



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 14 Commentary 1 Cor 15 and 2 Cor
Lesson 15 Questions Romans 1 - 5

THE FIRST OF MANY 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians

INTRODUCTION

In all of Paul's writings, the Resurrection of Jesus is clearly presented as the most important truth about Him; here in 1 Corinthians, we have the longest and most informative revelation of this key doctrine. Without your believing this, he said, "Your faith is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:2). It is difficult for us not to believe it, so many centuries and so many believers have witnessed to this belief which we proclaim aloud together each Sunday.

For these people, any of whom, including Paul, might have been of the same age as Jesus, it was amazingly new. And Paul insists that belief in this unique event in human history must be "as I preached it to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:2). Paul himself probably "received" it from Ananias to whom Jesus sent him. But he also received a vision of the risen Christ. Jesus points out to Thomas, the apostle who doubted the word of the other apostles: "You became a believer because you saw me. Blest are they who have not seen and have believed" (John

20:29, Mark 16:14, Luke 24:1-11, 13, John 20:19-23). This is our blessing from the risen Jesus.

However, Paul goes further and gives us a preview, almost a video, of tremendous events that we and the whole world will see in the future. This is more fascinating news than the last chapter of Revelation which shows us the fulfillment in heaven. For Paul tells us of our own resurrection and our glorification when "Death is swallowed up in victory (Isaiah 25:8) through the victory of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (Hosea 13:14).

I. VISITS FROM THE RISEN JESUS (1 Corinthians 15:3-28)

Paul introduces the list with verses that may be the origin of our Apostles' Creed, one of the most ancient non-biblical (Sacred Tradition) sources—though right here is a written section (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This Creed is proclaimed today by nearly all Christian churches... "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried and, in accordance with the Scriptures, rose on the third day." The reference "to the Scriptures" refers to the plan of God prophesied and revealed in the Old Testament.

A. Witnesses of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:5-8)

1. Cephas. The Aramaic form of Peter's name here suggests a very early account. The mention of Peter first suggests Paul's understanding that Peter (Greek for a "rock") was the first and most important of the apostles. (Matthew 16:15-18, 3:16, Luke 10:14, 24:34, Acts 1:13).

2. The Twelve. Peter had led the eleven apostles and over a hundred others to the Upper Room of the Last Supper, awaiting the Spirit's coming; while there, the Eleven chose by lot one of the two who had been with them from the beginning—Matthias, to replace Judas. Historically, all bishops since then have passed on their apostolic authority to one that they anoint.

3. Five hundred others awaiting the Spirit, "most of whom are still alive" (1 Corinthians 15:6). It sounds as though these people gathered at a time and place, after some announcement. If so, how thoughtful of Jesus to many who believed in Him.

4. James. This probably is James, the first bishop of Jerusalem (Acts 12:13). In Galatians 1:19, Paul mentions a James, "the brother of the Lord"—a brother in the language of Jesus (Aramaic) means any close relative. James, the Apostle and brother of John, was martyred under King Herod Agrippa in the early 40's (Acts 12:2).

5. By "all the apostles."

6. "Last of all, he was seen by me, the least of the Apostles" (Paul).

B. Among the Christian Corinthians were those who refused to accept the belief that all Christians were to be resurrected. To them only Jesus was resurrected. Paul strongly points out that Christ was a human being raised by the power of God; he taught his followers the resurrection of all (Matthew 22:29-33). If not, "your faith is

worthless; you are still in your sins and those 'fallen asleep in Christ' are the deadest of the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).

C. Christ the First Fruits (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). God, in His superior wisdom and love, turned things around: "Death came through man"; therefore, "the resurrection of the dead comes through a man. Just as in Adam, all die; in Christ, all will come to life again" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). Right here, Paul begins news of the end for us: "each one in proper order:"

1. Christ the first fruits returns.
2. At His coming, all who belong to Him, rise.
3. The end of the world.
4. Christ destroys every "sovereignty, authority and power."
5. Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father.
6. The last enemy destroyed: death
7. With all things now subject to Christ, He hands over
8. The Kingdom to the Father and Himself also,
9. God the Father is all in all.

There is no way that our understanding of these words can give us the experience of that time that we will have then: total joy, assurance, love.

Paul notes several beliefs that this fact produced: some Corinthians had themselves baptized and asked God to transfer it to their dead. Paul and the Apostles suffered all the indignity, imprisonment, toil, etc., for truths far beyond this life. Then he speaks of the way the resurrection of bodies and of natural creation is similar. A seed sown in the earth becomes quite a different appearance and body when it "rises"—so is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown in the earth is subject to decay, what rises is incorruptible, what is sown is ignoble; what rises is glorious. Weakness, sown, rises strong. And finally, "a natural body is put down and a spiritual body

comes up” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). The earthly man is like the men of earth, heavenly men are like the Men of heaven... we shall bear the likeness of the Man from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:39).

Paul concludes his message of the time after resurrection. We must not think of a resurrected body just like the one from earth: “Now I will tell you a mystery.” And Paul gives us an insight into our resurrected bodies.

First, “not all of us shall fall asleep (die), but all of us are to be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51). When the Risen Christ comes to claim those who have died in union with Him, those who are rising from the dead will do so with new qualities, as will those who are “changed.” There will be four new qualities in the bodies:

1. In the risen bodies of human beings, the body will be the perfect instrument of the created spirit, now completely possessed by and perfectly docile to the divine Spirit. The model of this “spiritual body” is the risen Body of Christ, “the heavenly man.” Genesis 2 says that God made Adam “a living being.” But God made Christ in His resurrection, a life-giving spirit who sends the Holy Spirit to make the resurrected beings a sharer in His risen, glorified body. The glorified Risen Christ is the new head of humanity, whose risen bodies will be like His—transformed into His image, sharing His life and glory. By the indwelling Spirit whom He has given these resurrected earth bodies once baptized and given a new life, not part of the natural child, and nourished spiritually, our resurrected spirit will enter the “life of glory” with all the abilities of Christ’s risen Body.

But Paul has another mystery to explain to us. Those faithfully living “in Christ,” not having lost grace through mortal (deathly) sin, who are still alive at the Parousia, will be transformed instantly into glorified, immortal, spiritual bodies. In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul made this even clearer. Those who survive until Christ’s coming will see those who have “died in Christ rise first.” Then

the living will be changed and caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

CONCLUSION

Paul gives some hurried instructions in the conclusion; the collection for the poor of Jerusalem, supposedly in the Christian Community, is mentioned again. To Paul this was a sign of a universal church; all Christians are gathered together in Christ; all care about the whole Church. Paul plans to visit the Corinthians. He mentions Timothy, Apollos, and others, showing that there are already leaders working with the Apostles. He tells them what he would tell us: “Stand firm in the faith; be strong, do everything with love.” He signs his own closing and adds the Aramaic expression: Maranatha! O Lord, Come!

2 CORINTHIANS 1-13

I. PAUL’S “WILDERNESS YEARS”

Because this letter’s structure is difficult to define, many Scripture scholars believe it to be a composite made of other letters. It was a sad time for Paul—his “wilderness years,” when he knew failure, had many setbacks, assaults on his person, and his work for the Gospel, the “Good News.” In his thanksgiving formula, a pattern of all letters then, he blesses God, and closes with: “we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings—we are comforted by God... through Christ we share abundantly in his comfort too” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

Paul’s plans had fallen through to visit Corinth again, and when he wrote the Corinthians of that, they seemed angry and saw him as changeable. The trouble came also from other missionaries with a different kind of Christian teachings, probably Jewish-Christian missionaries who wanted to present Jewish faith along with the Christian to these former pagans. With the help of Titus, whom Paul sent to them, friendly relations resumed with their first and devoted evangelist. In their letter to Paul, they asked many questions, which resulted in Paul’s instructions on the true

meaning of the Christian life, the proper conduct of the Christian apostle and the genuine tools he needed.

This letter, as a result, tells us of some of Paul's own formation by the Lord, and his realization that the Christ whom he loves, who was crucified, now lives in glory. By chapter four, we see Paul opening in self-defense and continuing with that splendid and much-loved defense, and remarks about the teaching of his enemies: "... they do not see the splendor of the Gospel, the glory of Christ, the image of God, whom we preach as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:4-5). That Jesus was Lord, and the "glory of God shining on his face... is a treasure we possess in earthen vessels, to make it clear that its surpassing splendor and power comes from God and not from us." (2 Corinthians 4:6-7).

II. LIVING BY FAITH (2 Corinthians 5-6)

Paul begins Chapter 5 with a declaration of the "earthly tents which will be destroyed" but "we have a dwelling provided for us by God, a dwelling in the heavens, not made by hands, but to last forever." These words have strengthened Christians in the hardest times. "We know that while we dwell in the body we are away from the Lord. We walk by faith, not by sight. We are full of confidence and would much rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6). Paul continues battling with the "falling out" he had with the Corinthians, and again it brings on wonderful words of Jesus and the comfort He is: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old order has passed, now all is new!... For our sakes God made him who did not know sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the very holiness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:17, 21).

In chapter 6 Paul changes his image of "earthly tent" and writes; "You are the temple of the living God... in the fear of God strive to fulfill our consecration perfectly" (2 Corinthians 6:16, 7:1). Paul evidently had seen Titus when he returned

and was comforted and elated by the news of the Corinthians "ardent concern for me." Turning to concerns about the help Christians should give each other, he encourages liberal giving in their "offering for the Saints."

We see the ardor (zeal, passion), the emotional stress Paul has had over this important community he had brought to Christ, for in the next three chapters he compares himself with the "False Apostles," admitting "that I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God Himself, since I have given you in marriage to one husband, presenting you as a chaste virgin to Christ... I consider myself inferior to the 'super-apostles' in nothing" (2 Corinthians 11:2, 5). He declares that: "I will continue doing what I am doing... depriving at every turn those who look for a chance to say that in their much-vaunted ministry, they work on the same terms as we do. Such men are false apostles... even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:12, 14).

Paul finally ends up describing his sufferings as an apostle; it is an astonishing number of persecutions that he endured as he went for Christ over the Roman Empire, planning even to go to Spain. In chapter 12, Paul even speaks of "I know of a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago, whether he was in or outside his body, I cannot say, only God can say—a man who was snatched up to the third heaven... up to Paradise to hear words which cannot be uttered, words which no man may speak..." (2 Corinthians 12:2, 3).

Almost regretting that he spoke of his graces, he admits that "I was given a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to beat me and keep me from getting proud" (2 pCorinthians 12:7b). These are true words for us, also, for Christ is quite aware and protective of us, too. "Those whom he loves, he chastises," as we do to those little ones dependent on us. He closes with warnings for their fidelity to Christ... "perhaps you do not realize that Christ Jesus is in you!" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Day 4 Read Romans 3:9-20.

- a. Why was the law not enough to bring real justification to people?

- b. Read Romans 3:21-31, Isaiah 51:6-8. Quote a passage that was most meaningful or reassuring for you.

Day 5 Read Romans 4:1-25, Genesis 12:7.

- a. How does Paul explain Abraham as the father of the uncircumcised?

- b. In one sentence, explain the importance of faith in being saved.

- c. For us, how will “faith be credited to us”?

Day 6 Read Romans 5:1-11

- a. In verses 2-5, what new virtue toward God does Paul introduce?

- b. Read Romans 5:8-11. What is your reaction to these lines?

- c. Read Romans 5:12-21, Genesis 2:15-17. Compare Adam (verse 15) and Christ in our regard.