

HEART OF COMPASSION



The Prodigal Son, a detail, Rembrandt, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

MEDITATIONS ON THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO SAINT LUKE

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FORWARD

This present work, *Heart Of Compassion*, is part of a larger Catholic bible study, *Invitation to Christian Discipleship*, a seven year study which consists in lectures, summary of lectures and worksheets. *Heart of Compassion* is the summaries and work sheets for the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke.

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

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

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PREFACE

There is only one Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; there are four inspired versions of the one Gospel: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The word "gospel" means "good news". It reveals the good news about the salvation of mankind. As St. Paul explains: "I mean that God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's transgression against them." (II Cor. 5:19) The Gospel brings divine revelation to us. It reveals the love of God in Christ and his work of universal salvation.

The Church teaches: "By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man is made clear to us in Christ who is the Mediator and at the same time the fullness of all revelation." (Div. Rev. 1-2) Through Jesus Christ we come not only to know God and experience salvation, but we encounter in Christ the fullness of revelation as Jesus Christ is God Incarnated.

After the Apostolic times and between the Apostolic times and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the Church rejects any subsequent revelations that claim to be both public and divine. As the Church teaches, ". . .we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Div. Rev. 1-4)

God chose certain individuals as prophets and apostles to make know divine truth. This Divine Revelation, revealed through the preaching of the prophets and apostles, became the Religious Tradition within the believing community. This same Divine Revelation, recorded by inspired scribes, became the Holy Scriptures within the Church.

INSPIRATION AND REVELATION

We must not deduce from the above that the entire written Bible is to be understood as Divine Revelation. There is a distinction between divine revelation and divine inspiration. Much of what is written in the Scriptures concerns itself with the circumstances surrounding the revelation—both the

effects and the reactions to the revealed Will of God. We will have no problem if we bear in mind the distinction between revelation and inspiration.

The word "inspiration" come from the Latin word "inspirare", which means "to breathe into." To say the Scriptures are inspired implies that the Holy Spirit of God, in some manner, influences these writings. The Catholic Church, through the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, confirms the divine inspiration of the Bible and defines the nature of inspiration and divine revelation. We read: "Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors, or sacred writers, must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation." (Div. Rev. III-11)

This teaching is subtle and easily misunderstood. It insists divine revelation is limited to "that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation." Therefore, it is the intention of the sacred authors to teach those sacred truths needful and useful for salvation—regardless of the literary means used by the sacred writers to express these truths. We should not read more into the Sacred Scriptures than the Holy Spirit intended. We may say that every word of the Sacred Scriptures is inspired but not every inspired word is a divine revelation. To know what God intended to communicate through the sacred writers—and actually did communicate through their writings—calls for a proper interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures.

INTERPRETATION OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

A proper interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures seeks first to know what the author intended to write. This is called the "literary sense." In a word, the sense intended by the inspired human author and that sense actually expressed by the words used by the sacred writer. Therefore, a proper interpretation of the Scriptures seeks to know what the words actually expressed at that historical moment and what the author actually intended to express in the words and literary form used. Obviously, this is no simple task. Not only must the ancient usage of the language be understood, but equally important would be the circumstances and the culture in which the author lived and wrote.

There is a need to go back, at least nineteen hundred years, to properly interpret the sacred writers of the New Testament. The past is not the present and the past must be permitted to give its own voice. The sacred writers must be understood in their own world, if their message is to shine forth properly today. This demands much research on the part of biblical scholars.

The Second Vatican Council emphasized one of the most valid principles for the proper interpretation of the Scriptures: The best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself. A particular scripture must be seen in the light of the entire revelation. A proper interpretation of a particular scripture will be in harmony with the rest of revelation. For example: We read in Exodus 33:11: "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another." In the next verse we read: "You are my intimate friend. . . You have found favor with me." A literal interpretation of that isolated scripture would be that Moses looked upon the face of God. However, that would not be what the author intended. Previously he related that God said to Moses: "But my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives." Often it is necessary for the proper interpretation of a scripture not only to read other verses of the text but other sacred books in order to maintain that harmony rightly belong to divine revelation.

The written scriptures do not claim to be the fullness of divine revelation. The Church proclaims Jesus Christ to be the fullness of divine revelation. Christ remains with the Church and continues to guide it through the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit the Church possesses the complete treasure of revelation. It acknowledges the Holy Spirit to be "the living voice of the Gospel." The Church teaches that a proper interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures must not only be in harmony with the rest of the Scriptures but, also, in harmony with the traditional apostolic teaching of the Church. As the Holy Spirit is author of both—there is harmony between the revealed elements of faith. Therefore, the Church teaches: "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is committed to the Church."

Prayer must accompany the reading and studying of Scripture. Unless the Holy Spirit enlighten the reader the effort becomes, in the words of St. Jerome, as effective as stones skipping across a frozen pond. Without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the Scripture does not open its treasures nor serve the food giving life and nourishment to the human spirit.

The Church teaches that divine revelation demands no less than “the obedience of faith” which consists in a “full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals.” “If you hear the voice of the Lord today, hard not your hearts!” A faithful student not only believes the truth revealed but is guided by its light in everyday life.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

TO THE GOSPEL OF SAINT LUKE

The Third Gospel has been called "the most beautiful book ever written (Renan)." It is often referred to as a lovely poem. Christian writers of the second century testify to St. Luke being the author of the Third Gospel. In the prologue to this gospel written around 150 A. D., we read: "Luke, a Syrian from Antioch, a doctor by profession, an associate of Paul till the death of the latter, unmarried, and dying at the age of 84 in Boeotia in Central Greece." The same source also testifies that Luke wrote The Acts of the Apostles.

The very obscurity of the personage of Luke in the New Testament enhances the possibility that the authorship of the Third Gospel rests upon a genuine memory. It was the custom to attribute such works to men more famous. Without a doubt, this gospel account was written by a Gentile Christian for Gentile Christians. And, as to the tradition that it was written by Paul's "beloved physician", one scholar remarks: "The tradition has been disputed but not disproved."

St. Irenaeus claims that Luke wrote before the death of Paul, but St. Eusebius and St. Jerome hold it to be written after the persecution of Nero in 63 A. D. in which both Paul and Peter died. Some modern critics place the composition of the Third Gospel between 63 A. D. and 70 A. D. The majority prefer a date after 70 A. D. but before 90 A. D. The Third Gospel was known and accepted in Rome by 140 A. D.

Luke is unique among New Testament writers as the author of two volume work: the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Luke intended, as indicated in his prefaces, the reading of the Gospel to be followed by the Acts. He addressed both works to the same person, Theophilus. Luke is recognized as the first Church Historian. He endeavors to show that the Church is not some spontaneous and independent organization created by men after the death of Jesus, but a creation of Jesus Himself.

The Church begins within Luke's gospel account of Jesus. His account tells the story of the Founder of the Christian Religion. The Acts demonstrates how the Holy Spirit formed men in the likeness of Jesus and used them to continue His work—the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The Third Gospel and the Acts are intended to be seen as one continuous work—the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Both the Third Gospel and the Acts present the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the his gospel account Luke presents the Person and life of the historical Jesus. It has been called the first "Life of Jesus"—the story of the Savior Himself. Luke primarily presents the material about Jesus in such a way as to invite faith. Christians in the early church did not go from education to faith, but from faith to knowledge—catechesis. Faith came through hearing, that is, through preaching the Word. Luke set forth Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, as the one means for salvation. As we read in the Acts: *There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved. (Acts 4:12)*

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke presents Jesus alive within his disciples through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel account for Luke is not so much what is said about Jesus, as what Jesus is saying to mankind through the Church.

The internal crises within the Christian Community during Luke's lifetime would naturally be reflected in his evangelical writings. The two major problems concerning the faithful were the Parousia—the Second Coming of Jesus and the relationship of the Christian Community to Israel—particularly whether Gentile converts are obliged to fulfill the Mosaic Law.

With the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father, the final age has come—the end times has begun, the last chapter of history unfolds. Luke came to understand that even though Jesus is the End, He is also the Beginning. The Last Chapter is simultaneously a New Chapter—a new kind of history, the beginning of Church History. Luke not only beholds its beginning but intuitively senses its end rest upon a remote, future horizon. This insight determines and directs his work as a sacred writer and makes him the Father of Church History.

THE THEOLOGY OF LUKE

Luke envisions salvation history to be in three epochs or phases moving continuously from creation to the Parousia. Israel of the Law and Prophets falls within the first epoch. The very name 'Israel' means 'God reigns.' Jesus Christ stand in the middle phase. The time of Jesus is the time of salvation. Through Jesus salvation comes to mankind. He is the Savior of the world. Salvation is a historical fact, achieved in time past. The middle phase ends with the Ascension of Jesus; it brings to an end the historical time of Jesus. The dawn of the final age breaks with the time of the Church on earth. With the Coming of the Holy Spirit, the last epoch of history begins and unfolds. Luke will never imply that the time between the Ascension of Jesus and the Parousia will be brief.

The Lord is now in Heaven, but the mission of Jesus continues through His Church now equipped with the Holy Spirit. The Church inherits the place and mission of Israel to extend God's reign to all mankind. The Lord commissions the Church to a world-wide missionary task. It is to proclaim the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ. The Church lives under the rule of Jesus Christ who works through the Holy Spirit.

The task of preaching the Word was by no means confined to Apostles, or to an official group. We read in Acts: *The members of the Church who had been dispersed went about preaching the word. (Acts 8:4) And, Those in the community who had been dispersed by the persecution that arose because of Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, making the message known. (Acts 11:19)*

The primitive Church was a witnessing Church and so must be the Church throughout its history. Luke presents the style, method and content of Peter's and Paul's preaching in order to instruct future Christian preachers how to evangelize. According to Luke's mind, a Christian preacher could not do better than proclaim the Gospel as did Peter and Paul. Luke sets before the reader men as Stephen, Peter and Paul as examples of unwearied evangelists.

THE SECULAR GOSPEL

Some hold that Luke produced "a secular gospel" in which Jesus appears as a very graphic teacher of everyday realities. The Life of Jesus is the star that must guide the steps of men and women on their journey to the Father. The maximum development of the human personality was the Greek ideal. Jesus appears strong and fearless, wise and humble—as excelling in every virtue. It was especially in Jesus' prayerful attitude towards the Father that He appears as the example for all. More than any other sacred writer, Luke presents Jesus as a man of prayer.

As the Preface to the Gospel indicates, Luke seeks to present, as fully as possible, the Gospel message to a Gentile person. He does this as clearly and as attractively as possible in order to win the reader's heart to Christ and to make firm his faith. Apparently, Luke believed the existing gospel tradition failed to present Jesus in a way fully comprehensible to the Gentile mind. He seeks to do precisely that. As he indicates, he already possesses much written and oral material about Jesus. Some of the written material he will use, some he will rewrite and some he will omit; he will add new material of his own, no doubt gleaned from oral tradition.

Luke's principle source seemingly was Mark's Gospel account. The Gospel of Mark comprises 661 verses. Luke incorporates about 350 of these verses into his own gospel account. Another 325 verses found in Luke are also found in the gospel account of Matthew, but not in Mark. It is possible Luke also used Matthew's account. Many scholars hold, nevertheless, to the existence of another independently written source that both Matthew and Luke were dependent upon and very possibly Mark himself. They refer to this as "Q" deriving its name from "quelle", the German name for source. It is because scholars have noted the similarity of material in Mark, Matthew and Luke that they have been called the Synoptic Gospels and the Synoptic Writers. Within the Greek "synoptic" means "same". There are 1,149 verses in the Gospel of Luke. Five hundred and forty-eight (548) of these verses are peculiar to Luke. They no doubt highlight the gospel message Luke desired to impart to Gentile Christians.

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

The Gospel account of Luke has a particular social orientation. In keeping with this, the Gospel highlights the catholicity or universality of the Gospel and thereby of the Church. Luke explicitly expresses his belief that the Gospel is addressed to all people. He begins the genealogy of Jesus not with Abraham as did Matthew, but with Adam, the father of all mankind, "who was of God".

In Luke's presentation, the Samaritan appears as model of charity and gratitude. Gentiles appear as models of good conduct and ready faith. Luke gives a prominent position to women. More women appear in this Gospel than in any other. Luke desires to clarify that the Gospel did not include the Jewish attitude towards women. Luke emphasizes with a number of parables and sayings Jesus' friendship and compassion for sinners. He alone writes that the Son of Man has come to seek and save what is lost. (See 19:10) For Luke, salvation ought to create an atmosphere of joy and express itself in joyful praise.

Different persons—Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke and John—from their own unique religious experience share and enrich us with their own personal witness to Jesus. Their presentations are uniquely theirs and yet with all differences and uniqueness the same Jesus substantially appears. For in the midst of all this difference and individualism, the one Spirit works and prevails—the Holy Spirit whose task it is to bear witness that Jesus is Lord—and to accomplish this task through the lives of Christian men and women.

GOSPEL OF SAINT LUKE

INTRODUCTION LESSON

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS

(With the exception of your introductory lesson, you will be given Scripture readings and questions for six days. You should prayerfully meditate on them and seek guidance from the Holy Spirit in answering the daily questions. Do not worry if you cannot answer all the questions. The Holy Spirit may wait to give you the answer during communal sharing. Your daily meditation on these Scriptures is the important element. The questions are to aid and direct your meditation and your answers are to add to your communal sharing.)

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE-MEMORIZE)

“THERE IS NO SALVATION IN ANYONE ELSE, FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME IN THE WHOLE WORLD GIVEN TO MEN BY WHICH WE ARE TO BE SAVED.” (Acts 4:12)

- I. The following questions pertain to your introductory lesson. The answer to these questions can be found in the present lesson.
 1. When was the Gospel of Luke believed to have been written?
 2. What makes Saint Luke unique among the New Testament writers?
 3. What does Luke desire to present in the Third Gospel?
 4. What does he intend to demonstrate in the Acts of the Apostles?
 5. What were the two major problems facing the Church when Luke wrote?
 6. Why may Luke be called the Father of Church History?

7. What did Luke perceive about the Second Coming of Jesus?
8. What were the three epochs of salvation viewed by Luke?
9. What is the missionary task of the Christian Community?
10. To whom is this task assigned?
11. What does this say to you?
12. According to Luke, how should this task be carried out?
13. Why did Luke feel the need to write another gospel account?
14. What does this say to you?

11. SCRIPTURE READINGS: Please read entirely Chapters 1 and 2.

1. What is the general impression this reading left upon you?
2. What do you feel Luke desires to teach through the Infancy Narratives?
3. List the number of references to the Holy Spirit you find in this reading.
4. What do you think Luke wishes to teach by these references?
5. List the expressions relating to joy in this reading.
6. What do you think Luke wishes to teach about the relationship of Jesus to joy?

CHAPTER 2

THE INFANCY GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION

The Risen Savior commissioned the Christian Community to go and make disciples of all nations and to teach them to carry out everything He had commanded them. The primitive Church fulfilled this divine mission primarily through a preaching ministry. Whatever events from the life of Jesus aided in proclaiming the message of salvation, the Church incorporated it into the Gospel message. Whatever did not do so, such as the events of Jesus' birth and childhood, was omitted. The literary genius of both Matthew and Luke is demonstrated by the fact that they are both able to weave together the existing stories of the birth and childhood of Jesus in such an artistic fashion that these stories themselves proclaim the gospel message. In fact, the infancy narrative written by Luke is an Infancy Gospel.

DEVELOPMENT OF DOGMA

In our study of the Infancy Narratives we cannot but help noting, in the Christian Scriptures, a progressive growth in the Christian Community concerning the true nature of Jesus Christ. From the early preaching of the Church it almost appears as if they held some kind of adoption theory concerning Jesus Christ -- at some time in His life the man Jesus was in some special way adopted by the Father and thereby became Son of God. They seem to express that at the Resurrection from the dead Jesus is confirmed and declared to be God's Son. Paul writes to the Romans: "...the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, but was made Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 1:3-4). By the time the gospel of Mark was written there was a tendency to push back this moment of divine confirmation of Jesus to His baptism at the hands of John the Baptist: "Immediately on coming up out of the water he saw the sky rent in two and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. Then a voice came from the heavens: 'You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests.'" (Mk 1:10-11)

Matthew and Luke differ from Mark. Not only do they demonstrate a progressive awareness among the apostles concerning the divine nature of Jesus during His public ministry, but what Mark indicates occurred at the baptism of Jesus is what Matthew and Luke teach occurred at the conception of Jesus as announced by an angel to both Mary and Joseph. According to Matthew and Luke, from the first moment of His birth, Jesus is God's Son.

In the gospel according to John – the last gospel account to be written we see the dogma concerning the nature of Jesus reach its full flowering when John pushes back the divine sonship of Jesus beyond creation itself – teaching us the eternal pre-existence of the Word: *In the beginning was the word: the Word was with God and the Word was God...the Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:1-14)*

Through these Christian Scriptures the doctrine concerning the divine nature of Jesus develops, clarifies itself and reaches full bloom. To interpret a text of Sacred Scripture, isolated from the whole of scriptures and the traditions of the Church, has led many teachers and instructors of the Word into serious error. We can see the wisdom of the Church in its insistence that the scriptures must be seen in their fullness. There is great danger of isolating certain teachings and failing to interpret them in the light of the complete revelation given to us by the Holy Spirit.

THE INFANCY NARRATIVES

The infancy narratives found in Luke comprise two annunciation accounts and two birth stories. The Old Testament serves heavily as the backdrop for the dramas presented. The major stars of these infancy stories are John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth.

Because of our written scriptures, we have no problem with seeing the proper relationship between John and Jesus. This was not so easy for those who were present on the historical scene. When the Christian Community reflected upon the two ministries it interpreted the role of John the Baptist as a subordinate role – of being a forerunner of Jesus, preparing the way of Jesus, the Messiah. The subsequent resurrection of Jesus from the dead distinguished Jesus from all other holy men and prophets.

Luke will paint four word pictures in which he will very skillfully teach that Jesus was always superior to John and, far from there being any opposition between the two, John and Jesus were blood relatives through Mary and each had been commissioned to divine mission.

The story begins where it will end, in the city of Jerusalem – the symbol of contact between God and men, and the point from which goes forth salvation to the world.

ANNUNCIATION TO ZECHARIAH

It was the week for the eight divisions, the division of Abijah, to serve in the temple. The lots were cast and it fell to an elderly priest named Zachariah to offer the evening sacrifice. It was the ninth hour, the hour of prayer, as Zachariah climbed the steps leading to the sanctuary to offer the incense signaling the hour of evening prayer. As Zachariah placed incense over the coals and scattered it over the altar he was startled by the presence of a supernatural being standing just to the right of the altar which signified divine authority. Dread and fear filled Zachariah as it did all men in the Old Testament in the presence of a divine, supernatural manifestation. He is the Angel Gabriel – a messenger from Yahweh. The Hebrew word for messenger “mal ak” when translated into the Greek became “angelos” – angel.

The belief in angelic beings runs through both the Old and New Testament and exhibits a certain consistency in teachings. The nature of these celestial beings was never clearly asserted. The idea of a spiritual reality was somewhat foreign to the concrete Hebrew mind. They accepted angelic beings as different from human beings, but these celestial beings presumably manifested themselves through a human form. The angel Gabriel was not unknown to the Jewish people. He appeared twice by name in Sacred Scripture – both times in the Book of Daniel.

The appearance of this angel Gabriel in the temple at the hour of the evening sacrifice deliberately ties what is now occurring to what has been foretold in Daniel. The New Testament is but the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Gabriel announces to Zechariah “good news”. The Gospel is about to unfold and the future son of Zechariah will be part of this Gospel. From the

beginning to the end, John's life will be directed by God's Holy Spirit. He will go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah – the prophet so zealous for the rights of the Lord. The ministry of John will effect the conversion of many in Israel and thereby “prepare for the Lord a people well-disposed.” (Lk. 1:17)

Zechariah hears the good news, but in his heart doubts. He seeks some confirmation of this promise. He seeks a sign, “How am I to know this?” (Lk. 1:18). He receives a punitive sign. Despite the goodness of the man, he reflects the sinful condition of Israel – that of constantly putting God to the test – demanding God proves His word to be true. What leaves no room for doubt – leaves no room for faith. Gabriel gives Zechariah a sigh: “Now you will be mute –unable to speak –until the day these things take place, because you have not trusted my words.” (Lk. 1:20).

Even as the dawn of the new age begins to break – a cloud of unbelief appears in the sky as a ominous prophetic sign...

ANNUNCIATION TO MARY

The scene shifts from Jerusalem to Nazareth of Galilee –a place not mentioned in the Old Testament. With Gabriel's appearance in Nazareth, a town with no Old Testament expectations, Luke signifies the total newness of what God now does. If this Gabriel is indeed the Angel of Paradise who drove Adam and Eve from the Garden, his visit might imply the damage caused by sin is about to be repaired –the Gates of heaven will soon open to mankind.

Almost in a spirit of deference, the angel greets Mary: “Rejoices, O highly favored daughter!” (Lk. 1:28). Gabriel greets Mary with the Greek word “chaire”. As an imperative the word is a greeting and is translated into everyday Greek as “Hail” or “Greetings”. The meaning of the verb “chairein” is “rejoice”. Many usages of the verb in the Old Testament refer to joy over a divine saving act. The Greek word “kecharitomene” translated as “O highly favored daughter” or “full of grace” does have definite theological significance. It implies that Mary is a “privileged one” – one graced by God. The verb sometimes has the sense of plenitude and Luke could be implying that Mary has received the fullness of God's favor. Gabriel continues, “The Lord is with you.” (Lk. 1:28) This means that God is about to intervene with a remarkable display of power.

The presence of the angel causes Mary no fear; it is the message that disturbs her. Gabriel explains the meaning of the greeting; "Do not fear, Mary. You have found favor with God." (Lk. 1:30) These words imply that God is about to shower on Mary a special blessing. An undreamed of privilege will be Mary's. Gabriel continues, "You shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus. Great will be his dignity and he will be called Son of the Most High." (Lk. 1:31-32) When Gabriel says Jesus "Will be called" Son of the Most High, such an expression means, in actual fact, He will be Son of the Most High. It is a revelation of the nature of Jesus.

Mary now proposes a question to Gabriel that will clarify to the readers how this will come to be that the son born to Mary will be the Son of the Most High. Mary said, "How can this be since I do not know man?" (Lk. 1:34)

There is no precedent for what will now occur. It is not a question of God's overcoming the sterility of a man or woman. There was no tradition that the Messiah would be born of a virgin without the act of a male partner. Mary is not barren and unable to have a child. We are dealing with the Divine Plan going beyond the dreams of men and women. This child will be a New Creation.

Gabriel's answer to Mary gives us the most important aspects of the nature of Jesus Christ. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence, the holy offering to be born will be called Son of God." (Lk 1:35) These words take us out of the realm of Jewish expectations into the realm of Christian reality... There is no concept of adoption of Jesus by the Father. What is being expressed is the incarnation of God's Son in the womb of Mary through God's creative Spirit. There will not be a moment that Jesus is not the Divine Son of God.

The heart of spirituality lies in the will. One becomes a saint by one's obedience to the Will of God. Mary's answer to Gabriel clearly reveals the depths of her personal holiness: "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say." (Lk. 1:38) Isaiah expresses the belief that Israel is the servant of Yahweh. It is when "God rules" that the people of God truly become "Israel." Malachi foretells this will distinguished the just and the wicked in the last days: "Then you will then see the distinction between the

just and the wicked; between him who serves God, and him who does not serve Him." (Mal. 3:18)

Mary's unique greatness lies not in the extraordinary privilege of being the Mother of the Lord, but in that she hears the Word of God and keeps it!

THE INFANCY NARRATIVE

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE-MEMORIZE)

"I STILL HAVE MANY THINGS TO SAY TO YOU BUT THEY WOULD BE TOO MUCH FOR YOU NOW. BUT, WHEN THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH COMES HE WILL LEAD YOU TO THE COMPLETE TRUTH...." (John 16:12-13)

FIRST DAY: Read John 16:12-16; Romans 1:1-6; Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 1:18-23; I Jn. 1-3,14.

1. What does Jesus tell us in John 16:12-16?
2. See if you can trace the development of the truth concerning the nature of Jesus in the above Scriptures.
3. What does this say to you?
4. How should this direct your study of Holy Scriptures?

SECOND DAY: Read II Chronicles 7:1-5 and verses 12-22.

1. How did the Jewish People look upon the Temple of Jerusalem?
2. What did the Temple symbolize to them?
3. Why do you think Jerusalem is so important in the New Testament?
4. Where does one find the Presence of God today?

THIRD DAY: Read Genesis 15:1-9, 18:9-15; and Luke 1:8-18

1. In what way do Elizabeth and Zechariah resemble Abraham and Sarah?
2. Why does Luke desire us to see the connection between these 4 people?

3. What spiritual failing is obvious in three of these people?
4. What do these readings teach you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Daniel 8:15-19, 9:20-27 and 10:4-12.

1. What would you say are angels?
2. What does the Angel Gabriel do for Daniel?
3. To what does the vision concerning the 70 weeks pertain?
4. What do these readings teach you?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 1:8-24.

1. What does Luke intend for the presence of Gabriel to recall to mind?
2. What does Gabriel's presence tell us about the events now taking place?
3. What will be the mission of John son of Zechariah?
4. What does the disbelief of Zechariah foretell?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 1:26-38.

1. What is symbolized by the Annunciation occurring in Nazareth ?
2. What difference do you note between Gabriel's meeting with Zechariah and with Mary?
3. What do you learn about the nature of Jesus?
4. What does Mary's reply to the angel in Luke verse 38 say to you?

CHAPTER 3

SONGS OF REDEMPTION

INTRODUCTION

With Gabriel's announcing to Zechariah and Mary the good news concerning the birth of their sons, the two themes of the Infancy Narratives have been played. Like a skilled composer of a musical composition, Luke will now artistically blend the two themes into one. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, will meet with Elizabeth, the mother of John. This encounter of Mary and Elizabeth will accent the theme of the narratives – the superiority of Jesus over John. After a brief harmonious moment Luke will part them again for the nativity scenes.

When the Angel Gabriel departed, we read that "Mary set out, proceeding in haste into the hill country to a town of Judah, where she entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth." (Lk. 1:39-40) At the sound of Mary's greeting, John leapt for joy in the womb of Elizabeth. John, filled with the Holy Spirit as prophesied by Gabriel, jumps for joy in his mother's womb proclaiming, even in his prenatal state, that the child of Mary is the Messiah. Even before birth, John fulfills his mission. John reveals to Elizabeth Mary's condition.

ELIZABETH'S SONG

"Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." (Lk.1: 41) What Elizabeth now proclaims is a divine proclamation. The prophetess Elizabeth "cried out in a loud voice." (Lk. 1:42) In the Greek this expression carries a sense of unrestrained joy. Elizabeth breaks out in a liturgical song of praise. God proclaims through Elizabeth that Mary is a Blessed Mother of a Blessed One. Mary is blest precisely because of her faith and confidence in God's Word. She believed that, as a virgin, she would conceive a son and He would be the Son of God. Verse 43 contains the most powerful theological statement in this section: "But who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" The word for "Lord" is "Kyrios" --the word used by the Christian Community expressing its belief that Jesus was Divine Person. Mary is the Mother of a Divine Being.

MARY'S SONG

Mary responded in song to Elizabeth with the Magnificent. The Magnificent is a beautiful mosaic formed from Old Testament themes and sentiments. It is divided into two major parts: verses 46-50 describe Mary's own personal experience and verses 51-55 describes what must be the true identity of all men and women of the New Age – in other words, all Christians.

Mary proclaims: "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit finds joy in God my savior, for He has looked upon His servant in her lowliness..." (Lk. 1:46-48) Mary testifies that everything about her – both in the natural and supernatural – glorifies God and makes the living, invisible God visible. She joyfully received and experienced the saving power of God. Mary attributes her divine favor to her own nothingness. Just as God created a universe out of nothing, He now creates a greater marvel in the supernatural order – a marvel of grace — Mary herself.

Mary, fully aware of what has been accomplished within her, sings: "Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me." (Lk. 1:48-49*) Mary does not deny her personal holiness, but she humbly attributes her grace of holiness to its proper source: "... Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is His name." (Lk. 1:49*) She confirms the only essentially holy person is God. All other holy people share, reflect or "magnify" the holiness of God. Humans holiness is a fact and effect of the Redemption!

Like the waters from a broken dam – at this moment in time and from this woman and her unborn Son – God's merciful love (the "hesed" of God) gushes forth over His Covenant People without any merit of theirs. Merciful love – an ocean of Redemption – streams back through the centuries to Abraham and, from this present moment in time, it streams away towards eternity embracing all future generations: "... His mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear Him." (Lk. 1:50*) In the biblical sense the expression "those who fear him" does not imply those people afraid of God, but rather the men and women who respect and acknowledge God's sovereignty over their lives.

Pride and arrogance are typical of those who do not recognize the holiness of God – the reign of God. Mary now turns attention to this element of humanity. She expresses her message in three pairs of contrast. Verses 51-53 express a

reversal of order found in the natural realm. The divine standard and action will oppose the accepted standards of this world. They express this spiritual revolution that will be characteristic of the New Age. If these three statements are removed from their present text, they could express political revolution.

In verses 54* and 55* Mary's words summarize God's total activity on behalf of the true Israel: "He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy – according to the promise he made to our ancestors." Mary ends the Magnificat revealing the promise of God to Abraham: "... promise Abraham and his descendants forever." (Lk. 1:55)

The early Church attached special interest to Abraham as a man of faith who patiently trusted God's word and waited for its fulfillment in the future. For the Christians that future is now. St. Paul writes to the Galatians: "Consider the case of Abraham: he 'believed God, and it was credited to him as justice.'...All who believe are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." (Gal. 3:6-9) Mary ends by confirming that God has kept His promise to Abraham in her – the true daughter of Abraham – the Daughter of Faith.

THE BIRTH OF JOHN

In accordance with Genesis 17:9-14, a child was circumcised on the eighth day. A child was commonly named on the day of birth. In Israel's primitive days, it was the custom for the mother to name a child. Sometimes the child was named after the father, but more often was named after the grandfather. As often happens on these happy family gatherings, a quarrel breaks out. Luke is fond of combining the human situation with the divine. At the circumcision of John, the argument develops over the name of the child. Because of the unusual circumstances involved, the relatives and friends insisted that the child be named after his father. Apparently, they already referred to him as Zechariah ben Zechariah. Elizabeth adamantly insisted the child must be called John ben Zechariah.

In the biblical context, a great deal may be implied in the name. For God to name a person would indeed express something essential about the character or mission of the person.

The argument between Elizabeth and her relatives was carried to Zechariah. They begin to make signs to him as to what the child should be called. Luke

implies that the father is both deaf and dumb. Zechariah called for a wooden tablet covered with wax and upon it wrote "His name is John." This expressed that Zechariah now believed and accepted the good news. His punishment is lifted and his speech returns, he begins to praise God.

ZECHARIAH'S SONG

"Then Zechariah, his father," we are told, "filled with the Holy Spirit, uttered this prophecy..." (Lk. 1:67-79), known today as the Benedictus. The prophecy is indeed a hymn of praise. Zechariah knows the events that have occurred mark the beginning of the New Age and the fulfillment of God's age old promise to Israel. He clearly acknowledges that his son is not the Messiah by confirming that the Messiah born of the house of Judah rather than the House of Levi. David was of the house of Judah and so also was Jesus. Aaron was of the house of Levi and so was John. Zechariah implies Jesus is the messiah.

The mission of John the Baptist was vitally important because the one obstacle to the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah is the power of sin over human heart. It darkens the mind so it does not see the Light. It debilitates the will so that it cannot follow the Way.

John would preach a baptism of repentance "which led to the forgiveness of sins..." (Lk. 3:31) The true freedom to be granted though the Messiah was internal freedom - freedom from power of sin. It would be the source of all other freedom. Men and women who repented would truly experience the visitation of God. This visitation would bring salvation. People would experience salvation through freedom from sin. To the old question, "How do you know if you have experienced salvation?" Luke would answer: Through freedom from sin. People who refused to repent would not be able to accept Jesus Christ. Jesus attributed their rejection to the hardness of their hearts. Jesus warned them that they would die in their sins.

The Benedictus concludes with: "All this is the work of the kindness of our God; He, the Dayspring, shall visit us in his mercy to shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Lk. 1:78,79) The redemption of man is a great gift following from the all merciful, compassionate heart of God. Man has done nothing to merit redemption nor can he! Redemption must be accepted as a gift from Divine

Love. Just as a darkened world must accept the light of the rising sun that will dispel all its darkness, so Malachi had foretold: "But, for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays." (Mal. 3:20).

Luke, beautifully and symbolically, expresses one of the great themes of his Gospel account – Jesus has come for sinners. He tells us that the "Dayspring", the "dawning light", will shine on those "who sit in the darkness and in the shadow of death..." (Lk. 1:79) Here we see the physician Luke recommending the Divine Physician as the "healing light". The Divine Physician not only cures the soul, but "will guide our feet into the way of peace." (Lk. 1:79) Peace is the tranquillity of order. Until man's life is ordered properly, he will never experience peace. Jesus establishes peace in our lives by ordering our lives back to God – He leads the creature back to union with the Creator, the source of Life.

CONCLUSION

Luke will now move John from the scene of the Infancy Narratives in order to place the full spotlight upon the Light of the World – Jesus of Nazareth. He tells us: "The child grew up and matured in spirit. He lived in the desert until the day when he made his public appearance in Israel." (Lk. 1:80)

"The child grew up and matured in spirit" means to develop the inner resources for the understanding and performance of God's will. The very words used by Luke suggest the quality of man John will be. In the Book of Judges it is written of Samson: "The boy grew up and the LORD blessed him; the spirit of the LORD first stirred him..." (Jdg. 13:24-25) John will be like Samson!

SONGS OF REDEMPTION

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

"MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD AND MY SPIRIT EXHULTS IN GOD MY SAVIOR: BECAUSE HE HAS LOOKED UPON HIS LOWLY HANDMAID, FOR THE ALMIGHTY HAD DONE GREAT THINGS FOR ME." (Luke 1:46-49)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 1:39-45

1. How does Elizabeth know Mary is with child?
2. What is implied when we read that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit?
3. What does Elizabeth imply about the child of Mary?
4. What would you say is the source of Christian blessedness?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 1:46-56.

1. What do verses 46-50 tell you about Christian spirituality?
2. What is meant by "those who fear him"?
3. Why has it been said that *this song* has a revolutionary theme?
4. What does the Song of Mary teach you?

THIRD DAY: Read I Samuel 1:22-28 and 2:1-11.

1. Why can it be said that Hannah is a symbol of Mary?
2. What are some of the themes in Hannah's Song that the Magnificat echoes?

3. What would you say is the source of Hannah's holiness?"
4. What does Hannah's Song teach you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Galatians 3:1-9 and 14-18.

1. Why do you think Abraham is so important in the New Testament?
2. How is Abraham an example for Christians?
3. Why does St. Paul teach it is important to be "sons of Abraham"?
4. What does this reading say to you?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 1:57-80.

1. Why do you think Luke does not have Mary present at the birth of John?
2. What does it imply when God gives a name to a person?
3. What does the Benedictus tell us about John?
4. What does verse 77 mean to you?

SIXTH DAY: Read Genesis 6:3-8 and Romans 8:5-13.

1. What does Genesis 6:3-8 teach you about sin?
2. What does St. Paul mean by the flesh?
3. What are some of the effects of living in the "flesh"?
4. Why is sin the greatest obstacle to the acceptance of Jesus Christ?

CHAPTER 4

BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR

INTRODUCTION

Saint Luke exquisitely weaves together history, prophecy and symbolism to compose a beautiful picture of the birth of Jesus. He incarnates his narratives within the historical events of this earth. Associating the announcement of John's birth with the reign of Herod the Great, Luke symbolizes the relatively provincial influence of John the Baptist. Luke notes that the birth of Jesus occurs during the reign of Caesar Augustus. By so doing, Luke indicates the worldwide mission of Jesus. His birth has universal importance. Jesus will truly bring the peace on earth credited to Augustus.

Luke write: "In those days Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole world. This first census took place while Quirinius was Governor of Syria." (Lk. 2:1,2) Since the census was normally taken for tax purposes, the obedience of Mary and Joseph to the decree implies obedience to the imperial government. It contains a subtle denial of the charge that Christianity was politically revolutionary. The census likewise serves to demonstrate how Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It shows how God uses Caesar and an enactment of the Roman government to fulfill a prophecy, the effects of which would one day influence the whole empire.

Bethlehem means, "house of bread". It is a city situated about five miles south of Jerusalem and built on a ridge about 2,550 feet above sea level. In those days, it was indeed an arduous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. We know from I Samuel 17:12 that David was the son of an Ephrathite from Bethlehem of Judea. By having Joseph register in Bethlehem, Luke underlines the fact that Joseph was the family of David. When King Herod called the chief priests and scribes to ascertain where the Messiah would be born, they informed him in Bethlehem of Judea. This would be in fulfillment of the prophecy of Micah given almost 750 years before the birth of Jesus. (See Micah 5:1)

While in Bethlehem, Mary's time had come to give birth and Luke records: "She gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the place where travelers lodge." (Lk. 2:7) "First-born" does not imply that other children were born to Mary. The "first-born" was a title for the heir of the family. It implies Jesus is the heir to David's throne. The concept of kingliness rather than poverty is implied by the expression that Mary "wrapped him in swaddling clothes." The book of Wisdom places these words in the mouth of Solomon, the first successor of King David: "I was nurtured in swaddling clothes, with every care. No king has known any other beginning of existence." (Wis. 7:4-5*)

The fact that Luke mentions Mary placing the newborn child in a manger suggests that Jesus was born in a place where animals stayed. The Greek word "phatne" can be translated as a "stall" for tying up animals, or a "manger" or "trough" for feeding animals.

Here in the city meaning House of Bread, Jesus is born and He is placed in a feeding trough. Does Luke desire us to see that herein lies the Bread of Life who will feed the world? The scene certainly recalls to mind the words of Isaiah: "An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master's manger; but, Israel does not know, my people has not understood." (Is. 1:3) It may be long forgotten, but the cow and the donkey in the Christmas scene are meant to recall this prophecy of Isaiah and the lesson it carries. Do we know who is our Master and Lord? Do we know where we are to be fed?

The Nativity scene takes place out there on the "fringe". Jesus is born on the fringe of a preoccupied and comfortable world. It has no room for Him. In the end, it will push Him out. In a sense, it recalls the birth of Moses for whom the world held no place. He was placed in a basket and left among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.

ANGELS AND SHEPHERDS

Luke relates on the night Jesus was born, in a field not too far away, shepherds lived and were taking turns watching their flocks. Suddenly, the night began to grow extremely bright as if stars were coming down from the heavens. The night became supernaturally resplendent and the hearts of these simple men

filled with fear and wonder. Amidst the light was an angelic figure who spoke to the shepherds: "You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you --- tidings of great joy to be shared by the whole people. This day in David's city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord." (Lk 2:10-11) These were numbered among the poor of the earth. They would be symbols of the throngs of poor later to flock to Jesus --- the Good Shepherd.

The angel emphasizes that it was for them a Savior had been born --- "a savior has been born to you." The Gospel could not be more personalized. Indeed, this message is a cause of extraordinary joy in which all people are invited to share --- to rejoice in.

The angelic message is the high point of the birth story. To emphasize the message all heaven breaks loose in song as if the very stars of heaven formed a heavenly chorus. Luke tells us: "Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in high heaven, peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests'." (Lk. 2:13-14)

"Glorifying" for Luke expressed that happy state of praise among people who recognized God's overwhelming love and kindness for them. It is not Caesar Augustus who brings peace on earth, but the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. On a night of His birth, heaven and earth are opened to one another and speak together as friends. Fulfilling God's words to Isaiah: "I live in a high a holy place, but I am also with the contrite and humbled spirit." (Is. 57:15*) Peace will indeed be His gift to those men and women with whom He is pleased. God is pleased with those who fear Him. Psalm 147:11 reads: "The Lord is pleased with those who fear him, with those who hope for his kindness."

The shepherds reveal their faith in the words spoken to them when they go see the child. Like Mary, they go in haste. The depth of one's spiritual commitment is measured by one's fidelity to the Word after the majestic voice grows silent.

The shepherds go back to their fields and sheep, but lives, touched so personally by the loving kindness of God, are never the same -- they become glorious lives. They necessarily had to share and witness the good news to others. They symbolize the evangelists who are to come later.

Again Luke presents Mary as the model of the Christian Community: "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart." (Lk. 2:19) It is not yet apparent to Mary how God's plan will unfold. It is one thing to have a vision, but to understand its meaning as it unfolds in the concrete circumstances of life is not always easy. One must learn to "treasure all these things and reflect on them in one's heart". It is necessary to thoughtfully hear the Word of God.

The highlight of the nativity scene is when the angels explain to the shepherds the meaning of what has occurred. In this we are taught a beautiful and powerful truth: only God can truly interpret the importance of Jesus. We must look to heaven for truth, understanding, and evaluation of Jesus Christ.

PRESENTATION AT THE TEMPLE

By the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Luke demonstrates the obedience of Joseph and Mary to the Law of God. Jesus was brought up in the strictest of Jewish devotion. Jesus is not presented as a religious revolutionary or rebel overthrowing and denouncing the religion of Israel. Jesus appears as the religious fulfillment of Israel.

Luke relates that Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple. Apparently he combined the rite of redemption of the child and the purification of Mary. The holy family offers only the two doves. They are thereby identified as God's poor --- the Anawim. The Old Testament backdrop for the presentation scene is Elkanah and Hannah bringing Samuel to the sanctuary at Shiloe.

While the Holy Family is in the Temple, two characters, Simeon and Anna, appear on the scene. They are symbols of the Law and prophets. They represent Israel. Both will verify that Jesus is the Messiah. Luke mentions three times that Simeon is operating under the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Jesus. Luke emphasizes that only under the power of the Holy Spirit can a man call Jesus "Lord".

The venerable Anna steps forward clothed in the imagery of Judith of the Old Testament. Like Judith ---whose names meant "Jewess" ---she had lived in the service of God since her widowhood and had reached the age of 105. She personifies the Anawim --- the little ones who depend on God for their strength. Anna is said to be of the house of Asher and the daughter of Phanuel.

Asher was considered to be the most insignificant tribe of Israel. "Asher" meant "fortunate" and Phanael meant, "face of God". The reward of Anna's life was to see the face of God. We are told: "She was constantly in the temple, worshipping day and night in fasting and prayer." (Lk. 2:37) The description of Anna is similar to that of the Christian widows as described in Paul's letter to Timothy. Probably Luke desired to present Anna as an example to these holy ladies and to remind them that their lives of service and witness to Jesus would one day be rewarded with the happiness of beholding at the end of their lives --- as did Anna at 105 years of age --- the face of God.

SIMEON'S SONG

Simeon, led by the Spirit, comes to the temple and meets with the Holy Family. He takes the child Jesus in his arms and blesses God with these words: "Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant [your slave] in peace; you have fulfilled your word. For my eyes have witnessed your saving deed displayed for all the peoples to see: A revealing light to the Gentiles, the glory of your people Israel." (Lk. 2:29-32)

The song of Simeon is the last of the psalms in Luke. It verifies that Jesus is the one spoken of in the Benedictus. It reveals what the coming of Jesus means to Israel and mankind.

With the coming of Jesus, the mission of Israel is completed. Jesus is the climax of God's revelation to Israel. Jesus is Israel's glory and the means whereby she achieves her ultimate purpose as God's people. The Messiah and His salvation is for all nations. Israel is but the means by which salvation comes. No one nation has a monopoly on salvation. All nations can lay claims to be the people of God through Jesus --- the Light of the Gentiles.

With the presence of Jesus in his arms, Simeon receives a realistic sobering conception of the Redemption. Jesus will become the center of a storm. Simeon says to Mary: "This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed ---and you yourself shall be pierced with a sword--- so that the thought of many hearts may be laid bare." (Lk. 2:34-35) The very presence of Jesus will be the cause of self-judgment. A man will fall and rise. Jesus Himself will express the conflict caused by Him when He teaches: "Do you think I have come to establish peace on earth? I assure you, the contrary is true; I have come for division." (Lk. 12-51) The Greek

term for this type of sword spoken of by Simeon refers to a very heavy weapon, signaling terrible destruction...

With all its notes of glory and joy, the infancy Narratives end in the shadow of the cross and in Mary being revealed as the Mother of Sorrows.

THE HIDDEN LIFE

Luke presents to us one brief glance into the hidden life of Jesus. What does Luke intend to teach us by this presentation? The primary way to interpret a gospel scene is seeking to discover what it tells us about Jesus. We can get lost in the story and miss its point. This may have been an existing story in the Christian Community affirming the divine Sonship of Jesus during His ministry although often misunderstood by those around Him. It was also common to include such a period in the lives of great persons to illustrate that the 'child was the father of the man.'

In His own public life Jesus will go from Nazareth to Jerusalem and finally to the Temple at Passover time. Here He will teach until death. In the account from his boyhood, He makes the same journey. The astonishment at Jesus' understanding and His answers anticipates the reaction that will one day greet the teachings of Jesus. The center of the story is not the Boy's intelligence, but His reference to God as His Father. Here Jesus says of Himself what the heavenly voice will proclaim at His baptism.

A standard reaction in the scriptures to a divine proclamation or revelation was a failure on the part of human beings to understand. When Mary and Joseph confess confusion over Jesus' proclamation, we no doubt are dealing with this set biblical pattern. It would be misleading for us to deduce from this encounter Mary's personal, spiritual, or psychological state at the time. In the light of the Infancy Narratives, any misunderstanding on the part of Mary and Joseph would concern the way in which the divine Sonship of Jesus would be expressed.

Luke does present Mary as a model to Christians. As an example to his readers, he often pictures Mary amazed and puzzled over occurrences in the life of Jesus. Mary takes these events to her heart and there she ponders and meditates on them. She comes to a deeper understanding of God's mysteries---

enflaming her with a deep love of God—enabling her to enter more deeply into the mystery. Mary does not just believe—she endeavors to understand!

Luke would have us keep this model before our eyes as he now presents the ministry of Jesus. Like Mary, he desires we keep these things in memory: “Treasure all these things and reflect on them in our hearts.”

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

“MARY TREASURED ALL THESE THINGS AND REFLECTED ON THEM IN HER HEART.” (LK. 2:19)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 2:1-7 and Micah 5:1-3

1. What is being implied by Luke’s connecting the birth of Jesus to the reign of Caesar Augustus?
2. What does the Prophet Micah in 5:1-3 tell us about the Messiah?
3. What do the swaddling clothes symbolize?
4. What does it mean to you when Luke tells us there was no room for them in the inn?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 2: 8-14 and Psalm 147.

1. What does the appearance of the angels to the shepherds teach you?
2. How does the angel personalized the message of salvation?
3. What does this say to you?
4. How does Psalms 147 verse 11 throw light on the words “peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests?”

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 2:15-21

1. How do the shepherds reveal their faith?
2. What does this teach you?
3. What does verse 19 teach you?

4. What does the name "Jesus" mean to you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 2:22-35

1. What lessons do we learn about Mary and Joseph from the Presentation in the Temple?
2. What does Simeon tell you about Jesus?
3. What is meant by the statement that Jesus will be the cause of the rise and fall of many in Israel?
4. What does verse 35 say to you?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 2:36-40; I Timothy 3-10.

1. What does Anna symbolize for us?
2. What is her importance in this narrative?
3. How does Anna serve as an example to Christian widows in the early Church?
4. What can one expect from such devoted service to the Church?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 2:41-52

1. What is the main teaching in the Hidden Life Narrative?
2. What does it tell you about the ministry of Jesus?
3. What does this reading reveal to you about Jesus:
4. How does Mary serve as a model for students of the Word?

CHAPTER 5

MOTHER OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

A Profound devotion to the Mother of Jesus has existed in the Catholic Church apparently from its origin. It is found present in Scripture, Church Tradition and traditional writings verifying the prophecy: "... all ages to come shall call me blessed." (Lk. 1:48) The Second Vatican Council confirms: "Mary was involved in the mysteries of Christ. As the Most Holy Mother of God, she was, after her Son, exalted by divine grace above all angels and men. Hence, the Church appropriately honors her with special reverence... Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion, nor in a certain vain credulity. Rather, it proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and are moved to filial love toward our mother and to the imitations of her virtues."

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Church came to understand that the effects of Mary's Faith were retroactive to the moment of her conception by a special divine privilege referred to in the church as the Immaculate Conception of Mary—Mary's soul from the first moment of its existence in the womb of Anne, her mother, was in the state of God's grace for "nothing is impossible with God." (Lk. 1:37) The Dayspring of Justice must flow from a pure stream!

The church recognizes in the Book of Genesis an ancient prophecy concerning Mary and her Son: "I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel." (Gen. 3:15) The Church finds in this prophecy support for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The word used in the Hebrew ---translated "enmity" ---meant a complete separation existed between the two parties. The use of the definite article "the" indicates that this enmity is to exist between Satan and a particular woman. It implies the woman will never be under the dominion of Satan. The prophecy does not refer to Eve.

By her sin she entered into the dominion of Satan. It is a prophecy referring to a future woman—the Mother of the Messiah through whom would come the defeat of Satan. In the last book of the Scriptures --- Revelations—the woman of Genesis is recalled. It describes a great war between Satan and the woman and her seed. It relates the inability of the great dragon to touch the woman.

Mary, the New Eve, is conceived in grace. She freely rejects the temptation of Satan and adheres to the Word of God. "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say." (Lk. 1:38) Mary freely confirmed herself as Daughter of the heavenly Father and became the fitting Mother of one whose life ambition would be to fulfill the will of the Father.

MOTHER OF GOD

We need to bear in mind that every privilege and honor granted to Mary has always been in light of her relationship to Jesus. Why has the Church insisted on the title "Mother of God" for Mary? Because men of the past and present have taught that Jesus was not divine at birth, but only a mere man later adopted by God. Mary gave birth to a person. She is the mother of a person. Who is this Person? Merely a human being or a God-man? In the Gospel of Luke, the inspired Elizabeth calls Mary "the Mother of my lord". (Lk. 1:43) The word for Lord was "kyrios" --- the divine name given to Jesus by the early Church. To say Mary is not the Mother of God implies her Son was not divine. The title properly understood does not imply that Mary is the origin of the divinity of Jesus, but rather that you cannot separate the divinity from the Person she bore. Never for a moment was Jesus not God-man. Never for a moment was Mary mother of a child that was not divine! If a woman has a son that becomes the President of the United States, that woman is certainly the Mother of President of the United States even though she did not beget his presidency.

MARY IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The appearance of Mary in Mark is somewhat negative. Mark relates: "His mother and his brothers arrived, and as they stood outside they sent word to him to come out. The crowd seated around him told him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you." He said in reply, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And gazing around him at those seated in

the circle he continued, "These are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me." (Mk. 3:31-35)

It is not the intention of Mark to call attention to Mary. The family of Jesus is being used by the enemies of Jesus to discredit Him. They call attention to His mother and His relatives to indicated His poor and lowly origin – a native of Nazareth in Galilee. The words of Jesus are a rebuttal to the belief that attributed worth and value to biological origin. Real human worth comes from the internal qualities of the soul and spirit. Those who are rich in faith and obedience are truly valued in the sight of God. Not even kinship in the flesh to the Messiah of Israel gives the Mother of the Messiah her claim to salvation. But, what does do so, Luke clearly indicates: " Those who hear the word of God and act upon it." (Lk. 8:21) Luke indicates that Mary and the brethren of Jesus did fulfill this requirement when he places them all in the Cenacle waiting and praying for the Holy Spirit.

MARY IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

The gospel account of Matthew emphasizes the virgin birth of the Christ child. The Old Testament tells of many marvelous births in preparation for the Messiah. These unexpected births were signs that salvation comes from God. The virginal conception of Jesus is the climax and goal of this great series, totally surpassing human hopes and means.

The perpetual virginity of Mary is a teaching of the Catholic Faith. The source of this truth is the Christian Tradition. That Mary was "evervirgin" was accepted by all Christians until the Reformation. The truth is widely attested to in the writings of the early Church. Certain biblical statements seemingly militate against this truth. St. Jerome dealt with these difficulties in the fifth century. The scriptures speak of "his brothers" and "his sisters". (See Mat. 13:55-56) The word "brethern" had a very wide use in the Old Testament. In the Hebrew the word "ah" covers masculine relatives of varying degrees: brothers, half-brothers, cousins, and brother-in-law. The Greek Septuagint uses "adelphos" to render all these shades of meaning. "Adelphos" is used in this text We read in Genesis 29:15: "He [Laban] said to him [Jacob]: 'because thou are my brother, shalt thou serve me without wages?'" (Douay Version) Jacob is not the blood brother of Laban, but his nephew. Abram calls Lot his brother, but he is not. Anyone who was kinsman to another in the Old Testament was called brother. It is generally believed that the brethren of

Jesus were his cousins through Mary of Cleophas who was related to Virgin Mary.

We Read in Matthew: "And Joseph rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife. And, he knew her not till she brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS." (Mat. 1:24, Douay Version) It is asked, "Does this not prove that Mary had other children?" St. Jerome demonstrated that in the Hebrew the word translated as "until" or "till" denotes only that something has been done without any regard to the future. St. Luke records that Anna lived "as a widow until she was eighty-four." (Lk. 2:37) It is doubtful she married after that.

"First-born" was merely an official title given to the first child born in the family. It did not matter if there were other children or not. It had been recorded on a tomb, still existing to this day, dating from the time of Christ, that a certain woman died giving birth to "her first born son".

These Scriptures of themselves do not disprove the perpetual virginity of Mary. Without reference to the traditional teaching of the Church, the question would remain unanswered. The Church is the true and authentic interpreter of the Sacred Scriptures and she affirms that these Scriptures do not imply Mary had other children.

MARY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

St. Luke presents Mary as the Daughter of Zion – the symbol and the representative of Israel. Mary spiritually inherits the graces of Israel. In her soul they found full flowering and fruition. She is the personification of Israel. As the embodiment of Israel she receives the Messiah. The Old Testament had pictured Yahweh as being present in the womb of His people, in the midst of His People.

The angel calls Mary "Kecharitomene". This is God's name for Mary. The word expresses loveliness and beauty... all the qualities expressed by the word "grace". The expression tells us that Mary has received the favor of God. Gabriel declares Mary's position before God: "O highly favored daughter!" (Lk. 1:28) Luke uses the same concept to express the divine favor resting on the Christ-child: "...the grace of God was upon him." (Lk. 2:40)

Luke confirms the virginity and divine maternity of Mary when he writes: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." (Lk. 1:35) The verb used to express the "overshadowing" conveys a very powerful concept. It means to cover over with one's shadow. When used in the Old Testament is signified the Divine Presence. We read in Exodus 40:35: "Moses could not enter the Meeting Tent [containing the Ark of the Covenant], because the cloud settled down upon it and the glory of the Lord filled the Dwelling." At the dedication of Solomon's Temple we read: "...the cloud filled the Temple of the Lord... the Lord's glory had filled the Temple of the Lord." (1 Kgs. 8:10,11)

Mary appears in Luke both as the House of God -- the New Temple and the Ark of the Covenant. The sacred ark that disappeared six centuries before has now returned in a more perfect way. Mary is the living Ark of the Covenant carrying Jesus. The "ark of the covenant" theme continues in Luke's account of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. The Old Testament backdrop for the visitation Scene is II Samuel, chapter six...

MARY IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

In the Gospel's Mary is called by name once in Mark, five times in Matthew, and 12 times in Luke. John never refers to her as Mary. He intentionally and systematically avoids doing so. He certainly knew her name. Yet, he calls her always "Mother of Jesus" or "His mother". This, in John's mind was the title that expressed the unique destiny of Mary, a destiny never to be repeated. "Mother of Jesus" expressed for John the very existence of Mary.

Both evangelists, John and Luke, present Mary not only as a unique person, but also as a Christian symbol. 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 Perfect Christian -- fitting example for the Church and its idealized symbol. Because Mary personally embodies the grace and 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. The Church beholds in the achieved glory of Mary, her Assumption into Heaven, its own glorious future.

John interprets Mary's presence at the Wedding of Cana symbolically. Mary represents the Church. The concern of Mary for the lack of wine is interpreted as a concern and request for the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist. The first prayer of the Church for the Holy Spirit is offered by Mary. Christ's reply to His mother is interpreted not as a refusal, but as a delay. The Holy Spirit – the New Wine—can only be given at the death of Jesus. The actual changing of the water and wine is a sign that the prayer will be granted.

Mary appears twice in the Gospel of John. The second time, Mary appears at Calvary. At Calvary John deliberately recalls the Cana Scene by a repetition of vocabulary "his mother", "woman", "hour". When the hour does come, we see that Jesus calls Mary and the Beloved Disciple to the foot of the Cross. John may well be, as tradition tells us, 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 by perfecting themselves in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ.

John indicates that something profound is taking place between the Beloved Disciple and the Mother of Jesus by using a scriptural formula for revelation: "... there is you son" and "there is your mother". (Jn. 19:26-27) What has occurred between Mary and Beloved Disciple apparently completes the work of the Father had given Jesus to do. Immediately following this scene, Jesus dies. 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 adopted brother 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 brought into being the world –now it brings a new creation into existence.

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 the followers of the Messiah.

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. 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.

No matter what man gives to Mary, it is nothing in comparison to what God has done for her. If we are criticized for honoring her, it should be remembered that God started it. God the Father chose her as the daughter most worthy to be the Mother of His Beloved Son. God the Son chose her as His Mother in the Incarnation. God the Holy Spirit chose her as His holy spouse...

MOTHER OF GOD

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS

“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 IN HIS CARE.” (John 19:26-27)

FIRST DAY: Read Genesis 3:15, Romans 4:1-8 and 16-25, and Mark 3:31-35.

1. What does the Immaculate Conception mean to you?
2. Why can it be said that Genesis 3:15 substantiates this doctrine?
3. In what way does the portrait of Abraham painted by Paul resemble Mary?
4. What does Mark 3:35 say to you?

SECOND DAY: Read Matthew 1:1-24.

1. What does Matthew indicate by the genealogy of Jesus?
2. What does the Church mean by Mary’s being “ever-virgin”?
3. How would you explain “the brethren of Jesus”?
4. How would you explain Matthew 1:25 in the light of the Church’s teaching on the virginity of Mary?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 1:26-38.

1. What does it mean to call Mary “Daughter of Zion”?
2. What does the “Kecharitomene” tell you about Mary?

3. Why is Mary called the perfect disciple of Christ?
4. What do you as a Christian learn from Mary?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 1:39-45, Exodus 40:34-38, and the 6th Chapter of 2 II Samuel.

1. Why is Mary called the Ark of the Covenant?
2. Why does the Church insist on the title "Mother of God"?
3. Who first implied that Mary was Mother of God?
4. What similarities do you find between the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth and the sixth Chapter of 11 Samuel?

FIFTH DAY: Read John 2:1-5.

1. What does it mean to say that Mary is a symbol of the Church?
2. What is symbolically being requested when Mary tells her Son "They have no more wine?"
3. How do you understand His answer to her?
4. In John 2:5, what do the last recorded words of Mary teach you?

SIXTH DAY: Read John 19:25-30 and Revelation 12:1-17.

1. What takes place in John 19:25-30?
2. In what way do you see Mary as your Mother?
3. What is Mary's role in relationship to Satan?
4. Why does the Catholic Church honor Mary in a special way?

CHAPTER 6

BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE

INTRODUCTION

Some scholars believe that the Third Gospel originally began with Chapter three – the Infancy Narrative being added by Luke after writing the Acts of Apostles. Luke certainly begins the public ministry of Jesus on keeping with the older gospel tradition following the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist.

Once again Luke indicates the precise historical moment when he relates: “In the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, Philip his brother tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas... (Lk. 3:1-2)

Against this historical backdrop begin the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. From the words “In the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar:” we know it probably was the year 26 A.D. Both John and Jesus were born during the reign of Herod the Great that ended in 4 B.C. John and Jesus were both thirty years of Age

JOHN THE PROPHET

When Luke wrote, “the word of God was spoken to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert” (Lk. 3:2), he tells us a prophet has risen in Israel. Something of the importance of John is seen when we understand that for over four hundred years there had been no prophet in Israel. The appearance of John marked a new epoch in Judaism. By God’s breaking the long cold silence, a historical moment in salvation had come. By quoting the prophet Isaiah (4:3f), Luke indicates both the role of John and what is about to occur. God now stands in the wings of time and His appearance of earth’s stage is imminent. A way must be prepared for the entrance of the Lord – the King of the Universe

comes. John's role is to prepare men for this Day of the Lord – to remove obstacles to the acceptance of salvation. Salvation is to be offered not only to Jews, but the time for the universal salvation of all men had come: “..all mankind shall see the salvation of God.” (Lk. 3:6) John knows the coming of the Lord is a matter of eternal life or eternal death for men. John knew the monumental task before him. Since Jesus does not measure up to popular messianic expectations, repentance is all the more necessary. Only a complete reversal of national and religious ideas will make it possible for Israel to accept Jesus as the Messiah. The words found in chapters eight and nine of Jeremiah give a realistic picture of the peoples spiritual condition.

John was convinced that divine judgment was hanging like a cloud over Israel, and the nation must be warned. When the Spirit of the Lord moved John, he came blowing out of the desert like a desert wind –hot, dry, uncontaminated. He was sent, not to refresh and nourish, but to burn and purify. He was a preacher of fire and brimstone because he beheld the coming wrath of God upon all who refused the gift of God's salvation. He would say to the crowd that came out to be baptized by him: “You brood of vipers! Who told you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Lk. 3:7) He pictured them as so many snakes wriggling from burning fields. “Give some evidence that you mean to reform. Do not begin by saying to yourself, ‘Abraham is out father’.” (Lk. 3:8) He strips away their mask of national pride in being descendants of Abraham and automatic heirs of a promised salvation. Being able to call Abraham “out father” would not protect an Israelite from eternal damnation. (See Lk. 16:24)

John knows that preservation of the Jewish nation was no necessity to God. God could summon a new nation from stones, which were strewn in the desert waste. John knew the ax of judgment was laid to the root of the tree, which signified the very life of the nation. A strict reformation of life was demanded to escape the wrath to come and preserve the nation from total destruction.

BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE

John's appearance signifies God's intention to save His people from His wrath and to make them whole. John's mission prepares men for this salvation. Luke relates how John fulfills his mission: “He went about the entire region of the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance which led to the forgiveness of sins.” (Lk. 3:3) this implies much more than having people go through

another ritual of purification. Baptism implied washing, but a baptism of repentance implies purification coming through a reformation of one's life. We know he would say to those who came out to be baptized, "Give some evidence that you mean to reform." (Lk. 3:8) Moral reformation of one's sinful life was the one condition on which the forgiveness of sins depended.

Repentance does not merely imply sorrow for sins—for the evil deeds committed. Repentance must reach to the root of sin—into the perversity of the human heart. It demands of a person a radical change. One does not just repent for one's sins—one repents for what one has become because of sin. Repentance demands one change one's life – one's person. Become a new creation!

The actual ritual of baptism became a visible and dramatic expression of an inward consent and allegiance to the higher standards of life, which were to prevail in the messianic age and Community. Through John, God was requiring every Jew to submit to this baptism as an admission that by the defilement of sin they had forfeited their right to be called the people of God. It was a chance for a New Beginning. Baptism was a prophetic sign carrying the assurance of God's forgiveness to repenters and that they had been incorporated into a New Israel.

We know from the example of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna and Mary that there were men and women in Israel who were of God, but the number evidently was small. From the description of the House of Annas, things had not improved between the prophets of old and the coming of John. The true spirit of religion had generally been perverted as indicated by the words of Jeremiah: "How can you say, 'we are wise, we have the law of the Lord?' Why, that has been changed into falsehood by the lying pen of the scribes!" (Jer. 8:8) Religion had become formalized and frozen into a loveless legalism.

It is not difficult to convince those who live outside the accepted norms of society of sinfulness. It is difficult to bring the socially accepted to an awareness of sin because their sins so often lie in deeds and omissions socially accepted. It is the dangerous role of a prophet to shine God's revealing light upon the social lives of men. When the light of truth meets resistance it increases the darkness within the soul, it stirs up hatred against the light and grinds its teeth against the bearer of the light. And so, John the Baptist was

imprisoned in the nearby inaccessible Dead Sea fortress of Machaerus and there murdered by the orders of Herod Antipas.

Jesus attached great importance to John the Baptist – the last of the prophets of the Old Israel. Jesus taught, “The law and the prophets were in force until John. From his time on, the good news of God’s kingdom has been proclaimed, and people of every sort are forcing their way in.” (Lk. 16:16) Jesus regarded the rejection of John’s Baptism of Repentance as a rejection of God’s purpose. We read in Chapter seven: “The entire populace that had heard Jesus, even the tax collectors, gave praise to God, for they had received from John the baptismal bath he administered. The Pharisees and the lawyers, on the other hand, by failing to receive his baptism defeated God’s plan in their regard. (Lk. 7:29-30)

BAPTISM OF JESUS

With the arrest of John the Baptist, Luke now leaves the stage clear to present to us Jesus of Nazareth. Our introduction to Jesus the adult is quiet and simple but deeply significant. We read: “When all the people were baptized, and Jesus was at prayer after likewise being baptized, the skies opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in visible form like a dove. A voice from the heaven was heard to say: ‘You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests (Lk. 3:21-22)

A union between Jesus and God is implied when we are told that the heavens opened while Jesus prayed. A new relationship between God and man has been established in Jesus. There is total peace—the effect of the tranquillity of wills between the Heavenly Father and Jesus. It is the fulfillment of the angel’s proclamation: “...peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests.” (Lk. 2:14) The Peace of God is Personal. Peace is the Holy Spirit symbolized by the Dove. The Holy Spirit will be possessed on earth by those on whom God’s favor rests. We are now told upon whom God’s favor rests: “You are my Beloved Son. On you my favor rests.” (Lk. 3:22) Jesus becomes Peace on Earth! St. Paul writes of Jesus, “It is he who is our peace.” (Eph. 2:14) It is understandable that many have seen in this scene a revelation of the Most Holy Trinity. The appearance of three distinct Divine Persons is being symbolized by the voice -- God the Father, the Dove -- God the Holy Spirit, and Jesus -- God the Son.

Luke intends for us to understand that all Jesus will do and say from this moment will be in fulfillment of God's Holy Will. Jesus humbly submits His human spirit to the operations of the Holy Spirit. He will walk in the Spirit through the pages of this Gospel.

Luke deliberately identifies Jesus with a particular group of people when he wrote, "When all the people were baptized, and Jesus ... likewise being baptized." (Lk. 3:21) Jesus is being identified with all baptized people. They received a baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins. Jesus identifies with those baptized men and women who have had their sins removed by His death on the Cross. Luke is telling us that Jesus died for the redeemed. If Jesus had not been baptized, there would have been no baptism unto the remission of sins. If men and women refuse repentance and baptism they can have no share in God's redemption through Jesus Christ. The Scriptures clearly proclaim the terrible truth: "...his mighty wrath is against all who forsake him." (Ezra 8:22)

GENEALOGY OF JESUS

Luke presents at this point a genealogy of Jesus. The genealogy of a man or family among Jews, as among many people, was extremely important. The genealogy was the family title. It could have serious legal, social, and religious consequences. Only those families that maintain racial purity formed part of the true Israel. A descendent of a pure genealogical line inherited a share in the particular merits of his ancestors. A descendent of David shared in David's merits and was especially accredited with the divine promise made to David. It was for this very reason that the Jews prided themselves upon their direct line of descent from Abraham -- glorying in the knowledge that they thereby shared in the promise made to Abraham.

Luke gives Jesus a most interesting genealogy. He is descendent of David and Abraham and therefore a very true "Israelite" recipient of the promises made to them. But Jesus' line does not stop there. Luke carries it back to the beginning of time by identifying Jesus with Adam. By doing, he identifies Jesus with the whole human race. This teaches that all mankind can identify with Jesus. Nevertheless, Luke teaches that although salvation is open to all mankind, only those who repent and are baptized will share in it.

Luke does not stop at Adam in the genealogy of Jesus. He carries it back to God with the full awareness of what is being implied. Jesus comes from God. Man has come along way from God. His racial purity has long since been contaminated. Man is too far removed from God to find his way back to God. Only Jesus goes straight back to God. It is only in Jesus that man can find his way home -- come back to God: "...through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father." (Eph. 2:18)

BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE-MEMORIZE)

"WASH YOURSELVES CLEAN! PUT AWAY YOUR MISDEEDS FROM BEFORE MY EYES; CEASE DOING EVIL; LEARN TO DO GOOD.... COME NOW, LET US SET THINGS RIGHT, SAYS THE LORD: THOUGH YOUR SINS BE LIKE SCARLET, THEY MAY BECOME WHITE AS SNOW..." (Isaiah 1:16-18a)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 3:1-6 and Isaiah 1:1-20.

1. What does Baptism of Repentance mean to you?
2. What is the relationship between repentance and salvation?
3. What connection do you see between a spirit of repentance and the study of the Scriptures?
4. What does this say to you personally?

SECOND DAY: Read Jeremiah 8:4-17 and 9:1-21.

1. What is the spiritual condition of the people in these readings?
2. What were some of the unrepentant sins of the people?
3. What comes upon those who refuse to repent?
4. Why do you think many people feel no need for repentance?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 3:7-19

1. How do people give evidence that they intend to reform?

2. What did water baptism imply?
3. What did John mean by 'even now the axe is laid to the tree?'
4. If you asked John the question "What must I do?", what do you think he would say?

FOURTH DAY: Read Amos 5:7-18 and 6:3-14

1. What are some of the social sins that incur the Wrath of God?
2. As a Christian Community where do you see we have need of repentance?
3. What are some of our socially accepted customs sinful in God's eyes?
4. Why do these sins fail often to create a personal or national sense of guilt?

FIFTH DAY: Read Matthew 3:13-17 and Luke 3:21-22.

1. What is the importance of the baptism of Jesus?
2. What is being implied by the opening of the heavens when Jesus prayed?
3. What does this reading teach us about the future mission of Jesus?
4. Why can this reading be said to reveal the Holy Trinity?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 3:23-38.

1. What was the importance of the genealogy to the Jews?
2. What is being implied when Luke carries Jesus' genealogy back to Adam?
3. What is implied by Luke carrying Jesus' genealogy back to God?
4. What is the importance of all this to you personally?

CHAPTER 7

THE ARMOR OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

St. Luke can rightly be called the Evangelist of the Holy Spirit. The pen of Luke describes the Holy Spirit as the architect of the Incarnation and the Redemption. In the first lines Luke writes about the mature Jesus and established the fact that Jesus operates in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Nothing is said or done by Jesus in the Gospel until this fact is established: all flows from the Holy Spirit. In a sense, the life of Jesus unfolds before us, we will experience the exquisite beauty and perfume -- the divine majesty and mystery of the all-holy Spirit of God. Let us open our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Heaven truly touches us in Jesus. That touch can purify and make us holy. Let us walk through the pages of this Gospel with the Man who walks in the Spirit.

TEMPTATION IN THE DESERT

Luke tells us that "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, then returned from the Jordan and was conducted by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, where he was tempted by the devil." (Lk. 4:1-2) We know that the desert journey of Israel, beginning in enslavement in Egypt, was directed to the Jordan and into the Promised Land. When Luke relates that Jesus returned from the Jordan into the desert, the reversal of Israel's journey is being enacted. The New Moses led Israel again into the desert for Jesus in His person is a corporate symbol of the New Israel.

A tradition of a second exodus for Israel strongly colored the rabbinical teachings. It was held that the Messiah would appear in the desert and there He would engage in a final struggle with the cosmic forces of evil.

As Jesus enters the desert, He symbolically represents the New Israel, the Christian Community freed from the enslavement of sin through baptism entering the desert, as Israel of Old, to be confirmed through temptation in its new status as Son of God. When Luke writes that Jesus was tempted by the

devil, he teaches us who the great obstacle and adversary is to the fulfillment of our Christian Commitment -- the keeping of our baptismal promises.

The early Church understood that it was at war with a personal evil power. This power was not just a symbolic representation of the evil within man. It was a power that primarily existed outside of man and had its own personal embodiment. Even though Jesus Himself acted and spoke as if Satan and demons were real, many today teach He did so only because it was an accepted belief of the times that Jesus went along with. Jesus does not appear to humor people or to be afraid to correct treasured Jewish misconceptions. The words and deeds of Jesus dramatically express the belief that Satan was contending for the minds and souls of His disciples. During Jesus' last moments with His disciples, He warns them: "Satan has asked for you, to sift you all like wheat." (Lk. 22-32) Three times, shortly before His death, Jesus refers to Satan as "Prince of this world" (See Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and the primary cause of His death. When the Jews claimed God as their Father, Jesus response: "The father you sprang from is the devil, and willingly you carry out his wishes. He brought death to man from the beginning, 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." (Jn.8:44)

To deny the personal existence of these evil beings implies Jesus was seriously wrong about a most important spiritual matter. It reduces Him to some sort of Don Quixote tilting windmills!

The temptations suffered by Jesus, as presented in the Synoptic Gospels, give valuable guidance and insight to the Christian Community. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert to be prepared by God for His public ministry. We find no plan here for success in the world, but one to establish the Kingdom of God in the world and in our souls.

Apparently, Satan enters into the trials and difficulties permitted by the Lord. He seeks to pervert the good end and purposes of these trials by causing them to weaken our faith and love -- to turn the soul away from God and the soul's firm commitment to God. The Temptations from Satan are directed against Jesus' public ministry. No doubt Satan seeks to pervert the true messianic role of Jesus.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION

"The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to turn into bread'." (Lk.4:3) The tempter appeals to His status as the Son of God. Jesus is being tempted to call into play His personal power for self-gratification. It would involve a transfer of allegiance from God to self -- to dependence upon self rather than God. It is a temptation to use God given powers for selfish ends.

Satan always begins with something good. He encourages us to seek a good -- a lesser good. He will feed our desire for this good until he blinds us to all but the obtainment of it -- the absolute necessity of possessing it. The end result will be that one day we will truly prefer this particular good to the Almighty Goodness itself -- God. Even to the point of turning from God. A good becomes our god!

Jesus answers Satan: "Scripture has it, 'Not on bread alone shall man live'." (Lk.4:4) Jesus restores the proper balance and order to good. A true Son of God will primarily do the Will of His Father, not his own will. He knows the Father knows how to give good things to His children. He doesn't leave him with stones and serpents. We learn by the first temptation that the apparent goods of the flesh and spirit ought to be sacrificed when the Will of God demands it.

In a small but personal way, you face this same temptation when you are tempted to give up the Bible Study because of the demands it makes upon the flesh. It is a spiritual quest and study and its primary good effect will be in the spirit. It always takes time before such good effects manifest themselves in our conscious personal lives. Satan endeavors to lead us to believe there is a better use of time and energy.

THE SECOND TEMPTATION

In the second temptation Satan comes to Jesus as the Prince of the world. Then the devil took him up higher and showed him all the kingdom of the world in a single instant. He said to him, "I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms; the power has been given to me and I give it to

whomever I wish. Prostrate yourself in homage before me, and it shall all be yours." (Lk. 4:5-7)

In this temptation, Jesus must choose between the Kingdom of this World or the Kingdom of Heaven. It is certainly not always obvious when we choose certain worldly means to achieve our ministry that this is so. It is certainly even less obvious that it may imply accepting the lordship of Satan rather than God. All that is in the very fine print is easily overlooked until the fruit ripens and payment is due. Jesus is being tempted to put His trust and confidence in something other than God -- in arms, wealth, and worldly influence -- in Himself. At times self and Satan may not be all that distinct. To achieve his messianic goals by means of arms, or wealth or worldly power would be to use ungodly means. Jesus opts to use only the powers not contaminated in this world by evil: Truth and Love! These were the powers of the Kingdom of God -- the powers in this world that were still godly. Jesus trusted that Truth and Love would prevail.

Every human being who has the work of God to do, will face the same temptation. Will we use godly means to fulfill a godly work? Or will we lose faith in the way of truth and love? Will we grow impatient with God's ways when the expected results are not forthcoming and then turn to human methods and worldly means? The Scriptures encourage us: "Be patient...until the coming of the Lord." (Jms. 5:7) The works of God must be accomplished in God's time and way --not man's.

THE THIRD TEMPTATION

For the third temptation we read: "Then the devil led him to Jerusalem, set him on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for Scripture has it, 'He will bid his angels watch over you' and again, 'With their hands they will support you, that you may never stumble on a stone.'" (Lk. 4:9-11) Satan can also quote Scripture and use it to tempt people to do his own biddings.

Satan tempts Jesus to test God. The voice from heaven confirmed that Jesus is God's Son. But is a word enough especially when being the Son of God does not seem to change anything in the everyday living of life? This was the besetting sin of Israel. When things went right, they had no problem believing and glorifying in the idea that they were the children of God -- Heaven's

favorites. But, the moment God tested them they immediately began to put God to the test of proving His love for them by working signs and wonders of love.

A demand for signs and wonders indicates a lack of faith. Where faith is lacking signs and wonders may impress, but they do not lead to a commitment in faith. Jesus refuses to force God to perform a sign confirming Him before Israel as the Messiah and thus forcing belief upon them. By this means, Jesus could escape the Cross and Crucifixion. The final echoes of this temptation will resound again in Jerusalem: "Let's see him come down from that cross and then we will believe in him... After all, he claimed, I am God's Son'." (Mat. 27:42-43)

These three temptations and Jesus' response to them may summarize the whole spiritual history of Jesus. The Old Israel did not endure its testing in the wilderness. Three times Jesus quotes the revealed word of God from Deuteronomy demonstrating that the will of God for Israel had been clearly declared in the Old Testament. Jesus acknowledges that God has complete freedom and sovereignty over His life! This was His "fiat"- Let it be done to me according to thy Word! In summary, Jesus teaches us that God should have the freedom to do with us what He pleases and the quality of our faith needs to be like that of Job: "Slay me though he might, I will wait for him." (Job 13-15) God deserves such faith and confidence from His children.

ARMOR OF GOD

Jesus has triumphed and now He returns "in the power of the Spirit" (Lk.4:14) to begin His public ministry. He appears on the scene as God's warrior armed to overcome the Kingdom of Darkness and establish on earth the Kingdom of God. The description given by Paul in Ephesians fits well Jesus of Nazareth: Jesus stands firm in the armor of God ready to stand and resist the approaching evil. He girds Himself about with truth, salvation as His helmet, justice as His breastplate, zeal to propagate the gospel of peace as His footgear. He holds faith before Himself as a shield to extinguish all the fiery darts of the evil one and He holds in His hand the sword of God's word. Of such a sword the Book of Hebrews writes: "...sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart." (Heb. 4:12) In other words, Jesus

comes forth with a heart filled with merciful justice and the words of truth in His mouth.

The armor of God in which every Christian must be clothed, if he is to stand firm and extend the kingdom of God, consists of Justice, Faith, the Word of God and the Gospel of Peace. His only shield is Faith and his only sword, the full Word of God -- living and effective!

JESUS IN NAZARETH

Immediately Luke relates Jesus comes to Nazareth. This whole section is quite significant. It is a cameo presentation of the ministry of Jesus. It mirrors to us Jesus' own conscious awareness of His ministry. Jesus appears in the synagogue at Nazareth on the Sabbath. Here He delivers the keynote address of His ministry. We are presented with only a kernel of the theme, but it establishes well the role of the Messiah as assumed by Jesus.

The people were delighted with His gracious speech and the proclamation of a Jubilee Year from the Lord, and the possibility that the messianic age had arrived filled them with excitement. But, when Jesus declares that He is the central figure of the Messianic age -- in other words, the Messiah, doubt begins to grow. This type of Messiah fulfilled neither the subconscious nor conscious desires of the people even though Jesus pointed out that He did fulfill the prophecies of the Scriptures. The Jews will ignore this point and insist that Jesus fulfill their messianic hopes. They said to Him, "Do here in your own country the things we have heard you have done in Capernaum." Jesus counteracts and demands that they believe in the Scriptures, which He fulfills. He demands faith in the revealed Word of God. Where there is no faith, there are no miracles. Jesus openly responded that if they refuse to believe in him -- the gentiles would believe in him and to them would go the rich inheritance of the Messianic Age and Israel would be left desolate.

Doubt became hardness of heart and hardness of heart gave birth to a murderous hatred for a doctrine untenable to their ears and for the Man who preaches it, and unconsciously, even for the God who sent Him. Isn't this a blasphemous nobody and his message a nothingness? "At these words the whole audience in the synagogue was filled with indignation. They rose up and expelled him from the town, leading him to the brow of the hill on which it was built and intending to hurl him over the edge." (Lk. 4:28-30)

The attempt of the Nazarenes to kill Jesus is a forbearing sign of how His ministry will effect Israel. The shadow of the coming Cross falls heavily across His newly inaugurated ministry. A pattern will follow of acceptance and rejection. He is "...destined to be the downfall and the rise of many." (Lk.2:34) We will see in a concrete way how the very person of Jesus becomes judgment. Before Jesus, people automatically fall into two groups: those for Jesus and those against Him. Some say, "but I'm neither for nor against Jesus." Jesus knows differently. He said, "...he who is not with me is against me." (Lk. 11:23) When it comes to Jesus, there can be no indifference -- no non-committal attitude. Every time we study the Scriptures, we truly come to judgment!

THE ARMOR OF GOD

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

“PUT ON THE ARMOR OF GOD SO THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND FIRM AGAINST THE TACTICS OF THE DEVIL.” (Ephesians 6:11)

FIRST DAY: Read Revelations 12:4-17, John 8:42-45
and I Peter 5:7-10.

1. What do you learn in Revelations about the nature of Satan?
2. What does Jesus teach us about Satan in John 8:42-45?
3. What do you learn in the reading from First Peter?
4. What is your personal belief about Satan?

SECOND DAY: Read Deuteronomy 8:1-5 and Luke 4:1-4.

1. What do you learn from Deuteronomy about the purpose of trials and temptations?
2. What is being symbolized by the Temptations of Jesus in the desert?
3. What is the real evil behind this Temptation?
4. What do you learn from this first temptation?

THIRD DAY: Read Deuteronomy 6:10-15 and Luke 4:5-8

1. How does Satan appear in this Temptation?
2. How did Satan come to such power in the world?
3. What is Jesus tempted to do in the Second Temptation?

4. What do you learn from this temptation?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 4:9-13 and Ephesians 6:10-17.

1. What does the Third Temptation teach you?
2. What do you learn from Jesus about handling temptations from the devil?
3. What is the "Armor of God" according to St. Paul?
4. What do you learn from this reading in Ephesians?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 4:14-19, Isaiah 58:1-14 and 61:11.

1. What do you think is the significance of this Nazareth scene?
2. What do the readings from Isaiah teach you about the role of the Messiah?
3. Why can Luke's gospel account be called a "social gospel"?
4. Do you think the most important freedom is a freedom from sin? Why?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 4:20-28 and II Kings 5:1-14.

1. Why do you think the people doubted that Jesus was the messiah?
2. What did the Jews demand of Jesus in order to accept Him as the Messiah?
3. What did Jesus imply when He recalled to their minds the story of Naaman?
4. Why do you think Jesus himself became a cause of Judgement?

CHAPTER 8

FISHER OF MEN

INTRODUCTION

In the most northern region of Palestine, in the province of Galilee, Jesus lived and worked most of His life. From Galilee came all the Apostles but one, Judas Isacriot. It is said if we want to understand the quality of the wine, you must know the soil that produced the grapes. The Galilean world in which Jesus physically moved and lived was one of garden-like beauty --truly the land of milk and honey. Indeed, the Lord knew how to give good things to His Son. But, the psychological, political, and religious atmosphere Jesus moved into was in ferment. He arrived at the city of Capernaum and appeared in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

THE WORD OF GOD

Jesus, despite His youth, was invited to address the congregation. One person in the congregation at Capernaum is totally conscious of the spiritual quality of the message and the man. From the moment Jesus began to speak, this person experienced the overwhelming powers emanating out of Jesus of Nazareth. As the congregation silently marvels about Jesus, they are suddenly shocked into a jolting awakening as this person can no longer remain silent before Jesus, the pain being too great. He shrieks in a loud voice: "Leave us alone! What do you want of us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God." (Lk. 4:34) One spiritual force recognizes another instantly, particularly if it is hostile, in the same way we sense as friendly or unfriendly a place or person.

The possession of this Jewish man was quite total. The evil spirit and the spirit of the man had wedded -- the two had become "us". The human personality of the man has been suppressed as the stronger spirit dominated and used him as his instrument. The possessed Jew in the Synagogue, coming immediately after the rejection of Jesus from the synagogue in Nazareth, may be intended

by Luke to symbolize the true cause for the Jews inability to accept Jesus. "You cannot bear to hear my word." (Jn. 8:43)

In addition, Jesus reacts quickly and sharply, "Be quiet! Come out of him." (Lk.4: 35) He speaks to the demon as a man would speak to a barking dog that feared him: "Muzzle yourself! Get out of there!" By the word of Jesus, the power of the demon over the man was destroyed. He was freed to be himself again. Jesus did for him what he could not do for himself. Man has the power to do many things that he lacks the power to undo.

We are witnessing here a concrete manifestation of the truth proclaimed at Nazareth: "a year of favor from the Lord...to proclaim liberty to captives... and release to prisoners. All were struck with astonishment, and they began saying to one another: 'what is there about this speech?'" (Lk. 4:19, 18, 36)

Four particular men in the Capernaum Synagogue were deeply impressed with what they heard and saw: Simon, Andrew, James and John. This was the first miraculous deed performed by Jesus. These four men saw the beginning of His ministry.

"Immediately upon leaving the synagogue, he entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and the first thing they did was to tell him about her." (Mk.1:29-30) Luke tells us that "... they interceded with him for her." (Lk.4: 38) Those who disbelieve in the power of the intercession of the saints over the heart of Jesus, ought to prayerfully meditate on this text. Jesus "...stood over her and addressed himself to the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and waited on them." (Lk.4: 39) The words used by Luke suggest that Jesus rebuked the fever much the same way that He had rebuked the demon.

The renown of Jesus kept spreading and at sunset, with the ending of the Sabbath, "all who had people sick with a variety of diseases took them to him, and he laid hands on each of them and cured them." (Lk. 4:40) Luke, the physician, now presents to us the Divine Physician. He teaches us how personally Jesus deals with the sick. Each sick person individually receives the healing touch of His hand -- "he laid hands of each of them." Even if the suffering is clearly a result of sin, He is moved to cure the person.

His ministry always faces the danger of being misinterpreted because of His expressions of love for the afflicted. It is not essentially a ministry of healing. There was always danger the crowds' enthusiasm would turn Jesus into a wonder worker and they would fail to see that all these cures are a dramatic form of preaching the good news – that the Kingdom of God had arrived. He could not openly proclaim to be the Messiah for fear of misinterpretation with serious political consequences.

The mission of Jesus is not to be constantly at the service of an enthusiastic crowd, but to “announce the good news of the reign of God.” (Lk. 4:43) Apparently, we have just witnessed the reign of God. We witnessed it primarily in the two miracles which Jesus works by a mere word: the man possessed by a demon and the woman with a fever. By the very power of Jesus' word, health is restored to both men and women and releases them from the possession and bondage of Satan. He restores to human beings the freedom to truly worship God and to serve God. Luke demonstrates the latter when he tells us that “...she got up immediately and waited on them.” (Lk. 4:39)

The men in the synagogue asked: “What is there about his speech?” (Lk. 4:36) It calls men and women from confused and enslaved lives into the fullness of life... into the reign of God.

FISHERS OF MEN

In this Third Gospel, Luke presents to us the founder of the Church. The Church is but the extension of the life of Jesus into the world. In the Church, “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit” into the world. We can expect, therefore to discover the roots of the Church presented in the Third Gospel. We see in the Acts of the Apostles that Simon Peter plays a prominent role in the early Church.

Luke demonstrates to the Christian Community that Peter does not choose Jesus. Jesus Christ chooses Peter! The details now related by Luke are highly significant and symbolic. He mentions the fact that two boats are present. Jesus has a choice. Jesus chooses the one belonging to Simon and He enters into Simon's boat. He requests Simon to pull a little out from the shore and from there He speaks and teaches the people. The boat belongs to Peter and is a material extension of the person of Peter. Luke teaches us that Jesus speaks from Peter.

When Jesus has completed His discourse, He instructed Peter to sail away from the shore out into the deep waters. The whole scene could well signify the Church's near fruitless toil to convert the Jews of Palestine. They labored long and arduously, but the returns had been slight. This text could be a defense of Peter's mission to the Gentiles --fishing in waters some considered dangerous.

Simon signified by his mild protest that he had no confidence on his ability to catch fish. He had let the net down too many times to be deluded about his luck or talent. It is out of respect for the word of Jesus that he lowered his nets...he resumed his work. He discovered that the word can have miraculous effects: Upon doing as Jesus requested, "...they caught such a great number of fish that their nets were at the breaking point." (Lk. 5:6) Peter gave a command to the others to come and help him. Even with the Lord in the boat, he could not do it all alone. It is only by the loving cooperation of the whole "team" that the Divine Fisherman brings the full catch into the Kingdom of God. When we refuse to accept directions of the Lord from His representatives and will not work together in humble obedience and love --the nets break and many are lost!

No one was more conscious than Simon that he was unworthy to be Chief Shepherd. That is what the whole story is all about. God chooses the lowly things of this earth! Jesus tells us: "...take courage! I have overcome the World." (Jn. 16:33) "In weakness power reaches perfection." (2 Cor. 12:9) "This man is the instrument I have chosen..." (Acts 9:15) "And, know that I am with you always..." (Mat. 28:20) St. Luke concludes with: "They brought their boats to land, left everything, and became his followers." (Lk. 5:11)

"The Fishers of Men": all the world knows their success story -- the success of sinners who dared believe in the Word of God!

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

“WE ARE TRULY HIS HANDIWORK, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS TO
LEAD THE LIFE OF GOOD DEEDS WHICH GOD PREPARED FOR US
IN ADVANCE.” (Ephesians 2:10)

FIRST DAY: Read Hebrews 12:1-17.

1. What advice does Hebrews give to those who seek to run the race for an eternal crown?
2. What does this Scripture teach you about trials?
3. How do trials prove God’s love for us?
4. What good fruit comes to those who patiently bears their trials?

SECOND DAY: Read II Thessalonians 2:1-17.

1. What do you think Paul means by the secret forces of lawlessness?
2. Who will be deceived by the lawless One?
3. Who does God save from his influence?
4. What does verse 15 teach you?

THIRD DAY: Read Ephesians 2:1-10

1. What does Paul teach you in verse one through three?
2. According to Paul how do we come to be saved from our sins?

3. What can a person do to merit salvation?
4. What does verse 10 teach you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 4:33-42.

1. What does it mean that the words of Jesus has authority?
2. How is the authority of Jesus' word demonstrated?
3. How would you answer the question: "What is there about his speech?"
4. How do you think Jesus announced the good news?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 5:1-11.

1. What is the importance of bring the apostles upon this scene at this time?
2. What is the symbolism of Jesus teaching from the boat of Peter?
3. What lesson does the Church learn from the miraculous catch of fish?
4. What do you learn from verse 10?

SIXTH DAY: Read Acts 1:12-26, 4:5-12 and Galatians 2:11-14.

1. What role does Peter appear to play in the early Church?
2. Why was he able to assume this role in the Church?
3. Why do you think Paul publicly corrected Peter?
4. What do you learn from the human weakness of Peter?

CHAPTER 9

HE TOUCHED THEM

INTRODUCTION

Men have with paint and pen have pictured Jesus, but perhaps no one better than Luke has combined and harmonized virility and tenderness in a portrait of Jesus of Nazareth. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is the Man who touches mankind with love -- the true Son of the Father who is Love.

Luke, in his subsequent narratives, demonstrates how Jesus incarnated the Gospel into His behavior. We discover more in the behavior of Jesus than in His words -- the true meaning of the Reign of God. Jesus not only reconciles sinners to God, but as in the case of Simon, He calls sinners to participate in the ministry of reconciliation.

THE UNTOUCHABLES

In an orderly manner, as Luke promised Theophilus, he continues to demonstrate the reign of God made present in Jesus. "On one occasion...a man full of leprosy came to him." (Lk. 5:12) In the Old Testament, holiness was maintained by avoiding defilement with physical, ceremonial and moral uncleanness. The Old Testament could do nothing positive for the leper. It could only protect society from him. It made him an outcast. It involved not only the isolation of a disease but of a human being. The very idea of having the disease caused greater suffering and damage to the human being than the actual disease. In rabbinical thought, only by the healing power of God could such a disease be healed.

The leper not only suffered social excommunication but religious as well. He was unable to fulfill the religious obligations of worship. The devastating physical effects of the disease were considered a particular, terrible

punishment by God. Rejected by man and God, he could not but reject himself and live in perpetual despair.

When the leper confronted Jesus, it was not merely a confrontation between a healthy man and a sick one. It was a meeting between the Lord and a social religious outcast. The leper falls upon his knees before Jesus and addresses Him as "Kyrios" --Lord. Luke deliberately indicates this to be an encounter between God and man -- an outcast man. The leper said to Jesus: "Lord, if you will to do so, you can cure me." (Lk.5: 12)

It may be said that one is what one wills. This is to imply that the will of a person expressed the real heart and essence of the person. When the leper said, "Lord, if you will to do so", he was centering in on the very nature of God. He was probing God's heart. Much more than a cure is being requested. It is a plea to be restored to self-respect, to human relationships and above all, to be brought back into a communication with God. The leper's attitude expressed faith in Jesus. What now follows is an epiphany -- a manifestation and revelation of God in Jesus. What kind of Man of God is Jesus? What kind of God does Jesus represent? The plea of desperation made in faith touches Jesus to the heart. Filled with pity and compassion, Jesus becomes one with the afflicted. He reaches out to touch the untouchable, the unclean. He says, "I do will it. Be cured." (Lk. 5:13) In Jesus, God touches mankind with a warm touch of love. Such a touch not only cures but creates. Jesus creates the sacrament of touch.

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

Jesus worked within the religious and social framework of His day, as long as these structure did not impede the expression of God's love. He recognized the necessity of authority and upheld it. He respected human authority as long as it did not reject, impede or override divine authority. When a man is faced with two conflicting moral obligations, the lesser obligation ceases in the face of the greater.

God has established civil and religious authority on this earth. Proper authority is a blessing in human life. It properly directs human life along the path of righteousness and justice. It was a Jewish law that a leper cleansed by God's power must present himself to the official representatives of God, the priests. The priests would verify whether the leper had truly been cleansed

and was now entitled to enter back into the religious community. The fact of the cure was not enough. The person could not assume his proper place in the community until the cure was verified by the priests. Jesus respected and accepted this stipulation. He commanded the man to go and show himself to the priests.

The church teaches that when Christians have seriously alienated themselves from God and the Christian Community, they are obliged, in order to return to Christian communion, to sincerely repent before God and present themselves to a minister of reconciliation. The priests acted as judges in the matter and when they were satisfied that repentance was real, they admitted the person back into communion. Jesus respected and accepted such religious legislation in His day. Many Christians today refuse to do so. The Heart of Jesus was not only loving but also meek and humble!

THE FIVE CONFRONTATIONS

Complying with this religious prescriptions for lepers would have certain serious consequences in the ministry of Jesus. It would bring Him to the public attention of the officials of Jerusalem. By sending this man cured of leprosy to the priests, Jesus would be saying, "...there is a prophet in Israel." (2 Kings 5:8)

In the peace and quiet of the desert, Jesus prayed and prepared His soul for the coming confrontations. For indeed, the clouds of confrontation are gathering. The news has been received: "...there is a prophet in Israel". And so they came -- the Scribes and Pharisees -- the self-appointed Guardians of Religious Orthodoxy -- "from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem." (Lk.5: 17) They came with their frozen concepts of holiness and their predetermined messianic expectations to encounter God in Jesus of Nazareth. They encountered the Lord whose presence is within a cloverleaf, yet, all creation cannot contain Him. They desire God to fit in their smug little world and God comes to make men fit for the Kingdom of God.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Jesus has come to remove the leprosy of the soul, sin. Forgiveness of sin is at the heart of the Reign of God. God offers forgiveness through Jesus. A necessary requirement for reconciliation is faith in Jesus. The Pharisees and

Scribes withhold faith in Jesus. An unexpected opportunity arose and Jesus used the instance for a little shock therapy for the guests. Men arrive with a paralyzed friend and because of the prestigious crowd around Jesus, they are denied access to Him. Not to put off by obstacles, they go up on the roof and lower their friend right down to where Jesus teaches. "Seeing their faith, Jesus said, 'My friend, your sins are forgiven you.'" (Lk. 5:20) "My friend" expresses it all. Jesus is not only a friend of sinners, He takes away sins, enabling man to become a friend of God. No one speaks, but minds begin to race and judgments are made: "Who is this man who utters blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Lk. 5:21) It is true that God alone can forgive sins, but God can delegate His authority to man. According to the Pharisaic belief, sickness was a punishment for sin and a person could not be cured of an affliction until forgiven for his sins. Forgiveness of sins and healing of affliction flowed from the divine source, God. Jesus takes the next logical step. "I say to you, get up! Take your mat with you, and return to your house." (Lk. 5:24) The man was cured by Jesus who had declared the forgiveness of his sins. The logical judgment should not be "Who is this man who utters blasphemies?" but, "Who is this man through whom God forgives and heals?"

Jesus won His first encounter with the Scribes and Pharisees. "Full of awe, they gave praise to God, saying, 'We have seen incredible things today!'" (Lk. 5:26)

ASSOCIATION WITH OUTCASTS

Jesus now takes the Scribes and Pharisees a step deeper into the mystery of the Kingdom of God. God not only forgives sins through Jesus, but God seeks out sinner to save through Jesus. The next scene presents the call of Levi. Levi is a tax collector --a social outcast. In our day, he would be considered a petty racketeer. Jesus calls him at his custom post. He left everything and became a follower of Jesus. To celebrate the joyous occasion of his conversion, he gave a great banquet for his friends. Jesus and His disciple were the honored guests.

A Jewish treatise expressly stated that "the disciples of the learned must not sit at table in the society of those who are ignorant or careless of religious usages." The fear was that in such a company the pious would be offered food from which proper tithes had not been offered and thereby had become

contaminated. Here we encounter a practical application of what has been called "the hedge of the Law".

Jesus disregards "the hedge of the Law". He knows that true holiness cannot be contaminated by the external world. To set a table and eat with other was a symbol of friendship. Jesus' presence at the banquet table not only celebrated Levi's reconciliation with God, but was a sign to all sinners present that God has taken the first step to seek and save them.

When the shocked Pharisees said to the disciples: "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and non-observers of the law?" (Lk. 5:30), Jesus replied, "The healthy do not need a doctor; sick people do. I have not come to invite the self-righteous to a change of heart, but sinners." (Lk. 5:31-32)

FASTING

The Pharisees and Scribes now direct their attack against the ascetical behavior of Jesus' disciples. "They said to him, 'John's disciples fast frequently and offer prayers; the disciples of the Pharisees do the same. Yours, on the contrary, eat and drink freely.'" (Lk. 5:33) Fasting in the Old Testament was associated with atonement for sins. On a day of fast, the person abstained from food and drink from sundown to sundown the following day. Jewish law required fasting only one day out of the year --The Day of Atonement. The pious Pharisees fasted twice weekly on Mondays and Thursdays. They fasted in atonement for the sins of the nation.

Jesus knew there existed a custom that even the Pharisees honored. During the time of the wedding celebration that usually lasted a week, the friends of the bridegroom did not fast for fear of curtailing the festive mood of the wedding. Jesus replied to the question with a question. "Can you make guest of the groom fast while the groom is still with them?" (Lk. 5:34) The prophets spoke of Israel as being the bride of Yahweh. Jesus interprets the behavior of His disciples as prophetic. Jesus suggests that the question they ought to ask themselves is whether the bridegroom of Israel and His attendants are present or not. Jesus implies that if they answer that question truthfully, the question of fasting will be answered.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

Jesus now proposed two parables to the Pharisees in order to help them understand that something new has come in Him and it cannot be contained by the old. The Gospel Jesus is incompatible with the present institution of Judaism. You do not put a new cloth on an old garment. You do not put a new wine in old wine skins. The old cannot be preserved at the expense of the new. If tied together, both the old and new are destroyed. The old will seek to reserve its traditions at the expense of the new Spirit. Faith in Jesus will call for a completely new life recreated by the Holy Spirit. A mere patching up of an old character will not do.

Jesus summed up the difficulty facing them when He said: "No one, after drinking old wine, wants new. He says, 'I find the old wine better'". (Lk. 5:39) This summarized their emotional response to the "good news". Tastes are difficult to change. One prefers that to which one has become accustomed. They say, "the old is better." The Pharisees for too long have believed their way was the only way to serve God. Change, demanded by Jesus, threatened their religious security. To be a disciple of Jesus truly demanded a radical faith in Him that was willing to leave all things and follow Him.

THE SABBATH

Few things were more sacred to the Pharisees than the Law of the Sabbath. It was important for their survival in a Gentile World. It obliged the Jews weekly to make a public profession of faith by abstaining from work. As the Law read, it was quite unencumbered. (Ex. 20:10; Deut. 5:13) But, around the Sabbath Law the rabbis erected 39 "hedges" --39 works that would violate the Sabbath. They spoiled the things they were trying to protect. As a result of this, the Sabbath did not exist for man, but man for the Sabbath.

The Pharisees first accused the disciples of Jesus of breaking the Sabbath because they plucked and ate some grain while walking through the field on the Sabbath. They accused Jesus of breaking the law of the Sabbath because He cured an afflicted man. Jesus defended His disciples with the argument that

what may at times be unlawful is not necessarily immoral when real human need is present. Law is made for the good of man and not his detriment.

When Jesus informed the Jews that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, He certainly implies He is above any Sabbath regulation in a much as a king would be above his own law. The Church certainly understood that, as the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus has freed them from these crippling traditions and stifling observances. It would later demonstrate confidence in its own authority by transferring the day of rest from the Sabbath to Sunday.

The Jews believed that God continued to work on the Sabbath. Jesus deliberately chose the Sabbath on which to work. His works were intended as prophetic signs that God is at work again in Israel.

Jesus' confrontations with these Jews reaches a climax while he is teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. They came to the synagogue with zeal to keep holy the Sabbath and to watch and see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath. It was illegal to heal on the Sabbath unless in case of death. They hoped He would perform a cure so they could have something to charge against Him. It was Jesus who charged them! They had come to accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath by curing a sick man. He was to be condemned for doing good works and here His condemners serenely sit in the synagogue and sin by plotting evil against Him. He exposes the hypocrisy of their position. Even they could not fail to see it. A spirit of hatred flamed in their hearts for Jesus. Luke relates: "At this they became frenzied and began asking one another what could be done to Jesus." (Lk. 6:11)

Jesus fails to touch them. They were to remain true to their name forever -- Pharisees --The separated ones. The Untouchables! Neither God nor man could touch them. But, they left themselves open to be touched by the one who is the eternally separated one --Satan.

HE THOUCHED THEM

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

"JESUS SAID: "THE HEALTHY DO NOT NEED A DOCTOR; SICK PEOPLE DO. I HAVE NOT COME TO INVITE THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS TO A CHANGE OF HEART, BUT SINNERS." (Lk. 5:31-31)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 5:12-16 and Mark 1:40-45

1. How did one preserve one's holiness in the Old Testament?
2. What is being implied when Jesus says, "I do will it?"
3. What does it tell us about Jesus when He sent the cured leper to the priests?
4. In what way is the Sacrament of Reconciliation symbolized in this episode?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 5:17-26 and Matthew 9:1-8.

1. Why can sin be called spiritual leprosy?
2. In the light of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, how would you answer the question "Who can forgive sins but God alone"?
3. What does it say to you when Jesus calls the man "My friend"?
4. What does it say to you when you read in Matthew 9:8 that "they praised God for giving such authority to men"?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 5:27-32 and Matthew 9:9-13.

1. What does this episode teach you?

2. How do you think you should go about bringing sinners back to God?
3. Have you ever taken a first step to reconcile a sinner with God?
4. What does Luke 5:32 say to you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 5:33-35 and Matthew 6:16-18.

1. What was the purpose of fasting in the Old Testament?
2. What was Jesus' reason for not fasting?
3. When do you think we should fast today?
4. What does the reading from Matthew tell you?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 5:36-39.

1. What do these parables intend to teach?
2. Why do you think religion had to change with the coming of Jesus?
3. Why did the Pharisees and Scribes prefer the "old wine"?
4. Why do you think changes in the Liturgy of the Church are so hard for many Catholics to accept?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 6:1-11.

1. What was the Law of the Sabbath?
2. How was the Sabbath perverted by legal prescriptions?
3. What do you see brought the Pharisees and Scribes to a hatred of Jesus?
4. By what right do you think the Church changed the day of rest from the Sabbath to Sunday?

CHAPTER 10

SERMON ON THE PLAINS

INTRODUCTION

In the life of Jesus the divine plan progressively unfolds itself. Jesus moves step by step along the path illuminated by the Holy Spirit. At a point in his ministry the Scribes and Pharisees rejected Jesus and sought to destroy him. This raised a serious crisis in his ministry. He had come to the crossroads. Which direction must He go? Should He go to the Gentiles? Should He continue on the same course? Jesus had but one course of action. "He went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night in communion with God." (Lk. 6:12.)

The Son of Man is not presented as self-sufficient unto His own wisdom and strength, but as one who repeatedly turns to the heavenly Father for guidance and help. Relating that Jesus spent the entire night in communion with God underlines in red what now occurs to be in accordance with the divine will and of crucial importance.

THE NEW ISRAEL

In prayer Jesus found the solution to His crisis and understood clearly the path of suffering now lying before Him. Since the Old Israel rejected Jesus, He must now inaugurate a New Israel who would be a People after His own heart.

Indicating the promptness of Jesus to divine inspiration Luke writes: "At daybreak he called his disciples and selected twelve of them to be his apostles." (Lk. 6:13) Out of those who believed in Jesus, God called twelve men to be twelve pillars of faith upon which the New Israel would arise. They were the foundation stones of a new people of God—a divine edifice of which Jesus was the cornerstone. These twelve men, separated from other disciples and gathered around Jesus, would be symbolic and prophetic signs of the coming of the New Israel. The Twelve were called Apostles. The word apostles means "one who is sent".

SERMON ON THE PLAINS

Jesus, coming down from the mountain with His chosen Twelve, certainly recalls Moses' descending Mt. Sinai with the Commandments of the Old Covenant. Jesus now presents God's Commandments to the New Israel. Luke deliberately mixed the disciples and the crowd together only to more clearly demonstrate that the sermon now delivered is not intended for all men. To emphasize that what now follows applies only to the disciple of Jesus, Luke writes: "Then, raising His eyes to his disciples, he said..." (Lk. 6:20)

When we deal with the Sermon on the Plains, or the Sermon on the Mount as it appears in Matthew, we stand on holy ground. We listen to the distilled essence of Jesus' personal message to His disciples. Jesus reveals what is the will of the Father and his own will for men and women who hear the call "...come and follow me." (Mk. 10:21)

The sermon begins with proclaiming the blessedness of the state of discipleship that brings many hardships in this life. Luke enumerates four blessings and Matthew eight.

SPIRIT OF ANAWIM

The Heart of the beatitudes is poverty. It is referred to in spiritual writings as evangelical poverty or gospel poverty. We need to keep in mind that the blessings enumerated come to the disciples of Jesus who are poor, and not to the poor in general. It is not poverty in itself that is being extolled, but poverty in discipleship. Luke has in mind the materially poor in his benedictions and the materially wealthy in his woes.

Many of the people whom Luke seeks to reach in his gospel are materially poor --men and women at the bottom of the economic level. No doubt about it, Luke sees a real blessing for disciples in material poverty and a real danger to discipleship in material wealth. This theme runs through his Gospel account.

Matthew's emphasis is clearly upon a spiritual dimension rather than material or physical. He writes: "... blest are the poor in spirit...Blest are they who hunger and thirst for holiness." (Mt. 5:3,6) In Luke, poverty is material and in Matthew it is spiritual. For centuries men and women have asked what is this

evangelical poverty disciples have been encouraged to embrace. Clearly, poverty is one of the essential traits of the spirit of Jesus Christ.

How do we interpret Luke in the light of Matthew's presentation? One of the best methods by which to understand an idea in the New Testament is to understand the same idea as it appears in the Old Testament, the word "poor" is not equated with the destitute. Biblical poverty is not equated with a material standard of life.

In the Old Testament the needy and the poor are called the "Anawim" --the little ones. The Anawim are first of all men and women faithful to the Law of God. They experience a profound dependence upon God not only for their existence, but for their survival upon earth. They recognize Divine Providence in the everyday circumstances of their lives. Therefore, a life of poverty in the Old Testament is defined primarily by man's relationship with God and not in terms of man's relationship to material goods.

Perfect biblical poverty, or the true spirit of Anawim, consisted in being free from all things but the will of God. It is not fundamental to evangelical poverty whether one has goods or not, but rather whether one fulfill the will of God. As Paul said: "I am experienced in being brought low, yet I know what it is to have an abundance." (Phil. 4:12)

Wealth may be an obstacle to the spirit of Anawim because it can make us self-sufficient with no need to trust God. Material poverty can be a blessing in that we are made to be dependent upon God. It is a good balance that we find in the beatitudes of Matthew, which considers poverty as a spiritual attitude, and Luke's interpretation that underlines the advantage of material poverty and puts us on guard against the dangers of wealth.

It is not material wealth not private property that is opposed to evangelical poverty, but the spirit of possessiveness, avarice which uses goods solely for the satisfaction of selfish pleasures and ambitions, and shuns the duties ownership involves.

Evangelical poverty manifests itself primarily as a disposition not to keep goods for oneself, but to share them with others. There is a free sharing of what each has with the community. The ideal Christian Community reflects

the Blessed Trinity wherein each person communicates himself entirely to others.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMANDMENT

The precept of charity is the Christian commandment. More than anything else it separates the Children of the Heavenly Father from the children of this world. The essence of love is good will. To essentially love another human being is to have good will towards the person. Practically speaking, it would imply doing unto others what you would want others to do unto you, and it implies doing it whether they reciprocate or not. Love can be expressed through passionate devotion as between "sweethearts". It can be expressed by warm affection as between two close friends. When Jesus teaches us to love our enemies, He does not tell us to "fall in love" with them, or to feel warm affection towards them --He doesn't even insist that we like them. Over these things of the emotions we can exercise so little control. Jesus does insist we do good to them and never evil. His command involves more than not doing evil. He obliges us to do something positive --whatever active good the situation calls for. "Do good" (Lk. 6:27) Jesus demands. Sometimes it involves blessing them --other times, praying for them, Jesus forbids His disciples to directly will evil no matter what the provocation.

Jesus commanded His disciples to be generous with their gifts --spiritual and material. They should do good without looking for any return. Jesus knows that when we love, when we do good, we are our own greatest benefactors. We give ourselves that which even God cannot give us: our own personal growth and development as redeemed human beings, as Christians. When we deliberately do evil to another --no matter the reason --we are truly our own greatest enemy. We do to ourselves that which even Satan cannot do, we destroy our Christian character, our very souls.

Jesus gives us motivation for loving all mankind and to love them without ceasing in order that we can rightly be called sons of the Most High"...since he himself is good to the ungrateful and the wicked." (Lk.6: 35) From the reflections of God's own heart, Jesus describes the qualities of Christian love. It is not judgmental, it is not condemnatory, it is forgiving and unceasingly giving. From the very heart of God will flow the measure of mercy towards us that we have permitted to flow from our hearts to others. Jesus summed up

His ambition for His disciples with the words, "Be compassionate, as you Father is compassionate." (Lk.6: 36)

What Jesus truly describes in the Sermon on the Plains is His own perfected heart. He reveals to us the way of purification and perfection of the human heart. The unfathomable love of the Father and Son are being revealed. God, through Jesus, commands from the disciples of Jesus, not their very best from them, but the very best for them. The disciples of Jesus are not called to second class citizenship. They are offered a share in the equality of citizenship shared by the Father and His Beloved Son. Such is the reign of God!

NOT FOR THE WORLD

The Sermon on the Plains is not a design for an earthly kingdom. "My kingdom does not belong to this world." (Jn.18: 36) Its principles do not apply to this world nor can they successfully be applied so. These are principles to be applied to our souls and not to our society.

Just as Jesus rejected the temptation to use the power of this world to fulfill His mission, so must His disciples reject the principles of this world as the means by which they live. Jesus chose godly means to achieve His ends. A disciple must be committed to these same godly means and maintain abiding hope in them for we do not follow a blind guide. They are not means for success in this world. There is no guarantee that they will ever win the day in this world. In fact, they may cause the disciples to suffer and be persecuted in the world.

Jesus expects His disciple to witness in this world to the presence of the Reign of God. They do this by the lives they lead --lives motivated by Charity. They must lead lives that have no other good to express than the very Charity of God. The Sermon on the Plains and the Sermon on the Mount serve forever as the Christian guide and norm which we follow in an unchristian world.

All of our lives we can never expect to be more than students at the Master's feet. It should be a consolation that the Twelve who first heard the Sermon on the Plains were a long way from graduation day. We should have no fear of remaining in such a school forever. We know from His own words that our Teacher is compassionate, He does not judge, nor does He condemn--he

pardons, and gives without measure. Again, we have His word: "...but the student, when he has finished his studies will be on a par with his teacher." (Lk. 6:40)

SERMON ON THE PLAINS

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

"MY COMMAND TO YOU IS: LOVE YOUR ENEMIES, PRAY FOR YOUR PERSECUTOR. THIS WILL PROVE THAT YOU ARE SONS OF YOUR HEVENLY FATHER, FOR HIS SUN RISES ON THE BAD AND THE GOOD, HE RAINS ON THE JUST AND THE UNJUST." (Mt. 5:44-45)

FIRST DAY: Read Exodus 19:1-8, 24:3-11 and Luke 6:12-16.

1. What does Luke 6:12 tell you about Jesus?
2. What was the solution to the problem of the rejection of Jesus by the Jews?
3. What did the choosing of the Twelve Apostles signify?
4. What would be the role they would play in the world?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 6:17-26 and Matthew 5:1-12.

1. What is the importance of the Sermon on the Plains in Luke and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew?
2. To whom is this sermon addressed?
3. What do the Beatitudes say to a disciple?
4. What is the difference between the first beatitude in Luke and the first beatiude in Matthew?

THIRD DAY: Read Matthew 6:19-34.

1. What in your opinion is evangelical poverty?

2. What is the spirit of Anawim in the Old Testament?
3. How can this spirit of Anawim be expressed in the life of a Christian?
4. How can you practice evangelical poverty?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 6:27-35 and Matthew 5:38-48.

1. How would you describe the Commandment of Charity?
2. What does it mean as a Christian to love one's enemies?
3. What does Jesus forbid a disciple ever to directly will evil?
4. According to Jesus, what does a life of Christian Charity revealed?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 6:36-42 and Matthew 7:1-6.

1. In Luke 6:36, what does Jesus demanded of a disciple?
2. What do you learn from Matthew 7:2?
3. What do you learn from Luke 6:41-42?
4. What does Luke 6:40 tell you about the purpose and goal of Charity?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 6:43-49 and Matthew 7:15-29.

1. How can a disciple know that he is not following a blind guide in Jesus?
2. What should be the result in your life of putting into practices Jesus' teaching?
3. Why is the Sermon on the Plains not addressed to the world?
4. What is the foundation upon which you build your life?

CHAPTER 11

NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

INTRODUCTION

In the beautiful Sermon on the Plains, Jesus brings the word of God down to earth. He tells his disciples, "Any man who desires to come to me will hear my words and put them into practice." (Lk. 6:47) A disciple must not only believe in Jesus, he must also obey Jesus. To believe and to obey is to build discipleship on a firm foundation. Such a disciple will endure the trials and tribulations of this world and win the eternal crown. Our Lord teaches a discipleship of faith and works.

When we teach that faith saves, we must clearly understand what the Church meant by such a statement. Living faith is implied --faith informed and infused by Charity. It is not enough that we study the words and deeds. Only when we understand the Spirit of Jesus can we know, as Christians, what to say and do in the everyday circumstances of our lives.

The closer one examines the teachings of Jesus, the clearer one sees that obedience is at the heart of both faith and charity. It truly becomes more evident that sincere Christian holiness reveals itself when a disciple honestly says, "Let it be done to me as you say." (Lk. 1:38)

FAITH OF A GENTILE

Following the Sermon on the Plains, Luke presents several episodes from the ministry of Jesus pertaining to the quality of faith demanded of a disciple of Jesus Christ. When Jesus returned to Capernaum, a delegation of Jewish elders met Jesus and interceded with Him on behalf of a centurion. This man had a beloved servant at the point of death. This centurion knew Jesus only by reputation. Living in Capernaum, he saw some evidence of Jesus' work. He believed, with men of his day, that sickness resulted from the controlling power of evil spirits over the minds and bodies of men. This God permitted because of the sins of men. If Jesus of Nazareth healed men, it had to be because He exercised divine power. He knew from experience numerous cures worked by

Jesus. Therefore, Jesus possessed divine authority from God just as he, an army officer, possessed authority from his lord. He knew Jesus possessed the power to cure his servant.

No doubt this centurion was what Acts called "religious and God-fearing." (Acts 10:1) He was indeed sympathetic to the Jewish religion. The Jewish elders go and earnestly intercede for him. They tell Jesus, "He deserves this favor from you...because he loves our people, and even built our synagogue for us." (Lk. 7:5) Anyone who would show such devotion to true religion and charity would certainly move the heart of Jesus.

The centurion knew the power of the spoken word. Where disobedience could mean immediate death, the words of command carried power. They caused things to happen. This is how the centurion saw the words of Jesus. The centurion expressed confidence that a command from Jesus would effect the cure. Underlining this confidence was a belief, deducted from the available evidence that God's power was present in Jesus of Nazareth. In the words of the Gospel, the reign of God had come in Jesus.

Jesus never saw the centurion nor touched his sick servant. The narrative implies that neither of them ever saw Jesus. Faith in the power of Jesus' word wrought the cure. The words of Jesus are not beautiful verbal sounds --bright and empty as soap bubbles --they are truly vibrations of divine energy -- clothed and conveyed by spoken sound. They are not just words of love. They are power of love. For this reason, the words of Jesus not only cure but create.

This episode may well be a defense of the early Church's policy --particularly Luke's community --of admitting Gentiles into the New Israel. This story certainly recalls the narrative in Acts when Cornelius, the centurion, is the first Gentile admitted into the Church by the Jewish elder, Peter.

THE WIDOW'S SON

This next episode demonstrates the full extent of power residing in the command of Christ Jesus. Outside of the gates of the town, Jesus encounters death -- the ultimate expression of Satan's rule over man. Jesus confronts a mother bereaved over the death of her only son. His compassionate heart goes out to her. "The Lord was moved with pity upon seeing her and said to her, 'Do not cry.'" (Lk. 7:13) Jesus calls this mother to faith to Him, to a belief that

she has no reason for tears for Jesus turns her tears to joy. When Luke relates that Jesus deliberately stepped forward and touched the litter, he teaches that Jesus was not afraid to touch death nor did he fear being contaminated by death.

This scene recalls to mind both the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Elijah restored the son of the widow of Zarephath and Elisha the son of the Shunammite woman. The raising of the widow's son at Naim no doubt intends to recall the episode from the life of Elijah. What effects should such a miracle have upon the readers and those who witnessed the miracle? Luke certainly expected his readers to recall and ponder the effects such a miracle had upon the widow of Zarephath. She said to Elijah: "Now indeed I know that you are a man of God...The word of the LORD comes truly from your mouth." (1 Kings 17:24) This is a description of a true prophet --the words of the Lord come from his mouth. Luke suggests that it is Jesus who frees people from the captivity of death. He appears clothed with power over life and death for which He becomes the object of faith and worship: "So that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: "JESUS CHRIST IS LORD!" (Phil. 2:10-11)

The figure of the weeping mother may be intended to suggest that image of Mother Israel symbolized by Rachel' weeping for her children and who "refuses to be consoled because her children are no more. Thus says the Lord: Cease your cries of mourning, wipe the tears from your eyes...they shall return from the enemy's land." (Jer. 31:15-16) Jesus, with the birth of the New Israel, restores to her the lost children.

Others see in this narrative a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus. The only son is Jesus and the sorrowful mother is Mary. Here Mary symbolizes the New Israel whose sorrow Jesus will turn to joy by His resurrection from the dead. It is the compassionate love of Jesus for His Church that brings Him back to the Church.

This interpretation carries us back to the centurion. The narratives of the centurion and the widow of Naim are no doubt intended to be seen as a piece -- a symbol of the Gentiles' coming to belief and a symbol of the death and resurrection of Jesus that makes possible for the Gentiles a "return from the enemy's land" (Jer. 31:16) --from the death of sin.

SHALL WE LOOK FOR ANOTHER

It is the intention of Luke to bring his readers face to face with Jesus and make them decide about Jesus. He uses various means as narratives, discussions, arguments, and even songs to achieve his purpose. He now brings John the Baptist back on the scene to ask the question "Who is Jesus?"

Whether doubts about Jesus were seeping into John's mind or whether he was in a process of coming to understand God's revelation in Jesus more clearly, we cannot be certain. From his dark dungeon prison in Peraea, John sent an embassy North to Galilee to question Jesus concerning His religious role.

The disciples of John said to Jesus, "John the Baptizer sent us to you with this question: 'Are you "He who is to come" or do we look for someone else?'" (Lk. 7:20) "Jesus gave this response: 'Go and report to John what you have seen and heard. The blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the good news preached to them. Blest is that man who finds no stumbling block in me.'" [In other words, is not offended by me.] (Lk. 7:22-23)

Jesus knew He did not fulfill John's nor the Jews' messianic expectations. He was deeply sensitive to John's dilemma. If John is to be saved from doubt and despair, he must be able to see that Jesus fulfills God's expectations and not man's. Jesus cannot be what other desire Him to be --even when the others are the good and pious of this earth. Jesus must go God's way and The Way opposes the way of man. In Jesus God does not come with an olive branch in one hand and the sword in the other. The coming of the messiah inaugurates not a time of apocalyptic fireworks to consume and destroy sinners, but "a year of favor from the Lord." (Lk. 4:19) The true hallmark of His ministry is that the poor --the anawim -- have the gospel preached to them. The poor are called into the reign of God, the compassion of God being motivating cause of it all.

The question, "Shall we look for another?" is answered "No!" by Luke. There is no other one to look for in which human fulfillment can be found. Luke would have all men answer with Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have to words of eternal life. We have come to believe; we are convinced that you are God's holy one." (Jn. 6:68-69)

THE MISSION OF JOHN

When the disciples of John depart, Jesus confirms that John was indeed a prophet. Men had not been mistaken in heeding his desert call to repentance. He testifies that John's mission prepared Israel for the coming of the Messiah. "This is the man of whom Scriptures says, 'I send my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way before you.'" (Lk. 7:27) when you take in Jesus' answer to the disciples of John and His personal testimony concerning John, the only logical conclusion is that Jesus states that He is the Messiah.

Luke once again emphasizes the importance of the baptism of repentance. Without it a person cannot be open to God's plan of salvation. It was this refusal to admit the need for repentance that made the acceptance of Jesus impossible for the Scribes and Pharisees. Luke writes, "The Pharisees and the lawyers, on the other hand, by failing to receive his baptism defeated God's plan in their regard." (Lk. 7:30)

Jesus compared these men to children at play who want things their way no matter what may be the rules of the game. They always find a reason to justify their behavior. They refuse to commit themselves one way or the other for they find what they are is far preferable to anything else --much more sane and dignified. Their defense is to sit coolly on the fence and criticize both the right and left-- smugly confident in the knowledge that they are "where it's at". Their behavior oozes self-righteousness.

THE WOMAN AND THE PHARESEE

Luke now presents us with a classical illustration of the sinner and the self-righteous. He demonstrates the broad contrasts in their reactions to Jesus. Jesus has been invited to dine at the home of Simon, a Pharisee. Jesus had not been received as an honored guest. When an honored guest arrived, his feet were washed at the door, the master of the house greeted him with an embrace and kiss, and his head was anointed with oil. All these niceties were omitted at Jesus' arrival. But, during the meal, a sinful woman entered and washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed and perfumed them with oil.

The relationship between Jesus and Simon symbolizes the relationship of the self-righteous with God. Simon keeps a respectful and cool distance between Jesus and himself. Since they share the same table, they are not enemies, but neither is there the warmth of friendship. Simon refuses to trust or give himself to Jesus. He remains aloof and an island unto himself. How different he is from the woman he disdains and condemns. This woman responds to Jesus with her entire heart. From Simon's distance, he could see only a sinner, but Jesus, from His close relationship, beheld a sinner pardoned and restored. Her reputation remained, but her character had changed.

Jesus did not deny that there was a distance between the life lived by the woman and the life lived by Simon. In comparison her sins were much greater than his. But, the point is not the number and gravity of the sins, but the fact of sin itself. Neither Simon nor the woman could atone for their sins. Before God they were both in the same situation. Each needed forgiveness of God. Both needed to be saved.

The insurmountable obstacle to salvation is not our sins, but the effect of our sins: the absence of the desire to love. We need not repent our sins so much as our sinful condition manifested by lives giving so little evidence of love of God or man. Only the Lord Jesus can remove the log jam of sin that blocks the flow of divine love and brings to life the hidden seeds of love buried in every human heart.

Love covers a multitude of sins. Jesus turns to the woman with divine absolution: "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has been your salvation. Now go in peace!" (Lk. 7:48,50) Somehow, along the way, Jesus had conveyed the truth to this woman that God truly loved her. She believed this and responded with a true repentance unto the forgiveness of sins. Her love of God now ordered all things properly within her life. She could indeed "go in peace!"

What was the quality of faith that brought such divine blessings into her life? It was living faith enflamed by Charity.

NATURE OF CHISTIAN FAITH
SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE-MEMORIZE)

"LITTLE IS FORGIVEN TO ONE WHOSE LOVE IS SMALL." (Luke 7:47)

FIRST DAY: Read Romans 3:21-31 and James 2:14-26 and I John 2:3-6.

1. Why should we seek to know the Spirit behind the words and deeds of Jesus?
2. What do you see to be the danger of only knowing what Jesus said and did?
3. What is the difference between a living faith and dead faith?
4. As a Catholic, how would you explain "Faith Saves"?

SECOND DAY: Read Acts 10:1-8 and Luke 7:1-10.

1. What are some of the characteristics of faith demonstrated by the centurion?
2. In what way does the centurion symbolize the faith of the Gentiles?
3. What underlines the confidence of the centurion in Jesus' words?
4. What does this episode teach us about intercessory prayer on behalf of others

THIRD DAY: Read I Kings 17:17-24 and Luke 7:11-17.

1. What motivates the action of Jesus at Naim?
2. What does this miracle reveal about Jesus?
3. What underlines the confidence of the centurion in Jesus' words?

4. What are some of the possible symbolism to be discovered in this episode?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 7:18-23.

1. What question is being answered in this section?
2. What do you see to be the source of John's possible doubt?
3. What does this episode teach you about the ministry of Jesus?
4. How would you answer the question "Are you the 'one to come' or do we look for someone else?"

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 7:24-35.

1. What do you learn about Jesus from His testimony about John?
2. Why was it possible for some to believe in Jesus?
3. What does Luke 7:30 tell you about salvation?
4. What does Luke 7:32 say to you?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 7:36-50.

1. How would you describe Simon's relationship with Jesus?
2. How would you describe the sinful woman's relationship?
3. What do you see to be the cause of their different relationship with Jesus (God)?
4. In the light of this how do you see your relationship with Jesus?

CHAPTER 12

JESUS AND WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

In chapter Eight Jesus abandons His more formal environment to make the villages His pulpit and the sloping seashore His auditorium. He wanders through smaller "... towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God." (Lk. 8:1) He does not travel alone. As could be expected, the Twelve accompany Him, but it is surprising to read, "... as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and several others who provided for them out of their own resources." (Lk. 8:2-3)

Women were not only permitted to be part of Jesus' ministry, but they economically supported the operation. Against the background of the times, this was indeed a break with tradition and custom. Luke emphatically desires to express the truth that Jesus did not sanction the traditional attitude towards women. This attitude of Jesus restored the primitive and proper position of women as men's equal and their helpmates.

All these women had been cured by Jesus. They now expressed their gratitude in loving service to Jesus and His disciples. These expressions of gratitude Jesus did not refuse. The most famous of these women was Mary of Magdala out of whom Jesus drove seven devils. In the Semetic world "seven" symbolized completeness and fullness. Whether possession indicated madness or evilness in this case is not certain. At any rate the lady, before her encounter with Jesus, had been completely Mad Mary of Magdala or else the fully Bad Mary of Magdala. Regardless of her notorious Jewish past, Mary had a glorious Christian future.

When it comes to the Crucifixion of Jesus, Luke tells us: "All his friends stood at a distance; so also did the women who had accompanied him from Galilee, and they saw all this happen." (Lk. 23:49) Mark relates that at Calvary, .."there were some women watching from a distance. Among these were Mary of Magdala, Mary who was the mother of James the younger and Joset, and Salome. These used to follow him and looked after him when he was in Galilee. And there were many other women there who had come up to Jerusalem with him."(Mk. 15:40-41)

Luke later relates that the first witnesses to the Resurrection were women: "The women were Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. The other women with them also told the apostles (about the resurrection), but this story of theirs seemed pure nonsense, and they did not believe them". (Lk. 24:10-11)

All the gospel accounts confirm that this once "mad" or "bad" Mary was the first witness to the Resurrection of Jesus. Even if men could not accept her testimony, Jesus made her His first witness! These women disciples of Jesus had truly surpassed the Twelve in their fidelity to Jesus.

When the gospel account indicates the presence of these women in the early Galilean Ministry, and as witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus, it strongly suggests the apostolic vocation of these women. One of the criteria for being an official witness for Jesus was to have been with Jesus from the beginning, remaining with him until the end of His life on earth. Luke does not limit the concept of apostle to the Twelve. As we will see in the Acts, He broadened it. No doubt these women were very powerful and prominent witnesses in the early Church. They certainly fulfilled the requirements of an apostolic vocation. We do know from Scripture that Mary Magdala was sent by Christ to proclaim the Good news of His Resurrection to the Apostles. She was an Apostle to the Apostles.

Jesus' attitude towards His female disciples is best expressed when he refers to such women as "mother" and "sister" to Himself. "Anyone who does the will of my father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."(Mat. 12:50) Such a life brings the disciples into an intimate family relationship with Jesus and His Father.

St. Paul states in Galatians 3:27-28 the principle which expresses the Equality of Christian Women in the Kingdom of God: "All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourself in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

When the Christian Community strives for the perfection of Charity indicated by this principle, it is wise to bear in mind that equality and sameness are not synonymous. We can be equal without being the same. Genesis teaches that men and women are a complement to each other and that they complete each other. It is not male alone that is made to God's image. God made mankind to His image --male and female He made them. The two together, in the fullness of their personal development, have the potentiality of imaging God on this earth. To impede the growth and development of either on this earth is to impede the full glorification of God on earth --in mankind. The true spirit of Christianity sponsors the proper love of the sexes and not the battle between the sexes!

CHRISTIAN WISDOM

In this wandering ministry of Jesus, Luke relates that Jesus taught the people in parables. The parables are like tiny time capsules that contain the actual expressions of Jesus and have transported them down through the ages largely uncontaminated. A typical parable presents one single point of comparison. It endeavors to teach a truth. The many details within the parable are not intended to have a special significance. This is what distinguishes the parable from the allegory. In the allegory each concept has a particular meaning. It is a descriptive message in code.

Luke relates that when a large crowd had gathered around Jesus, He tells the parable of the Sower. It was customary in Palestine for a farmer to sow the seed before plowing the field. Apparently much of the seed was lost, but in the end he still reaped an abundant harvest. What would be the one truth Jesus desired to teach in this parable? The truth concerned His own ministry. He may appear to have little success, but one day His life and ministry would bear an abundant harvest. This parable also intends to encourage the apostles in their own ministries.

Luke teaches that the parables do not intend to conceal truths from the disciples but to reveal it to all disciples. A mystery of religion was not something that could not be understood but a truth that was hidden. When the mystery was revealed to a person, he could fully understand the truth. These spiritual truths, indeed religious mysteries, are not secret things but the wisdom and will of God made manifest in Christ and in His Church. The believer has the grace and power to see and understand this wisdom of God. The Christian lives in a world of darkness. In this darkness he is a Lamp of Light enkindled by the divine Flame of Truth. He has a serious obligation to bring light to those sitting in the darkness. He is warned not to hid his light and appear as if he himself is part of the darkness. The light is not given solely for his contemplation and refreshment. "Your light must shine in the sight of men." (Mat. 5:16) As we seek to be a light for others, the intensity of our own light grows. Our own understanding of the mysteries of God deepens, grows brighter and becomes more illuminated.

Luke now presents an explanation of the parable of the Sower of Seed that renders it an allegory. No doubt this allegorical interpretation of the Sower was an inspired teaching existing in the Christian Community that explained why certain Christians persevered in their commitment to Christ whereas others did not respond or else fell away after a time. This interpretation will always serve the Christian who stands today in Christ as a salutary warning lest he or she fall tomorrow.

STORM AT SEA

Luke certainly knows that black, stormy days come both for the individual Christian and the Church. There are periods when the besetting trails and tribulations seem overwhelming for souls. He now relates a miracle story intended to encourage the Church and the individual not to loose faith during those periods of trial. This miracle story from the historical life of Jesus demonstrates the power of Jesus over the forces of nature. These are indeed powerful and destructive forces, but Jesus controls their anger and reduced them to a state of calm. The exercise of such a power reveals the lordship of Jesus over the chaotic forces in the universe. The apostles asked: "Who can this be, that gives orders even to the winds and waves and they obey him?" (Lk. 8:25) The answer is, Jesus is Lord.

In the time of Luke, Christian death was described as a sleep. The sleep of the Lord in the Barque of Peter could well symbolize the time between the Resurrection of Jesus and His Second Coming. During that period of time there will be many occasions when the Church would appear to be facing destruction. After all, it exists in a world under the power of the Evil One. His fury against the Church knows no bounds. The effect of his fury is limited only by the power of God. Times of storm afford the Church the opportunity to exercise faith and grow in the faith that Jesus is Lord. The Barque of Peter will never go under. Those who are within it are safe as the people in the Ark of Noah.

Times of trial offer each a Christian the opportunity to trust in the "sleeping" Lord. If the winds and waves obey this Lord, how much greater should be the obedience of the one who says that Jesus is Lord. The Christian soul that trusts in the Lord will never be disappointed. He will arrive safely at the port to which he is bound.

STORM IN THE SOUL

Luke desires the following episode to be seen as a compliment to the miracle at sea. Following the calming of the sea Jesus now calms a sea of insanity raging within a human soul. The Boat in which Jesus is sailing arrives at Gerasa (Khersa), a small village on the eastern shore. A raving lunatic, diagnosed as severely possessed, immediately encounters Jesus. The great spiritual force of Jesus is recognized by the evil spirit within the man. They move towards an encounter with each other. The possessed man feels himself caught in the crossfire. He himself has become identified with these hostile forces to holiness. Will the Holy One of God destroy him also? Jesus had not come to destroy man enslaved by Satan but to save him. The power of Jesus drives the entire diabolical hoard out of the man.

When the news of what happens reaches the town, the people come out to see. They find the man sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his full senses. In the mind of Luke, the only proper place of a person in their full senses is to be at the feet of Jesus and freed from the influence of the evil one. This picture of total sanity frightens the towns' people. They each had their own devils, and they had no desire to be parted from them. They asked Jesus to leave. They were not ready for Him. He respects their will and departs. This newly found friend of Jesus desires to follow Him. One does not follow Jesus by being

physically present with Him but by hearing His words and putting them into practice. Jesus commanded the man to return home and report all that God had done for him through Jesus. The man became a disciple --he obeyed Jesus!

THE TWO WOMEN

When Jesus returned to Galilee the crowds welcomed Him. Luke writes "...they were all their waiting for him." (Lk. 8:40) Luke sees the waiting crowd as a symbolic picture of the vast Gentile world waiting to receive with gladness the Gospel message. Certainly the women of the world were waiting to receive it. That particular day two pairs of eyes anxiously sought Jesus. One belonging to Jarius, a leader of the synagogue whose daughter lay dying. The other belonged to a woman lost in the sea of faces. For these two women Jesus will work miracles. One woman, because of her affliction, is alienated from her proper place in the family of Mankind. The other one is twelve years old. Among the Jews a girl is considered a woman at twelve and a half. This girl dies on the verge of womanhood. He restores her to life and womanhood. Both these miracles beautifully symbolize what Jesus does for women. He restores woman to her proper place in human society, and He brings to life the maturity of her womanhood.

POWER OF FAITH

The Apostles at the mercy of the sea, the man of Gerasa enslaved by evil forces within him, the incurable illness of the woman, the dying daughter of Jarius -- all four cases have one thing in common: the victims were powerless to help themselves. The Scriptures reveal a great mystery in these episodes. Despite all these alien powers and the innate weakness of human beings, we do possess a power within us capable of delivering people from all evil --the power of faith. By example the Gospel teaches that the saving power of God has entered our lives through Jesus Christ. Luke especially seems to emphasize that the measure of our faith in Jesus will measure the degree Jesus will work in our lives. According to Luke to ask and never give up asking is a fine expression of faith in Jesus.

JESUS AND WOMEN

SCRIPTURE READING AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK

"MY MOTHER AND BROTHERS ARE THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD AND PUT IT INTO PRACTICE." (Lk.8:21)

FIRST DAY: Read Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 25:13-25 and 26:1-18.

1. What was the position of women in the Near East at the time of Christ?
2. In what way did the cultural attitude effect the role of women in the Jewish religion?
3. What is the attitude towards women expressed in this reading?
4. What would you say was the guiding principle underneath these traditions, laws and customs?

SECOND DAY: Read Summary- Jesus And Women; Genesis 1:26-29, Luke 8:1-3, 24:9- 11, and Galatians 3:27-28.

1. In Genesis what was the primitive position of women?
2. What was the attitude of Jesus towards women?
3. What does Gal. 3:27-29 teach you about Christians?
4. How would you feel about women becoming priests?

THIRD DAY: Read Summary-Christian Wisdom; Luke 8:4-10 and I Corinthians 2:7-12.

1. What is the difference between a parable and an allegory?
2. What does the parable of the sower teach?

3. What do you think the “mysteries of the Kingdom of God” mean?
4. How does a Christian come to know these mysteries?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 8:11-21.

1. What does the allegory of the sower teach you?
2. What is the most important virtue for reaping an abundant harvest?
3. What does Luke 8:16-18 tell us about our Christian obligation?
4. What does Luke 8:19-21 teach us about true Christian kinship?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary- Storm At Sea; Luke 8:22-39.

1. In what way are these two miracles similar?
2. What lesson does the storm at sea teach you?
3. What for Luke is a picture of full sanity and sinlessness?
4. Why do you think the people of Gerasa wanted Jesus to leave?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary through Power of Faith; Luke 8:40-56.

1. What did the cure of the woman effect for her and what does it symbolize for women?
2. What is being symbolized for women in the raising of the girl to life?
3. What one element do the four miracles have in common?
4. What do these miracles teach you about hopeless cases?

CHAPTER 13

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION

Jesus knew His allotted time of earth was drawing to an end. The Scriptures clearly revealed to Him the destiny of the Son of Man. He must soon go up to Jerusalem where all that had been foretold would come to pass. His Galilean days were the springtime of His ministry. Precious few of them remained.

Some disciples gave particular evidence of God's grace working in their lives. They had become his hope for the continuation of His mission and a means by which the task of establishing the Kingdom of God could be completed. Jesus now called The Twelve and commissioned them to go two by two into the other towns and villages to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

Jesus teaches them a two-fold lesson. The time is short and the work extensive. They must be prepared to travel quickly and not be burdened down by things for the work can only be accomplished by the means He gives them. To these Ambassadors of His, Jesus gives power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases. He sends them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God to heal. (See Lk. 9:1-2) Jesus not only commissions them to proclaim the kingdom but gives them the power to do so. They are to go in His name. And that means in His power as if He was actually physically present with them. He is spiritually present within them. Jesus, by so sharing His commission and power with the Twelve, multiples Himself by twelve.

Luke clearly manifests that the apostolic authority and power present in the early Christian Community flows from Jesus and is rooted in the historical Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus indicates the urgency of their mission when He cautions the Twelve not to waste time on the inhospitable and the unreceptive --"shake the dust from your feet as a sign to them." (Lk. 9:5*) This was a prophetic sign that a man of God did not share in the responsibility for the judgment that will fall upon those rejecting the message of God.

The Twelve "set out and went from village to village proclaiming the Good News and healing everywhere." (Lk. 9:6)

HEROD THE FOX

When Herod heard all these reports about Jesus from his spies, he said, "John? I beheaded. So, who is this I hear such reports about?" And he was anxious to see him." (Lk. 9:9*) Herod was not only anxious to see Jesus, but the original Greek words imply that he continued seeking to see him. For a man of such a suspicious temper and character, to want to see Jesus was indeed dangerous. Jesus knew Herod was a deadly fox and he could not afford to fall into his hands. Jesus' ultimate destiny lay in Jerusalem, not Galilee. It was now no longer safe for Jesus to remain in Galilee.

As soon as the Twelve returned and gave their optimistic reports to Jesus, He gathered them all together and slipped quietly across the border into the jurisdiction of Philip, tetrarch of Ituraea --never again to return to Galilee.

We have here an excellent example of human prudence exercised by Jesus. He uses the natural means available to insure God's plan will not be frustrated by Herod's ill will nor by human foolhardiness.

MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES

Jesus brings His disciples to Bethsaida --north of the Sea of Galilee and just across the Galilean border. There they could be alone and rest. Ah, but the best laid plans of both mice and men often go amiss, even when the man is the Son of Man. Luke relates, "But the crowds got to know and they went after him. He made them welcome and talked to them about the Kingdom of God." (Lk. 9:11*) Always His personal needs were subordinated to His mission.

The crowds and their demands aroused the anxieties of the Twelve. In their human prudence, they advised Jesus, "Send the people away." (Lk. 9:12*) No longer could they get off so easy. They were to be His Ambassadors on this earth and they would have to assume His responsibility towards the crowd. Jesus said to them, "Give them something to eat yourselves." (Lk. 9:138)

The multiplication of the loaves and fishes is the most testified to miracle in the gospel. We have six accounts of it, suggesting the important place it had in the

oral tradition of the early Church. Jesus was on the eve of leaving these good Galilean people and He must leave them a sign that would always symbolize His love and care for them and of His ability to fulfill their true needs. It is indeed a symbol of the messianic banquet when the redeemed, through Jesus, will be eternally at one with the Father and their lives totally fulfilled.

The story is truly a parable of the Church's ministry to the world. The Twelve who are the basic resources of the Christian Community are given the instruction to feed the New Israel. They obey Jesus and place what little they have into His hands and through their lives the multitude is fed.

The miracle was indeed a prophetic sign of the bread that would one day be changed in the hands of the Twelve into the Body of Jesus in order to feed the world the true Bread of Life. For many years, the mystery of the Holy Eucharist was referred to only as the "breaking of the bread" in order to guard this great mystery from desecration by unbelievers.

CONFESSION OF PETER

Herod had previously asked the question, "Who is this man about whom I hear all these reports?" (Lk. 9:9) The multiplication of the loaves and fishes has answered this question. Peter will now verbally formulate the answer.

The crowd has gone and Jesus is alone with His disciples and He is in prayer. Jesus asked the Twelve what were the rumors they had heard about Him when they traveled about. They reported to Him the same rumors Herod's spies reported to him. The crowd stooped short of saying Jesus was the Messiah. Those expected apocalyptic signs had been absent. Jesus now asked a question vital to the success of His ministry. "But you --who do you say that I am?" (Lk. 9:20) It was Simon Peter who responded, "The Messiah of God." (Lk. 9:20) The answer no doubt brought a measure of relief to the heart of Jesus. Progress had been made. They had arrived at this truth without the expected apocalyptic signs. This suggested a change in their own messianic expectations. It indicated an openness to the Spirit of God. This was indeed a mystery of religion revealed only through the Spirit. Jesus knew they had taken the first step. The next one was indeed more difficult for their hearts and faith to bear.

THE SUFFERING MESSIAH

Jesus had promised His disciples that the mysteries of the Kingdom of God would be revealed to them. (See Lk.8:10) He endeavors to take them a step deeper into the mystery of His own mission and, therefore, their own destiny that could now no longer be distinct from His own. "The Son of Man, 'he said, must first endure many sufferings, be rejected by the elders, the high priests and the scribes, and be put to death, and then be raised up on the third day'" (Lk. 9:22) Until this moment, the Son of Man was identified with power and glory. Now Jesus reveals the other side of the messianic coin --suffering, disgrace and death.

As messiah, Jesus was King, an embodiment of the people -- they both shared under God a common destiny. All who identified with Him --who composed the New Israel --must go the way of their King. They would also share in the redemptive sufferings of the Son of Man.

LIFE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus now reveals another step in discipleship --its vocation to suffer. Luke deliberately writes that Jesus said to all:"Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps. Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit does he show who gains the whole world and destroys himself in the process? If a man is ashamed of me and my doctrine, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and that of his Father and his holy angels."(Lk. 9:23-26)

Jesus tells His disciple the secret that even though it is a hard way and appears to self as a deadly way, they will one day discover that all the time it has been the very finest, most loving Way --leading the soul into deeper waters of peace and joy.

This reveals another mystery of the tremendous love of Jesus for His disciple that invites them into His sufferings and death and calls them to complete identification with Him in order that they can share fully in His glory. This is a mystery rarely understood and so the depths of God's love remains yet a mystery to be revealed to most disciples.

The disciple is warned never to be ashamed of the Son of Man in this world -- never to be ashamed of His Way and to deny that Way. We deny this more by what we become than what we say. A disciple denies Jesus and His doctrine by identifying with the world and its way. Such a disciple disgraces the Way and gives personal shame to Jesus. Such a disciple will be disgrace to Jesus before the Father and the angels of Heaven.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

Jesus and His disciples arrive at the foot of a mountain. Jesus ascends the mountain with Peter, James and John in order to pray. Jesus enters into deepest prayer. He is totally one with God. In Luke's words, "as he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became brilliant as lightening." (Lk. 9:29*) Two great personages of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, appeared and spoke with Jesus concerning "his passing" which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem." (Lk. 9:31*) The disciples aroused from sleep beheld this marvelously divine manifestation. They beheld the "glory" of Jesus. When Moses came down from his conversation with the Lord on Mt. Sinai, the glory of God shown on the face of Moses. This glory is something external to Moses. A distinction is carefully drawn between Jesus and Moses. This glory of Jesus is intrinsic to His nature --in other words, Jesus is divine!

The presence of God, as a cloud, covered the mountain and all present were in His presence and man was indeed afraid. And, on this new Mt. Sinai the voice of God spoke again, "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him." (Lk. 9:35*) When the Voice ceased, only Jesus remained. Moses and Elijah were gone. The Old Testament had passed away being perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. Only Jesus remains before mankind as the expressed will of God. One must never look beyond the Person of Jesus to hear or to find God on this earth!

SOME FAILURES OF THE DISCIPLES

When Jesus comes down the mountain, Luke presents four episodes that clarify the gap existing between Jesus and His disciples. These incidents reveal their weakness of faith, unmindfulness of His doctrine, their self-seeking and intolerance.

At the foot of the mountain, Jesus finds His disciples shrouded in darkness and confusion. They have encountered forces of evil they are unable to deal with,

apparently because they have failed to hear His words and put them into practice. The slowness of His disciples truly troubles the spirit of Jesus.

Jesus tries to separate His disciples from the crowd by deepening their knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He said to the disciples, "For your part, you must have these words constantly in your mind: The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the power of men.' But they did not understand him when he said this; it was hidden from them..." (Lk.9: 44-45*) Why was this truth hidden from them? It was a truth unacceptable to their own spirit. They refused to inquire for fear of finding out the truth. Their spirit was not in tune with that of Jesus. They were not identifying with any spirit of humble service and self-forgetfulness, but with a spirit of self-fulfillment and exaltation. They argued among themselves who was the greatest.

Jesus teaches His disciples that greatness in the Kingdom of God is measured by the degree of forgetfulness of self --that expresses itself in genuine loving service to God's little ones. Jesus identifies Himself with the "least". The disciples, who consider themselves the "most", have a lot of emptying out of self to do before they will ever see themselves as the least.

The disciple, John, said to Jesus, "'Master,' he said, 'we saw a man casting out devils in your name, and because he is not with us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said to him, 'You must not stop him: anyone who is not against you is for you.'" (Lk. 9:49-50) Our Lord gives His disciples a principle by which to measure those not in their Community. Anyone who does good in the name of the Lord cannot be against them. Their actions are also extending the Kingdom of God. They ought to be left alone. The Church ought to bless goodness, whatever its immediate source. Such cases do call for discernment of spirits. Devils do appear as angels of light!

The turning point of Jesus 'ministry had truly arrived and Luke relates,"...he firmly resolved to proceed toward Jerusalem." (Lk. 9:51) Jesus sent messengers ahead of Him into Samaria, but when the Samaritans learned Jesus was bound for Jerusalem, they refused him hospitality. When James and John, the Sons of Thunder, heard this they flew into a rage. "Lord, would you not have us call down fire from heaven to destroy them?" (Lk. 9; 54) Jesus turned and rebuked them as He had rebuked the evil spirits. He told them, "You do not know of what manner of spirit you are; for the Son of Man did not

come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Lk. 9:55-56) Jesus demonstrates His own meekness and patience and leads His disciple off to another village. Jesus does not render evil for evil. He shows His disciples how to behave when men hate and reject them.

From the example of James and John we learn that just because a person has had a baptism of repentance, and has become a disciple of Christ and follows in the footsteps of Jesus, it does not automatically follow that all the activities of the disciple flow from the Spirit of God. A humble disciple daily questions the spirit motivating His life. He sincerely asks the Lord, "Lord, what spirit am I of?" To a truly humble soul, Jesus will always reveal the true nature of his activities --whether they flow from God, self or Satan. For by his fruits, he will know...

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS (SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK)

“IF A MAN IS ASHAMED OF ME AND MY DOCTRINE, THE SON OF MAN WILL BE ASHAMED OF HIM WHEN HE COMES IN HIS GLORY AND THAT OF HIS FATHER AND HIS HOLY ANGELS.” (Luke 9:26)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 9:1-9.

1. What purpose did the Mission of the Twelve fulfill?
2. How did Jesus multiply himself by 12 with their commission?
3. What do His instructions in 9:3-5 tell us about the mission?
4. What effect did Herod's interest have on the ministry of Jesus?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 9:10-17, II Kings 4:42-44 and Numbers 11:21-23.

1. In Jesus' mind what is the Twelve's responsibility to the crowd?
2. What lesson does this teach you?
3. This miracle gives what answer to Herod's question, “Who is this that I hear such reports about?”
4. What does this miracle symbolize for you?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 9:18-27.

1. What mystery of faith was revealed to Peter?
2. What 2 great Christian mysteries must the disciples now understand?
3. Why must a disciple also share in the sufferings of Christ?

4. How may you demonstrate that you are ashamed of Christ or his doctrine?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 9:28-36 and Exodus 24:12-18.

1. The Transfiguration manifest what great Christian Mystery?
2. What does the presence of Moses and Elijah symbolize?
3. What do verses 34 and 35 teach you?
4. Jesus standing alone before the Apostles symbolize what Christian Truth?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 9:37-45, Numbers 14:11-12, and Deut. 32:4-6.

1. Coming down from the mountain what environment did Jesus enter?
2. How would you explain Jesus' reaction to this scene?
3. Why did the disciples fail to understand Jesus' revelation in 9:44?
4. How can you also hide from the truth?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 9:46-56, Numbers 11:27-29 and II Kings 1:3-17.

1. What is the secret of greatness in the Kingdom of God?
2. What do you learn from Luke 9:50?
3. What can we learn from Jesus example before the inhospitable Samaritans?
4. What main characteristics of Jesus do you see distinguishing Him from the great personages of the Old Testament as Moses and Elijah?

CHAPTER 14

SERVANTS OF THE KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION

Out of His own personal experience, Jesus sought to prepare His disciples for all the possible demands the reign of God could make in their lives. To become a disciple of Christ is to place oneself at the disposal of the Holy Spirit. Jesus knew from personal experience the possible consequences of being at the disposal of the Holy Spirit. He seeks to train His disciples to be open and prepared for the demands of the Holy Spirit.

REQUIREMENTS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Luke now presents three illustrations in which Jesus emphasizes the requirements of discipleship. He writes, "as they were making their way along..." (Lk. 9:57) Here Luke infers that it is not just Jesus' Way but that the disciples, by forgetting themselves and following in His footsteps, have identified with him and now it is "Their Way".

A certain enthusiastic individual has become very interested in Jesus and his Way and he says to Jesus, "I will be your follower wherever you go." (Lk. 9:57) Jesus does not trust enthusiasm that may be no more than zeal of the moment --a spring flower with no stamina. He gives the man no invitation to follow Him, but encourages him to consider the consequences of discipleship.

Any persons identifying with Jesus must be willing to lose the security of their roots. It could demand a rootless existence in this world. They would have to find their security rooted only in Divine Providence. To this would-be disciple, Jesus responds, "The foxes have liars, the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Lk. 9:58) Foxes and birds were migratory creatures but even they, from time to time, had a place to call their own. Not so the Son of Man.

In another case, Jesus takes the initiative and invites a man to follow Him. The man hesitates. He has some earthly obligations. Jesus teaches that nothing can be "first" before the vocation to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Such a vocation takes precedent over all other obligations. These should be left to those who have nothing more important to do. His reference to the dead burying the dead may refer to those who are spiritually dead --those who have refused the call of God to a higher life. Let such take care of each other.

A third would-be disciple said to Jesus, "I will be your follower, Lord, but first let me leave of my people at home." (Lk. 9:61) Jesus knows this man's heart is still in the past. He sees a divided heart that leaves the man lukewarm towards his prospective vocation. Jesus holds that the vocation of discipleship the same value He puts on His own life as discipleship is an extension of His life.

SERVANTS OF THE KINGDOM

Jesus now further selects seventy-two disciples sending them before Himself into every town and place He intends to visit. These appointments suggest the vastness of His missionary enterprise and the impossibility of Jesus, alone, completing this task. This appointment recalls the appointment of the Elders by Moses and it suggests that these disciples, as the Elders, have received something of the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus not only shares His burden with the disciples, but He shares His Spirit with them. They too have become Servants of the Kingdom.

Jesus sends His servants out two by two because two witnesses were required for the validity of legal testimony. Jesus commands them, "Be on your way." (Lk. 10:3) Disciple often need a kick in the pants to overcome their initial inertia. The disciples must be prudently cautious --their battle will not be against flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness. Always, they need the Armor of God. They are not to depend upon worldly means for success. On entering any house, the disciples are to say, "Peace to this house." (Lk. 10:5) Going in the name of Jesus, the disciples have the power to bring peace to a home if the hearts of the people are receptive to the Peace of Christ. They are not to be ashamed of receiving hospitality for they are indeed great benefactors and blessings to their hosts.

The reaction of the people to the disciples' message reveals what lies behind their façade of religious rituals. Jesus does not demand guilt from sinners, but repentance -- a change of mind and heart. To reject the invitation is to invite judgment. Those rejecting the message of the servants of Christ share in the judgment of those who reject Christ—all of them have truly rejected God. The Apostolic Mission of the Church is clearly revealed as God's own efforts. These servants of the Kingdom are but God's own efforts. These servants of the Kingdom are but God's instruments and are not to take their rejections and failures personally. By being obedient servants, they escape any responsibility for the coming judgment.

RETURN OF THE SEVENTY-TWO

These seventy-two Servants of the Kingdom returned to the Lord rejoicing in the success of their mission. Jesus suggests that the activities of His disciples on earth were destroying not only the power of the demons, but the power of the Prince of Demons: "I watched Satan fall from the sky like lightning." (Lk. 10:18)

These evil spirits --agents of spiritual death --are referred to as deadly serpents and scorpions. Through Jesus Christ, His servants have the power to crush these evil forces and they will never destroy these servants of Christ.

In their excitement, the disciples make no mention of the Reign of God. Their conscious awareness is flooded with memories of the great deeds they have accomplished. Salvation is the goal of their ministry and their knowledge of being saved ought to be the source of their spiritual joy and not their charisma. They have heard the word of God and have put it into practice; they have overcome the Evil One, and their names are written in the Book of Life.

Luke relates the joy that fills the heart of Jesus when His disciples "hear the word of God and put it into practice." (Lk. 8:21*) To "rejoice in the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 10:21) implies that divine joy filled Jesus. The Wisdom that fills the souls of these simple servants owes nothing to man and, thereby, all the glory belongs to God. For this, Jesus gives praises. It is all in accordance with the Divine Will.

SECRETS OF THE KING

To these simple men, Jesus now reveals the great mystery of His own personal relationship with God: "everything has been given over to me by my father. No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son --and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." (Lk. 10:22) Jesus acknowledges the distinction between the Father and Son, but implies that a divine relationship exists between them. To "Know" in the Hebrew implies an intimate, personal and mutual reciprocal relationship. For the Son to "know" the Father implies the divine personality of the Son. Because there is such a total union of wills between the Father and Son --this is the Source of Their knowledge of each other --the Son becomes the Revelation of the Father. This Revelation, Jesus manifests to His disciples. The state of discipleship is far more blessed than that of the prophets and kings of the Old Testament. What was only a dreamed-of union with God has become a fact in the lives of the disciples.

SCHOOL OF DISCIPLESHIP

Before Jesus turned towards Jerusalem, Luke clearly indicated the disciples lacked proper understanding of Jesus and His doctrine. As they journey towards Jerusalem, most of the time will be used by Jesus to clarify His doctrine. His teaching floodlights the Way.

An episode is now introduced that will answer the question, "Who is a disciple?" A lawyer stood up and asked, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?" (Lk.10: 25) This will lead to another question, "Who is my neighbor?" and to the parable of the Good Samaritan in which Jesus implies the wrong question has been asked.

In this episode, the religious philosophy of Jesus --The New Wine --is contrasted with the religious philosophy of the Lawyer --the Old Wine. The Lawyer's question reveals the erroneousness of his doctrine. He desired to know what great heroic act a man must perform in order to win salvation is obtained by meticulously observing religious rules. Therefore, it is important to define with exactness one's moral duty. This sets limits to one's moral behavior. Religion is reduced to a set of restrictive regulations. One can find in such a religious philosophy a sense of spiritual security and thereby become

spiritually complacent. It offers a yardstick for perfection and makes it possible to see oneself as a saint. Jesus throws away the yardstick of perfection. He pointed to the love of the heavenly Father as the measure for the love of Christians for others: "Be compassionate, as your Father is compassionate." (Lk. 6:36) Infinite love becomes the goal. Therefore, it is impossible for a disciple to be perfect. He can only travel the road of perfection, an unending road on which he is ever walking --ever traveling and ever perfecting himself in time and eternity. Jesus will set no limits to the religious obligations to love others, and so, the Christian life becomes a boundless series of opportunities to love, to grow, and to live.

Compassion is characteristic of the Savior. The compassion of Christ is the main cause for the miracles of Christ: "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd." (Mk. 8:2) Compassion is love that becomes incarnated at the sight of human pain and suffering. It makes no distinction whether the afflicted person is a loved one, an unloved one or an unlovable one. If God in Heaven and Jesus on earth are identified as compassionate, then compassion in a human being must be confirmed of the Holy Spirit within the person, and an operation of the Holy Spirit through the person.

Who is a disciple of Christ? One who loves God with heart, soul, strength and mind and his or her fellow man with Compassionate Love!

MARTHA AND MARY

This next episode recorded by Luke serves as a balance for the Good Samaritan story. There the emphasis lay upon love of neighbor and now our attention is centered on love of our Lord. The principle characters in the little drama are Jesus and two sisters named Martha and Mary. Mary is presented as a picture of the perfect disciple sitting at the feet of the Lord and listening to His words. Martha, too, is a disciple of Jesus. She represents the disciple actively engaged in ministering to the Body of Christ. Martha is full of good works devoid of that selfishness that seeks its own pleasure. Martha is described as a distracted person drawn in different directions at the same time. Her unselfish service and sacrifice are about to be spoiled by her self-concern and self-pity. At this moment she is over her head in the service of the Lord and usual this gives rise to resentment and crossness with others. She vents her displeasure directly upon the Lord and indirectly upon her sister. Our Lord's response to Martha reflects His affection and deep concern for

her. Our Lord doesn't rebuke her service until she becomes agitated and begins finding faults with others. He indicated that much of this work is her own doing and is not necessary --not demanded by Him. If she would sit down at His feet for a while, she might learn what is demanded of her. He tells her that the only required thing is love. Mary's action flows from the love of God and it, therefore, is above criticism. When a disciple finds himself or herself out of love in their service of others, it is time to stop whatever they are doing and go sit at the feet of the Lord and LISTEN!

THE SERVANTS OF THE KINGDOM

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

"HE WHO HEARS YOU, HEARS ME. HE WHO REJECTS YOU, REJECTS HIM WHO SENT ME." (Luke 10:16)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 9:57-62

1. What are some of the requirements of discipleship demanded here?
2. What is being implied in verse 60?
3. Why do you think that Jesus does not invite some people to be His disciples?
4. Why does Jesus make the requirements for discipleship so high?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 10:1-9, reread Luke 9:1-6, and Numbers 11:16-17.

1. What difference do you see between the *Commission of the Twelve* and the *seventy-two*?
2. What does the *sending of the 72* tell us about the *mission of Jesus*?
3. Why can we say that these men, in a certain sense, became other Christs?
4. If a disciple is to be successful, what means must he use?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 10:10-20.

1. What do you understand by verse 16?

2. What will be God's judgment upon those who reject the message of the disciples?"
3. How does the work of the disciple affect the Kingdom of Darkness?
4. What should be the cause of true joy for a disciple?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 10:21-24.

1. What do you think "to rejoice in the Holy Spirit" means?
2. What gives joy to the heart of Jesus?
3. What do you learn about Jesus in verse 22?
4. Why is being a disciple of Jesus a greater blessing than being a prophet or king of the Old Testament?

FIFTY DAY: Read Luke 10:25-37

1. What error is implied in the question "What must I do to inherit everlasting life?"
2. What are the limits of Christian Charity?
3. How is love of neighbor expressed according to this parable?
4. How do you show compassion for others?

SIXTH DAY: Read Corinthians 7:29-35 and Luke 10:38-42.

1. What does St. Luke wish to teach using the story about Martha and Mary?
2. Why does Mary express the ideal disciple?
3. What do you see to be Marha's real problem?
4. What does this story teach you about your work for the Lord?

CHAPTER 15

PRAYER OF DISCIPLESHIP

INTRODUCTION

Prayerfulness permeates the Third Gospel, and Jesus appears as a powerful man of prayer. When Luke writes that Jesus "went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night in communion with God" (Lk. 6:12), he describes Jesus habitual state of being. Jesus was always in communion with God, as the will of Jesus was always one with that of the Father.

For the first time in Chapter Ten, Jesus encourages His disciples to pray. He asks His disciples to lift up their eyes and behold the vast number of people ready to receive the Gospel and then to lift up their hearts in prayer for more workers. After the example of Jesus and His personal petition to them, the disciples had an obligation to pray. "One day he was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples asked him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" (Lk. 11:1)

PRAYER OF DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus calls the rest of the disciples around and He says, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins for we too forgive all who do us wrong; and subject us not to the trial" (Lk. 11:2-4) That "when you pray" distinguished the disciples' prayer from all others.

These are more than words to be said. These are truths to be understood and incarnated into the life of the disciples. The very first word used by Jesus translates as "Father" and opens to the mind a sea of infinity upon which to meditate and floods the heart with awe and wonder. The use by Jesus of the Aramaic word "Abba" is a unique revelation of the relationship that exists between God and the disciples of Jesus. The Word "Abba" does not only

express the relationship of God to a disciple of the Jesus, but describes what ought to be the disciple's orientation towards God.

When "Abba" is translated as "Father", it loses the true impact of what Jesus is teaching His disciples. "Abba" was a word used by little children to address their father. Perhaps the closest thing we have to Abba in the English language would be "Daddy" or "Poppa". Jesus, from His own intimate relationship with God, knew that the best earthly concept by which God's relationship with His disciples could be expressed would be that between a small child and a loving father. There is no wall that separates a Christian from God --only a veil and a veil pierced by faith at any moment.

We certainly know there is a distinction between being a child and being childish. A Christian must be a child as Jesus was a child. The remainder of our Lord's prayer rules out a childish spirituality. The first intention of our prayer is "hallowed be your name." That should be the first goal of our prayer and our life. The Name of God implies the personality of God and the Plan of God. His Name is hallowed when the true nature and will of God are known in this world and held in reverence. It is a prayer for God to display His holiness and love on this earth. Primarily, it is a prayer to display it in our own lives.

When we pray "your kingdom come", we are praying for the means by which God's Name is hallowed upon this earth. The Kingdom comes as the reign of God extends itself over the lives of people through their obedience to the will of God. Each disciple is a little bit of this earth into which the reign of God must be extended and when it does, a little bit of heaven is established upon this earth.

Jesus teaches His disciples in regards to their physical and material needs not to look beyond the next day in their prayers: "Give us each day our daily bread." Jesus teaches His disciples that they, as He did, must have a day-to-day dependence upon the Providence of God. One stage in advance is requested and no more.

The next day two petitions deal with the daily moral needs of human existence. From His realistic understanding of His little brothers and sisters, Jesus knew that day-to-day these children would be in need of their Father's forgiveness for their failures in fulfilling His perfect will. Many of these failures would be

in their interpersonal relationships with each other. Jesus teaches the disciples to pray: "Forgive us our sins for we too forgive all who do us wrong." The "all" is emphatic and no one can be excluded. Where there is no human spirit of forgiveness, there is no condition within the human heart for divine forgiveness. A spirit of unforgiveness will reveal one not to be a child of the heavenly Father.

Our Lord again emphasizes the human frailty of His disciples in His final petition: "and subject us not to the trial." Here disciples pray that since they are fools who rush in where angels fear to tread, God will not let them get over their heads in anything. In St. Matthew's version of the Lord's prayer, a disciple prays to be delivered from the power of the Evil One.

The Lord's prayer, as we are accustomed to saying it, is found in the Gospel account of Matthew. Some scholars believe that Luke's shorter version is closer to the original and the version found in Matthew's is a liturgical adaptation of it by the Church. Both the longer and shorter versions substantially express the same concepts.

PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

By our prayers, we open our lives to God in order to be able to receive from Him. Luke encourages persistence in prayer. He relates a parable in which a man has his prayer answered because he refused to take "No!" for an answer. The Greek word translated as "persistence" carries the meaning of "shamelessness". It clearly emphasizes the degree to which our perseverance ought to reach. Luke confirms that the person who asks, seeks, and knocks will certainly be rewarded because it is a heavenly law that God will respond to and meet each of these actions.

Jesus again recalls to His disciples' minds that their relationship with God is a Father-Child relationship. Even with human beings, a persistent child --bad as he or she is --usually wins in the end and obtains a good. We need to study the spirit of the Lord's prayer for it is in that Spirit a disciple ought to pray

The greatest gift of God to the disciples of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. Jesus confirms that God will give to them the Holy Spirit if they open their lives through persistent prayers to receive Him: "How much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." (Lk. 11:13) A disciple must

not only passively open his life to God as Mary of Bethany, but also as a persistent friend ask for the Holy Spirit --truly the daily, sustaining bread of discipleship!

SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

The Gospel scene now suddenly changes as when on a sunny day the sun is suddenly eclipsed. The mood now grows dark and somber. A picture now forms on the Gospel scene of what becomes of a man who lives beyond the rays of the Holy Spirit of God.

We read that Jesus was casting out a devil from a man made dumb by the evil spirit. Matthew says this man was blind as well. In both the gospel accounts of Luke and Matthew, this incident is more than just a miracle story. We are dealing with the problem of Jewish disbelief in Jesus in a symbolic manner. The Jews are displaying a moral blindness, deafness and dumbness towards Jesus. It is attributed to diabolical influence. The Gospel presents Jesus with the power to save the Jews if they will but repent.

They do not deny the extraordinary power of Jesus. He indeed performs marvels. They deny the source of His power and blasphemously attribute the operation of the Spirit of God to Satan. Jesus appeals to the reason still remaining to them. He indicates that there are certain immutable laws in this universe and they apply in heaven, on earth and in hell: that which is divided, falls --that which works against itself, destroys self. Satan is no fool to allow civil war. Physical and mental diseases are in some degree evidences of his control over men. He allows none to break his control.

Jesus points to the accepted work of Jewish exorcists. "In such case, let them act as your judges." (Lk. 11:19) In other words, they who know about such power will instruct you properly. Our Lord is recalling to their minds the pagan magicians in Pharaoh's Court. They knew the limits of their art and when Moses exceeded it they said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God. Yet, Pharaoh remained obstinate and would not listen to them." (Ex. 8:15) The only power on earth stronger than the Prince of Demons is the power of God. The exorcisms of Jesus manifest that God is saving His people through Jesus.

THE HOUSE GUEST

Jesus now dramatically illustrates that a person will either be in the Spirit of God or else under the dominion of the Evil One. Under his dominion there will be an on-going process of corruption and deterioration. He sees men as houses and unclean spirits as parasites needing a place in which to dwell. A certain man is freed of his unwelcome and destructive house guest --and with its departure everything improves. The house remains empty. He does not invite a good guest to come and dwell within him. One day the evil spirit returns and notes the vacancy and the improvements. He moves back in and this time he brings others and they eventually destroy that house.

It is a story with many applications, but it essentially tells that a man cannot be neutral towards God. He enters into the reign of God and becomes the Temple of the Holy Spirit or he will become, in time, a true enemy of God. Probably it is a parable about Israel freed from the evil of idolatry, but rejecting the true Spirit of God --especially manifested in Jesus of Nazareth. It foretells the terrible future of Israel.

THE BLESSED MOTHER

While Jesus is speaking, a certain woman interrupts Him and calls out: "Blest is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!" (Lk. 11:27) Luke had foretold in the Infancy Narratives that all generations would call Mary blessed. This prophecy has already begun to be fulfilled. Jesus does not deny what the woman says, and our Lord's response to the women implies that what she says is true, but not for the reason she thinks. To be the Mother of Jesus implies no more than a human relationship with Him. By her faith and obedience, Mary shares in His communion with God. This is the source of all blessedness: "Hear the word of God and keep it." (Lk. 11:28)

AN EVIL AGE

Jesus now declares the serious spiritual state of Israel: "This is an evil age." (Lk. 11:29) The healing of the dumb man was a sign, but they refused to believe in it. Jesus is still on trial in their hearts and they demand a sign from Heaven. Such demands but echo their hearts' unbelief. Jesus recalls that God

sent one man to Nineveh to preach and the people repented. The only sign from heaven to the Ninevites was the preaching of Jonah. It will be the only sign to this evil generation. The Son of Man --a greater one than Jonah -- stands before Israel as a sign. Unless Israel responds by repentance to this sign --destruction awaits Israel.

Jesus recalls to their minds how the pagan Queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth to become a disciple of Solomon. Here in their presence, a greater one than Solomon stands. The Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba are examples of how men must receive Jesus: they must repent and become His disciples. Both the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites were Gentiles. They may well symbolize the future acceptance of Jesus by the Gentile world.

THE DIVINE LIGHT

Jesus stands before Israel --before mankind --as a Divine Light. God has enkindled this Light and has placed it before men. Yet, men do not see this Light. They demand more light from heaven so they will be able to see Jesus -to believe in Him. Jesus affirms that no sign is needed in order to believe in Him. If the spirit of a man is under the Spirit of God, that man will be able to see the Light of God's Truth in this world especially shining in Jesus. But, if the eye is diseased --even though there is plenty of light --things are distorted and disfigured. The mind does not receive enlightened visions of reality, but dark and distorted concepts. Jesus warns the crowd: "Take care, then, that your light is not darkness.' (Lk. 11:35)

HOUSE OF ISRAEL

This darkened day ends with Jesus being invited to the house of a Pharisee for dinner. Jesus comes to this house as a prophet. Upon entering the house he omits, as a prophetic gesture, the ritual absolutions demanded before eating. It is a symbol of the sin in this house. Jesus reclined at table with host and guest. Jesus has come in love and with an offer of divine forgiveness and friendship. It is real friendship. It is a real friend who tells one the truth. Jesus discerns the evil spirits destroying Israel's relationship with God. We have in this story a symbolism of the House of Israel and the Prophet of God seeking to cleanse this house of its evil spirits. Jesus discerns within Israel the spirits of greed, infidelity, hypocrisy, mercilessness, murder and deception. Six are mentioned symbolizing the corrupt state of Israel. Seven are not

mentioned signifying that there is yet hope --the process of possession is not yet completed.

As a prophet of Old, Jesus does not hesitate to condemn the hypocrisy, the erroneousness and sinfulness of the Jewish leaders. History confirms that martyrdom is the price prophets must pay. Jesus has shared his own light with these men. They are all revealed as sinners. What will be their reaction? "After he had left this gathering, the scribes and Pharisees began to manifest fierce hostility to him..." (Lk. 11:53) The reactions of these religious men of the past recall the reaction of certain religious men in our own day to particular teachings of the late Pope Paul VI.

"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 come into the light, to make clear that his deeds are done in God." (Jn. 3:19-21) A disciple of Jesus daily brings his or her spirit before the Light of Truth in prayer.

PRAYER OF DISCIPLESHIP

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

“HE WHO IS NOT WITH ME IS AGAINST ME, AND HE WHO DOES NOT GATHER WITH ME SCATTERS.” (Luke 11:23)

FIRST DAY: Read Romans 8:14-17, Galatians 4:1-9 and Ezekial 36:22-31.

1. What does the word “Abba” describe to us?
2. What does that reveal to you about a disciple’s relationship with God?
3. What does St. Paul say is the difference between a Christian relationship with God and a non-Christian one?
4. In Ezekiel what does it mean for God’s name to be hallowed?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 11:1-13

1. What would you say in the spirit of the Lord’s Prayer?
2. How should this direct your prayer life?
3. What do the last three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer teach you?
4. What do these teachings teach you about perseverance in prayer?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 11:14-23 and Exodus 8:12-15.

1. What is being symbolized by the cure of the dumb man?
2. In what way are these Jewish people like the Pharoah of Egypt?
3. What do the exorcisms performed by Jesus teach?

4. What does Luke 11:23 mean to you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 11:24-32, Jonah 3:1-10 and I Kings 10:1-10.

1. What does Luke 11:24-26 teach you?
2. What is the true source of Mary's blessedness?
3. In what way is Jonah a symbol of Jesus?
4. How do the words of the Queen of Sheba in Kings 10:8 apply to our present-day discipleship?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 11:33-36 and Romans 1:18-32.

1. How do you see Luke 11:33 as applying to Jesus?
2. Why are special signs from heaven not needed to believe in Jesus?
3. What do you think our Lord means in Luke 11:36?
4. What does St. Paul teach us about the light of truth in this world and its rejection by people?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 11:37-53 and John 3:17-21.

1. What is being symbolized in the reading from Luke?
2. In what role does Jesus appear in this scene?
3. What evil spirits are discerned to be possessing Israel as this time?
4. What does John 3:17-21 say to you?

CHAPTER 16

THE LIGHT OF DARKNESS

INTRODUCTION

Anne Lindbergh once wrote, "The most exhausting thing in life, I have discovered, is being insincere. That is why so much of social life is exhausting: one is wearing a mask."

Jesus Christ discerned this masked spirit in the Pharisees and condemned it: "You hypocrites! How accurately did Isaiah prophesy about you when he said: 'This people pays me lip service, but their heart is far from me.'" (Mt. 15:7-8) The word 'hypocrite' comes from a Greek word meaning "one who plays a part on stage" --in other words, one who wears a mask. A religious hypocrite appears to be acting out of love for God, Church, and other human beings, but in truth, the motives are selfish. He hides his true self and disguises the evil intentions of the heart by cloaking them in deceitful actions.

Hypocrisy is truly a most serious moral condition and may have devastating spiritual results...

LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES

Jesus spoke of hypocrisy as an evil leaven that seeps through the soul, permeating it, swelling it with pride and souring the whole spirit. Hypocrisy is a lie. To be a hypocrite is to give flesh and blood existence to a lie --to incarnate it. A person may be totally unaware of the degree to which he has become a lie. Jesus warns His disciples to avoid this contamination; He turns and speaks first to them: "Be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." (Lk. 12:1)

Jesus teaches that hypocrisy is useless and senseless for it will all, one day, be exposed. One cannot hide forever, from his own eyes and the eyes of others, what he has truly become in his heart. Paul warns the Corinthians that Jesus "will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and manifest the intentions of hearts." (1 Cor. 4:5)

What the disciples hear in private they are encouraged to proclaim boldly in public. They need this warning because of the pressures of this world and because of persecution. Fear of people and their rejection lies at the root of hypocrisy. The remedy is fear of God. In times of persecution the disciples would be tempted to hypocrisy. Jesus encourages them to resist this temptation: "I say to you who are my friends: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and can do no more. I will show you whom you ought to fear. Fear him who has power to cast into Gehenna after he has killed. Yes, I tell you, fear him." (Lk. 12:4-5)

A disciple may have to suffer and die, and these are facts of discipleship to be understood and accepted. The life of the person is not terminated through physical death --a form of life has ended. The person continues on in existence with total conscious awareness. From this point on --no person or thing on earth can touch that individual. From this moment on the person is in the hands of the Living God. And it is a moment of judgment. Jesus teaches that if a disciple must fear --then fear God! Eternal life is a fact of life and so may be eternal punishment. It is a frightful reality.

Our Lord demonstrates a peculiar concern over hypocrisy. He singles this spirit out for special attention. It must be especially detrimental to discipleship and salvation. We can better understand the dangers of hypocrisy when we see its innate opposition to repentance.

Repentance flows from truth: it is seeing oneself in a true and proper light and then turning from sinful self to God. Hypocrisy impedes this for as self clings to its lies and illusions it cannot experience the need for repentance. It especially blocks the operations of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. When things are seen through the eyes of hypocrisy, the very light of our eyes is darkness. Deception and error become our light. This is the "light" Jesus calls "darkness". If this is our "light", how entangled in darkness will the soul become?

UNFORGIVABLE SIN

Speaking about the coming Judgment, Jesus declares certain sins forgivable and certain ones not forgivable: "Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit will never be

forgiven." (Lk. 12:10) Sins against the Son of Man would be forgiven. A man may deny Christ out of fear as did Peter. He may blaspheme Jesus out of ignorance and pride as did Paul. Here would be applicable Paul's teaching that the ultimate tribunal of judgment before which a man must stand will be his own conscience. It suggests that a pagan dying without the opportunity of believing in Jesus will be judged by his fidelity to the truth revealed to him in his lifetime. This indicates the universal dimension the Holy Spirit plays in the salvation of mankind. Every man and woman on this earth, whether reached by the Son of Man or not, will be reached by the Holy Spirit. How does the soul react to the Presence and influences of the Holy Spirit? In order to be saved, through Jesus, every person must be loyal to the Truth his Holy Spirit revealed to him. It is of the nature of the sins against the Holy Spirit to treat as false that which one knows to be true. The light is deliberately rejected. The soul has a deliberate preference of darkness to the light. If the human eye continuously rejects light it will lose its ability to see. So it is with the soul --a continual rejection of the light of truth renders the soul incapable of receiving light. The soul spiritually dies. Such a condition renders repentance and forgiveness morally impossible. The sin against the Holy Spirit can indeed have a universal scope. The Hindu and the Buddhist, as well as the Christian and the Jew, can sin against the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised His disciples if they were faithful to the Truth, the Truth would be faithful within them. Their trials and persecutions would afford opportunities for the Holy Spirit to be manifested in their words and deeds.

SPIRIT OF GREED

A particular man in the crowd did not listen to what Jesus preached. He was wrapped up in his own problems. When the opportunity afforded itself, he said: "Teacher, tell my brother to give me my share of our inheritance." (Lk 12:13) This prayer Jesus will not grant. He discerns greed to be at the heart of the request. This was another besetting sin of the Pharisees and the people. It was a sin His own disciples must likewise guard themselves against.

Jesus paints a picture of a man who seeks material wealth with his whole soul. The energies of body, mind, heart and spirit are singly channeled towards the goal of gold. he truly found his joy in amassing wealth. His heart hovers over gold as a bee over honey. It totally absorbs him.

The rich man makes the mistake of identifying his soul with his physical life. His physical life suddenly ends, but his soul transcends physical death. Death revealed the abject poverty of this man's soul. Considering the fact that conscious life survives after death and given the brevity and uncertainty of physical life, his was a life of folly. It was an idolatrous life.

As wealth can be danger for those who possess it, so can the absence of wealth be a danger. An absence of material blessings can be a real source of anxiety. Just as the rich man may find his security in material possessions, a poor man may find the absence of material possessions the source of his insecurity.

This cannot be a way of life for disciples of Jesus. Anxiety has no right to be in their lives. They are not pagans. They know God cares for them. God is "Abba" for them. Jesus knew if faith was weak the disciples would not resist the temptation to find security in material possessions and get caught in a frantic search for them--wasting time and energy of life. Leaving off the parables, Jesus speaks plainly to His disciples: "That is why I warn you, do not be concerned for your life, what you are to eat, or for your body, what you are to wear. Life is more important than food and the body more than clothing." (Lk. 12:22-23)

The whole point of the teaching is that disciples should avoid this consuming and detrimental state of anxiety over material possessions. This anxious spirit may be concealing a spirit of mistrust in God and/or a spirit of greed. On the other hand, there is no condemnation of wealth and material possessions in themselves. The Gospel does not teach material prosperity to be an evil --a danger yes!

Our Lord establishes a principle to guide all his disciples regardless of their financial status. If this principle is vigorously adhered to, it will maintain the perfect balance between the material and spiritual worlds: "Seek out instead his Kingdom over you, and the rest will follow in turn." (Lk. 12:31) When a disciple sets his heart upon the will of God and its fulfillment --life is properly ordered. All other things will fall into place. The pluses and the extras will come. Jesus encourages his disciples not to be worried about living in this world, but to be generous with their lives and their possessions for it has pleased the Lord to give them the Kingdom!

ALWAYS PREPARED

In every moment of life a disciple must experience his or her self as a servant of the Lord. Death will come as a thief in the night. It caught the rich man unprepared. It makes no difference whether the moment comes in the spring, summer or fall of our lives; we must be awake, our lamps burning, our belts fastened around our waist. "That servant is fortunate whom his master finds busy when he returns." (Lk. 12:43) We may be part of the kingdom of God, but as long as we are on this earth, we are the working part of the kingdom -- servants of the kingdom --its Cinderella's. Death must find a disciple on duty. We are expected to die with our boots on! When death knocks, the faithful disciple will find the Lord at the door. It will be for both a blissful moment described as a blessed banquet with the Lord as Host and the disciple as guest.

Peter asked the Lord if this applied to the Twelve. Our Lord's response makes it clear that all of us are servants. The Twelve and their successors are but servants placed over servants to sustain and care for them. To these servants a greater responsibility is given and much will be demanded from them. If they abuse their position and "lord" it over the faithful, and abuse them while selfishly serving themselves, then death will catch them unprepared. Severe punishment awaits such unfaithful servants after their death. Jesus confirms that after physical death a person faces bliss or punishment. This truth should control and color every moment of disciple's life on earth whether he be Pope or peasant.

FIRE ON EARTH

As Jesus contemplated man's indifference to eternity and his absorption in self and this world, He knew only His death could make a difference; it would release His Holy Spirit upon the world --that Spirit burning and consuming Him with intolerable agony for the glory of God. If the Holy Spirit in the world would be the fruit of His Death --then let it be. Let it be soon. To His friends He unburdened His heart: "I have come to light a fire on this earth. How I wish the blaze were ignited! I have a baptism to receive. What anguish I feel till it is over!" (Lk. 12:49-50)

The fire of His Spirit will forge the souls of persons to the will of God effecting eternal peace with creature and creator. But on this earth, this Fire of Peace would enkindle one heart and be rejected by another. It would become a sword of separation. A person could not become a lamp of truth and a lover of God and be at peace with a world permeated with the leaven of hypocrisy.

THE COMING STORM

It all seemed so futile at that moment, but Jesus had to continue His mission to proclaim the kingdom of God. Where there is no repentance, there would be no acceptance. Time is important. It is the moment of salvation. The opportunity for salvation passes quickly. Once again, with heroic patience, Jesus launches His attack against that encasement of hypocrisy guarding the soul from truth and warding off repentance. Addressing the crowd, He said, "Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it you do not know how to interpret these times?" (Lk. 12:56)

Someone in the crowd reports to Jesus that Pilate and his soldiers ambushed certain Galileans in the temple and slaughtered them while they offered sacrifices. Probably they were a group of Zealots, sworn enemies of Rome. These people believed that such evil only befalls guilty people. Jesus says that such people are no worse than those standing presently around Him. Jesus teaches that such tragedies in the world --certainly works of the Evil One -- are prophetic signs and symbols of what awaits all men who after death fall into the hands of the Evil One.

THE BARREN TREE

Jesus compares the people and Israel to a barren fig tree. Three years He has worked to produce the fruit of repentance. Precious little time now remains to Israel. A failure to produce fruit of repentance will result in total destruction of the Nation.

This is a message to all ages: there is a time of life and there is a purpose of life. There is time for repentance and time for salvation. The time can run out and the purpose remain unfulfilled...then what?

THE LIGHT OF DARKNESS

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

“SEEK OUT INSTEAD HIS KINGSHIP OVER YOU, AND THE REST WILL FOLLOW IN TURN.” (Lk 12:31)

FRIST DAY: Read Luke 12:1-7, I Corninthians 5:7-8, and Galatians 2:11-14.

1. How would you describe a hypocrite?
2. Why is hypocrisy opposed to the spirit of repentance?
3. In what way was St. Peter being a hypocrite?
4. What are signs of hypocrisy within our own souls?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 12:8-12 and Romans 2:13-16.

1. Why is it important what we acknowledge Christ in this world?
2. How does one sin against the Holy Spirit?
3. Can you recall an incident in Luke Chapter 11 that appears to be a sin against the Holy Spirit?
4. How will people be judged who have not come to believe in Jesus?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 12:13-31.

1. What do you learn by Jesus' refusal to do what the man requested?

2. Why is the rich man of the parable considered a fool?
3. What should be a disciple's attitude towards material goods?
4. What does Luke 12:31 teach you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 12:32-48.

1. What would you say is the real treasure of your life?
2. What does this tell you about yourself?
3. What does it mean to be a servant of the Kingdom?
4. What do the "signs of the time" indicate to the people according to Jesus?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 12:49-59.

1. What do you understand by Luke 12:49?
2. What is the baptism Jesus must receive?
3. Why does Jesus bring the sword of separation into this world?
4. What do the "signs of the time" indicate to the people according to Jesus?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 13:1-9.

1. In the mind of Jesus what does the death of the Galileans symbolize?
2. What connection does Jesus see between these disasters and repentance?
3. What does the barren fig tree symbolize?
4. What application to your own spiritual life does this reading have?

CHAPTER 17

THE LAMP OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

Luke desires his readers to see Jesus as the Lamp of Truth enkindled in this world by God Himself. Jesus is the Light moving over a stage of darkness. Jesus is contrasted against this background, but to the spiritual blinded Jesus appears as darkness and darkness appears as light. As Jesus moves across the gospel stage, we see the different reactions of people. Some hide from the light and hate it. Others desire the light and will climb a tree, if necessary, to see it: "...he who acts in truth comes into the light, to make clear that his deeds are done in God." (Jn. 3:21)

LAST SYNAGOGUE APPEARANCE

Jesus now makes His last appearance in the Jewish synagogue as teacher. He will no longer be recognized as a qualified rabbi to instruct the congregation. The Jewish hierarchy is drawing its lines of resistance against Him. The synagogue and the Sabbath expressed the very heart of Jewish religion. Luke uses both of these elements, as background, to highlight the conflict between Jesus and the institutional Jewish community. Luke relates:

...On a Sabbath day he was teaching in one of the synagogues. There was a woman there who for eighteen years had been possessed by a spirit which drained her strength. She was badly stooped -- quite incapable of standing erect. (Lk. 13:10-11)

The synagogue and the Sabbath symbolize the spirit of the Jewish religion. What is the symbolism of this woman? The number eighteen symbolized the period of bondage and enslavement that Israel presently suffers. The woman is not said to be possessed but in bondage. Apparently bondage distinguishes a lesser degree of domain of Satan over people. Some note that Jesus never lays hands on a possessed person in the process of exorcism. When Jesus lays hands on someone it is to heal. He heals those wounded by the operations of the evil spirit. He healing of the woman on the Sabbath in the synagogue symbolizes the power of the Spirit of Jesus to save Israel.

The response of the leader of the synagogue gives an indication of the evil spirit draining the religious spirit of Israel. He was indignant with Jesus over the healing but he expressed his displeasure towards the people. The leader of the synagogue manifested a spirit of hypocrisy and a spirit of religious legalism. Legalism truly became a façade -- a mask to hide the absence of a true spirit of love of God and mankind. The Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of the synagogue are contrasted. The woman represents what Jesus can do for Israel, and the leader of the synagogue represents Israel's official attitude towards Jesus and reveals the cause of the opposition.

Jesus permits the light of truth to shine revealing the hypocrisy behind legalism. Jesus demonstrated that the leader and others like him released animals from bondage on the Sabbath so that they could go and drink water. And, yet, they accused Him of freeing a daughter of Abraham from the bondage of Satan on the Sabbath! If you can do the lesser good without sin, so then can a greater good be done without sin. Evidently, Jesus implies these men cared more for the welfare of animals than for human beings who were members of their own race.

Jesus emphasized that it was precisely on the Sabbath that the woman should have been released from bondage. This indicated that what has occurred was no work of man but an act of God. In Jesus, God had risen from His rest and was now prepared to deliver His people from bondage and from a spirit draining all their religious spirit.

A DIVINE LEAVEN

In a world of hypocrisy appearances are all important. In such a world Jesus and His gospel message suffer. To the sophisticated of this world Jesus has so little to offer. Jesus now prophesies the powerful effect His insignificant person and message will have on the face of the earth. In the person of Jesus resides a divine power unable to be discerned by the spiritually blinded. Nothing could stop this power from permeating mankind. Jesus compares His spirit to a bit of yeast a woman takes and buries in 190 cups of flour. Just as a bit of yeast affects every single bit of a tub of flour, so this life standing so insignificantly before Israel today would affect the whole history of mankind.

Jesus tells His disciples that no matter the odds against them, no matter how long the struggles, they are on the winning side -- future victory is assured. In the light of two thousand years we see its achievements and the continual fulfillment of the prophecy. But who would have expected the War of the Kingdoms to have lasted so long?

SALVATION AND NUMBERS

On one occasion a man asked Jesus, "Lord, are they few in number who are to be saved?" (Lk. 13:23) Many have asked this question and it has stimulated much discussion. Jesus knew the futility of discussing things best left to the wisdom and mercy of God. Jesus by-passed the question and answered the man with practical advice rather than with a theological opinion: "Try to come in through the narrow door. Many, I tell you, will try to enter and be unable." (Lk. 13:24) The actual Greek expression carries the idea that a person should restrain every nerve of their being to enter.

The Lord implies many will not enter the Kingdom of God. There is a distinction made between those who "strive" to enter and those who only "seek" to enter. Jesus confirms that all those who strive will enter but many will merely seek in vain to enter. Our Lord's answer to the man tells him that no matter the number saved, he must not delay securing his place among them.

The narrowness of the door symbolizes that the entrance is not made for crowds. There is no national or collective salvation as the Jews believed. Each person individually is responsible to the call of grace and cannot depend on a religious heritage to be a pass-key to heaven.

A DIVINE COURSE

At this point we are told, "certain Pharisees came to him. 'Go on your way!' they said. 'Leave this place! Herod is trying to kill you.'" (Lk.13.31) Probably the Pharisees attempted to frighten Jesus into Judea where the Sanhedrin could exercise some control over Him. His answer was: "Go tell that fox, 'today and tomorrow I cast out devils and perform cures, and on the third day my purpose is accomplished. For all that, I must proceed on course today, tomorrow, and the day after, since no prophet can be allowed to die anywhere except in Jerusalem.'" (Lk13: 32-33)

Jesus demonstrates His own political awareness when He refers to Herod as a fox. The fox appears in the Old Testament as a predator more destructive than cunning. When Jesus makes reference to three days He implies a definite time has been decreed by God. He follows God's time schedule. This will bring His life to perfection. The Greek word translated "my purpose is accomplished" implies the full moral perfection of His life. Jesus perfects His human nature by submitting it completely to the will of God.

Jesus foretells that Herod will not cause His death but the Judean powers in Jerusalem will do so. Jesus will die in Jerusalem. As a consequence God will withdraw His Presence from Israel, and she will be left to her enemies.

THE SABBATH BANQUET

In the Jewish literature the Sabbath banquet became a symbol of a person's eternal union with God -- when the human person would rest forever in the eternal bliss of God. This eternal friendship with God was symbolically expressed as a great messianic banquet with Yahweh as Host and Israel as guest. Isaiah describes such a banquet in chapter twenty-five. The Sabbath banquet was a foreshadowing of this messianic banquet. It is against this backdrop one must understand the teachings of Jesus given during a Sabbath banquet. He reclines at table -- probably in the last place. Jesus reflects upon the coming messianic banquet: the quality and nature of the banquet; who will be invited; who will ultimately come; who will have the honored positions; and how one prepares oneself, here and now, in order to be present at the eternal banquet. Jesus cannot but reflect what a poor symbolic sign this particular Sabbath meal is of the messianic banquet.

Luke, no doubt, desires this incident to serve as a reflection and warning to the Christian Community who, in their Eucharist Banquet, beheld a symbol of the heavenly banquet they hoped one day to participate in. They too are to see the Eucharist Host, Jesus, teaching them important truths about Christian Fellowship.

The meal begins on the note that the other guests are watching Jesus. Already there is an absence of true love and friendship. Suddenly an unexpected person appears at the banquet to be healed. This gives Jesus the opportunity to assume the initiative. Jesus asks those present, "Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath or not?" (Lk. 14:3) Their silence reveals their hypocrisy and

indifference to the sufferings and afflictions of others. Jesus "took the man, healed him, and sent him on his way." (Lk. 14:4) Jesus knew they silently condemned His action. He reveals the hypocrisy of their position and the lack of love for neighbor. He caused them to reflect on their own behavior when it was a matter of personal concern to them: your son, your ox falls into the well what do you do? Such incidents call for action and not theological debates. What they allowed to themselves out of love for their own interests must be allowed to Jesus out of love for His own --the poor, the afflicted, the sinners. He reveals the hypocrisy and selfishness of their personal spirits. He now suggests to them their own spirits of pride. He teaches that not only must those who attend the messianic banquet have a spirit of charity but a spirit of humility also. They all sought the first places and the honored positions. In the kingdom of God it will be most humble who will occupy the places of honor.

The truly humble are emptied of self and therefore capable of being filled with God. As Mary expressed: "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord." The humble do not deny beauty, talent grace --they acknowledge it and proclaim God to be its Source. "God who is mighty has done great things for me, holy is His name." (Lk. 1:49) Thus sings the humble virgin of Nazareth. The greater the emptiness of self the greater the capacity to receive the "light" of God. Therefore, those closest to God are truly the humblest. The humblest are greatest in the Kingdom of God. They will have the first places. We know James and John wanted those positions but apparently they didn't qualify for them.

Our Lord now turns His mind from the seating arrangement to the host's guest list. With the exception of Jesus there was probably not one man at the banquet who would not be playing host himself in the coming weeks. Jesus indicates that this guest list was just the opposite to that of the messianic banquet. These guests could all return the favor --not so those at the messianic banquet. There would not be one single person on that guest list who could claim he or she merited to be there. Every one was there through the generosity of their Host. Each was so totally poor as to be unable to give any return to the Host other than the gratitude and praise.

Jesus teaches the generosity of God in sharing His friendship with sinners. He points out how far these people are from imitating their Father in Heaven. The Greek text does not imply one must not invited relatives, friends and

neighbors, but that they must not habitually invite only these and neglect those too poor to make any return.

The banquet expresses friendship and love. Jesus teaches that if we want to receive a reward from God, we must imitate Him and share our time, our talents, our abilities, our goods with others who have nothing to give us in return. They come only with their needs; they can only receive.

One guest tries to move the conversation away from these embarrassing subjects to a more pleasant and inoffensive topic for table talk. He piously emotes: "Happy is he who eats bread in the Kingdom of God." (Lk. 14:15) The strategy doesn't work. Jesus isn't to be sidetracked. He grabs that ball right out of the air and runs it into the concrete. He tells a story that reveals that the kingdom of God has come and the banquet is ready. The invited guests have refused their invitation. Others have been invited in their place and have accepted. The places were being filled. The guest first invited will not have the happiness of eating bread in the kingdom of God. This applies to the present company He now dined with. They could emote over the blessedness of the heavenly banquet, but they did not value it enough to accept its invitation. "I tell you that not one of those invited shall taste a morsel of my dinner." (Lk. 14:24)

That was indeed a Sabbath banquet from which the guests came away with heartburn and stomach indigestion. Jesus served them more than they could digest. But, the true gospel message has been more than many men and women would bite into.

SALT OF DISCIPESHIP

It has been foretold that many Gentiles would come to Christ. The large crowd that now surrounds Jesus symbolizes this coming harvest. There is great reward for discipleship and future glory but such rewards and glory demand a price. There is a particular and unique quality to Christian Discipleship just as there is to salt. It possesses a unique quality of enthusiasm for the reign of God that expresses itself in total detachment from all one possesses. It displays a sacrificial spirit that willingly sacrifices life in a glorious shedding of one's blood for the Gospel or in the day-by-day martyrdom of dying to self and carrying one's cross in the footsteps of Jesus.

A person is encouraged to count the cost of discipleship before making a commitment. Better not to begin this quest than quit or be defeated along the way. Discipleship is like salt. If salt loses its unique quality, it is useless and fit for nothing, and Jesus says the same applies to the disciple who loses enthusiasm for the reign of God. For this reason Father Judge often asked the members of the religious congregation he founded, "Has the Holy Spirit gone out of your lives?" "How much are your lives under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?"

THE LAMP OF GOD

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

"SOMEONE ASKED HIM, 'LORD, ARE THEY FEW IN NUMBER WHO ARE TO BE SAVED?' HE REPLIED, "TRY TO COME IN THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR. MANY, I TELL YOU, WILL TRY TO ENTER AND BE UNABLE." (LK. 13:23-24)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 13:10-12.

1. What is being symbolized by the afflicted woman?
2. What was the spirit draining her spirit?
3. What did Jesus reveal about the spirit of the leader of the synogogue?
4. What do you learn from this reading?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 13-20-35.

1. What do you think Jesus is teaching in verse 24?
2. What does the narrow gate imply?
3. What does verse 30 teach you?
4. How did the life of Jesus reach moral perfection?

THIRD DAY: Read Isaiah 25:1-12.

1. What is being symbolized by the Sabbath banquet?
2. What does the messianic banquet describe?

3. What do verses seven and eight tell you about the people at the banquet?
4. What do verses eleven and twelve teach you about pride?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 14:1-11.

1. What would you say was the general atmosphere at this banquet?
2. What evil qualities did Jesus discern in the other guests at the banquet?
3. What two qualities are needed in order to share in the messianic banquet?
4. What does it mean to be humble?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 14:12-24.

1. What is the difference between the guest list at the Sabbath meal and the messianic banquet?
2. How often do you expect a return here and now for your good deeds?
3. What is wrong with this attitude?
4. What does this reading tell you about your own guest list?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 14:25-35.

1. Why can discipleship be compared to salt?
2. What would you say is the "salt" of discipleship?
3. What does this reading tell you about your discipleship?
4. How would you answer the question, "Has the Holy Spirit gone out of your life?"

CHAPTER 18

CAUSE OF JOY

INTRODUCTION

The proximate mission of Jesus was to save the house of Israel. This house was composed of those who kept the Law of Moses and those who did not keep his Law. Both groups were composed of sinners, but only those living outside the Law were consciously aware of their alienation from God. For the Pharisees the term "sinners" meant people who led immoral lives, such as, swindlers, adulterers and those who follow a dishonorable profession involving immorality or dishonesty, such as, tax collectors, shepherds, donkey-drivers, peddlers, and tanners. Jesus had to call both the "sinners" and the law-abiding to repentance.

Jesus has to do more than preach to the "sinner". He has to personally encounter them with love so that through Him and in Him they would personally experience God's love for them -- a love that called them to renew their personal lives by responding to God's love. Not only did God love them, but it was possible for them to love and serve God who was their "Abba".

The Pharisees and the pious avoided sinners as being an occasion of sin. The book of Tobit expresses their sentiments: "Be lavish with your bread and wine...but do not share them with sinners." (Tb. 4:17) The Book of Sirach declared: "The Most High himself hates sinners, and upon the wicked he takes vengeance." (Sir. 12:7) Therefore, the behavior of Jesus confused and confounded them. His marvelous words and deeds suggested He was a prophet, but His conduct shocked their religious sensibilities. He openly associated with sinners --even to the point of dining with them. According to the pharisaic norms, Jesus had to be a sinner and no prophet. Those marvelous works flowed from the power of Satan.

LOST AND FOUND

In chapter 15, Luke exquisitely defends Jesus' mission to sinners. He relates three of our Lord's most beloved parables: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Drachma, and the Prodigal Son. These three parables carry the message of God's mercy

to sinners. These parables were not addressed to the poor sinners, but to those who opposed His ministry to sinners. The first two verses set the background for the telling of the parables: "The tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him, at which the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" (Lk. 15:1-2)

The parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Drachma are perfectly balanced parables appealing to both men and women. Obviously, both are capable of becoming quite Pharisaic. In both cases the owners represent God. In both parables the Greek texts express a sense of great, persevering activity --with no let-up in the search. It seems ridiculous to spend all this time and energy over one lost sheep or silver coin and that is just the point. Man sees value in numbers and production. In the sight of God each human being possesses a unique intrinsic value.

If the sheep represents, as most suggest, the sinner gone beyond the Law, then coin may represent those lost within the Law --Jesus being the Lamp enkindled by God to recover these lost sinners. Nevertheless, both parables express the importance of the individual sinner, regardless of the nature of the sin, and God's persistent effort to bring back each lost sinner.

Through these parables, Jesus answers these critics by demonstrating that His attitude towards sinners expresses God's own attitude. Their attitude expressed quite the opposite. If Jesus did as they desired, He could not associate with them either. He knew they too were sinners. Their sins may have been socially accepted sins, but no sin was acceptable to God. If God was as they believed, Jesus would not be on this earth. "God so loved the world that he gave his only son...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)

Who are the 99 not in need of repentance? Certainly not the Pharisees. Perhaps the best answer was given by an ancient scholar who said the 99 must be the good angels the Lord left in heaven when He came to this earth to save sinners.

Both parables carry a message to those considered to be the "redeemed" on earth. They cannot sit around criticizing sinners for not joining the Church, and as a group of untouchables, keep their distance from the sinful humanity.

As Jesus, they must seek the lost. Luke no doubt intends to suggest that it is the mission of both men and women to diligently evangelize the world.

THE PRODIGAL SON

The first two parables stress the action of God's grace seeking the lost sinner. The third parable now presents the human side with the sinner's response to the grace expressed in repentance and returning to God, and how God deals with the returning sinner.

A father has two sons --an older son reserved, conservative and dutiful and the younger son outgoing, extravagant, and irresponsible. The father unconditionally loves both his sons. His love flows from his goodness rather than from any merits of his sons. The younger son comes to the father requesting the legal inheritance coming to him at his father's death. He wanted now a completely independent life. He displays no concern or love for his father or brother. He leaves with no intention of returning home.

Jesus sees this family as a reflection of God's family on earth. The father of the family represents God who has given life and blessings to his sons. One son takes what the father has given him and leaves his father's house. This younger son represents the sinners who publicly break away from God --no longer acknowledge God as their father --these are the lost sheep. The older son represents the pious and the religious who dutifully remain in their father's house --in its present application --the Pharisees and the scribes.

Following the road of selfishness and self-gratification ultimately leads to emptiness and the deepest wants. Degradation follows quickly. So it came to the younger son. This degradation was expressed by the young Jewish man's becoming a swineherd. To the Jewish mind this would express the ultimate in moral degradation and sinfulness. The scripture says he "came to his senses" (Lk. 15:17*), which is equivalent to saying he comes to repentance. The Greek text suggests that he rouse himself out of lethargy and despair. He makes a good resolution to return to his father's house and he acts upon it. He prepares a full confession with no excuses. He can make no further claims on his father; he can only hope to be taken on as a hired hand. He could not think of his father in terms of forgiveness and restoration. He had loved his father too little to understand the love of his father and what it truly meant for him to be his father's son.

In the parable, the father awaits the son's return and runs to meet him while still far off. The father gives orders to the servants to bring the finest robe in the house, a ring for his finger, and shoes for his feet. The robe was a mark of high distinction, the ring was a signet rings establishing his authority in the house, the shoes were a sign that he was a free man --not a slave. The fattened calf was killed only for a special occasion. There could be no more important occasion.

The parable illustrates how sin and adversity brought the young sinner to repentance. The repentant sinner realizes that any form of life with God is better than life without God. The narrative dramatically teaches how divine love receives the returning sinner. There is a complete restoration of the relationship because that is the way of divine love. The returning sinner brings joy to God and all heaven enters into this joy. All on earth that means celebration --feasting, music, dancing --are used to describe the reunion of "Abba" with a lost child.

THE SECOND SON

At this point, the second son enters upon the scene. He represents pious Israelites --particularly the Pharisees and scribes. It is to them these parables have been directed. The main point of the parable centers upon the second son --not upon the prodigal younger son.

The second son appears on the scene as a dark rumbling cloud. His loveless spirit reveals itself by the first demanding to know the reason and purpose for joy. Evidently, it was something alien to his own religious spirit and under suspect. A reason for joy did not help. It never does! It only surfaced the spirit of jealousy for his honored brother and the spirit of contempt for his father's foolish generosity. When the father appeared, all the bitterness came out. His service in his father's house he viewed as slavery. Whatever he did for his father, he did for motives other than love. He worked for the father in order to receive from him, but not to share life with his father. He possessed no more love for the father than had the younger son. His body remained in his father's house but his heart was not there.

The older son stands before the father in bitterness of spirit and the father, with tender and gentle love, encourages him to bring his heart home --if he but

enters into the love of the father, he will know all that the father has is his. There is no need to ask for or to be given what is one's own inheritance. To enter into the father's love implies embracing with love the prodigal son as his brother. If he can enter into the spirit of his father, he can enter into joy -- into the music, the dance and the banquet. If he will not, he will remain in the dark, in the cold --standing there grinding his teeth in anger. How true it is that it is not God who keeps man out of heaven but his own spirit --a spirit that refuses to embrace the father's love! As our Lord ends the tale, the door is still open --the night is filled with the sounds of joy --the son stands in the dark looking in. Will he go in or not?

CAUSE OF JOY

The parable was addressed to men who were like that brother, men who were offended at the Good News. Jesus' reply is that the boundless love of God justifies His approach to sinners. Jesus extends an invitation to sinners to enter the reign of God because it is the will of God for him to do so. They do not deserve to be there, they have not merited it, and yet, they are invited and many will be there because of the compassionate love of the Father.

These parables vibrate with God's fatherly love for all His children. They echo with a divine sorrow that God's children do not follow in the generosity of their Father in Heaven. All human beings ought to rejoice in the knowledge that God wills the salvation of all men. For in this universal salvific will of God lies the salvation of each individual. It implies that we cannot be saved if in our hearts we would deny salvation to others. We must not only desire the salvation of all sinners, but as the angels, we rejoice in their salvation --rejoice in the mercy of God!

One cannot know the heart's desires of a loved one and remain coolly indifferent to that desire and truly love that person. Our indifference to anything measures our lack of love for a thing. Jesus tells us God is our "Abba" and that opens up to us the deepest personal relationship possible. We are invited into the heart of our Father. It is given to us to know the secrets of that Heart. The burning love for God for all mankind has been revealed to us. His love is directed towards each individual human being. It actively seeks to bring every soul into His eternal love.

All of this Jesus reveals in His ministry. Being caught up in the love of the Father, He should do no other than tirelessly carry this love to lost sinners -- inviting them back to God who would be their "Abba". The return of lost sinners actually brings joy to the heart of God --a joy that all the angels rejoice within.

What does this say to disciples of Christ? That we must tirelessly seek the lost sheep. We must go to sinners in love and not condemnation. That they may experience in our love that God still loves them and that it is not too late to come home. To those who are lost in darkness we must endeavor to be kindly light within their lives that enables them to see the way home.

If we, sons and daughters of the Lord, have come to know the will of our Father for the salvation of all men and we remain coolly indifferent to the salvation of others, we deserve to hear on Judgment Day: "You sticks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!"

CAUSE OF JOY

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

"BUT GOD IS RICH IN MERCY; BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE OF US HE BROUGHT US TO LIFE WITH CHRIST WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN SIN. BY THIS FAVOR YOU WERE SAVED." (Eph. 2:4-5)

FIRST DAY: Read Ezekiel 33:1-17 and 34:17-24.

1. How does the Son of Man share in the death of a sinner?
2. In this reading what is God's attitude towards a wicked person?
3. What does Ezekiel 33:14-16 teach you about repentance?
4. In what way does "the fat sheep" resemble the Pharisees attitude towards sinners.

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 15:1-10.

1. What was the Pharisees attitude towards sinners?
2. Why do you think Jesus ate with sinners?
3. What does the Lost Sheep and Drachma tell you about God's attitude towards sinners?
4. What is your attitude towards sinners?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 15:11-24.

1. How does the young man reveal his lack of love for the father?
2. How does the father reveal that to love means to leave the other free?

3. What does the father's reception of the prodigal son tell you about God?
4. How can you make it easier for those who have offended you to be reunited with you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 15:25-32.

1. In what way does the older brother's attitude resembles the Pharisees'?
2. How is the older brother's lack of love revealed?
3. What would you say was the root of the older brother's problem?
4. What does a lack of joy reveal about a personal commitment to Christ?

FIFTH DAY: Read Matthew 20:1-6 and 21:28-32.

1. What does the first parable tell you about God and salvation?
2. How would you describe the spirit of those who complained to the owner?
3. How do these two sons in Matthew resemble those two sons in Luke 15?
4. Which of the two sons would you say is most like yourself?

SIXTH DAY: Read Ephesians 2:1-21.

1. For St. Paul where does the grace of salvation flow?
2. What do verses 9 and 10 say to you?
3. According to St. Paul how are separated brothers to become one?
4. From the readings this week what do you see as your Christian duty towards alienated and separated brothers and sisters?

CHAPTER 19

SHREWD AS THE SERPENT

INTRODUCTION

“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart.” (Ps. 90:12) Herein the psalmist prays for the virtue of prudence. In the Scriptures the prudent person is one who wisely judges each situation of life in the light of the whole life process. The prudent person sees life on earth as a process that must be accountable to God when ended.

The Church later defined the virtue of prudence as the grace that gives a person knowledge of one's moral duty and the concrete means to accomplish it. Perhaps the one word “shrewd” would convey the meaning expressed both by the Scriptures and the Church. The serpent appears as a symbol of shrewdness in the Scriptures. Jesus encourages His disciples to be “as shrewd as serpents.”

PRUDENCE WITH MONEY

The imprudence of the disciples gave Jesus concern. With many admonitions and parables He urged the disciples to be at least as prudent or as shrewd as men of this world. On Chapter Sixteen, Our Lord relates to the disciples a particular incident of human prudence taken from the business world. He ends His tale by directing these words to His disciples: “For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.” (Lk. 16:8*)

Our Lord uses this incident to teach His disciples how to use money and wealth in this world. “Mammon” is the word used for money. It is an Aramaic expression for wealth and carries a literal meaning of “that which is trusted in.” To understand Our Lord's instructions, we need to reflect on verses one through eight. The shrewd servant used the money at his disposal to make friends with his master's debtors --men much poorer than his master. His generosity to these poor men assured a comfortable future for himself.

Jesus encourages His disciples to shrewdly use the wealth that comes to them. In the scales of heaven, mammon weighs very little. It is the "little thing" a disciple may be trusted with. He must understand it is not his very own but a trust given to him. It is to be used as an instrument of justice in this world. A shrewd disciple will use his material wealth to care for the poor. He will become the friend of the poor. Jesus implies, that in a most special way, the kingdom of God belongs to the poor: "Blest are you poor; the reign of God is yours." (Lk. 6:20*) The rabbis had two sayings: "Alms are the salt of riches" and "The rich help the poor in this world, but the poor help the rich in the world to come."

Jesus teaches that if one used money while still in the world to make friends with the poor, the poor would welcome their friends into their "eternal tent". Material wealth is not a blessing from God merited because of a good life, but a trust --a responsibility. In Psalm 41, we find a good commentary of this teaching of Jesus. "Happy the man who cares for the poor and the weak: if disaster strikes, Yahweh will come to his help. Yahweh will guard him, give him life and happiness in the land; Yahweh will be his comfort in his bed of sickness."

LOVE OF MONEY

Jesus warns His disciples: "You cannot give yourself to God and money." (Mt. 6:24) In the Lukan text, Mammon is personified as a god to whom devotion amounts to idolatry. Both God and Mammon claim undivided service. Jesus says that a servant cannot be the slave of two masters who both demand undivided attention. The manner in which disciples use wealth will reveal the nature of their commitment to God --it validates or invalidates their claim to an eternal inheritance.

When the Pharisees heard this teaching, they ridiculed Jesus. The Pharisees believed that as a reward for their extremely virtuous lives minutely observing the Law --God abundantly rewarded them with material wealth. Those who were poor and afflicted were so because of their irreligious lives.

Directing His attention towards the Pharisees, Jesus says, "You justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God reads your hearts. What man thinks important, God holds in contempt." (Lk. 16:15*)

SPIRIT VS. LAW

Following the discourse on prudent use of wealth, there appears a small section difficult to interpret. Some scholars feel we are dealing with a fragment of our Lord's debate with the Pharisees. It proclaims with the preaching of John a new day has begun for true religion. The legislation of the Old Testament has been abrogated—ended. The letter has been replaced by the Spirit. But, the Pharisees are so unopened to the Spirit --so entrenched in the old way --so opposed to renewal that heaven and earth will pass away before they will change one little stroke of the Law. In actual practice they have changed the Law itself by their divorce practices and other such practices. The renewal inauguration by Jesus does not undercut morality, but truly brings moral perfection to religion.

JUSTICE AFTER DEATH

Our Lord now illustrates with a very dramatic story what happens to one who fails to prudently use wealth while in the world. He addresses a parable to the Pharisees who scoffed at His doctrine concerning wealth. He describes the life style of two men: a very rich man and a sick, poor man. The rich man wore the richest clothes and every day of his life he feasted at a banquet. He has no name. He is only identified by his possessions. The second man was covered in rags and sores. He lay by the gate of the rich man's house hoping for alms. This man has a name. His name is Lazarus which means "God helps". He may have been poor and sick, but he was a real person with personal identity. Jesus knew his name.

In the eyes of the world, Lazarus would have been judged as a contemptible wretch, but the rich man would have been seen as an admirable and exalted person. Man judges by what he sees and his vision of life ends at the grave. Jesus now carries His listeners beyond the vision of the flesh. He brings them on the other side of death --life after death.

There the rich man is in a habitual state of torment. He is not in torment because he was a rich man --Abraham was a very rich man --he is there because of his heartless neglect of the poor. The exact measure he measured to others is measured to him. Lazarus appears at a banquet in an honored position, next to Abraham. The rich man makes an appeal to Abraham for compassion. With his same arrogant attitude from life he tells Abraham to

send Lazarus to aid him. Abraham gently responds that during his lifetime the rich man had received in full. He had reserved nothing for the future. As the man had never interrupted his pursuit of pleasures to concern himself with Lazarus' hunger and pains, so now Lazarus could not be interrupted in his bliss to relieve his pains and thirst.

Abraham stresses a separation existed eternally between them and neither could pass over the chasm. It was a chasm established in the life of the rich man when he kept Lazarus removed from his personal life as he enjoyed unbroken pleasure. This chasm created by him in time had been eternalized by death. He could have made Lazarus and other poor people his friends and closed the chasm between his wealth and their poverty. He made the fatal misuse of wealth. The words of Psalm 49:21 express well the truth taught by Jesus: "Man, for all his splendor, if he has no prudence, resembles the beasts that perish."

SIGNS FROM THE DEAD

There is a second part to this narrative. The rich man makes a second request. In this request he insinuates his own personal fate was not justified. He had not been sufficiently warned. He desired to send Lazarus on another errand: "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too." "They have Moses and the prophets," said Abraham, "let them listen to them." "Ah no, father Abraham," said the rich man, "but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." (Lk. 16:27-31)

It was characteristic for the Pharisees to insist upon signs and wonders as a prerequisite for their repentance. A person may witness an extraordinary miracle and it may, as we say, blow the mind and even deeply stir the emotions. For awhile things may appear to be different in the person, but time will reveal there was no conversion of heart. The heart has remained unmoved. Nothing from the outside can open a closed heart. When a heart opens itself to God's grace, that grace can move the heart to repentance. This Scripture teaches that if a human being hears the Word of God and it does not produce repentance then the heart has hardened itself to God's grace.

It is precisely for this reason that Jesus did not appear to those who refused to believe in Him. It would not have changed their hearts, only increased their guilt!

CAUSING SCANDAL

In Chapter Seventeen, Jesus continues in the instruction of His disciples. It is impossible in this world, He tells them, for there not to be temptations and occasions of sin. Due to the bad influence of others, because of the evil pressure some will put upon the weak, souls will be led away from union with God. They will be led into a life of sin. This is a very sensitive subject with Jesus. He warns that no disciple of His must become a source of evil in the life of another. "Scandals will inevitably arise, but woe to him through whom they come..." (Lk. 17:1) The Greek word translated "scandal" implies that a person sets a trap to lure another person into sin or they "bait" a person into sin

"Woe", Jesus says to the man or woman who leads the least of these little ones out of the Father's house—into darkness of sin. Jesus seems to suggest it would be better for such people if someone put their feet in a barrel of cement and dropped them in the nearest lake. For Jesus, such a concept expressed some strong feelings. Evidently He was most serious!

FRATERNAL CORRECTION

Our Lord tells His disciples to be on their guard, not to cause another to sin, but also to be careful about their attitude towards sinners. Love for sinners demands that the sinners be warned about their sin. Love for sinners does not imply we love their sin. We must be careful not to use the sins of others as an opportunity to express our hatred for them or an occasion to express our displeasure with them because they have offended us, not God. That is falling into the snare of hypocrisy. If we truly do not feel love towards the sinner, it is better that we be quiet and leave the correction to another. We have to seek the lost sheep with love and not vengeance. If we seek to correct without a genuine spirit of charity, we do more harm than good.

SORROW AND FORGIVENESS

Our Lord said, "If your brother does wrong, correct him; if he repents forgive him. If he sins against you seven times a day, and seven times a day turns back to you saying, 'I am sorry', forgive him." (Lk. 17:3-4) It is well understood

that "seven" in this text is symbolic: seven implies that there can be no limit to the spirit of forgiveness. We must always be willing and ready to forgive those who have offended us when forgiveness is sought.

"Sorry!" is not just a word one says, but an action one expresses through a change of behavior--or at least a genuine effort to change. Otherwise, "Sorry!" becomes another expression of our hypocrisy. That kind of sorrow for sin is not to be accepted but rebuked. It is itself a sin. The sorrow on our lips must be matched by the sorrow in our hearts. As the old act of sorrow says, "With the help of thy grace --to confess my sins, do penance and amend my life. Amen!"

INCREASE OUR FAITH

In the face of all these demands the apostles said to Jesus, "Increase our faith." (Lk. 17:5) When confronted with the demands of discipleship, we always feel that we need "more" faith. Jesus' reply implies it is not a matter of added faith, but faith pure and simple. Jesus indicates that the apostles' problem, at this stage of their relationship, is a lack of faith.

In our Lord's teaching, He uses the sycamore tree because of its massive root structure. To uproot such a tree would take unusual power. Naturally, such trees do not normally grow in the sea. The illustration points to the fact that true faith accomplishes what lies beyond the normal power of man. Instead of saying, "I cannot!" a man of faith exclaims, "By the grace of God, I will!"

SPIRITUAL BOOKKEEPING

There is a temptation that comes to every disciple who permits the life of grace to unfold within his life. There comes a temptation to start a little bookkeeping --to keep a journal of good deeds. The Pharisees fell into this trap. It is a trap of many dangers. Our Lord seeks to protect His disciples against these dangers. Jesus tells us that it should be a servant's joy to serve the Lord.

Disciples are not to work for a reward for their labors. Their work is an expression of their love for their Father. They have entered into the heart of their Father. It is reward enough for them that they can truly love their Father. Their love is their reward! They find their joy in loving service.

When a disciple's life is joyless, it is time for the Christian to ask, "Has true love gone out of my service to the Lord? Have I let myself slip into the role of a hireling working for a daily wage?" Reward does not enter into the picture of true discipleship. What can be given to a Christian as a reward when the Father has already confirmed through Jesus Christ: "My son, you are with me always, and everything I have is yours." (Lk. 15:31)

SHREWD AS THE SERPENT

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

“WHEN YOU HAVE DONE ALL YOU HAVE BEEN COMMANDED TO DO, SAY, ‘WE ARE USELESS SERVANTS; WE HAVE DONE NO MORE THAN OUR DUTY.’” (Luke 17:10)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 16:1-8.

1. What does the virtue of prudence mean to you?
2. What is the importance of prudence in our spiritual lives?
3. How did the manager display worldly prudence?
4. What does it mean to you to be as “shrewd as a serpent”?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 16:9-18.

1. What does the Lord teach us in verse nine?
2. What is meant by a “little thing” in verse ten?
3. What does “you cannot give yourself to God and money mean to you?”
4. How is a disciple to prudently use wealth?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 16:19-32.

1. What does the Lord teach you in this parable?
2. How do you see the saying “what you measure to others will be measured to you?”
3. How was this chasm between the rich man and the blessed established?

4. Why does Abraham say that the brothers of the rich man would not believe someone from the dead if they would not believe in the Scriptures?

FOURTH DAY: Read Psalm 49.

1. What does this psalm teach you about wealth?
2. In what way is verse 13 a commentary on Luke 16:19-31?
3. How can wealth be used to help one after death?
4. What does this psalm teach you about death?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 17:1-4 and Matthew 18:5-9, 15-18.

1. What do the Scriptures mean by scandal?
2. What do you see to be a serious scandal today?
3. What does verse three say to you?
4. What would you say is true sorrow?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 17:7-10.

1. What does this parable teach you?
2. What does verse 10 say to you?
3. What should motivate the service of a true disciple?
4. What would you say is the real reward of your own discipleship?

CHAPTER 20

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION

When there is a misunderstanding of an important teaching of Jesus, or there has been need for clarification or deepening of the understanding of the Way, Luke indicates this by prefacing the truth to be dealt with by mentioning they were "on the way to Jerusalem."

THE TEN LEPERS

Luke now relates an incident in which Jesus cures ten lepers—nine of which are Jews and one a Samaritan. Nothing more than leprosy symbolized the sinful state of man before God. We have been told that Jews did not associate with Samaritans. The presence of the Samaritan among the Jewish lepers suggests that before God sinfulness is the one common denominator for all mankind. All mankind is sinful. All are in need of salvation.

In the story of the Ten Lepers, all ten men demonstrated faith in Jesus. They exercised faith in His word. Jesus did not immediately heal them but sent them as lepers to show themselves to the priest. Acting only on faith the ten went to the priests. They believed in the power of Jesus to heal their bodies. They were healed along the way. A most interesting aspect of this incident and perhaps the key to a deeper understanding of the scene was that the Samaritan was also sent to the priest. He would not have been welcomed. Samaritans were not allowed to enter the Temple. No Jewish priest would declare a Samaritan as clean. The Jews closed salvation to the Samaritans. The man no doubt represented those non-Jewish sinners deemed damned by the Pharisees. The Samaritan could not give thanks to God in the Temple of the Jews.

The attitude of the Samaritan is very revealing and instructive. Once he experienced the great mercy of God towards himself a sinner, he returned to Jesus the Agent of divine mercy. He fell on his face before Jesus giving praise and thanks to Jesus. This is an adoration scene. The Samaritan acknowledged Jesus to be divine mercy incarnated.

The behavior of the Jews is contrasted to that of the Samaritan. The Jews failed to see what the power of Jesus truly expressed. They had faith in God to heal them. Some even had faith in Jesus as an Agent of God but they failed to respond properly to God or to Jesus. The root cause of it all was their failure to repent. They failed to experience their need for the merciful forgiveness of God.

The Samaritan, a symbol of those lost sinners, had no place else to go but to Jesus. His faith in Jesus was not misplaced: "Your faith has been your salvation." (Lk.17:19.) This is a Scripture expression for salvation. Here we are told that not all faith saves. Not even all faith in Jesus. It is not a matter of increased faith. It is a matter of the quality of faith--the kind of faith the Samaritan has in Jesus. His faith expressed the quality or the kind of faith that saves. The story of the Ten Lepers depicts man's reaction to the Kingdom of God present in Jesus. In Jesus the Kingdom has come, and it is manifested through His words and deeds. This incident shows how few recognize the reign of God in Jesus Christ.

THE WHEN AND WHERE OF THE KINGDOM

The Pharisees now asked Jesus when the reign of God would come. This question reveals how far the popular concept about the reign of God was from actual reality. People clung to the dream that it would begin with spectacular signs and wonders rocketing Israel to political dominance and glory. Jesus' reply teaches that the reign of God is not something beginning in this world with external signs and wonders. It has its beginning in the soul of man. It is not something that can be said to be "here" and "there" in the external world. Jesus tells the Pharisees with all careful observations they had already missed the presence of the reign of God--visibly manifested in His words and deeds. They failed to understand the true nature of the kingdom and enter into it. Jesus reveals the kingdom to be "within" man. It works in the hearts and souls of men producing a new creation. It is manifested in obedience and known through peace and joy of the spirit. By a slow, gradual process a man becomes a new creation as the Holy Spirit operates like a silent leaven within the spirit.

Luke seeks to correct the existing errors within the Christian Community concerning the Second Coming of Jesus. In Chapter Twelve Jesus apparently anticipated a considerable lapse of time before His return--a return that could not be calculated. In Chapter Nineteen we will read the parable of the talents

directed to those who "thought that the reign of God was about to appear." (Lk.19:11.) In Chapter Seventeen Luke continues to demonstrate from our Lord's words that the Second Coming will be delayed and its coming will be unexpected. The disciples who are looking for signs of the Second Coming are in danger of making the same mistake as the Pharisees. All their attention is being drawn into the eternal. His coming will be as sudden and as clear as lightning in a darkened sky--no man will foresee its coming but all men will see it when present.

Jesus prophesies His own rejections and suffering by "this generation". "This generation" refers primarily to a class of people rather than a period of time. Following this rejection there would be a considerable absence of time before Jesus appeared again. But as He was rejected in His first coming He will appear in His Second Coming as the judge of "this generation"--of the world.

During the interim the disciples will continue the Presence of Jesus on earth. They too will suffer because of their affiliation with Jesus. The Son of Man will continue to be rejected by "this generation." The days of the disciples will be difficult because men will continue to reject Jesus. Of necessity this will create a longing for a vindication and glorification of Jesus. Christians will long for the days of the Son of Man to begin. This very longing can become a temptation to a disciple. A Christian must patiently await on the day of the Lord. Christians must lay hold upon the kingdom in hope and patience, in firm faith defying all obstacles and disappointment--in patient waiting. The nearer the day of judgment the less it will appear. So it will be just as in the days of Noah and Lot.

The coming of the Son of Man will be a day of judgment not only for unbelievers but also for unfaithful disciples. Jesus cautions His disciples not to start with Him and then turn back to the world. The wife of Lot lingered and was lost. So it will be with a disciple. The conditions of true discipleship are re-emphasized by Jesus. He affirms that the heart of a disciple must remain detached from possessions, home and from one's very physical life. Jesus indicates that His people will be separated and removed by an act of God from the scene of judgment and wrath.

The Pharisees asked "when?" and the disciples asked, "Where?". Our Lord's teaching implies we are not to ask the "when" or "where" of the reign of God.

The reign of God is Here! And men must enter in now, or else repeat the mistake of the Jews and share the fate that was Jerusalem's.

PRAYING ALWAYS

Luke relates a parable about an unjust judge and persistent widow to teach the disciples how to survive in time of hardship and persecution as they await the Second Coming. The first verse of the parable reveals its point: "... the necessity of praying always and not losing heart." If an unloving and unfeeling judge could be moved to grant justice how much more would the truly loving and merciful Judge grant justice to the disciples of Jesus who cry out day and night to Him. Justice will swiftly be done but that does not necessarily imply it will be done "soon". Our Lord does imply a delay in the Second Coming. It is not the delay itself that is the problem but delay in the face of constant hardship, persecutions and even death that causes the heart to lose hope in God and the disciple to fall away from the faith.

Prayer is man's finest day-by-day expression of faith. To persevere in prayer is to persevere in faith. The time of adversity affords the spirit the opportunity to grow strong and rich in faith. If God permits trials to come they will ultimately rebound to the enrichment of the persevering soul.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

The parable of the Pharisee and the publican is addressed to people who experienced themselves as "saved" and as a result despised "sinners". The protagonists in the drama are a very pious Jew--a member of the strict religious sect of the Pharisees and a Jew engaged in the despised business of gathering taxes for the Romans. One would be considered an ideal and exemplary citizen and the other a traitorous and petty racketeer. The life of the good man and his social environment reinforced his confidence in God. The good man's confidence rested in himself--his ability to keep the Law and in his good deeds beyond the demands of the Law. He experienced himself as his own savior. On the other hand, the publican's work and his environment reinforced his conscious awareness of his personal sinfulness before God and man. Both these men come before God--symbolized by their presence in the Temple for prayer. One man reviewed before God his goodness and reinforced within his own mind his acceptability before God. The other man had nothing to recommend him to God. He was a sinner and he experienced

himself before God as such. All he could hope for would be the mercy of God: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." (Lk.18:13.)

In the scales of divine justice, God rejected the "good" man and chose the "sinner". God does not condemn the man's observance of the Law nor his good works, it is the attitude of the man. Before God, no man can truly stand justified on his own merits.

As the feast of Passover approaches all Israel proceeds to Jerusalem. Jesus and Israel will present themselves in the Temple before God. Israel comes before God in complacency and pride. Jesus comes in deepest humility and childlike confidence--not lifting his eyes towards heaven. His prayer will seek mercy and forgiveness for sinful mankind. Israel will exalt itself and be rejected and remain unjustified before God.

AS LITTLE CHILDREN

Luke uses an episode from the ministry of Jesus to teach there is nothing in the works of man--no achievement of human beings that can merit, gain or win the favor and acceptance of God enabling man to enter the reign of God. According to the rabbis children could not be models of righteousness because they were incapable of knowing the Law. Jesus uses the child as a model for the Kingdom of God.

Disciples must not impede infants from being brought to Jesus for to such belongs the kingdom of God. We are taught that an infant has a certain quality enabling the child to enter the kingdom. An infant can do nothing to merit or win the love of another. The infant can only receive. An infant's salvation depends upon the love of another for him--an unmerited love. Before God a person is as helpless as an infant. The incident teaches that salvation is a pure gift flowing from the love of God. As a small child has no sense of worth or importance so adults must empty themselves of all pride of mind and heart in order to make their souls receptive to the reign of God.

What could be more different than the internal world of the Pharisee praying in the Temple and the internal world in the soul of a little child? If we desire to receive God as a savior into our lives our own internal world must be as that of a child.

THE RICH MAN

A man from the ruling class approached Jesus and asked: "Good Teacher, what must I do to share in everlasting life?" (Lk.18:18.) He represents the idea that eternal life is something one can gain by performing certain heroic deeds. In response to the man Jesus said, "Why call me good? None is good but God alone." (Lk.18:19.) This does not imply Jesus is not good but rather that the source of all goodness is God. The rich man attributed this goodness to man himself. It was this failure to recognize man's true condition and relationship with God that was part of this man's error over salvation. The Old Testament left no doubt as to the way of life.

Jesus makes reference to the keeping of the Commandments but enumerates only those guarding man's relationship with man rather than God. It is in these commandments that a person expresses in a concrete, discernible and measurable way one's obedience to God.

Jesus brings the man to confront the true spiritual condition of his soul. He kept the laws of God and felt himself godly and entitled to salvation. He checks with Jesus in order to see if there is something else he should do. Jesus teaches him that he has not yet begun to be saved. The man does not trust in God. He trusts in his wealth. He is unable to imitate the generosity and compassion of God by sharing his material wealth with the poor. Furthermore, he will not follow Jesus. He is weighed down by his possessions and cannot put faith in Jesus. The man demonstrates that "no servant can serve two masters ... you cannot give yourself to God and money." (Lk.16:13.) The man had called Jesus "good", implying that Jesus was a teacher of righteousness--a voice of God. Deuteronomy promised life would come to those "loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him." (Deut.30:20.) Jesus demonstrates that the man does not love God but money. He hears in Jesus the voice of God and he cannot heed it. He is invited to come to God through Jesus but he is unable to do so.

When the light of divine truth shines into our souls, we understand quite clearly that before God we are sinners not saints. Our rich man came to this point and we are told: "On hearing this he grew melancholy, for he was a very rich man." (Lk.18:23.) Indeed life is melancholy when life is devoid of true love of God. It is but the harbinger of the Hell to come.

When Jesus noted the man's reaction to His advice and call He said: "How hard it will be for the rich to go into the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." (Lk.18:24-25.) Many try to water down this statement but to do so is to miss the entire point Jesus makes. Jesus' emphasis is upon the fact that it is "impossible". This His listeners understood and asked, "Who, then, can be saved?" to which he replied, "Things that are impossible for men are possible for God." (Lk.18:26-27.)

We have come full circle back to the teaching of Jesus about entrance into the kingdom of God. There are two ways apparently of entering God's kingdom: as a child to receive it in faith and trust or as a conscious sinner humbly acknowledging one's bondage and weakness and throwing oneself upon the mercy of God: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

We can now understand much better those words of Paul: "I repeat, it is owing to his favor that salvation is yours through faith. This is not your own doing, it is God's gift; neither is it a reward for anything you have accomplished, so let no one pride himself on it." (Eph.2:8-9.)

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE KINGDOM

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

"I REPEAT, IT IS OWING TO HIS FAVOR THAT SALVATION IS YOUR THROUGH FAITH. THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING, IT IS GOD'S GIFT." (Eph. 2:8-9)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 17:11-19 and Psalm 30.

1. How does this miracles demonstrate the presence of the reign of God?
2. How does the faith of the Samaritan differ from that of the nine Jews?
3. How does the spirit of the Samaritan express the spirit of Psalm 30?
4. What would you say was the quality of faith that Jesus referred to when He said: "Your faith has been your salvation"?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 17:20-37.

1. What did the Pharisees imply when they asked Jesus when the reign of God would come?
2. What do you think Jesus meant when He said: "The reign of God is in your midst."?
3. Why will disciples long for the coming of the Day of the Son of Man?
4. What does this reading tell you about the Second Coming?

THIRD DAY: Read I Thessalonians 4:13-18, 5:1-11 and 2nd Thessalonians 2:1-12.

1. What do these readings tell you about the Second Coming?

2. What were some of the errors about the Second Coming that Paul seeks to correct?
3. According to these Scriptures and those in Luke how would you answer the question, "When will the Second Coming occur?"
4. What would you say is the spiritual danger of being concerned about the "signs" of the end times?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 18¹-8.

1. To whom is this parable addressed?
2. How can one best prepare oneself for the Second Coming?
3. Why does prayer help a disciple to persevere until the end?
4. How would you answer the question asked by Jesus in verse 8?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 18:9-17.

1. To whom is this parable addressed?
2. Why do you think the Lord rejected the Pharisees?
3. What does this parable teach you about salvation?
4. How can we receive the kingdom of God as a child?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 18:18-30.

1. How was the ruler in error concerning salvation?
2. What spiritual truth did Jesus bring to this man's conscious awareness?
3. What does this reading tell you about salvation?
4. What do you learn from verse 30?

CHAPTER 21

THE REJECTED KING

INRODUCTION

Our Lord promised eternal life to all who would follow in His footsteps. Jesus takes the Twelve aside and reveals to them it will be through His sufferings that they will come to eternal life: "He will be delivered up to the Gentiles" and they will put Him to death. Our Lord tells the Twelve, "We must now go up to Jerusalem ..." (Lk.18:31.) They cannot be separated from the Jerusalem experience and still share in the life of Jesus. They will experience in a most personal way the prophecy given to the Mother of Jesus: "You yourself shall be pierced with a sword--so that the thoughts of many hearts may be laid bare." (Lk.2:35.)

Luke writes to a non-Jewish audience and his mention of the Gentiles in the death of Jesus has special significance. Both the Jews and the Gentiles share in the death of Jesus. Jesus dies because of the sins of the Jews and the Gentiles. His death atones for the sins of both people. The effects of the Redemption will have a universal effect. "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (Jn.1:29.)

The popular belief about the Messiah left no room for a suffering Messiah. There was no conscious awareness that the Messiah would suffer or that there was any need for Him to do so. The disciples shared in these popular misconceptions. His utterance remained obscure to them, and they did not grasp His meaning. They were blinded to what lay ahead.

THE BLIND MAN

Jesus and His disciples approached the city of Jericho--one of the oldest living cities on the face of the earth. The site was inhabited as far back as 6800 B.C. They have arrived at the last stage on the journey to Jerusalem. The city lies only seventeen miles away. "As he drew near Jericho a blind man sat at the side of the road begging. Hearing a crowd go by the man asked, "What is that?" The answer came that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by." (Lk.18:35-37.) From other gospel accounts we know this blind man has a name--

Bartimaeus. He had heard stories about Jesus and a belief about Him had formed in his heart. He wanted to be more than a beggar; he desired to follow Jesus but he was blind and could not. He could not let this opportunity pass him by. He was wise, for Jesus would never pass this way again. He shouted out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" Those in the lead sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me!" Jesus halted and ordered that he be brought to Him. Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you? ..." (Lk.18:38-41.) He would not bestow the gift of sight upon a man who only had faith to ask for alms. "Lord," he answered, "I want to see." (Lk.18:41.) The bold request of Bartimaeus invites Jesus to validate His title to be "Son of David". "Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight. Your faith has healed you." (Lk.18:42.) The quality of the faith expressed by Bartimaeus has healed him. It brings him sight and also insight into the mystery of Jesus. "At that very moment he was given his sight and began to follow him, giving God the glory ..." (Lk.18:43.)

Jesus does not silence Bartimaeus nor forbid him to follow Him. It is the only time Luke relates a cured man followed Jesus. The time has come for Jesus to reveal His true messianic role and invite all men to follow Him. It is the way that leads to light and everlasting life.

For the disciples there are two important points in this incident. Bartimaeus by persistence in faith comes to grasp the mystery of the Son of David, to understand the role of Jesus and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. It is Jesus who enables His disciples to truly see the Way. Until a disciple can see the inner meaning of discipleship, his life is like the blind man who "sat by the wayside begging". His or her whole relationship with God is expressed in begging, asking for favors and crying out. When the mystery of the Cross is understood then a disciple realizes that the purpose and goal of discipleship is to imitate Jesus by sharing in His Passion--the role of suffering becomes clear and a disciple accepts it as Jesus did and matures in discipleship. He no longer sits by the wayside begging but he gets up and quickly follows in the footsteps of Jesus. We who still sit by the wayside are encouraged to persist in prayer to Jesus that we can "see" and follow the path to Jerusalem.

THE CHIEF TAX COLLECTOR

As the time quickly approaches for Jesus to enter Jerusalem, Luke seeks to conclude the teachings upon the kingdom of God. He reiterates that salvation is the basic characteristic of the reign of God. The blind man pronounced Jesus to be "Son of David" and heard the verdict: "Your faith has saved you." Now Luke relates that Zacchaeus, a very rich man, enters the kingdom of God answering thereby the question, "Who then can be saved?" Luke answers the question with a concrete example.

When Jesus and His disciples entered Jericho, they caused quite a stir. There was one man anxious to see Jesus, but he was small of stature and could see nothing because of the pressing crowd. The man was Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector and a very wealthy man. He ran ahead of the procession and climbed a tree known as a fig-mulberry. Only God knew what was in his heart that day he climbed the tree. He went up the tree a sinner and came down a changed man. When the procession reached the spot, we are told that Jesus looked up and saw Zacchaeus watching Him from a distance. Zacchaeus was trying to see Jesus but Jesus had come looking for him –The Good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep. Jesus called out to the surprise of all: "Zacchaeus, Hurry down, I mean to stay at our house today." (Lk. 19:5) When this was observed, everyone began to murmur, "He has gone to a sinner's house as a guest." (Lk. 19:7)

Zacchaeus is not about to let this moment be lost or slip by him. He stands his ground and makes, before all, a public confession of repentance. He addresses Jesus as his "Lord" and proclaims: "I give half my belongings, Lord, to the poor. If I have defrauded anyone in the least, I pay him back fourfold." (Lk. 19:8) Jesus has given no command to this man. His actions flow automatically as a fruit of his sincere repentance. He becomes a living definition of repentance. In the eyes of the Jewish rabbis such a promise, publicly made, would constitute true repentance.

Zacchaeus means "the righteous one". Jesus enables him to live up to his name and to become his true self. How far he was from being Zacchaeus --"the righteous one" when Jesus came to town! "Jesus said to him: 'Today salvation has come to this house, for this is what it means to be a son of Abraham.'" (Lk. 19:9) The New Testament teaches that the reign of God

belongs to the true sons and daughters of Abraham. Jesus confirmed that the actions of Zacchaeus expressed the true nature of this sonship: he expressed faith in Jesus and brought forth fruit that gave evidence of repentance.

We learn from the example of this man that true repentance means more than coming to Jesus and confessing one's sins--saying "I'm sorry" to God and man. It was just such an attitude as this that encouraged the wrath of John the Baptist: "He would say to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him: "You brood of vipers! Give some evidence that you mean to reform." (Lk.3:7-8.) No, salvation has not come to those who only say, "I'm sorry" or "I'm going to be good from now on." It has come to those who reform their lives and seek to make restitution for the harm and evil they have done. We can see the wisdom of the Church who has always insisted that we not only confess our sins but that we do penance for them--give some evidence we mean to reform.

Zacchaeus stands where he is and encounters Jesus. And he stays where he is and there his salvation is worked out. He does not literally follow in the footsteps of Jesus as did the Twelve but he received into his life the Spirit of Jesus. He lets that Spirit control and direct his present and future activities in Jericho. He sought to carry out the will of Jesus in a way in which his human conditions permitted. Jesus permitted this and shows his satisfaction and proclaimed that salvation had come to his house.

RESPONSIBLE DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus now relates a parable, called the Ten Pounds, to His disciples confirming that He is the messianic king who will be rejected by His subjects but in time will be vindicated. Between the time of His rejection and vindication the disciples had important work to do--work that they would be held accountable for to the Lord. Jesus teaches a disciple will be judged on the return made from the investment He has given to each. All have received the Holy Spirit. Some generously, faithfully, shrewdly cooperate with the Holy Spirit and produce much fruit.

Our Lord rewarded all the servants who were productive but he only congratulated the one who made a "tenfold" return. Again, it ought to be noted that the rewards from the Lord are out of proportion to the fruitfulness of the disciples.

It is the third type of disciple that truly needs to be concerned about his salvation. This one is rated as a total failure. This type does not lose the gift given--it is kept intact--but he or she does nothing with it. These are the ones who never do anything wrong because they never do anything! Our Lord tells them that if they are afraid of Him then fear ought to make them produce for Him. The one thing we ought all to fear is being an unfruitful servant. Maybe they do not have the freedom to brave new frontiers for the Lord or initiate creative apostolates but they can certainly work in the tried-and-true ones.

THE REJECTED KING

The way is now open for Jesus to reveal the means by which redemption will take place and the price to be paid by Jesus for the salvation of mankind. Luke writes, "Having spoken thus he went ahead with his ascent to Jerusalem." (Lk.19:28.) Jesus goes before His disciples. He leads the way. The picture presented recalls the words of Isaiah: "I have not rebelled, have not turned back ... I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame." (Is.50:5,7.)

The setting for the entrance into Jerusalem takes place on the Bethany Jerusalem road. Jesus gives orders to His disciples as a king would display his jurisdiction over his subjects and their property. Jesus will approach the city riding on a colt of a donkey. This may seem unkingly to us but it was very significant to the Jews. When a king was bent on destruction, he approached a city riding upon a war horse but when his intentions were peaceful he symbolized this by riding upon a donkey.

A great spiritual awareness sweeps through all the disciples as a conscious awareness of all Jesus has accomplished fills their hearts. He had demonstrated His power over sickness, demons and death--the destroyers of man's peace and welfare. Jesus is indeed the Prince of Peace. Their spirits were flooded with uncontrolled joy.

...“the entire crowd of disciples began to rejoice and praise God loudly for the display of power they had seen, saying: "Blessed is he who comes as king in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." (Lk.19:37-38.)

These words of praise were taken from Psalm 118. It is implied that God comes in Jesus of Nazareth. It was a spontaneous profession of joyful faith and love. These words suggest the crowd believed themselves to be taking part in the coronation procession of the Messiah.

This faith and love is not shared by Jerusalem. Jerusalem's rejection of the King of Peace is expressed through the words of the Pharisees who saw in Jesus no more than a rabbi. They are truly blind and cannot see in Jesus the "Son of David". "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." (Lk.19:39.) to them the truth of what was being said was not important. It was the danger of what was being implied that frightened them. This could be misinterpreted by the Romans and thereby threaten their vested interest. They preferred the peace of the world (Pax Romana) rather than the peace of Heaven.

Jerusalem comes to the crossroads of its destiny. Its failure to recognize in Jesus its Messiah closed to itself divine mercy and left itself open to divine judgment and wrath. Coming within sight of the city, Jesus is deeply moved to pity and sorrow. He weeps for the destiny it has chosen and He confirms its destruction.

With the rejection of its king, the royal procession has come to an end. The coronation is indefinitely postponed--but not cancelled! Even though He is a rejected and unrecognized king, Jesus appears in the enemies' camp clothed in the armor of God. Jesus enters the temple. He takes possession of it and gives orders to clean it up. The prophets after Jeremiah promised a permanent reform of the Temple would occur in the days of the Messiah. Zechariah foretold: "There will be no more traders in the Temple of Yahweh Sabaoth, when that day comes." (Zech.14:21.*) The cleansing of the temple by Jesus was a messianic act. The Messiah had entered His temple.

Jesus appears as a great teacher in the temple. What the priests and scribes had failed to do, Jesus accomplished. The people hung upon His words. Jesus failed to follow the orthodox, the strict patterns of procedure established by the temple authorities. It jarred their sensibilities. They recognized it as a rebuke to them and a challenge to their authority. The lines of battle were being drawn. Their decision had been made. They must be rid of Jesus of Nazareth.

They marshalled their forces, approached Him and demanded His credentials. He was not a trained and licensed rabbi so by what authority did He presume to teach and assume authority? They said to Him, "Tell us, by what authority do you do these things? In other words, who has authorized you?" (Lk.20:2.)

Jesus does not refuse to answer their question, but was truth the objective of their interrogation? Jesus tests their honesty. He asks a question that the recognized spiritual leaders of Israel ought to be able to answer: "did the baptism of John come from God or from men?" (Lk.20:4.) It was a most clever question. It places them between the horns of a dilemma. They could not dare say what they believed. If they say John was from God, he will ask them why they did not accept him. If they deny that John was from God the people will stone them. They opted for agnosticism: "They ended by replying they did not know where it came from" (Lk.20:7.) Jesus forced them to manifest their hypocrisy. These men were not seekers of truth but selfish preservers of their own vested interest. To speak the truth to them would be of no avail. Jesus said to them: "In that case neither will I tell you by whose authority I act." (Lk.20:8.)

Jesus will not communicate His truth to them. There is a lesson here for disciples--neither will He communicate His truth to those like them. The Scriptures tell us that the truth will set us free. Yet many lives are filled with hypocrisy--we live a lie. How then can we hope to communicate with God who is Truth? Jesus said of Himself: "I am Truth!" The Holy Spirit has been called "the Spirit of Truth" All in the life of a Christian that opposes truth, opposes Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The leaven of hypocrisy needs to be purged from every Christian spirit or else it will remain continually in opposition to the Spirit of Jesus. Faith may save but humility--the guardian of truth--will set us free to be holy.

THE REJECTED KIND
SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)

"THE SON OF MAN HAS COME TO SEARCH OUT AND SAVE WHAT WAS LOST." (Luke 19:10.)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 18:31-43.

1. What is the significance of the Gentiles' being mentioned in the death of Jesus?
2. How does the blind man represent the disciples of the Lord?
3. What two lessons does he teach us?
4. What does it mean to you to follow Jesus to Jerusalem?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 19:1-10.

1. How does this story answer the question "Who then can be saved?"
2. How did Zacchaeus demonstrate true repentance?
3. Why is restitution important in repentance?
4. What does Luke 19:10 tell you?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 19:11-27.

1. What does this parable tell you about the Kingship of Jesus?
2. What does it tell you about the Second Coming?
3. What does this teach you about Christian Discipleship?

4. What do you think Our Lord means in verse 26?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 19:28-40 and Psalms 118.

1. What is being symbolized and taught in verse 28?
2. In this reading how does Jesus demonstrate His kingship?
3. How would you describe the reign of Jesus, the King?
4. What is being expressed by the Pharisees in verse 39?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 19:41-48 and Matthew 21:12-17.

1. What does Luke 19:42 say to you?
2. What does this prophecy teach you?
3. What kind of behavior does Jesus demonstrate in the temple?
4. What do you think the cleansing of the Temple symbolizes?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 20:1-8.

1. Why do you think the leaders desired to destroy Jesus?
2. Why do you think Jesus refused to answer their question concerning His credentials?
3. How does Jesus deal with those not open to truth?
4. What does this say to you?

CHAPTER 22
VOICE OF AUTHORITY
INTRODUCTION

An often unrecognized need in human life is proper authority. Authority sets safe limits to human behavior and conduct. It brings a certain security and peace to human existence. Proper authority is a blessing. True religion is an invitation by God to man to enter into a covenant relationship with God in order to fulfill the created destiny of man. Without an external revelation from God, man could only blindly grope towards this destiny. It is in the religious sphere that expressed divine authority is most needed.

In revealed religion certain men are called and appointed to be intermediaries between man and God. God has never left the People of God without a living human symbol of divine authority among them. We see from the Books of Exodus and Deuteronomy that God called and appointed Moses as His representative among the Israelites. When Moses' life drew to an end, Joshua was chosen to take his place. After Joshua, the Judges came; then came the kings and the high priests, and lastly came the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin came into existence about the second century B.C. It was a limited form of local government conceded to the Jews by foreign rulers. It gave the council of the elders the right to make civil and religious laws. The Sanhedrin acquired a great deal of power under Roman rule. Its decisions carried executive weight and Roman soldiers could be used to enforce them. It could pronounce sentence of death but it could not execute the sentence without the approval of the Roman Procurator. The Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one members presided over by the chief priests, prominent members of the lay aristocracy and the scribes or doctors of the law. These last were also laymen and belonged mostly to the party of the Pharisees. From the history of Israel we see that the forms of government changed throughout its history through which divine authority expressed itself.

THE PROPHETS

The power to rule will always be a great temptation and peril for man. Man will be tempted to assume and use religious authority for his own personal advantages and because of a personal craving for power. Is an established religious authority completely free, autonomous, self-determining or is it checked and governed by another authority? Jesus, simply and clearly, answers this question in the following parable of the Tenants.

As the parable appears in Luke it opens itself to an allegorical interpretation. The vineyard refers to Israel. God is the owner. Over His dominion He places tenants--the Jewish authorities. They have a rightful position of authority over Israel but Israel does not belong to them but to God. The true religious authority is Yahweh. He permits men to exercise authority in His name. From time to time God sends others in His name to keep alive in the minds of these leaders that they are only overseers and not owners. These messengers of God demanded that the "tenants" acknowledge the Lord's power and dominion. But these authorities wanted the full unrestricted exercise of authority over Israel. They disregard the messengers sent to them and abuse them.

The messengers are the prophets. The word prophet comes from the Greek "phemi" meaning "he who speaks for another". It implies more to one who gives advice than to one who predicts the future. A prophet is a religious herald who speaks in the name of God. The prophet always had his own particular mission to fulfill side by side with the king and the priesthood. These were morally bound to give him recognition. The prophet insured that religious authority did not degenerate into human tyranny--a danger always present when one commanded in the name of God. The dangers besetting those in authority are only removed when they are challenged by those who by comparison are the more direct messengers of God. Too often the only response of authority to the prophet is to seek to silence him. Our Lord declares in His parable that this was ever so in Israel.

God uses His prophets for the purpose of Self communication. The most perfect and the fullest expression of God took place when the Divine Person of the Word was made flesh. Jesus, the Incarnated Word of God, is the Supreme Prophet--the perfect Herald of God. As the parable indicates, God sends more than a prophet to Israel in Jesus--He sends His Son.

The Sanhedrin refused to acknowledge John the Baptist as a true prophet. They not only refuse to repent but they rejected the authority of God in Israel. Therefore, they were not open to accept the authority of Jesus' Spirit. Jesus foretells that the Sanhedrin will excommunicate Him from Israel and destroy His life.

THE TRAP

Jesus stands before Israel as the new Joshua. He is "the wisdom and power of God". When His enemies meet Him face to face, they are demolished. They do not dare risk their fragile honor in another public encounter. These men design a scheme to entrap Jesus--to place Him between the horns of a dilemma. They sent spies to ask Jesus a question the answer to which would either alienate Him from the people or make Him speak treason against Rome. They asked: "May we pay tax to the emperor or not?" (Lk.20:22.) The tax was a yearly tribute each adult in the empire had to render to Caesar. The tax was extremely unpopular because it constantly reminded the Jews of their subjected state and because the silver coin in which it had to be paid bore the image and name of Caesar.

Jesus knew the pretense and evil design behind these words and said, "Show me a coin. Whose head is this? Whose inscription do you read?" (Lk.20:24.) According to ancient ideas, coins were ultimately the private property of the ruler who issued them and whose image they bore. When they gave Jesus the coin He had what he needed for His argument. Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's." (Lk.20:25.) The word translated "give" or "render" implies payment of a debt. Jesus' words imply that since the money they have in their possession is Caesar's they implicitly acknowledge his authority. Man receives from the state certain benefits and goods. He therefore has something to return in the form of good citizenship. But what does society give man in comparison to the blessings and benefits received from God? What is the debt each man owes God? Man bears the image of God and therefore belongs to God as that coin belonged to Caesar.

RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

The next attack directed against Jesus came from the Sadducees. The Sadducees Party was composed of the aristocracy and the chief priests. They

accepted only the first five books of the Bible as inspired Scripture. They were the more liberal party. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, nor in spirits and angels. These men presented to Jesus one of their standard arguments that reduced the concept of the resurrection to the ridiculous. After quoting the Levitical law of Moses they related the case of one woman who, due to the law, finally had to marry seven brothers. They asked Jesus: "Whose wife would she be in the life to come?"

Christ responds to His opponents with exactness and clarity. Their question about the resurrection is quite gross, demonstrating the unspiritual quality of their religious belief. In their thought, the resurrection expressed a continuation of human existence on earth. According to Jesus the resurrected life is not a continuation of life on earth. It is quite different in that it is a new world and a new existence beyond the imagination of man. Jesus states that human beings will be equal to angels who are pure spiritual beings. In other words, even the bodies of human beings will be so determined by what is higher and spiritual that normal body functions cease. Jesus tells us the resurrected are the "children of God".

Our Lord proves life after death to be a fact by appealing to the Scriptures accepted by the Sadducees. Jesus tells us that God is no mere name or idea but a living Person. As such, He is not a God of the dead. When God identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, He implies these men live as individual personalities that the living God identifies with. Their bodies are dead, but these persons exist, and they are destined one day to fullness of the redemption through the resurrection of their bodies. God is revealed as the one who maintains all in life. Eternal life flows from the power of God--the Power of His love.

WHOSE SON IS HE?

Jesus now takes the offensive and puts a question to them. The Jews claimed that the Messiah would be the son of David. Jesus said:

How can they say that the Messiah is the son of David? Does not David himself say in the psalms, "The Lord said to my lord: Sit at my right hand while I make your enemies your footstool"? Now if David accords him the title "lord", how can he be his son? (Lk.20:41-44.*)

Jesus was conscious of a greatness that could not be ascribed to His descent from David but one resulting from His unique relationship with the Father. Jesus exposes the narrowness of the messianic concept taught by the rabbis. This teaching of Scripture implies the divine sonship of the Messiah when David speaks of Him as "Lord". If the Jews accepted the teaching of Jesus, it would revolutionize their concept of the Messiah. These men are not opened to such truth. It threatened the whole fabric of their lives. As a result, Jesus publicly reveals the shallowness of their religious lives and the true spirit of greed that directs their lives.

PROPHECIES OF SUFFERING AND HOPE

As the supreme Prophet, Jesus reveals to His disciples things to come. He speaks of the destruction to come but He ends always with words of comfort and encouragement. He foretells the destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem was a prophetic sign of the destruction of a world that would not accept God's authority and His Christ. Before dealing with the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus warns His disciples that certain things will occur but they must not be deceived--it is not the time. He also lifts His gaze towards the end of the world and He teaches that the things occurring before the fall of Jerusalem will continue on through the history of man. But, just as these were not true signs that the time was near for the fall of Jerusalem--but only warnings and signs that it would certainly one day occur, so these are not signs that the world's end is at hand. The disciples are to note by these occurrences in the world that they confirm the end of the world will surely come but they do not indicate "when" it is near.

Our Lord confirms that before the destruction of Jerusalem and before the end of the world, suffering will come to the disciples. They will be persecuted in this world by all who hate Christ and His principles--by the Jews first and then the Gentiles. Their very testimony in times of persecution will be an instrument to save others for Christ. They must not be anxious about their defense of Jesus--after all, it is His defensive not theirs. The words and the wisdom of their commitment will come from Jesus Himself. Jesus reveals that the most painful persecution will not come from the expected corner but from an unexpected source--from family and friends--from those we expected love and support. For some, persecution will lead to death. Our Lord encourages faith in the protective love of God and in the resurrection from the dead. Nothing will truly be lost or perish. A disciple can give up all in this world

without fear of losing anything for all is in God's hand. This world does not hold the final say on anything.

In the midst of all the sufferings of discipleship one thing is important--perseverance until the end. This alone assures and insures complete success and victory. Jesus confirms final perseverance assures salvation. He does not conceal the hard reality of discipleship. He does not desire our courage to be based on our ignorance but rather on our faith in His promises and love.

Jesus now turns to the destruction of Jerusalem: "When you see Jerusalem encircled by soldiers, know that its devastation is near." (Lk.21:20.) Our Lord foretells not only the fall of Jerusalem but destruction upon the whole land. (When these things began to occur, the Christian disciples recognized them and fled Jerusalem and Judea.) He foretells that some Jews will die by the sword, others will be scattered over the face of the earth and Jerusalem will remain in the hands of foreigners "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled". Here we are also told that following the destruction of Jerusalem will be a time of grace for the Gentiles. But hope is also given to the Jews. The prophecy seems to imply that after the "time of the Gentiles" there will come a time for the people of Israel. This does not infer that a conversion of the Jews would signify the end times--it reveals that their conversion will be part of the effects of the Redemption.

Our Lord now turns His attention to the end of the world and the Second Coming. Just as the disciples could know the destruction of Jerusalem was near by the encircling armies so they will be able to know the Second Coming is at hand when "...the powers in the heavens will be shaken." (Lk.21:26.) A chain of chaotic events will occur in the heavens and on the earth. Men will drop dead from fear. But not so the disciples of Jesus! They are to look up in hope for as this world collapses and passes away--a world that held the disciples captives--it will be making way for a new order--a new creation. The Son of Man will then appear to complete the glorious redemption of His followers. "When these things begin to happen, stand erect and hold your head high, for your deliverance is near at hand." (Lk.21:28.)

Luke demonstrates in this Gospel account that the ultimate meaning of all suffering--that of Jesus, of the disciples, of the Jews, of the world--leads ultimately to redemption. The ultimate end of all suffering is the redemption of the children of God. God will turn defeat into total victory.

BE PREPARED

Whatever has been said about the Parousia or will be said about it, this truth endures: the Day of the Lord will come upon the whole world suddenly and unexpectedly and catch men unaware--as a thief in the night. This must not be the case with the disciples of Jesus. They must not be like people who have eaten too much and cannot keep their eyes open. They are not to be like drunks who are unconscious of what is going on. They must not be as children of this world totally absorbed in the things of the world. Otherwise, they will not be prepared. They will be weighed in the balance and found wanting. They may have to hear: "You wicked servant!" "You worthless lout!" "Be on guard lest your spirits become bloated with indulgence and drunkenness and worldly cares. The great day will suddenly close in on you like a trap." (Lk.21:34.)

Jesus comes to the end of His earthly life. We are given an example of how He lives this life right up to the end: "He would teach in the temple by day, and leave the city to spend the night on the Mount of Olives"--in prayer. (Lk.21:37.) Once again he teaches His disciples how to live their lives right up to the end. Be faithful to the work given to you and "pray constantly for the strength to escape whatever is in prospect, and to stand erect to meet the Son of Man." (Lk.21:36.)

VOICE OF AUTHORITY

DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(MEMORIZE - PLEASE)

"BE ON YOUR GUARD. PRAY CONSTANTLY FOR THE STRENGTH TO ESCAPE WHATEVER IS IN PROSPECT, AND TO STAND SECURE BEFORE THE SON OF MAN." (Luke 21:36.)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 20:9-18 and Jeremiah 7:24-30.

1. Why do we need a visible religious authority in our lives?
2. What is the role of a prophet in a religious community?
3. Why do we need prophets in the community?
4. What does the parable of the tenants teach you about the voices of authority in the Christian community?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 20:19-26 and Matthew 22:15-22.

1. What did the enemies hope to accomplish by asking Jesus this question?
2. What does Jesus teach us here about political authority?
3. If man is made in the image of God what does this lesson teach us?
4. What do you see to be the debt each person owes to God?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 20:27-39, Mark 12:18-27, and I Corinthians 15:12-19.

1. Why can we say this question goes to the heart of religion?
2. What importance does St. Paul give to this teaching?
3. What does Jesus tell us about life in our resurrected bodies?

4. How does Jesus show the Sadducees that they are ignorant of the Scriptures and the power of God?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 20:41-47, Luke 21:1-4, and Matthew 23:1-12.

1. What does our Lord try to teach the scribes when He asks them about the Messiah's being the Son of David?
2. What does our Lord teach us about authority in the reading from Matthew?
3. Why can it be said that wisdom was a symbol of Jesus?
4. What do you learn from the story of the widow's mite?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 21:5-24.

1. What was the only sign that the destruction of Jerusalem was near?
2. What do all the other signs and events tell us?
3. What sufferings did Jesus foretell would fall upon the Jews?
4. What was the encouragement expressed in this prophecy?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 21:25-38.

1. What will be the only sign that the end of the world is near?
2. What does Luke teach us about suffering?
3. How does Jesus tell us to prepare ourselves for His Coming?
4. What is the example He leaves with us as His life comes to an end?

CHAPTER 23

THE PASCAL LAMB

INTRODUCTION

It was the 13th of Nisan, and Jerusalem was as active as an overturned ant bed. Pilgrims streamed into the city for the celebration of Passover to begin at sundown on the 14th of Nisan. The Passover celebration had become the great national feast celebrating the establishment of the Israelites as the people of Yahweh. The festival was the symbolic reliving of Israel's exodus from Egypt. It recalled the day the families of Israelites marked the doorpost of their homes with the blood of a yearling lamb, and the night they feasted upon the lamb celebrating the passing over of their homes by the Angel of Death that slew the first-born of every Egyptian household.

Along with the people streaming into the city, thousands of lambs were being herded through the city gates on into the temple area. On the afternoon of the 13th of Nisan the slaughtering of the lambs would begin and continue until the afternoon of the 14th. The pilgrims were all busy making arrangements for the celebration.

Somewhere in the city, members of the Sanhedrin were meeting. At this meeting were members of the chief priests and the scribes who were discussing a mutual problem--Jesus of Nazareth. They all agreed it was far better that Jesus died than to let harm come to Israel. His life must be sacrificed to save the life of the nation. The logistics of carrying out their evil decision concerned these members of the Sanhedrin. Prudence dictated that they hold off arresting Jesus until after the Passover. But a sudden, unexpected turn of events altered their plan. One of the chosen Twelve, Judas Iscariot, appeared and offered to betray Jesus into their hands. To insure Judas' continual cooperation, they offered him money and Judas sealed the bargain by his acceptance.

Why did Judas turn against Jesus? Luke writes, "Satan took possession of Judas, the one called Iscariot, a member of the Twelve." (Lk.22:3.) Judas was possessed by Satan. After the temptation in the desert Luke had written: "when the devil had finished all the tempting he left him, to await another

opportunity." (Lk.4:13.) Only the presence of Satan can adequately explain what will occur. Like a silent and evil ray he had been working in the background. If he could not control Jesus, he would destroy Him. This he could not do alone. He needed his agents. In the chief priests, Scribes, Judas and the Romans, he found the willing tools for his evil.

THE NEW COVENANT

The Passover was celebrated in the evening and so when the time came for Jesus He "took his place at table, and the apostles with him." (Lk.22:14.) Jesus implies the fulfillment of the Passover is about to occur: "I tell you, I will not eat again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (Lk.22:16.) This ancient ritual of the Passover but symbolized a greater deliverance and a more magnificent freedom yet to come. Jesus indicates His personal suffering, to follow this Passover feast, is in some way connected with the fulfillment of the Passover. He Himself will become the Lamb of God--the Paschal Lamb--soon to be slaughtered. Those who behold in His sacrifice the true Lamb of God and marked their souls with His Blood--the Christian Community spoke of baptism as washing oneself in the Blood of the Lamb--would be purified from their sins--freed forever from the power of the Angel of Sin--eternal death.

Jesus is the new and greater Moses. Jesus will lead the New Israel into a New Covenant with Yahweh. Mt. Calvary will replace Mt. Sinai. Jesus will be called into the consuming fire upon the mountain top of Calvary. Here the fire of suffering will consume the life of the Lamb of God. From this consuming fire Yahweh will call Jesus into the midst of the cloud--Jesus will ascend into the heavens to remain for forty days and forty nights and then He shall come down upon the New Israel as tongues of fire inaugurating a new, perfect and eternal covenant. For it is a covenant established between Yahweh and the Perfect Man--Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God.

Jesus moves towards this awesome accomplishment. Following the Passover meal, another meal follows. Luke deliberately indicates it is different and separated from the Old Passover banquet. Something new is being inaugurated by Jesus.

Then, taking bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying: "This is my body to be given for you. Do this as a remembrance of me." He

did the same with the cup after eating, saying as he did so: "This cup is the new Covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you." (Lk.22:19-20.)

The new banquet far surpasses the old one. Jesus identifies the bread as His own body and the wine as His own blood telling us that His own Body and Blood are the food of the new banquet. He likewise identifies Himself as the sacrificial Lamb of God whose life's blood will seal the New Covenant. The separating of His body and blood indicates the sacrifice of His life. His body is willingly given up to the Cross and His blood is willingly shed. Nothing need be spoken on Calvary--all has been said. The scene so simply enacted contains within it the entire Passion and sacrificial death of Jesus.

Just as Moses commanded the Israelites to re-enact the Passover, Jesus gives the Twelve the command and power to re-enact this ritual in order to perpetually recall His loving sacrifice for His disciples. Isaiah had foretold there would be a new priesthood among the Gentiles in the messianic ages: "And I will take of them to be priest and Levites says the Lord." (Is.66:21.)

The Church recognizes in the ritual inaugurated on Holy Thursday a sacrament and a sacrifice. The Eucharist is a sacrament insofar as the faithful receive under the appearance of bread and wine the glorified Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is a sacrifice for again the Lamb of God is offered to the Father and the merits of His Passion are applied here in time. The Church teaches that the Last Supper, the Sacrifice on Calvary and the Sacrifice of the Mass are all one and the same sacrifice. The Sacrifice of the Mass does not imply that Jesus dies again but that His death is mystically re-enacted. By so doing, each of the faithful can enter into the death of Jesus and make His sacrifice their own. The Eucharist, sacrament and sacrifice, is another expression of the unfathomable mystery of God's love for mankind.

Luke is at pains to emphasize to the Church that it is not their participation at the Eucharistic rite but their union with Jesus in the Eucharist that insures Christian fidelity. To emphasize this, he recalls to our minds the presence of Judas at the Last Supper.

THE NEW COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

Luke tells us that "A dispute arose among them about who should be regarded as the greatest." (Lk.22:24.) The serenity and peace of the Last Supper

melted away in the heat of their attacks and counter-attacks upon each other. All of the disciples missed what their new covenant relationship essentially implied. Each of them had been brought into a complete union with Jesus. To each, Jesus had given Himself completely. To not one of them had He given Himself more, or less. Each received Him fully. They are not to measure themselves by their individual virtues, powers, talents, positions of authority they may possess but by their union with Him. This union brings to each of them the fullness of the richness that is Christ's. The true measure of their personal greatness will always be measured by how closely they imitate Jesus Himself. Speaking plainly Jesus told them: "I am in your midst as the one who serves you." (Lk.22:27.) the example of Jesus obliges the Apostles to be the servants of the Christian community. No one should excel them in service.

PETER'S UNFAILING FAITH

Since Peter would occupy a special position of authority in the Church, Jesus singles him out for a special lesson--a lesson that would well serve those who must take His place. Jesus publicly reveals the weakness of Peter that will lead him to deny the Lord. Jesus foretells that Peter will prove to be a coward. Jesus revealed that his betrayal had given Satan the right of dominion over his soul. If this right of dominion had been exercised as Satan demanded, Peter would have never returned. He too would forever have been lost. Jesus had intervened. He made intercession for Peter. Jesus won the soul of Peter from Satan. Yet, Peter would grow strong in faith. He would confirm the other apostles and disciples in faith. He would hold the Church together. Yes, he would even go to prison and death for Jesus. But, none of it would ever be due to his personal power and strength. It would all flow from the power of Jesus' infallible prayer for him. He would do all things in Him who strengthened him. And this would be true of all the Peters to come. Jesus had prayed for Peter and his faith will not fail!

MATURITY IN DISCIPLESHIP

Our Lord teaches that a new day has come for the disciples. It will be a dark day. The childhood of their faith has come to an end. It had been great being a disciple up to now. Evil powers were about to be leashed upon Jesus and since they had entered a covenant contract with Him, their lives were inevitably bound with His life. Satan and his agents would bring sufferings and death upon Jesus. His Church must carry on His work in the world. It too

must encounter this evil and suffering and death would come to many disciples. It will seem as if God has abandoned them. Their faith and love will be tested to the limit. When Jesus tells His disciples to buy a sword, He teaches them a time of war has come. They must be soldiers who will live and die in wartime conditions. As yet, they did not understand. They took Him literally. Later, they would realize He was teaching them to clothe themselves in the Armor of God. Their war was not against flesh and blood but against the perverted spiritual powers from on high.

FINAL ADVICE

The hour approaches for Jesus and the Church to meet the enemy. "Then he went out and made his way, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; his disciples accompanied him." (Lk.22:39.) Jesus knows the hour of terrible trial and test has come not only for Himself but also for His disciples. When they reach the garden He warns them to be on their guard: "Pray that you may not be put to the test." (Lk.22:40.) Only by prayer will they be able to come through all that lies before them and stand by the side of the Son of Man. They choose to escape their problems and His--they opt to sleep.

Here in the garden, aloneness and alienation reach their zenith in the life of Jesus. The disciples are still physically present but soon they will desert Him leaving Him alone to face agony and death. Jesus began to totally experience what it meant to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". A heart that sought but to love must now love people who offer Him only a chalice of hatred and indifference. Jesus must drink this bitter cup if He would offer to mankind the cup of salvation.

Heaven offers no mitigation of pain, only the power to endure. When the will of God crushes the human spirit all man can do in order to abide in God's will is to intensify his prayer to obtain heavenly strength. Luke writes, "In his anguish he prayed with all the greater intensity, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground." (Lk.22:44.) Luke describes the condition of man in the throes of mortal fear and suffering. Jesus' prayer of submission finally brings peace to His soul. Amidst fear, He finds victory over fear. His submission opens His soul to be filled with heavenly fortitude empowering Him to welcome and embrace all that lies ahead. In faith and love He arises from prayer and goes to meet the approaching forces of darkness. He came "to his disciples, only to find them asleep, exhausted with grief. He

said to them, {"Why are you sleeping? Wake up, and pray that you may not be subjected to the trial." (Lk.22:45-46.) A Teacher of prayer to the end. He has spoken personally to them for the last two times. "Pray!" is His last admonition to His disciples. A lesson they never learned and now it is too late. "While he was still speaking a crowd came, led by the man named Judas, one of the Twelve." (Lk.22:47.) The time of test and trial has arrived. Now we see how the Man of Prayer conducts Himself in this hour of darkness and how the disciples fare, who failed to prepare themselves with prayer.

THE ARREST OF JESUS

The arresting scene was quite ridiculous. The majesty and dignity of Jesus dominates the whole episode. He is completely in control of Himself and therefore, He is in complete control of the situation. They came against Him as a revolutionary or as a bandit. He majestically comes forward to meet them. His disciples make a feeble blustering attempt at defense. Jesus expresses a concern for Judas' action—one last offer of friendship and help. In His last free act, Jesus reaches out to heal the man wounded by the disciple's attack. He permits His enemies to bind Him and lead Him away. He is as gentle and meek as a lamb being led to slaughter.

Peter represents the disciples. He cannot walk beside Jesus. Peter cannot even walk in His steps. We are told he keeps his distance. Out of fear, Peter keeps some space between himself and Jesus.

The trial of Jesus is a pretense. They have already condemned Him without even hearing the evidence against Him. He is merely being interrogated in order to gain information to be used before Pilate. John tells us that the high priest put two questions before Jesus concerning His disciples and His teachings. Both could have had political and religious implications. Jesus stands up to His interrogators and denies nothing. He defends Himself by appealing to the openness of His ministry. Then the High Priest asks Him directly if He is the Messiah, which is the real question at issue: "Are you the Messiah?" Jesus makes His confession before the highest tribunal of the nation. He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I question you, you will not answer. This much only will I say: From now on, the Son of Man will have his seat at the right hand of the Power of God." "So you are the Son of God?" they asked in chorus. He answered, "It is you who say I am." They said, "What need have we of witnesses? We have heard it from his own

mouth." (Lk.22:67-71.) 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.

PETER'S DENIAL

The very moment Jesus makes the "good confession of faith" before His enemies concerning the truth of His divine vocation, Peter denies the truth of his vocation. Three times Peter denies his association with Jesus. When questioned, Peter lied. He was guilty of hypocrisy with the gravest consequences. The Pharisees denied the reality of truth. Peter knew the reality of truth and yet he denies The Truth. In his lying he not only disowns the truth but Truth Itself--Jesus. In John's account he is questioned in private by a slave girl and he denies Jesus privately. Later in the society of men, he denies being a disciple of Jesus and disclaims having any association with Jesus. All this time Jesus stands before His accusers and speaks the truth. He speaks truth even when He knows men will not believe. Even when he knows they will use that spoken truth as a means to bring His life to an end.

These two examples the Gospel places before us. Does it leave any doubt in the mind of a disciple what course must be taken: Does it leave any doubt in our minds what we are becoming and what we are doing when we deny Truth? When we water down Christian truths for social acceptance? When we seek to reduce Christianity to its lowest common denominator in an erroneous spirit of charity and ecumenism? We truly betray and disown the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. What better example than this Gospel account to teach us that "the truth will set you free" and that the lie will enslave self and others.

This Gospel was written when the confession of Jesus could mean imprisonment and death. It teaches that any situation which calls for the concession of one's faith in Jesus and His teachings is appropriate for a confession of truth. When a disciple of Jesus is confronted by some person, even a servant girl, and is questioned about his commitment to Christ, it must be acknowledged. When a disciple fails to testify, when questioned, to his or her Christian discipleship, the failure is sinful. Only God knows what will be the consequences...

THE PASCAL LAMB

DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (MEMORIZE - PLEASE)

"HE SAID TO THEM, "WHY ARE YOU SLEEPING? WAKE UP, AND PRAY THAT YOU MAY NOT BE SUBJECTED TO THE TRIAL." (Luke 22:46.)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 22:1-13 and Wisdom 2:12-24.

1. In Luke what do we learn about Satan's role in the Passion of Jesus?
2. What lesson do you learn from the reading in Wisdom?
3. What does the behavior of Judas teach you?
4. What do you learn about Jesus from the fact that He guarded the secrecy for the place of the Last Supper?

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 22:14-23, Exodus 24:3-8 & 17, and Jeremiah 31:31-34.

1. How was the Old Covenant inaugurated?
2. How do we know that the Last Supper was the inauguration of the New Covenant?
3. What elements indicate the Last Supper was also a sacrifice?
4. In Jeremiah what do you learn about the nature of the New Covenant?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 22:24-38.

1. How is greatness in the New Covenant to be measured?
2. What does it mean that Peter's faith will not fail?
3. What does this reading teach us about the role of Peter in the Church?
4. Why do you think Jesus told His disciples to buy swords?

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 22:39-53 and Matthew 26:36-46.

1. What was the purpose of Jesus and His disciples' going to the Garden of Gethsemane?
2. What do these readings teach you about Jesus?
3. What does Matthew 26:37 tell you about the sufferings of Jesus?
4. What do the last two admonitions of Jesus to His disciples teach you?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 22:54-62 and Matthew 26:47-56.

1. In what way is what occurred in the garden carried over in Jesus' arrest?
2. How does Jesus differ from his disciples?
3. What would Luke have us attribute this difference to?
4. What does the denial of Peter teach you?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 22:63-71 and Matthew 26:57-68.

1. Why is the trial before the Sanhedrin a pretense?
2. How does Jesus answer the questions of His enemies?
3. How do the answers of Jesus compare to the answers given by Peter?
4. What is your moral responsibility to Christian Truth?

CHAPTER 24

THE KING'S HIGHWAY

INTRODUCTION

The passion, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ comprised the very heart of the apostolic preaching of the primitive Christian Community. These were the first truths preached and the first to be recorded in writing. By the time of the writing of the Four Gospels, these traditions were firmly rooted in the memory and heart of the Church. For this reason, there exists a great similarity between all four of the Passion Narratives. Yet, each gospel account has its own uniqueness. Each evangelist used the material available to underline the aspect of the gospel message he desired to highlight for his readers.

In Luke's time, Christians were fighting the charges that Christianity was a subversive and revolutionary organization. The authors of the gospel accounts were at pains to demonstrate that their Founder and Leader was no rival nor enemy to the power of Rome. Unbelieving Jews continued to assert, and Roman authorities to believe, that the Christian Messiah was executed for sedition. Luke seeks to set the record straight.

JESUS BEFORE PILATE

The Sanhedrin started Jesus' prosecution by saying, "We found this man subverting our nation, opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar, and calling himself the Messiah, a king." (Lk.23:2.) Pilate was too shrewd in the way of politics not to see through the scheme of the Sanhedrin. The interests of Rome never concerned them before. This scheme of theirs to use Roman Justice to perpetrate their injustice, Pilate resolves to check-mate. He would not rubber-stamp the decision of the Sanhedrin. He decided to interrogate Jesus. After talking with Jesus, Pilate is certain that Jesus' claims to be a messiah in no way proposed a rivalry nor a threat to Rome. Three times Pilate will declare Jesus

to be innocent. Two times too many. His refusal to authoritatively carry his first decision through subjected it to argumentation.

"Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean; and when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who also happened to be in Jerusalem at the time." (Lk.23:6-7.) Herod is a Jewish prince. Let him pass the verdict. It flattered Herod to have the Procurator recognize his jurisdiction and to ask for his verdict in the case. Pilate may have acknowledged Herod but Jesus ignores this thrill-seeker and murderer of John the Baptist. The only defense for Herod's honor was to consciously proclaim Jesus to be a fool incapable of being guilty of such charges. They put a magnificent robe on Him and sent Him back to Pilate. This episode fulfills the requirement of Deuteronomy 19:15 that declares two witnesses are required for a declaration of guilt or innocence. Jesus has been declared innocent of the charges brought against Him by both civil authorities of Israel--Pilate and Herod Antipas. Two men, two rulers, previously at enmity with each other, become friends through Jesus--in their agreement about Jesus they found peace between themselves.

Pilate's decision to send Jesus to Herod betrayed his hand to the Sanhedrin. They now knew he lacked the moral courage to free Jesus. This encouraged their aggressiveness. Pilate was backing away from rendering justice. They used two tactics to force Pilate's capitulation--threats and mob pressure.

At Passover time, it was customary for the Procurator to release a prisoner symbolizing Israel's being freed from slavery. Pilate addressed them again, for he wanted Jesus to be the one he released. But,

...the whole crowd cried out, "Away with this man; release Barabbas for us!" This Barabbas had been thrown in prison for causing an uprising in the city, and for murder ... They demanded with loud cries that he be crucified, and their shouts increased in violence. Pilate then decreed that what they demanded should be done. He released the one they asked for, who had been thrown in prison for insurrection and murder, and delivered Jesus up to their wishes." (Lk.23:18-25.)

Luke has presented the evidence in the case. His gospel account presents to the world Jesus of Nazareth, the Founder of Christianity. His enemies had proclaimed to the world that Jesus died a condemned rebel--an enemy of true

religion and legitimate government. But, true evidence reveals that Jesus was murdered by the Jewish leaders out of diabolical hatred. Roman authority, out of political expediency, yields it justice to blackmail and mob pressure. Jesus of Nazareth is martyred.

The case of Barabbas only highlights the travesty made of justice. One is totally innocent and the other totally guilty. The guilty one goes free in place of Jesus and Jesus dies in place of the guilty one. We must thank God that Jesus died in the place of that sinful Barabbas. For that man symbolizes sinful humanity--he represents you and me. Jesus dies in His place--He dies in place of you and me. What is presented here is not justice for Jesus but mercy for sinners. Here at least in Luke's gospel account we catch a cameo presentation of the doctrine of the atonement--Jesus is the scapegoat bearing the sins of the nation. "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

WAY OF THE CROSS

Luke records that Pilate "delivered Jesus up to their wishes and they led him away." The Way of the Cross begins. The psychological and physical sufferings endured by Jesus had nearly depleted His strength. To carry the Cross alone was too much for His human strength. His enemies feared He might die before being crucified. This must not happen. It was important to them that He die upon the Cross. The authorities forced a man to help Jesus carry the Cross.

Luke tells us what it means for a disciple to carry the Cross in the footsteps of Jesus. Truly, the disciple shares in the Lord's own Cross. The sufferings and abuse a true disciple bears patiently for the sake of Jesus identifies him or her as a disciple of the Lord. It identifies the disciple with Jesus. It is not the signs and wonders performed by the disciple but the suffering borne that truly makes a Christian one with the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. From the example of Simon of Cyrene, who carried the Cross out of obedience to authority, a disciple learns that God does press His people into the service of Christ whether they like it or not; whether convenient or not!

Along the way of the Cross, Jesus meets the professional mourners of Jerusalem. In Judaism the mourning of the dead was an act of religious merit. Their mourning certainly symbolized that Jesus was as good as dead. Jesus saw their action as a prophetic sign. For the very deed they now mourn--His

death--Jerusalem itself was as good as dead. Jesus turns and speaks to the women of Jerusalem. For the last time, Jesus prophesied the coming destruction of Jerusalem. If Rome permitted Him to come to such a terrible end--whom it proclaimed to be no enemy--what will be the fate of Jerusalem who will rebel against Rome? If God permits this to happen to the innocent man, what will befall the guilty?

That Friday in Jerusalem, a procession of criminals made its way through the winding streets to the place of execution known as "Skull Place". "Two others who were criminals were led along with him to be crucified." (Lk.23:32.)

THE CRUCIFIXION

The crucifixion of Jesus is recorded by Luke in simple and stark drama: "... They crucified him there and the criminals as well, one on his right and the other on his left." (Lk.23:33.) It was customary to place above the crucified the reason for death. They put this inscription over the head of Jesus: "This is the King of the Jews." The King of the Jews is enthroned on a Cross with two crucified criminals as His attendants.

The Jewish leaders could not taste their triumph in silence. They must squeeze the last bit of satisfaction from the success of their satanic scheme. Now, the Scriptures themselves support their discernment about this Jesus of Nazareth. He is the accursed of God for the Scriptures say, "God's curse rests on him who hangs on a tree." (Deut.21:22.) All men now know that the curse of God rests upon Jesus of Nazareth. They confidently jeered at the dying Jesus: "... He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, the chosen one." (Lk.23:35.) One man, for some time, silently contemplated the entire scene. As dying dimmed his natural sight, it sharpened his spiritual vision. The other crucified criminal utters the only words of defense of the dying Christ on Calvary. He rebuked the other criminal for his words to the Lord and then he said to Jesus: "Jesus, remember me when you enter upon your reign." Jesus responds, "I assure you: this day you will be with me in paradise." (Lk.23:42,43.) This incident carries the entire message of Luke's gospel account: Jesus comes to save the lost sinners. All others demanded He save Himself and prove Himself an innocent man, but Jesus willed to save sinners instead. In order to do this, He identified with them and died for them. The criminal on the cross confessed his sins, gave evidence of his repentance by accepting his death and sufferings as punishment due sin. He did one more

important and essential thing--he turned to Jesus in faith and hope. The Charity of Jesus supplied all that was needed for his salvation.

This incident also teaches that heaven is now being opened to sinners by the death of Jesus on the Cross. This Luke symbolizes when he writes that at that moment, "The curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two." (Lk.23:45.) Now, the Way into the Holy of Holies was opened to all mankind.

With abiding confidence and trust in the Father, Jesus utters His last prayer--one His Mother taught Him as a child to pray before falling asleep: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." With childlike confidence that God is indeed still His "Abba", Jesus dies on the Cross.

CALVARY AND THE DISCIPLES

Throughout history political and spiritual movements have been aborted by killing the leader, the inspirer of the movement. To morally discredit the leader before and after death is to doubly kill him. This triumph of the chief priests was the despair of the followers of Christ. Good Friday found them spiritually unprepared for the test they faced. They were overcome by the darkness. The death of Jesus not only demolished their faith and hope in Jesus but shook the very foundation of their religious faith. Their personal experience of Jesus testified to themselves that he was indeed a good man and innocent of the charges hurled against Him. But, He died on the Cross and Scripture affirms that such a man was accursed of God. How could they endure in faith? Their knowledge of Jesus and their belief in the Scriptures was tearing apart the fabric of their religious beliefs. All that could lie ahead for them would be a life of bitter disappointment and religious cynicism. In more ways than one the resurrection of Jesus was the salvation of their faith. But damage was done and a broken faith is not easily restored. It would take more than an empty tomb and reports of visions. Only when they could reconcile the death of Jesus with the God of the Holy Scriptures could the mending of a shattered faith be completed.

HE IS RISEN

Luke presents the resurrection of Jesus to men and women who no longer had access to eye witnesses or received visions of the Risen Christ. He writes for people who need to understand that there was a physical resurrection of Jesus, and He did not merely return in the Spirit. Luke does not expect them to base

their faith in the Risen Lord upon an empty tomb or reported visions, but rather upon the Word of God that cannot fail. Luke demonstrates that God is faithful to His promises. He teaches that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and therefore He had to rise from the dead because the Scriptures promised that the Messiah would suffer and die, but God would not let His "holy one" undergo corruption. He would raise Him from the dead on the third day.

Luke carefully noted that women who knew Jesus from Galilee were present at His death and burial. They personally attended His burial on Friday afternoon. Luke says, "They saw the tomb and how His body was buried." (Lk.23:55.) On the first day of the week, at dawn, these same women returned to the tomb. They found the stone rolled back from the tomb and the tomb empty. The body of Jesus was not there. Two men in dazzling garments stood beside them and rebuked the women for seeking Jesus among the dead: "He is not here; He has been raised up." (Lk.24:6.) These women became the first witnesses to the Church that Jesus had risen from the dead. They told all these things to the Eleven and the others but the story seemed like nonsense and they refused to believe them.

Luke now takes one of the appearances of the Risen savior to the disciples and teaches the Church of his time and ours how the spiritual presence of the Risen Lord remains within the Christian Community. How in this very day a disciple must hear and see the Lord. Two disciples are walking along the road to Emmaus sadly pondering the whole matter about Jesus. Our Lord joined them along their journey. They do not recognize that it is Jesus who is with them. "... they were restrained from recognizing Him." (Lk.24:16.) These men believed Jesus dead, and no empty tomb and no reports of visions would change their minds. Our Lord begins to speak to them and as they listen to His words, they make a profound impression upon their hearts and minds. They are deeply moved without knowing why. Our Lord's teachings to them rebuild their crumbling faith in Jesus and in the Scriptures. Just like the Sadducees, they had not believed in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead because they were ignorant of the Scriptures and the power of God. By the time they reached Emmaus, they had been so spiritually renewed that when the "stranger" (whom they had invited to supper with them) "... took bread, pronounced the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them" (Lk.24:30.), they recognized it was Jesus "in the breaking of the bread".

The physical presence of Jesus was gone, but from now on, time and space could no longer hold Jesus its captive. His presence would ever be with the community in the words of Scripture and in "the breaking of bread". At the time Luke wrote his gospel account, the expression "the breaking of bread" referred to the Eucharistic celebration of the Christian Community. Our Lord has now entered into a dimension of existence that enables Him to achieve the greatest personal intimacy with each of His disciples. These two disciples from Emmaus got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem. "Then they recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know Him in the "breaking of bread". (Lk.24:35.)

The final appearance of Jesus recorded by Luke is a manifestation of the Risen Lord to the Eleven Apostles. Here Luke balances the spiritual manifestation of Jesus on the road to Emmaus with a resurrection account that clearly testifies to the physical resurrection of the material body of Jesus of Nazareth. This Resurrected Lord is identified clearly as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus encourages them to touch His body, He eats before them. He recalls words spoken to them while Jesus lived among them and the Risen Lord consciously identifies Himself as the one who spoke these words to them.

CONCLUSION

Jesus tells them the story has not ended--it is but the beginning. What has proceeded has made possible what is now to come. The whole world can now be invited to the messianic banquet. Through Jesus all human beings can receive forgiveness of their sins and be saved from eternal death.

In the last portrait Luke paints of Jesus--our Lord stands on a hill near Bethany as the New High Priest who has just offered the Atonement for the sins of the people. He now stands before these redeemed and imparts to them his priestly blessing before He ascends into the holy of Holies to take His seat at the right hand of the Father. The disciples all fall down and do Him reverence. Now they know that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord! The disciples returned to Jerusalem filled with joy and entering the temple they praised God. The story ends where it began--in the Temple of Jerusalem.

So ends the Gospel of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke! Yes, the Life of Jesus on earth has ended. The Life of the Church on earth is about to begin ...

P.S. This story will be continued in the Acts of the Apostles!

THE KING'S HIGHWAY

SCRIPTURE READING AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE-MEMORIZE)

"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?" (LUKE 24:25-26)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through Jesus before Pilate; Luke 23:1-25.

1. How would you explain the similarity of the Passion Narrative in all four gospel accounts?
2. What particular truth did Luke emphasize in the Passion Narrative?

SECOND DAY: Read Summary- Way Of The Cross; Luke 23:26-31)

1. In what way does the disciple share in the Cross of Christ?
2. In what way does a disciple differ from Simon of Cyrene?

THIRD DAY: Read Summary- The Crucifixion; Luke 23:32-49.

1. How does Deut. 21:22 apply to Jesus Christ?
2. What does the death of Jesus on the Cross mean to you?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary- Calvary And The Disciple; Luke 23:20-56.

1. How did the crucifixion of Jesus effect his disciples?
2. What do you see was needed to restore their faith in Jesus?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary- He Is Risen; Luke 24:1-12.

1. What does Luke teach you about the nature of Jesus' resurrection?
2. What does the resurrection of Jesus teach you about human nature itself?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary- Conclusion; Luke 24:13-53

1. How does the Risen Christ still remain on earth with the Church?
2. As a member of the Church and a disciple of Jesus, what is your mission on earth?

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