated, a messenger of God sees a person and says, "*Behold!*" or "*Look!*" The seer then follows with a description revealing the mystery of the person's divine mission. We read in I Samuel that when the prophet Samuel saw Saul, the Lord exclaimed, "*Behold the man . . . this man shall reign over my people*" (1 Sam. 9:17, Douay Bible.) When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he cried out, "*Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (Jn. 1:29) In this formula, the one speaking reveals the mystery of the divine mission to be undertaken by the person mentioned in the formula. Jesus speaks both of sonship and motherhood from the Cross. Evidently, these two concepts are important in the Divine Plan and they are being brought into being by Jesus' death on the Cross. The importance of what has taken place is demonstrated by the words preceding it: "*After this, Jesus, knowing that all was not finished . . .*" (Jn. 19:28). What has occurred between Mary and the Beloved Disciple completes the work the Father has given Jesus to do.

The words addressed to Mary and the Beloved Disciple indicate an adoption process. In this process, the Beloved Disciple becomes the adoptive son of Mary and thereby, the adoptive brother of Jesus. We were told that all who accepted Jesus would be empowered to become God's children.

Jesus asked His mother to relinquish her natural affection for Himself – for His natural life that was quickly ebbing away and soon would be no more –

and exchange it for a completely spiritual love directed to *“the disciple he loved,”* representing all the disciples of Jesus. When Our Lord speaks from the Cross, *“Woman, there is your son!”* and to the Beloved Disciple, *“There is your Mother!”* the words are creative. They are spoken by the Creative Word of God – His Word had brought the world into being and now it brings a new creation into existence. We have arrived at the heart of Calvary’s mystery: the redemption. Jesus addresses His Mother as *“Woman”* to recall the divine prophecy concerning her role recorded in Genesis 3:15: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you will strike at his heel.”* Mary now becomes the New Eve, *“mother of all the living,”* as she accepts the Beloved Disciple. Upon Calvary, Mary, Mother of Jesus, *“according to the flesh,”* becomes Mother of the whole Christ *“according to the Spirit.”* As Mother of the Messiah, Mary’s role is in the struggle against the satanic serpent; at the foot of the Cross she is entrusted with offspring whom she must protect in the continuing struggle between Satan and followers of the Messiah. John again will refer to her role in Revelations:

When the dragon saw that he had been cast down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the boy. . . . Enraged at her escape, the dragon went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep God’s commandments and give witness to Jesus. (Rev. 12:13, 17)

John’s picture of the Mother of Jesus becoming the Mother of the Beloved Disciple recalls to mind the picture of Israel as Lady Zion, giving birth to a new people in the messianic age. This imagery flows over into the imagery of the Church, who brings forth children molded after Jesus and cares for them as a mother does a child. The new relationship between Mary and the Beloved Disciple symbolizes the loving relationship that will bind the Church and Christians. The Beloved Disciple has no difficulty in accepting Mary as his spiritual mother or the Church she symbolizes, represents and protects.

When John writes that Jesus *“bowed his head, and delivered over his spirit”* (Jn. 19:30), he pictures Jesus breathing His last breath over the heads of His Mother and the Beloved Disciple. For John, this is a symbol of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the Christian Community. Earlier, John states, *“There was, of course, no Spirit as yet, since Jesus had not yet been glorified”* (Jn. 7:39).

At this hour of Jesus' glorification, as Jesus returns to the Father, the mission of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Son and the Father, has commenced. A new creation has occurred, flowing from the work of the New Adam, assisted by the New Eve.

We read:

After that, Jesus, realizing that everything was now finished, said to fulfill the Scripture, "I am thirsty." There was a jar there full of common wine. They stuck a sponge soaked in this wine on some hyssop and raised it to his lips. When Jesus took the wine, he said, "Now it is finished." Then he bowed his head, and delivered over his spirit" (Jn. 19:28-30).

John presents the death of Jesus as the completion of all that the Father had given Him to do; a task described beforehand in the pages of the Holy Scriptures. The life of Jesus ends with a reference to His handing over of His Spirit. This indicates that Jesus' own Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, will now take up the ministry and work of Jesus. *"If I do not go away, the paraclete will never come to you."*

The common wine offered to the dying Jesus symbolizes once again the old wine of the Old Testament that had grown sour; an old spirit that could not give life any more than the water of Jacob's Well could forever quench the thirst of man. The thirst of Jesus symbolizes the thirst of God's people for the good wine saved until last, for the messianic age inaugurated by His death, when the Holy Spirit would be poured into the hearts of men. Jesus deliberately accepts death because it is the completion of God's plan of salvation; but death does not come until he signals his readiness to die. *"It is finished!" is a cry of Victory!*

Since John had affirmed that those who believed in Jesus were to receive the Spirit once Jesus had been glorified, it is understandable that at this climactic moment there would be a symbolic reference to the giving of the Spirit. John emphasizes that Jesus handed over the Holy Spirit to those at the foot of the Cross, in particular, to his Mother who symbolizes the Church and to the Beloved Disciple who symbolizes the true Christian.

After Jesus dies, John relates:

Since it was the Preparation Day, the Jews did not want to have the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, for that Sabbath was a solemn feast day. They asked Pilate that the legs be broken and the bodies be taken away. Accordingly, the soldiers came and broke the legs of the men crucified with Jesus, first of the one, then of the other. When they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. One of the soldiers thrust a lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. (This testimony has been given by an eyewitness, and his testimony is true. He tells what he knows is true, so that you may believe.)

(Jn. 19:31-35)

FINISHED – BUT NOT ENDED

John emphasizes that Jesus is dead and from the side of the dead Christ flows water and blood. These two concepts are so important to his theological thought that he mentions these facts have been verified by an eyewitness. The death of Jesus is certified. The very birth of the Church is being symbolized in this episode. John would carry our minds back again to the Garden of Eden when God cast a deep sleep on Adam and, while he was asleep, God brought forth, from his side, the “*creation*” of Eve. Jesus is now dead, but His death is life-giving; from the death of the New Adam flows a new creation, the new Israel, the Church. This John symbolizes when he relates that from the side of the dead Jesus flows water and blood. John wants us to understand that Jesus’ death is not the end of life. It is the beginning of life! The drama of the Cross does not end in death, but in Life. This is the glorification of Jesus and the Victory of the Cross.

From the study of the Fourth Gospel, we are aware that “*flowing water*” or “*living water*” is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and a sacramental symbol of Baptism. The blood flowing from the side of Jesus represents the Eucharist, the sacrament by which Christian life is nourished. From the death of Jesus flows the life and nourishment of the Christian Community. St. Augustine writes that from the side of Jesus “*flowed forth blood and water, in which we see the sacraments by which the Church is built up.*”

John completes his pictures by a reference to the Paschal Lamb. He had

begun with John the Baptist's proclaiming, "*Behold the Lamb of God.*" He ends with the completion of the Sacrifice of the Passover Lamb: "*Not a bone of his shall be broken.*" And John recalls to our mind the prophecy of Zechariah:

I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and petition; and they shall look on him whom they have thrust through, and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son, and they shall grieve over him as one grieves over a firstborn. . . . On that day, there shall be open to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a fountain to purify from sin and uncleanness.

(Zech. 12:10; 13:1)

Of this Crucified Jesus, John wrote in the Book of Revelation:

. . . To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his own blood, who has made us a royal nation of priests in the service of his God and Father – to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen. See, he comes amid the clouds! Every eye shall see him, even of those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth shall lament him bitterly. So it is to be! Amen. (R. 1:5-7)

CALVARY REVISITED

For Catholics, the Holy Eucharist is our constant memorial of the unforgettable death of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For the Eucharist is both a sacrament and a sacrifice. It is a sacrament insofar as Jesus is received under the appearance of bread and wine for the nourishment of Christian life. As a sacrament, the Eucharist is directed towards the nourishment of the soul – "*our daily bread.*" The Eucharist is a sacrifice insofar as Jesus is offered as a sacrificial gift to God. As a sacrifice, the Eucharist is offered to the glorification of God. This is called in the Church the Sacrifice of the Mass.

The Sacrifice of the Mass is essentially linked to the Sacrifice of the Cross. The sacrifice of the Mass is the reenacting of the Sacrifice of the Cross, insofar as the sacrificial Body and the sacrificial Blood are made truly present under the separate species of bread and wine. This symbolically represents

the real separation of the Body and Blood of Christ on the Cross.

The words of Jesus indicate that He instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper to be a sacrifice: *“This is my body which shall be given up for you”* and *“This is my blood, which shall be shed for you.”* *“To give up the body”* and *“to shed blood”* are biblical, sacrificial terms. They express the offering of a true and proper sacrifice. *“Do this in commemoration of me”* makes the Eucharistic sacrifice to be a permanent institution of the New Testament.

The Mass is the living memorial of the death of Jesus; not in the sense of merely recalling the memory of Jesus’ death, but as an actual mystical renewal of the supreme sacrifice. The Liturgy calls for the presence of a crucifix before the eyes of the celebrant and the congregation, symbolizing that all minds and hearts are called to Calvary.

Jesus spoke of *“my flesh for the life of the world.”* The Mass makes this a reality. The Book of Revelation speaks of the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. The Sacrifice of Jesus took place in time, but it is a timeless act. The Sacrifice of Jesus is in the eternal present. Through the Mass, the eternal Sacrifice of Jesus was made present yesterday, is made present today, and will be made present tomorrow. Through the Mass, Calvary is always here and now!

The Sacrifice of the Mass is the application of the fruits of the Sacrifice of the Cross to sinful mankind in need of salvation. These fruits are applied to the individuals participating in the sacrifice. *“. . . Seeing the blood, I will pass over you: thus, when I strike the land of Egypt, no destructive blow will come upon you.”* (Ex. 12:13) We become *“holy and without blemish in God’s sight”* through Jesus Christ.

The Sacrifice of the Mass in no way detracts from the Sacrifice of the Cross. It draws its whole power from the Sacrifice of the Cross. The sacrificial Gift is the Body and Blood of Christ – the whole God-Man. The bread and wine give a sensible presence to the sacrificial Gift, but do not of themselves belong to the sacrificial Gift.

Jesus of the Mass is the Resurrected Christ whose sacred body bears the wounds of Calvary; from Him flows streams of light flooding the Eucharistic celebration with the peace and joy resulting from His victory over sin. In the

Mass, we rejoice, because our God is a God of the living!

The primary sacrificing Priest is Jesus Christ; the human priest is but the servant and representative of the Lord through whom Jesus speaks the words of consecration over the bread and wine. One important distinction between Calvary and the Mass must be borne in mind: On the Cross the sacrificial Gift was offered in a bloody manner, by a real separation of the Body and Blood; in the Holy Mass, it is offered in an unbloody manner, by a mystical separation of the Body and Blood. Jesus cannot die again.

Isaiah proclaims a priesthood from among the Gentiles for the messianic era: “*Some of these I will take as priests and Levites, says the Lord*” (Is. 66:21). The Prophet Malachi proclaimed a sacrifice among the Gentiles:

For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, my name is great among the nations; and everywhere they bring sacrifice to my name, and a pure offering. For great is my name among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. (Mal. 1:11)

The oldest Christian traditions refer to the Prophecy of Malachi as fulfilled in the Eucharistic celebration. We read in our earliest non-scriptural work, the Didache:

On the day of the Lord, collect together, break bread and give thanks, after having first confessed your sins. Nobody who has a dispute with his neighbor should join the assembly, until they are reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be desecrated. For this sacrifice is that of which the Lord saith: In this place and at that time, a clean sacrifice shall be brought to me; For I am a great King, saith the Lord of Hosts, “and my name is dreadful among the Gentiles.”

St. Augustine attests that,

. . . the daily sacrifice of the Church is the Sacrament; that is, the mysterious replica of the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross which was made once and for all time, and in which Christ was the sacrificing Priest and the sacrificial Gifts in one Person. The sacrifice offered by Christians is the universal sacrifice foretold by Malachi. (Tract.

adv. Jud. 9, 13.)

The Book of Hebrews says: *“We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat” (13:10).* The whole argument of Paul in I Corinthians, Chapter Ten, is based upon the assumption that the Eucharist is a sacrifice from which flows the sacrificial food received by Christians at the *“table of the Lord.”*

Less than twenty years after the Last Supper, St. Paul writes: *“Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes!” (Cor. 11:26).* As His death is proclaimed in time, it brings the eternal Gifts into the present. The Mass opens the eternal Treasures of Calvary to men who must be freely saved in time. It brings the power of Calvary into our souls. It brings us to Calvary. The Mass brings us into the death of Jesus. (As expressed in an old hymn – *“Let me hide myself in thee!”*) The Worshipper dies with Christ by dying to sin – a person’s death to sin is a heroic affirmation for Jesus. We are never more alive than when in the Mass; we die to sin. One cannot truly communicate with the victim of Calvary unless one wills to become one with the victim! Men who want no share in the Suffering of Jesus want no share in the Sacrifice of the Mass!

The Sacrifice of the Mass is both our Mt. Calvary and our Mt. Tabor (our Sinai). It makes the hours, days and years in the desert possible. The Bread of Life infuses into our hearts the obedience and self-sacrificing love of Jesus, bringing the Spirit of Life within man. It strikes deathblows to Satan’s hold over the soul. The Eucharist strengthens us to daily take up our Cross and follow the Master. Our desert journey only ends when our return to the Father is completed – consummated!

The Fathers at the Council of Trent confirmed the ancient teachings of the Christian Community as a Catholic Dogma: *“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” (De Fide).*

The Book of Hebrews is but one light shining on Calvary. We must see Calvary in the full glow of Christian Revelation. When we do, we shall eternally contemplate it.

The Bells of Consecration at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass announce the

Parousia – the triumphant presence of Jesus. May this longing for the Parousia among so many Christians be but their thirst for the Eucharistic Jesus!

John records the last words of Jesus: *“It is finished!”* Jesus completed the work given Him by the Father. Now He may go in Peace. Now He can rest from His labors. The King is dead and His Reign now begins!

While Jesus lived, He had nowhere to lay His Head. In death, His Mother had nowhere to lay His Body. The Lord provides. Already the uplifted Jesus begins to draw men. Two men, who could never admit they believed in Him while He lived, now found the courage to acknowledge their discipleship before the world after He died. What His life among them could not do, His death accomplished.

Afterward, Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus (although a secret one for fear of the Jews), asked Pilate’s permission to remove Jesus’ body. Pilate granted it, so they came and took the body away. Nicodemus (the man who had first come to Jesus at night) likewise came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes which weighed about a hundred pounds. They took Jesus’ body, and in accordance with Jewish burial custom, bound it up in wrappings of cloth with perfumed oils. In the place where he had been crucified, there was a garden; and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had ever been buried. Because of the Jewish Preparation Day, they buried Jesus there, for the tomb was close at hand. (Jn. 19:38-42)

The large quantity of spices indicated a truly royal burial for Jesus.

John ends the Passion narrative where it had begun – in a garden. From His labor of redemption, the New Adam now finds rest in a garden.

CHAPTER 22

THE NEW GENESIS

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Gospel is a Christian document on belief. John the Evangelist presents Jesus of Nazareth as an Object of faith. John carefully selects and edits scenes from the life of Jesus. Certain teachings and deeds have been presented. As John's narrative evolves, the unique personality of Jesus unfolds. Jesus of Nazareth appears as the Promised Messiah, but a Messiah going far beyond the expectations of the Jewish people. John reveals Jesus as Divine Wisdom Incarnate. He is presented as bearing the Divine Name. Signs and wonders demonstrating divine power are performed. Their purpose is to lead the beholders (and later the readers) into placing a divine faith in Jesus, a faith equivalent to the faith one should have in the heavenly Father. Jesus is presented as a personal Object for our divine worship.

The Fourth Gospel was written in order to produce this quality of faith, not to stimulate a superficial admiration of the Person and Power of Jesus, but a whole-hearted commitment to the Person and Way of Jesus. A commitment to His Person is a commitment to the Way! By such a faith, the believer comes to eternal life. More accurately, God's eternal life comes to the believer here and now in time! This quality of faith brings the Power of heaven into the life of the believer. This grace-filled life enables the believer to live a godly existence in this world. The disciple of Jesus bears fruit in abundance and fruit that endures!

The conclusion of the Fourth Gospel clearly reveals the purpose of the Gospel:

*Jesus performed many other signs as well – signs not recorded here
– in the presence of his disciples. (Jn. 20:30)*

There are still many other things that Jesus did, yet if they were written about in detail, I doubt there would be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them. (Jn. 21:25)

But these have been recorded to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that through this faith, you may have life in his name. (20:31)

As mentioned in the beginning of our study, we have only one Gospel of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and four accounts of this one Gospel by Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. John's account closes the (written) Gospel presentation to the world. Chapter Twenty originally concluded the Gospel story. John climactically ends the Gospel narrative presenting the greatest sign and wonder accomplished by Jesus Christ – His Resurrection from the dead and His Ascension to the Father – and presenting the diversified effects of this wonder upon the disciples of Jesus.

John presents to his readers four symbolic examples in relating the reactions of Mary Magdalene, Peter, the Beloved Disciple and Thomas to the Resurrection. The last words to be spoken by a disciple in the Gospel are a full profession of faith in Jesus: *“My Lord and My God!”* The Gospel presentation ends on the final words of Jesus – words not addressed to men in Jesus' time. Jesus turns and looks to the future, to all those who are yet to hear the Word of God: *“Blest are they who have not seen and have believed”* (Jn. 20:29).

The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the supreme sign given by Jesus. The importance of the Resurrection to the Christian Community cannot be overemphasized. Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, best expresses the Christian Doctrine of Resurrection. This letter was written about twenty years after the death of Jesus, and is therefore, our first written account of the event. In Paul's teachings, we hear a good echo of the earliest thoughts and teachings of the Church.

Paul mentions the first list of witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus:

I handed on to you first of all what I myself received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried and, in accordance with the Scriptures, rose on the third

day; that he was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, although some have fallen asleep. Next, he was seen by James; then by all the apostles. Last of all, he was seen by me, as one born out of the normal course. (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

Paul explains to the Corinthians the importance of the Resurrection:

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content and your faith is empty too. Indeed, we should then be exposed as false witnesses of God, for we have borne witness before him that he raised up Christ . . . and if Christ was not raised, your faith is worthless. You are still in your sins, and those who have fallen asleep in Christ are the dearest of the dead. If our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of men.

(1 Cor. 15:14-19)

Paul teaches that the Resurrection of Jesus guarantees our own resurrection from the dead: “Christ is now raised from the dead; the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (Ver. 20). All of us shall be changed: “This corruptible body must be clothed with incorruptibility, this mortal body with immortality” (Ver. 53). If there is a natural body, be sure there is a spiritual body. “Adam, the first man, became a living soul; the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit.” (Ver. 45) It is thus with the resurrection of the dead:

What is sown in the earth is subject to decay [as a kernel of wheat or some other grain]; what rises is incorruptible. What is sown is ignoble; what rises is glorious. Weakness is sown; strength rises up. A natural body is put down and a spiritual body comes up.

(Ver. 42-44)

Here, Paul instructs us that the resurrected Body of Jesus is different from the Body buried on Good Friday; not different in the sense that it is an entirely different body, but different in the sense that it has undergone a total transformation in which the physical body becomes totally spiritualized. “Just as we resemble the man from the earth [Adam], so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven [the Risen and Ascended Jesus].” (Ver. 49) It is because of our own personal resurrection that Paul is able to encourage the Corinthians, “You know that your toil is not in vain when it is done in the

Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

MARY MAGDALENE

The Fourth Gospel presents Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb while it was still dark, searching in the darkness of unbelief for Jesus among the dead. The death of Jesus overwhelms her with grief. Her eyes are towards the grave, towards the dead. Life holds no attraction for Mary. Her strength for living is channeled into grieving and weeping over the dead remains of her Loved One. She weeps for what has been. There is no hope for life, only despair; a despair only deepened and darkened by the empty tomb: *“The Lord has been taken from the tomb! We don’t know where they have put him” (Jn. 20:2).*

Mary is an image of Israel itself, longing for its Lost Love. Pictured as the disturbed lover in the Canticle of Canticles, she awakens to discover her house empty and goes immediately into the by-ways, the city, its streets, into the lives of strangers, and among the graves, seeking, in vain, her Lost Love. The words of Psalm 63 express this search as man’s thirst and hunger for the living God: *“O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water” (Ver. 2).*

John indicates that the Resurrection of Jesus occurs on Sunday when he says that Mary comes *“early in the morning on the first day of the week.”* The phrase, *“while it was still dark,”* symbolizes the spiritual condition of unbelief in Mary. When Mary discovers the empty tomb, she runs immediately to inform Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Both disciples run to the tomb, but the Beloved disciple reaches the tomb first.

He did not enter, but bent down to peer in and saw the wrappings lying on the ground. Presently, Simon Peter came along behind him and entered the tomb. He observed the wrappings on the ground and saw the piece of cloth which had covered the head, not lying with the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the disciple who had arrived first at the tomb went in. He saw and believed. (Jn. 20:5-8)

The Beloved Disciple arrives first at the tomb and first at faith in the Resurrection. He believes without seeing the Risen Lord!

This is attributed to the unique loving relationship existing between Jesus and this man. Love has its reasons! Love empowered him to read the signs, bringing him to the conscious awareness that Jesus had risen. John, the Beloved Disciple, found, in the empty tomb, the evidence of resurrection. No one stealing a dead body would remove the clothing. The position of the clothing indicated the body departed from them. Lazarus came from the tomb wrapped in the symbols of death, indicating that death still held him. Jesus comes forth freed from death, victorious over death! Peter's thoughts are not revealed. We are merely told, *"With this, the disciples went back home."* The home of Simon Peter was in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee.

After the departure of Peter and John, Mary arrives back at the tomb. Mary's love, though not of the quality of the Beloved Disciple, wins for her the glory of being the first to see the Risen Lord. Mary, weeping, stooped to peer inside the tomb, as if unable to believe the evidence.

[She beholds] two angels in dazzling robes. One seated at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus' body had lain. "Woman," they asked her, "why are you weeping?" She answered them, "Because the Lord has been taken away and I do not know where they have put him" (Jn. 20:11-13).

In the same place, only a few moments before, Peter and John saw and heard nothing. Why is it that some people see visions and hear heavenly voices and others do not? Apparently, God deals differently with different people. Perhaps there is some quality of the spirit or nature that would make it more conducive or necessary for God to deal with a person in such an extraordinary, sensible manner.

The Saints, who have enjoyed these divine favors, have not overestimated them. They have even encouraged their disciples not to seek them or to give them too much importance. They knew such things could proceed from a disturbed nature deluding the person, or even be caused by the Evil One with evil intent.

Because of Mary's condition, the vision had little effect upon her. Mary turned away from the tomb and caught sight of Jesus standing there, *"but she*

did not know him.” John does not wish merely to imply that tears of grief blinded her eyes, making it impossible for her to see Jesus. Much more appears to be indicated by *“but she did not know him.”* Paul teaches that the transformation taking place at Resurrection is quite total. The resurrected body is as different from the former dead body as the flower is different from its seed. The Resurrected Jesus is not the physical Jesus known by Mary. She knew Jesus in the flesh and now, the physically spiritualized (pneumatized) Jesus stands before Mary.

When Jesus says, *“Mary,”* what eyes and ears are unable to perceive, the spirit of Mary knows – her heart immediately perceives. The spirit quickened at the sound of her name and her heart leapt for joy, crying out, *“Rabboni,”* meaning, *“my dear Teacher.”* Mary recognized Jesus by the love vibrating in her name. (*“The sheep hear his voice as he calls his own by name and leads them out.” [Jn. 10:3]*) Mary’s response with *“Rabboni”* was often used by the rabbis in prayer to God. By this use, John may be indicating Mary’s coming to fullness of faith in the Risen Lord.

Apparently, Mary immediately ran and fell at the feet of Jesus. Jesus said to her, *“Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Rather, go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (Jn. 20:14-17).* Mary’s reaction is understandable. She had found the Lord for whom she sought. She does realize that things have changed. The old relationship she enjoyed with Jesus can be no more. It belonged to His earthly life that has ended. What she had experienced led her to love Jesus deeply. What she now experiences brings revelation and wisdom to her love. Now she truly knows that the Object of her love is the Lord. Of necessity, she must love Him in a different way.

While Jesus is in heaven and Mary remains on earth, she must love the Lord in her service to his brothers as commanded by the Lord. Mary must witness to the brethren that Jesus is truly the Lord. *“Mary Magdalene went to the disciples. ‘I have seen the Lord!’ she announced. [Now she knows who He is!] Then she reported what he had said to her.” (Jn. 20:18)* Mary Magdalene is the first to give witness to the Christian Community of the Risen Lord.

Mary may well represent many today who have had their lives transformed by a religious experience and have failed to understand the importance and purpose of their experience. They wish to cling to their religious experience.

They seek to keep the effects of the experience alive. They search here and there for religious stimulation to keep alive, within their conscious awareness, the feeling of God's love. They utterly fail to realize the selfishness involved in their spiritual lives. Their search for God is but a disguised search for spiritual self-gratification that truly dwarfs their spiritual growth and keeps them babies in the spirit. They, too, like Mary, must find a new relationship with the Lord, in service to the Christian Community.

HIS APPEARANCE TO THE APOSTLES

John next presents Jesus' appearance to the apostles. By the preceding scene between Mary and Jesus, John desires to indicate that it is now the Ascended Lord who appears. Having now been glorified at the right hand of the Father, Jesus fulfills His promise of giving the Holy Spirit to the apostles. Both St. Luke and John present the coming of the Holy Spirit following the Ascension of Jesus, but the time sequence and the manner of the Coming of the Holy Spirit are different. Each presents the same truth within a framework that best illustrates his own theological insights.

John has placed each manifestation of Jesus on the first day of the week, Sunday. We know the Jerusalem Christians celebrated the Sabbath in the Temple and, when the Sabbath was completed at the setting of the sun, they would gather together for the Lord's Supper, which would be eaten on the first day of the new week – a new day beginning at sundown.

The different Gospel accounts confirm that the Resurrection occurred on Sunday. In time, Church legislation designated Sunday as the Lord's Day for all Christians. It should be noted that this is not in the Scriptures. In the Scriptures, the last day of the week is legislated as the Lord's Day. (This is why the Jews and the Seventh Day Adventists observe Saturday.) The Church changed the day!

We see from the Didache that, by the time of the writing of the Fourth Gospel, it was legislated that the Lord's Supper be celebrated on the first day of the week. It is possible that by placing the appearances of the Lord on Sunday, John desires to teach the Presence of Jesus at the Eucharistic celebration.

Thomas, for what reason we do not know, absented himself from the Community and the Eucharistic celebration, missing the revelation of the

Lord. The following Sunday, while Thomas is present with the Community, he sees the Risen Lord! Some believe the words placed on the lips of Thomas, *“My Lord and my God,”* were a Eucharistic acclamation used by the early Church. Those thoughts are not too far removed from those expressed by Luke when he tells us that the disciples in Emmaus recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Likewise, Mary heard Jesus on Sunday in the *“word.”* We read in John:

On the evening of that first day of the week, even though the disciples had locked the doors of the place where they were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood before them. “Peace be with you,” he said. When he said this, he showed them his hands and side. At the sight of the Lord, the disciples rejoiced. (Jn. 20:19-20)

In these verses, John teaches us that the Resurrected and Ascended Body of Jesus is both different and the same. His Body passes through material substances, and yet, it is the Crucified Body, bearing the prints of the nails and the mark of the lance. It is hard to resist the thought that John does not desire the Christian Community to see the Crucified Jesus passing through the bread and wine of the Mass into the midst of their being, into the heart of the Community.

When Teresa of Avila sought a criteria to distinguish between the Lord’s Presence and the presence of the Evil One appearing as the Lord or an Angel of Light, she discovered this phenomenon: where one spiritual experience always left her in peace and humility, the other left her disturbed and tempted to pride! From her experiences, she came to know the Presence of the Lord, because it always produced peace and humility. His entrance greeting is always *“Shalom!”*

The Lord taught the disciples, when entering a house, to first say, *“Peace be to this house!”* If a man of peace is there, your peace will remain. If not, it will return to you. He warned them not to enter such a house. Our Lord practices what He preaches! He always offers Peace to a soul when He comes. The soul must accept His peace, or the Presence of the Lord will not remain. Teresa of Avila understood quite well that there must be tranquility of spirit before there can be friendly discourse with the Lord.

John relates that the disciples rejoiced at the sight of the Lord. The prophecy

made at the Last Supper is fulfilled: *“You are sad for a time, but I shall see you again; then your hearts will rejoice with a joy no one can take from you. On that day, you will have no questions to ask me”* (Jn. 16:22-23). *“. . . You see me as one who has life, and you will have life. On that day, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”* (Jn. 14:19-20)

A NEW CREATION

Now that the disciples have come to the fullness of faith and are one with Jesus, He commissions them as apostles: *“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”* There is to be such an identification between Jesus and His disciples that the Christian Community now takes the place of Jesus in the world and continues this work. The faith and love of the disciples open them completely to the Power of Jesus. Jesus breathed on them and said, *“Receive the Holy Spirit.”* John carries our minds back immediately to the creation of the first man. When John writes that Jesus *“breathed,”* he uses the same word used in Genesis at the creation of man: *“The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and so man became a living being”* (Gen. 2:7). (There was an ancient belief that the breath of a holy man possessed miraculous powers.)

John describes a New Creation – a New Genesis! It is the first day of Creation and Jesus, as Lord of life, brings to birth the Church – the Christian Community. The Life of this Community is the Holy Spirit breathed forth by Jesus. God’s prophecy, in Ezekiel, to the Son of Man becomes fulfilled, the dry bones of Israel come to life: *“O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them. O my people! I will put my Spirit in you that you may live”* (Ezek. 37:12, 14).

Indeed, this is the day the Lord has made. This is the day the Christian Community celebrates; not so much as the day of rest, but as the Lord’s Day. The first day of a New Genesis!

The Lord now imparts a tremendous power to the disciples. A power flowing from the Holy Spirit within the Community: *“If you forgive men’s sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound”* (Jn. 20:23). Obviously the power to forgive sins flows from the atoning death of Jesus upon the Cross. Jesus definitely gives to the Church the power to forgive sins. It is not merely a power and commission to preach forgiveness of sin or

declare men free of sin, but the power to actually effect the forgiveness of sin. The truth is clearly stated and revealed, but denied by many. It is hard for the pride of man to believe that Jesus would have that much confidence in His disciples to grant them such divine authority. Here we have another instance where God's ways are not our ways. And, man's way often sets aside the way of God.

As the Father had sent Him, Jesus sends the disciples into the world in His place, to reconcile the world to God. They are sent to sinners to save them. They are given the power to remove the primary obstacle to reconciliation – sin! – to save sinners by freeing them from their sins.

The Church must judge the world as Jesus judged the world. When the world rejects the Word – refuses repentance – the Church must declare as Jesus did, *“Your sin remains!”* At times, it must declare, as Jesus did, whose sin is greater.

One day, in the life of Our Blessed Lord, a great crowd collected in front of a house where He resided. Several men, having been unable to take a sick friend to Our Lord through the door, had climbed to the roof, removed the roof in a section and lowered the sick man down beside Christ. Our Lord looked at the sick man and softly said, *“Thy sins are forgiven thee.”* Some of the scribes professed to be scandalized at Christ's claim to exercise such power, saying,

“Who is this man who utters blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Jesus, however, knew their reasoning and answered them by saying, *“Why do you harbor these thoughts? Which is easier: to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Get up and walk”? In any case, to make it clear to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”* – he then addressed the paralyzed man: *“I say to you, get up! Take your mat with you, and return to your house.”* (Lk. 5:21-24)

That was the beginning of men being scandalized at God's forgiving the sins of men through man. *“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”*

The power described in John is quite similar to that mentioned in Matthew: *“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you lose on*

earth will be lost in heaven” (Mt. 16:19). This saying comes within the context of Jesus’ promising the “keys” to Peter, which itself finds echoes in Isaiah, where keys have a symbol of royal authority. To Eliakim, the key of the palace is promised:

I will] give over to him your authority. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open. (Is. 22:21-22)

Here, Jesus used a rabbinical formula of authority expressed by, “*binding and loosing.*” Most often, this refers, in Jewish writings, to the imposing or the removal of an obligation by an authoritative doctrinal decision. Likewise, it refers, in Jewish circles, to the power of imposing or removing a ban of excommunication. It was a power that could affect the thinking of people and their personal lives.

We find in the Book of Acts, one of the best examples of the use of this power by Peter. Peter releases all Gentile converts from the divine obligation of circumcision, and James imposes, upon Gentile Christians, three Jewish laws to be observed. We read in Acts that certain Christians were teaching, “*Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved.*” This created dissension and much controversy in the Church. After much discussion, Peter took the floor and said to them, “*“Our belief is rather that we are saved by the favor of the Lord Jesus and so are they!’ At that, the whole assembly fell silent” (Acts 15:1, 11-12).*

James, Bishop of Jerusalem, rises and says, “*It is my judgment, therefore, that we ought not to cause God’s Gentile converts any difficulties. We should merely write to them to abstain from anything contaminated by idols, from illicit sexual union, from the meat of strangled animals, and from eating blood” (Acts 15:19-20).* We see later that Paul, in a letter to the Corinthians, excommunicates a member of the Christian Community because of the sin of incest.

The early Church believed it had authority from Christ and it exercised its authority. Christ clearly imparts power to the Church to forgive sins. She exercises this power through the Sacraments – chiefly Baptism and Penance. As Paul preached, “*God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18).* The Church ordains

ministers of reconciliation and legislates the use of the power to forgive sins for the good of the Christian Community.

As the text stands in John, there is nothing that associates the power to forgive or retain sins with the preaching of the Gospel, with Baptism, or with the Sacrament of Penance. We must look to the teaching and practice of the Church for its proper interpretation. The Catholic Church teaches that the power, given in John 20:23, concerns the forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism and is given to a specified group – the Eleven – who pass it on through ordination to others.

We have already indicated the influence that Qumran may have exerted on the early Church. The monks of Qumran taught that God poured out His Spirit on anyone who was admitted to the Community: *“He shall be cleansed from all sins by the spirit of holiness” (IQ. 3:7-8)*. This purification, resulting from a baptism, did not eliminate the necessity for later forgiveness in the Qumran Community. We read that the supervisor of the Community – equivalent to “bishop” in the Church – is to take pity on those under his care, just as a father takes pity on his sons; and he is to bring back all who have strayed: *“He shall loosen all the fetters that bind them so that no one should be oppressed or broken in his congregation” (CD 13:9-10)*.

John relates that the Apostle, Thomas, was absent when Jesus first appeared in the Cenacle. The other disciples kept telling him, *“We have seen the Lord.”* Thomas will not accept the word of the disciples. He puts no faith in their witness. His faith in Jesus has been so destroyed that he refuses to believe that Jesus lives unless he can see and feel Jesus for himself. He not only wants to see, but to feel! He falls into the category of men condemned by Jesus: *“Unless you people see signs and wonders you do not believe.”* Thomas’ answer to the disciples was, *“I will never believe it without probing the nail prints in his hands; without putting my finger in the nail marks and my hand into his side” (Jn. 20:25)*. Thomas demands a scientific investigation of the miraculous event of the Resurrection.

Jesus meets Thomas where he is. Our Lord appears to the Eleven the following Sunday and invites Thomas to *“Take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side. Do not persist in your unbelief! (Jn. 20:27)*. When Thomas beholds Jesus, all his doubts melt away and he comes to the fullness of faith without his scientific investigation. Thomas responds to

Jesus, *“My Lord and my God!”* Thomas sees beyond the sign, the appearance of what is revealed by the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. On the lips of Thomas rises the supreme profession of faith. Jesus is addressed as Yahweh Himself, fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus: *“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM.”*

During this particular moment of history, faith came through seeing Jesus. Now Jesus remains invisible from the world. Man must come to believe without seeing Jesus. After the Ascension of Jesus, a new age began – the age of the Holy Spirit – the New Genesis. Men must come to see the invisible Jesus through the operations of the Holy Spirit within their lives. The Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus. Jesus’ last words imply the latter faith is nobler: *“Blest are they who have not seen and have believed.”*

Chapter Twenty appears to have been the original ending of the Fourth Gospel. The present final chapter was added later. It preserves a very beautiful and early tradition of an appearance of the Risen Lord to Simon Peter. We have noted that Paul mentioned Jesus appearing personally to Cephas, Peter. Some believe that Luke incorporated the tradition into his gospel account, but presents it as an encounter when Jesus calls Peter to discipleship. When Luke’s account is examined, its similarity to the Fourth Gospel’s account is apparent and the conversation recorded would be more appropriate after the Resurrection.

SIMON PETER – THE SHEPHERD

The tradition suggests that after the death of Jesus and denial by Peter, Peter returned home and undertook his old way of life. If he had not lost faith in Jesus, he certainly lost faith in himself to be a disciple. He returned to what he knew best and was most comfortable with – catching fish. The Lord does not let Peter go. He comes seeking him where he is.\

As the scene opens in Capernaum, Peter is not alone; six of the disciples are with him. He informs them, *“I am going out to fish.”* And the others reply, *“We will join you.”* They fish all night and catch nothing. (John teaches us that without the Lord, our toil is fruitless and we indeed work in darkness.) When Jesus appears, it is light.

Just after daybreak, Jesus was standing on the shore, though none

of the disciples knew it was Jesus. He said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" "Not a thing," they answered. "Cast your net off to the starboard side," he suggested, "and you will find something." So they made a cast, and took so many fish, they could not haul the net in. Then the disciple Jesus loved cried out to Peter, "It is the Lord!" On hearing it was the Lord, Simon Peter threw on some clothes – he was stripped – and jumped into the water. (Jn. 21:3-7)

Peter arrives ahead of the rest and meets Jesus alone. *"Simon Peter fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord. I am a sinful man.' . . . Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid. From now on, you will be catching men.'" (Lk. 5:8, 10)* There is the portrait of Divine Forgiveness!

When they landed, they saw a charcoal fire there with a fish laid on it and some bread. "Bring some of the fish you just caught," Jesus told them. Simon Peter went aboard and hauled ashore the net loaded with sizable fish – one hundred fifty-three of them! In spite of the great number, the net was not torn. (Jn. 21:9-11)

There are several important symbolisms in this passage. The unique position of Peter is being displayed in his single-handedly bringing the large net of fish to Jesus. St. Jerome sees, in the number of fish, the then known species of fish, representing that all men of all races would be brought to Jesus. The unbroken net represents the Church that has room for all people. Perhaps the unique responsibility of Peter to bring the Church and its members to Jesus is symbolized here.

The crowning moment of Peter's life took place that early morn at a fish fry on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It was a private little party for eight, with Jesus Christ as Host and Cook. With consideration for their digestion, the gracious Host waited until after the disciples had breakfasted before bringing up the business at hand. Gazing directly into the eyes of Simon Peter,

Jesus asked: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" [Did "these" represent his boat, his nets, his old way of life?] "Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know that I love you." At which Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." A second time he put his question, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord,"

Peter said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus replied, “Tend my sheep.” A third time Jesus asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because he had asked, “Do you love me?” a third time. So he said to him, “Lord, you know everything. You know well that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep” (Jn. 21:15-17).

Christ has compared his Church to a sheepfold and Himself to the Shepherd of the fold – one fold, one shepherd. The lambs, the shearling, and the sheep compose the entire flock. Our Lord commissioned Peter to tend and feed and protect His flock. It is the duty of a shepherd. Christ Himself is the Shepherd of His Flock, but now, as He prepares to depart, He places Peter over His flock and entrusts them to him. But Jesus remains always the Chief Shepherd. (See 1 Ptr. 5:2-4.)

It has been noted that there is a custom in the New East of saying something three times before witnesses in order to solemnize it, especially in contracts that confer legal rights and authority. Jesus’ command to Peter before the disciples lends a special legality to Peter’s position of authority in the Church.

It is not only a scene by which Peter is made the Shepherd; it is also a scene of reparation, in which Peter is restored to discipleship. John mentioned a charcoal fire and this is sufficient to recall Peter’s denial. He stood before a charcoal fire warming himself the night he denied Our Lord. There is no recrimination against Peter – no “I told you so.” Jesus speaks of love. What is now important is the love of Peter for Jesus. Three times Jesus asked Peter to affirm his love. (When the question hurts, Jesus stops!) Every sin is a failure in love. Jesus seeks the reparation of love. As Peter expresses total love for Jesus, Our Lord entrusts the Church to him.

Immediately following Peter’s appointment, Jesus speaks of Peter’s death. This appointment demands a life of loving service that will demand that Peter lay down his life for the flock – for a true shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

“I tell you solemnly: as a young man you fastened your belt and went about as you pleased; but when you are older you will stretch

out your hands, and another will tie you fast and carry you off against your will.” [What He said indicated the sort of death by which Peter was to glorify God.] When Jesus finished speaking, he said to him, “Follow me” (Jn. 21:18-19).

Peter wanted to know about his companion and friend and so he asked the Lord what was going to happen to the Beloved Disciple: *“Suppose I want him to stay until I come.” Jesus replied, “How does that concern you? Your business is to follow me” (Jn. 21:22).*

A disciple can learn much from all this. What does Jesus ask of us? To love Him more than anything else; to have care and concern for our brothers; to follow Him and not to be minding God’s affairs with others. Make sure we attend to our business of following the Lord!

Tradition and Church History tell us how Peter followed the Lord. His first See was in the city of Antioch. In time, he moved to Rome and established his See. With Paul, Peter worked for the conversion of Rome.

When the persecutions of Nero broke out against Christians in Rome, Peter fled. Tradition tells us that in his flight from the city, he passed an old familiar face set towards the city of Rome. Over his shoulder Peter called, *“Domine, quo vadis?”* And the answer came back, *“I am going to Rome, Peter – to be crucified again.”* Peter stopped. He knew Christ would die again, but in him. Peter returned to Rome.

Peter before Nero, the Kingdom of God before the Kingdom of the World! It happens all over again. In condemning Peter, the world condemns Jesus all over again and condemns itself.

As the fisherman was led to the Vatican Hill, all the old unworthiness and betrayal flooded in on his heart and mind. Peter made his last request, *“I am unworthy to die as my Lord. Crucify me up-side down!”* If God granted vision to his dying eyes, he may have seen, 60 years later, coming up that same hill, Pope Sylvester, spiritual ruler of the world; and by his side, Constantine the Great, the material ruler of the world, and with them the Bishops, clergy and whole body of the faithful. The Seven Hills of Rome would be ringing with the praises of the Triune God. He would see the Emperor of Rome lay aside

his diadem and robes of state and, on the spot where he, Peter, now hung dying, the Emperor would begin to dig the foundation for the Church of St. Peter at Rome.

Linus succeeds Peter only to win his martyr's crown. Cletus followed Linus and went to his martyrdom. Clement is now the third successor of St. Peter as Bishop of Rome. John, the Beloved Disciple, is Bishop of Ephesus. Dissension arises in Corinth. Corinth is near Ephesus. Does the Church of Corinth appeal to John to intervene? No! But to Clement in Rome! Clement intervenes and settles the problem.

Origen writes in the second century: *"The chief authority for feeding the sheep was delivered through Peter, and upon him the Church was founded."* St. Cyprian writes in the third century: *"The Roman See is the Mother and Root of the Catholic Church."* In the Fourth Century, St. Ambrose writes, *"Where Peter is, there is the Church."* In the Fifth Century, the Council of Chalcedon, on hearing the decision of Pope Leo I, accepted it with the words, *"So do we believe. Peter has spoken through Leo."*

For nearly two thousand years, the rains have fallen and the floods have come and the winds have blown and beat upon that house; but it has not fallen, for it is founded upon rock. Jesus asked his disciples, *"Who do you say that I am?"* *"You are the Messiah,"* Simon Peter answered, *"the Son of the living God!"* Jesus replied, *"Blest are you, Simon, son of Jonah! No mere man has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. I, for my part, declare to you, you are 'rock,' and on this rock, I will build my church, and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:15-18).*

Father Thomas Judge, the Founder of the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate, wrote to the early members of the Cenacle around 1921:

I know not what evils the future will launch upon us, but remember, never be found in any faction or schism opposing Rome. If an Angel of heaven were to come down on earth and war against the Holy Father, refuse to surrender your allegiance to the Pope. Rally around the Holy Father of Rome for he is the standard-bearer of the Cross."

GOD BLESS YOU!

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