



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 16 Commentary Romans 6-8

Lesson 17 Questions Romans 9-16

SINS' WAGES AND THE SPIRIT'S GIFTS Romans 6-8

INTRODUCTION

After explaining in the last chapter the gift that Jesus left us in His death, the gift of overflowing grace and justice within us, Paul explains how this happens. In doing this, he gives us understandings of how sin and death, burial and resurrection, natural life—“flesh,” and life with the Spirit of God within, works in our lives. There is a great deal in these chapters on baptism and its real effects on us, how the “Law” failed in these effects, how life in Christ raises us out of a sort of death in the spiritual part of us, and into a destiny of glory as true sons and daughters of God.

Paul ends this somewhat difficult explanation with triumphant words about God’s devotion, His love, His unceasing efforts, His determination to save us, to change this highest of His earth creatures into beings worthy of the glory and the fullness of reality in heaven. In these chapters we hear of a remarkable share our planet earth is to have in all this. The message we get is truly GOOD NEWS! No sin, no abandonment of this goal, this race, as St. Paul calls it in another of his

letters, can ever equal such a victory and such a reward as living this Good News will bring us.

I. DYING TO SIN, LIFE IN CHRIST (Romans 6:1-6)

A. The Power of Baptism: Dying in Order to Rise (Romans 6:1-23, Galatians 3:27, Philippians 3:10). Paul considers our baptism a dying into Christ’s death, even into His burial (Romans 6:3, 4a). Either lowering us into the water, pouring water over us, or sprinkling baptismal water, is a symbol, says Paul about baptism, of a sharing in the death of Jesus and a burial with Him. The lowering into the water was the best symbol of dying and burial. There has to be a death in order to be a resurrection, and the great effect of baptism is “a new life” (Romans 6:4). Again, Paul calls our unbaptized state our “old self which was crucified with Jesus” so that the “sinful body might be destroyed and slavery to sin was no longer our master.” “We believe that we have died with Christ and that we will also live with him” (Romans 6:8). Christ allowed death its power over Him, so that He could triumph in His resurrection, showing that evil and

the devil are not triumphant over Him or over us. “In the same way, you must consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Jesus” (Romans 6:11). We have come back from the dead to life, and our bodies are weapons for justice (Romans 6:13-14). In Ephesians, Paul spells out these weapons:

“...hold your ground. Stand fast with the truth as the belt around your waist, justice as your breastplate, and zeal to spread the gospel of peace as your shoes. In all circumstances hold faith up before you as your shield to help you extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, the word of God” (Ephesians 6:13b-17).

Baptism brings a death to sin, but a new life to God, a life of grace (a gift given). Yet we can still let sin obey the body’s lusts. “Rather, offer yourselves to God as those who have come back to life, and your bodies to God as weapons for justice” (Romans 6:13b).

Over the long centuries since Paul pondered on these truths and wrote them for his Christians and those to come, God has done some unusual things regarding bodies who were used as “weapons for justice.” There is a book which came out a few years ago, called THE INCORRUPTIBLES. I read it at a hermitage in Idaho which a new order of Sisters founded to live a hermits’ life and to share their life with those who wish to experience solitude for a while in their lives. This book astounded me. Each page had a photo of a canonized saint during these two thousand years since Christ, whose body was found incorruptible when the tomb or grave was opened, as one of the investigations for canonization. There were around two hundred pictured in the book. Some were so life-like it was difficult to believe. I remember how long I gazed on the photo of the body of St. Bernadette of Lourdes, so beautiful was she. Not included in this remarkable book, but an Incorruptible close to our times, is the body of Jacinta, the seven-year old girl who was one of the visio-

naries at Fatima. Our Lady told her (and her cousin Francisco) that they would die before long, but first would testify to the world her message. Jacinta died sometime after, of a lung disease which reduced her body to a pitiable sight. Jacinta’s body found in her grave after investigations for her canonization, is radiantly beautiful. It reminds us of what the angel told Mary when announcing the birth of Christ: “Nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

B. The Gifts at Baptism. The Faith that has come down to us calls these gifts “sanctifying grace”—a new life, “alive for God in Christ Jesus,” as Paul says (Romans 6:11) consisting of the gifts of faith, hope and love. If we were brought up by parents of faith, we were trained as children to believe, hope in, and love God and each other. If not, and they were not cultivated, when we do begin to live by them, they are quite powerful and have made many a sinner into a saint.

Paul writes of being “slaves of the one you obey, whether yours is the slavery of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to justice.” To his Roman readers, he writes: “for you sincerely obeyed the rule of teaching imparted to you; ...you became slaves of justice.” Bodies once made “slaves to impurity and licentiousness for their degradation... are then made servants of justice for their sanctification.” That is, made saints. Sin’s wages is death, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our LORD” (Romans 6:23).

Another aspect of baptism taught by Paul is that after Baptism, “There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.” To our shame, it does exist among us that race or color, country or sex, makes a difference in countless ways: privileges, prejudice, opportunities, etc.

These gifts of sanctifying grace and of faith make us capable of living up to the dictates of our conscience concerning faith and life, but personal effort and avoidance of occasions of sin are ne-

cessary to overcome weakness against evil, or strong temptations, strong forces against us.

II. THE LAW AND SIN (Romans 7:1-25)

A married person bound by the Law to another is freed from that marriage when the other dies; so Christians “died to the Law through the body of Christ” and are now “raised from the dead so that we might bear fruit for God... we serve in the new spirit.” St. Paul uses the word “flesh” for living merely natural lives.

From here to the end of this chapter, Paul uses the first person pronoun, almost making his statements seem to be a confession of his own life. But what he is trying to say is that “it was only through the Law that I came to know sin” (Romans 7:7). He says that by giving a list of sins as the law does he first knew of sin, which “roused in me every kind of sinful desire” (Romans 7:8). The law and the commandments are holy and just and good, “but sin found its opportunity and used the commandment first to deceive me, then to kill me” (Romans 7:11). In order to explain his meaning better, Paul writes a lengthy explanation, and an excellent one, of what happens inside us when we give way to sin.

“I cannot even understand my own actions” (Romans 7:15). We have all experienced that when we look at our sin: “I do not do what I want to do, but what I hate to do... Though the will to do what is good is in me, the power to do it is not... While I am acting as I do not want to, I still consider the law as good, so it is not myself acting, but the sin which lives in me” (Romans 7:14-20). How very well we can align with that description... He ends by a conclusion that is almost too favorable to us: “Every time I do what I do not want to, then it is not myself acting, but the sin that lives in me” (verse 20).

Such a discouraging description of what sin does to us, of its power within us, makes us say with Paul, “What a wretch I am! Who will rescue me?” (Verse 24). God will!

III. THE SPIRITUAL LIFE IN US (Romans 8:1-39)

Throughout this chapter, we hear what God did for these wretches of his, how He rescued us. The Spirit of God which was in Jesus “set us free through the grace of Jesus’ sacrifice for sin, which condemned sin in human nature” (Romans 8:1-3 - Jerusalem Bible translation). For Jesus has given us His Holy Spirit, sanctifying us and teaching us and bringing to our minds spiritual realities. All who are in this Bible Study know that we have our minds on spiritual things. We are “looking forward to life and peace since the Spirit of God has made a home in us” (Romans 8:9). And then Paul goes on to a wonderful and happy conclusion:

“When Christ is in you... the spirit is alive because you have been made just, and if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead has made his home in you, then he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you” (Romans 8:11).

Some of us have never really realized that the Holy Spirit is a Person who is God; this is a most perplexing truth—that there are three Persons in God; but this truth is found throughout the whole Bible, especially in the New Testament. When we study Acts, you will discover the Spirit really in action! Jesus left the church in the Holy Spirit’s “hands.” He does marvelous things, just as with Christ!

Jesus made the reality of the Holy Spirit quite clear, especially in the fourth Gospel—that of John, which you will study in this Scripture Study. But all of the letters, the gospels, and Acts, tell us again and again about this very real Person, who (unlike Jesus, whom we know has a human body and soul and whom we can imagine, talk to) is an Infinite Spirit who knows and loves us, who acted in our creation of body and soul and who

dwells in our spirits and calls them to God, to virtues, etc.

And not only that, but Paul continues with the truth he saw so richly: “All who are guided by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Romans 8:16). This “children” word means a relationship such as yours to your own children, someone who has your traits, physical likeness, etc. We have something of God in us; a relationship to Him that was not born in us; it comes from an act of His at our baptism. Probably only in heaven will we then realize what baptism really is for us.

St. Paul, trying to express this to “children,” next writes one of the most quoted, most loved, of all his statements: “You received the spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out: ‘Abba’ Father!” The Spirit himself unites with our created spirits so that we are “children of God” (Romans 8:14-15 - Jerusalem Bible).

“And if we are children, then we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, provided that we share his suffering, and then his glory” (Luke 22:28-30, Galatians 3:26-27). The suffering is part of earth’s condition and our “fallen nature.” But we will achieve through patient endurance the full harvest of the Spirit’s Presence.

For those who want to go more into a life of prayer, St. Paul’s chapters 7 and 8 are often used to describe some of the process that must happen if we are to grow in our spiritual life—union with God more and more on this earth. In a chapter on this in Thomas Greene, S. J.’s book, DRINKING FROM A DRY WELL, we find these texts explaining a stage in the life of prayer. For this, we find two conflicting “laws” at work within us.

“At the level of senses we desire what pleases our senses, and at the level of spirit we desire to please the Lord and do His will...” “I do not understand my own action... For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I do not want” (Romans 7:15ff).

We have to have a “fast of the senses” to tame them—a lengthy and painful process. That done, God begins His work; “the dark night of the soul” or digging up the roots of the weeds we’ve cut down.

First, Paul gives us a personal estimation... “all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined for us; for the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed” (Romans 8:18, Wisdom 3:1-9).

We who love many of the beauties of the earth, the world of air and sky and land that God has made for us, will take joy with Paul’s understanding of creation: God has the intention that all he has made will be freed from corruption “and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God” (Romans 8:21-22, 2 Peter 3:12-13). This holy, loving Spirit also “personally makes our petitions for us... and He who can see into all hearts knows what the Spirit means...” (Romans 8:26-27).

“In everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Another insight that Paul shares with us is that God knew from all eternity those whom he destined “to be molded to the pattern of his Son... He called those, he made them holy and he has brought them into glory” (Romans 8:30).

We have in our lives, as every Christian has had from the Apostles on, trials and distresses, perhaps persecution in some form, hunger or nakedness, dangers, or a weapon for death.

“Yet in all this, we are more than conquerors because of him who has loved us. For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor princes, neither the present or the future, or powers, neither height nor depth nor any creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39). The love that God has is infinite and it goes out to us. If only we can accept it and return our love to Him.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 17
Romans 9 - 16

Day 1 Read the Notes. Give your reaction to this information.

Day 2 Read Romans 9:1-24, Malachi 1:3 and footnote.

a. What does Romans 9:13 mean according to the rather undeveloped language Jesus was using?

b. How does Paul interpret this in Romans 9:14-15?

Day 3

a. How do you feel about “God’s free choice” expressed in this story?

b. Read Romans 9:25-33. Who is the “rock” in verse 33?

c. What are two things needed for salvation according to Romans 10:8-10?

