



CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE STUDY

Catholic Scripture Study Notes written by Sister Marie Therese, are provided for the personal use of students during their active participation and must not be loaned or given to others.

SERIES V

WISDOM LITERATURE AND NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

Lesson 5 Commentary Job 2 (20-42)

Lesson 6 Questions Proverbs

JOB'S NEW WISDOM

Job 2 (20-42)

I. MORE DIFFICULTIES FOR JOB (Job 20-27)

A. Increased Fears of the Friends

1. Zophar (Job 20:1-29). In his new effort to convince Job, Zophar comes to a harsh conclusion: Job is a great sinner! Zophar begins to mention “the wicked,” “wickedness.” He describes “such a one... he has oppressed the poor... stolen a patrimony” (Job 20:19). Zophar lists the punishment due the wicked and ends with “This is the portion of a wicked man” (Job 20:29).

Job replies by describing wicked men who suffer none of this! (Job 21:1-34). The evil man is often “spared calamity” and is buried—“Sweet to him are the clods of the valley” (Job 21:33).

2. Eliphaz (Job 22:1-30, Job 23 - 24). This “friend” accuses Job of several serious evils. “You have unjustly kept your kinsmen’s goods in pawn... from the hungry you have withheld bread” (Job 22:6a-7b). He pleads, “If you return to the Almighty you will be restored” (Job 22:23a). Job answers only about his desire to

“come to his (God’s) judgment seat! I would set out my cause before him!” (Job 23:3-4a). Again he says no evil of God and claims “if he proved me, I should come forth as gold!” (Job 23:10).

3. Bildad (Job 25:1-6, Job 26-27). So little is Bildad’s response that scholars believe some of the text has been lost. “How,” he says, “can a man be just in God’s sight?” Job declares that little is the help Bildad gives, and again turns to the mighty deeds of God. “So long as I have life in me... my lips shall not speak falsehood... my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.” What a claim! It is an ideal for us to aim for. Later, God speaks rather proudly of “my servant Job!” (Epilogue 42:8b).

Chapter 28 seems to serve as an “Interlude” as in a Greek drama. It is a beautiful poem on divine wisdom and governance of the universe, ending with one of Wisdom literature’s great words: “The fear of the Lord is wisdom; and avoiding evil is understanding!” (Job 28:28).

II. JOB’S FINAL SUMMARY OF HIS CAUSE (Job 29 - 31)

A poignant nostalgia for his happy days comes over Job. He wishes for the “days when God watched over me... (Job 29:2).

“When the Almighty was yet with me,
And my children were round about me...
When I went forth to the gate of the city

And set up my seat in the square...
While the elders rose up and stood”
(Job 29:5, 7, 8)

It is a beautiful and moving description of his faithful life in the duties of a God-fearing Israelite. Quickly he changes to “now”... and laments his days, questioning why such bad fortune came from so many of his upright deeds (Job 31:1-34).

Job explains (31:24-28) how he had made a choice between God and his own gold, how he had rejected all idolatry, but he does not realize the place that adversity in his life may have in God’s plan.

His soliloquy ends with one more heartfelt need—for “one to hear my case, that my accuser would write out his indictment... like a prince I should present myself before him.” We feel the heart of Job aching, wondering, knowing his innocence, yet, that his God was his accuser. It is a poignant, dramatic moment.

Then Job knows that he can say no more.

“This is my final plea: let the Almighty answer me!”

In a staged drama of Job, these words of a broken, suffering man, from a fine actor, could equal those in Greek tragedy.

III. WILL GOD ANSWER (Job 32-37)

At this juncture, a new character appears as though from nowhere. Scholars believe that some

other writer inserted this mysterious character in a skillful contribution to this masterpiece. Some critics find it wisdom writing on a high level, comparable to the best parts of the book of Proverbs, though inferior in style.

A. Elihu. Elihu comes on stage as a young, brash Hebrew, “the original ‘angry young man,’ self-satisfied, pompous, and yet naive” (JBC) We will notice this in him, and yet we also hear serious religious doctrine. As we read Elihu, we are tempted to see Elihu as a character representing the very one Job so wanted, a mediator, to come to present his case to God for him.

Before we go on, we should also know that some critics see Elihu as a “satan,” others as a young theologian; he has come to teach; he presents God’s case to the hapless Job. His religious understanding of adversity shows a clear understanding of its value in containing a revelation of God. “God saves the afflicted by his affliction...” (Job 36:15). Suffering disposes one to hear and accept the word of God, to turn to God. Elihu’s teaching is almost a Christian doctrine that we hear... Elihu urges Job to come to a conversion to God. “Pray to God and God will hear... and show his face joyfully to you and he will give you back your salvation” (Job 33:26). The greatness of God is so clear to Elihu... he seems to anticipate the coming speeches of God. He also tells Job, however, that “it is not for a human being to appoint a time for appearing in court with God” (Job 34:23).

B. A View of God. Elihu emphasizes the attitude of God to the poor. God “does give fair judgment to the afflicted” (Job 36:6). Job has already felt a shift in his own attitude. He realizes that he is now sharing the lot of the poor. Job is learning to relate to the needs of the poor who suffer what he has found so hard. He becomes able from now on to think of others’ suffering—he, a rich and healthy landlord, had felt his only obligation to others was to give of his wealth. But justice calls for remedying the cause of such inequi-

ty. Job's misfortune has been his eye-opener, his teacher.

It can be so with us too. Have we learned to give just of our plenty, of our sufficiency but also of our need? Have we learned to work for the remedies of the causes of the poverty of others? "The poor you will always have with you" (Mark 14:7).

Elihu tells Job, "The doctrine of retribution is at odds with human experiences." To Job he says, "God saves the afflicted by affliction." Then he explains again God's attitude to the poor, "I have heard the cry of my people against their taskmasters" (Exodus 3:7). "He caused the cries of the poor to reach him so that he heard the pleas of the afflicted" (Job 34:28).

This relationship of God to the poor is the very heart of the prophets' messages. Now Job, and we, too, are led to see that divine justice comes to earth when God's people do justice to others, especially those who are poor through the injustice of others.

IV. A CHANGE IN JOB

A. Openness to Others in Need. After experiencing his suffering, Job became aware of the suffering of those around him, the poor, the mistreated who must bear the injustice of the wicked who "remove landmarks, steal away herds and pasture them, and take the widow's ox for a pledge" (Job 24:2-3). He recognizes that God's friends must lighten the unjust burdens of the innocent suffering among God's people.

We, too, must see in the faces of the poor and deprived, the face of Christ. It is love for Christ, our love of Him, that opens us to the injustice of man to man. It is easy for those who lead serene and satisfied lives to reject the Lord's teaching on justice to the poor and to the mistreated. In his affliction, Job begins to consider others who suffer more than himself, who had never known the

comfort he had had. He sees that he, too, all along had been indifferent, blind, to the state of affairs which caused such unfair distribution of God's world.

First of the writing prophets, Amos, was called to denounce the wealthy, self-seeking ones who "ground down the poor" (Amos 3:9-11, 4:1-3). Job realized that people reduced to poverty and pain by their own fellowmen of the middle and upper classes who had turned away from the Mosaic Covenant and from the prophets' teaching, can be rich in virtue and trust in God. That their persecutors in fact, if not in their consciences, probably are deadened to God by greed? Among us, also, may be placid, nominal Christians. It is so easy to have or desire a larger house or a better car, than to notice others who have no house or car.

"He who mocks the poor insults his maker."
(Proverbs 17:5)

Through his suffering, Job begins to go out of himself and find that to help others is to find a way to God and to his reward.

Yet, Job is still left with his longing for an unlimited encounter with the God in whom he believes and hopes. It comes in a very different way than he expected.

B. God's Answer (Job 38-41). "Brace yourself like a fighter," God suddenly says. "I am going to ask the questions, and you are to answer me" (Job 38:3).

"Where were you when I founded the earth?"... and God goes on to describe the mighty acts of creation, all their marvels, and their functions: the earth with its dawning sunlight and its setting into the depth of sea. "Who determined the earth's size; do you know? Have you been right down to the sources of the sea?" (Job 38:21). In question after question, God continues in a bewildering and masterful description of creation's ori-

gins; at one time remarking, “You must know, for you were born then and are very old now!” God is playfully sarcastic, using irony on his complaining friend.

God shows us in His words His pleasure in His work and His creation; we see His freedom and His desire to please, to create freely, to give freely, to all His creatures. With playful irony, He continues to humble Job with question after question: “Do you know...,” “Can you...,” “Are you,” each followed by a list of impossible and miraculous wonders of earth, sea, and animals. The lesson is that God knows thoroughly His whole creation and can be trusted with Job’s life.

Finally, Job has been reduced to a shamed, simple human creature who has dared to take God to task. He realizes that it is impossible for man’s mind to discover in detail the reasons for God’s actions. Finally, God says with a note of humor, “Will we have arguing with the Almighty by a critic?” (Job 40).

Shamefacedly, Job answers:

“I feel my littleness...
I have put my hand over my mouth...
I have nothing more to say.”

Now Job has talked with God, himself; he has been with God and has been given a view of creation and its amazing realities: of the earth, of his own body, and of his own condition.

But God continues the debate, this time revealing His just government of the world. He closes with, “Do you really want to reverse my judgment?” (Job 40:8).

To Job, and to us, God shows that we will be in the right only if we occupy the place that is ours as a human being and a believer. There is a note of tenderness in this last question of God. God is gently teaching that even His power will not impose itself upon His gift of creation as He has

made it, especially in the case of human freedom, for then human beings and human history would not be free. As it is, we have been given the power to change our course, to be converted... If God bowed down to man’s pride, to his desire to replace God, then a created human being would then need the infinity of God, not possible to him at all.

Job speaks for the last time:

“I know that no purpose of yours can be hindered, I have left the great things that I do not understand.” (Job 42:5)

Then Job reveals to us a special way of knowing God, Himself:

“I have heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you!” (Job 42:5)

Job had contemplated God. God had shown himself to Job, had communicated to him His own great perfect Being, as far as a creature could receive, according to his spirit’s capability. This is what spiritual writers call “contemplation”—a gazing upon God as He shows Himself to the “pure of heart” (Matthew 5:8).

Prayer, in a quiet “being with God,” brings us to forget self, to forget earth, and to be free enough to see “the invisible God” with our created spirit—free of willful sin, free of self-love that is disordered, free of unwise absorption in creatures, free to rush into God’s embrace.

To do this, Job had to realize his own limits, to reject obstacles in life and in himself. The obstacles to God and His plans for us, Job recognized after his contact with God: he was “without understanding, discernment.” “There are marvels beyond my grasp” (Job 42:3).

In Job’s new humble acknowledgment of his lack of direct, unmediated knowledge of God, he can say, “The Lord is with us” (Jeremiah 20:11)

and “I shall behold your face in righteousness” (Psalms 17:15).

Job has a new world to be part of; his hope is satisfied; earthly possessions, joys, all temporal gifts of God pale to unnecessary realities, after a loving God has shown him His greatness and love. He stands as a child before his Father.

A result of his new knowledge and understanding is his opening of himself to be like God: open to the suffering of others and trying to end it. But he also understands that human works do not save by themselves: such spiritual justification comes

only from openness to growth in the knowing and the loving of God more than all else.

“Yet with you I shall always be:
You have hold of my right hand.
With your counsel you guide me.
and in the end you will receive me in glory.
Whom else have I in heaven?
and when I am with you, the earth delights
me not.
Though my flesh and my heart waste away.
God is the rock of my heart and my portion forever.” (Psalms 73:23-26)

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 6
Proverbs

Day 1 Read the Notes on Job (2).

- a. Quote a sentence from the notes that gave information new to you.

- b. Give the effects of the Book of Job on you.

Day 2 Read Proverbs 1:1-33.

- a. How would the fear of the Lord be the beginning of knowledge? What words direct the son in Proverbs 1:8-19?

- b. What is the fate of those who do not listen to Wisdom's cries to all the citizens? See John 7:33-34 and Proverbs 1:28.

- c. Read Proverbs 2. List the fruits of "turning your ear to wisdom." These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit that come with Pentecost and Confirmation.

Day 3 Read Proverbs 3.

- a. From "attitude toward the Lord" (verses 1-12) quote a meaningful verse for you and tell how you can put it in practice.

- b. How can Proverbs 3:14 be true in a life?

- c. What do you think is the best advice in Proverbs 3:25-34 and the best reason for living it?

Day 4 Read Proverbs 6:6-11, 20-29.

- a. Comment on either of these sections, applying it to us or to a Christian life.

- b. Read Proverbs 8:22-31. Who could the being mentioned in these verses be?

- c. Read Proverbs 10:1-10 in the First Collection of Proverbs of Solomon. Choose a verse and write what it can mean for us.

Day 5 Read Proverbs 17:1-10, 28.

- a. Quote a verse that can help you with your life

- b. Read Proverbs 17:28; 18:12, 10-13. Compare Proverbs 18:12 with Matthew 23:12.

- c. Read Proverbs 25:1-7 in the Second Collection of Proverbs, and Luke 14:7-11. What do these verses in Proverbs and the Gospel indicate to you?

Day 6 Read in the Words of Agur (under Numerical Proverbs) 30:21-28, and the Words of Lemuel (Proverbs 31:1-9).

- a. Share a quote and your reason for choosing it.

- b. Read “the Ideal Wife,” Proverbs 31:10-31. Share a verse and its value to you.

- c. What description is a challenge to our society in relation to marriage?

- d. Decide on a quality or a habit you want to develop. Take it to the Lord and ask Him to work with you.