



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 18 Commentary Ephesians 1 - 2
Lesson 19 Questions Ephesians 3 - 6

GOD THE FATHER'S PLAN Ephesians 1:1 - 2:22

INTRODUCTION

Paul spent almost three years in Ephesus, a large seaport and the capitol of the providence called "Asia" by the Romans. This letter has always been ascribed to Paul, for it was in the very first collection of his letters. Yet today, with methods scholars use in studying language and style in the Biblical books, some question this. For Ephesians is very similar to Colossians, and, in fact, parallels material in other letters too, by 85% of the verses, which kind of "copying" is not characteristic of Paul. It was probably written to Timothy and Titus, pastors to early Christian communities. Paul tells us that he was in prison when he wrote to the Ephesians.

In this letter, the "Body of Christ" refers to the universal Church, with Christ as the head and all Christians—Jews or Gentiles, are one great people of God, in the unity and universality of the Church.

The doctrine of marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33) is more complete than in 1 Corinthians 7 which was slanted somewhat by emphasis on the Parou-

sia. In all, the letter is a mature development of Pauline thought.

Ephesians is a treasure of teaching on the Faith, especially beautiful in expression after expression, so that it is a favorite for quotations, probably more often used than any other.

I. A MYSTERY HIDDEN FROM ETERNITY (Ephesians 1:1-22)

A. The Father's Plan. A new kind of opening from Paul comes in Ephesians: a hymn of praise to God for planning the wonderful event of our salvation. He uses new ways of referring to God, that had not previously been used by the Jews: "The God and Father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST" and "God our Father"—a whole new relationship of God to us (Ephesians 1:3). Not only that, but the terms used for Jesus are new also: "Our LORD JESUS CHRIST" names not only a man from Galilee, Jesus, but calls Him LORD, a term for one anointed by God as priest and king for God's people. Through Him, exults Paul, God gives us "every spiritual blessing in the heavens!" The Apostle rejoices in who our God is. Surely,

we come to such a joyful realization of God, of Jesus, in moments of our lives.

B. Who We Are (Ephesians 1:4-6). Praise wells up in Paul also when he realizes the extent, the eternalness, of our frail earthly beings. Yet we inherit every spiritual blessing in the heavens and the universe. For of all created realities, we alone are eternal, spirits who will live, know, and love forever. “God chose us in Him before the world began, to be holy and blameless in his sight, to be full of love.” Often we sadly feel that we are none of those things, but we need to convince ourselves of this eternal plan of God to create us and choose us before the world began, to be united to “Christ” the anointed king, the great high priest, and so “to be holy and blameless in his sight,” even to “be full of love” (Ephesians 1:4).

Do we realize what this is saying about us? We who can hardly live through a day, “blameless,” even “full of love”? Yet, notice that Paul says, “to be...” Are we becoming this as we live our Christian lives? This is a great challenge, hopefully making us value our spiritual development more than our earthly careers and choices.

Next, an extra gift occurs to Paul: after our close relationship to God the Son, God plans that we too be sons and daughters of the Father Himself: “Such is his will, his pleasure!” (Ephesians 1:5). Note, however, Paul adds, “so that all might be for the praise of his glory.”

These last four words have become closely connected with the story of a young French musician who finally received her mother’s permission to choose a longed for state in life, one which her poetry and her diary shows to have been calling her since early childhood: a religious vocation. In her twenties, she entered a Carmelite convent in Dijon, France. There she discovered St. Paul’s letters. Her spirituality developed rapidly; she shared much of her joy and spiritual understanding in her letters to her mother and sister. These and her perfect living of her calling in the short

time she was in Carmel, have brought the Church to call her “Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity,” the title just before “Saint.” Books of her writings have spread rapidly. One of her most popular letters is on this one to the Ephesians. The verse we have just read, “the praise of his glory” give her such light on heaven’s activity of praise that she called herself from then on: The Praise of His Glory, *Lauda Gloriam*.

Our adoption as the sons and daughters of the Father Himself came through Jesus.

II. A NEW REALITY IN JESUS (Ephesians 1:7-14)

A. Savior. How did the Son sent by the Father bring us to this glorious favor of who we are now? We must hear the difficult reality, the words, “through his blood” (Ephesians 1:7). Blood was shed, all of it, from Jesus in this saving of us. In a sense, we belonged to a “kidnapper” who claimed a payment before giving us back to our “Father.” The great pain and cruel death of the Father’s Son paid that ransom. “So immeasurably generous is God’s favor to us” (Ephesians 1:7-8).

We have the wisdom to know and believe this because God has given it to us (Ephesians 1:8-9). The last verse in this description of our future (if we claim it by our life here) is a prophecy we might not have guessed: all this to be carried out in the “fullness of time.” This future won for creation by Christ will be “to bring all things in the heavens and on earth into one under Christ’s headship” (Ephesians 1:10). The little happenings of our day, of life here, must not have all or most of our attention; instead we must want and strive for the very best in our whole existence from now on: that we are under Christ’s headship.

B. The First to Hope in Christ (Ephesians 1:11-14). These first were the Jews whom Jesus called to follow Him, and whom He made His Apostles, and who then preached Him to others—the “first to hope in Christ” (Ephesians

1:12). The preaching came to Ephesus and “when you... believed in it, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit... the pledge of our inheritance, the first payment of the full redemption of a people God has made his own, to praise his glory” (Ephesians 1:14).

C. The Church (Ephesians 1:15-23). To these Ephesians Paul tells of his first hearing of their faith and their love “for all the members of the Church” (Ephesians 1:15) which prompts him to pray in thanks and petition (Ephesians 1:17-19). It is a prayer which we can say for our loved ones, recommending them to God. Paul sees the great power of God in “raising Christ from the dead and seating him in his right hand in heaven... He has put all things under Christ’s feet and has made him, thus exalted, head of the church, which is his body: the fullness of him who fills the universe in all its parts” (Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

God prompted Paul by the Holy Spirit to end these reflections on the Church with words whose full meaning he did not realize, for he did not know “the universe” as our age does. Yet he wrote: “...the church is his body: the fullness of him who fills the universe in all its part” (Ephesians 1:23). There is a mystery here which we can know only in the fullness of heaven. Is this little planet, to which the Son of God came and lived and died for all, the most important of all the great heavenly bodies?

III. GOD’S RICH MERCY (Ephesians 2:1-22)

A. The Prodigal Father (Ephesians 2:1-16). “Prodigal” can mean recklessly extravagant, yielding abundantly, and so some ask why we don’t call the story Jesus told about a runaway boy the “Prodigal Father.” In chapter 2 we find great similarity with Luke 15:11-32, the runaway son:

Luke 15:13

Ephesians 2:13

“The son went off to a far country”

Luke 15:20

“His father ran to him and kissed him”

Luke 15:32

“He has come back to life again”

Luke 15:24

“He was lost and is found”

Luke 15:32

“The father reconciles the brothers”

“You who were far off have been brought near”

Ephesians 2:4

“God is rich in mercy because of his love”

Ephesians 2:1

“He brought us back to life”

Ephesians 2:19

“You are members of the household of God”

Ephesians 2:16

“Reconciling both of us in one body”

It was as though Paul was familiar with Christ’s parable, in Luke’s Gospel. Luke was a Gentile, and accompanied Paul on some of his journeys. This might have been a shared reflection on these scriptures.

B. A War For all Times (Ephesians 2:1-5, 6:17, John 12:31)

1. The Enemy (Ephesians 2:1-3). This chapter begins with “You were dead,” which sounds as though the enemy had already conquered, but Christ brings about a resurrection of a spiritual kind. First, however, we have to see what brings about spiritual death.

“You gave allegiance to the present age...” In what ways do we give allegiance by our way of life to the present age and to “the prince (ruler) of the air, that spirit who is even now at work...” (Verse 2). Does our money go mostly to the latest of our homes, our cars, our clothes? Is this more important to us than to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are hungry, out of work, discouraged and needing help? America is, however, a very

generous nation to those under tragedy or great need. But what does God judge us by?

“All of us were once of their company. We lived at the level of the flesh, following every whim and fancy and so by nature deserved God’s wrath like the rest.” “At the level of the flesh” means our natural, bodily appetites and this world’s.

2. “The Tactics of the Devil” (Ephesians 6:11-17). “The armor of God” is our battle gear, for “our battle is not against human forces” (though as we see above, human forces can take a battle to overcome) “but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above.” This reality that Paul warns his Christians about is frightening: there is a “prince of the air” who actively “is at work” all over America and the world. There is a war going on always—in our city, our neighborhoods, our world, in ourselves.

The “heroes of Christian warfare,” the saints, left the evidence in their writings of evil spirits and their efforts against us. Persons without faith are at the mercy of such beings. We are foolish if we ignore this fact of the spiritual world. The Gospels show the powers of “the rulers of darkness” as Jesus came against them and with a word, expelled them. The church still teaches of evil spirits and of their ability to influence our minds and our hearts, for they are created spirits, fallen angels, created spirits of intelligence and free wills, now against God and His will. Paul says, “Put on the armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the evil day; if you resist on the evil day, do all that your duty requires, and hold your ground” (Ephesians 6:13).

We have aids in this; the Church has records of its long history of the efficacy of “holy water”—that blessed by a priest with the sign of the cross and a calling of God’s blessing, also blessed objects over which the sign of the cross and the authority of the priest puts a protection on us. These,

in our homes, on our bodies, have proven to be a means of conquering temptation and the devil’s doings. All of this, however, takes faith in that these things, blessed and God’s help called upon them, are powerful for us.

Paul tells us how to fight the evil one: in the language of Roman armor, he says: “Put on the armor of God... truth as your belt, justice (righteousness, holy lives) as your breastplate; as your shoes, zeal for spreading the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances, hold faith up as your shield—it will help you extinguish the fiery darts of the evil ones. Put on a helmet of salvation (live a life that is saving). Lastly, (and here you, our CSS members, as our victorious “saints,” are well defended) “take the sword of the spirit, the word of God” (Ephesians 6:13-17). “The seed on good ground are those who hear the word in a spirit of openness, retain it, and bear fruit through perseverance” (Luke 8:15).

Our age is gripped by evils, by constant advertising, by images we view and hear in our homes of blatant sins and situations. Our growing children, even at home, can become “streetwise.” Every home has the battle. Politics, business, married life, motherhood, are tainted, endangered, by evil and selfishness, by the goal of money and pleasures and honors in this life. We have a remedy provided by God, but we must use it.

As if he is filled with light on the work of Jesus as a Savior, Paul writes to the Ephesians who were just out of paganism. “You form a holy temple in the Lord; in Him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22). We will form this holy temple in us, only if we live Christ’s teaching, actively study it, and plan to carry it out, only if we invite Christ to form us as sons and daughters of God His Father. This is the way the Holy Trinity operates in our spiritual life.

C. Amazing Grace (Ephesians 2:4-10). Paul has already told us of the wonders of the

grace Christ has won for us: “the great hope... the wealth of his glorious heritage... the immeasurable scope of his power... all things are under Christ’s feet... head of the church, his body; and finally, the amazing words, “the fullness of him who fills the universe in all its parts” (Ephesians 1:18-23).

Now he tells the new converts who come from false gods, from paganism: “God is rich in mercy... his great love for us (Romans 5:8, Colossians 2:13)... gave us a place in the heavens... the great wealth of his favor.... salvation is yours through faith. This is not your own doing, it is God’s gift... We are truly his handiwork... to lead a life of good deeds” (Ephesians 2:4-10). Paul is describing the unlimited, the infinite, the “great wealth” of God’s infinite LOVE for us. We ourselves are “his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus.” The son of Mary, the boy from Nazareth, the miracle-worker, the teacher, is still more: He is the Son of God. All the sinfulness that Paul has described as the Enemy, can be overcome in the lives of human beings, all can be enriched, can be forgiven, through Christ, who, as the Son of God, is infinite in all ways, and the gift of a loving God.

If there is any rebellion against the law of God and our faith in you, any “living only by our natural inclinations, any human self-indulgence, that leads you into sin, any principle of this world,” that will lose your place in heaven if continued, take the necessary action in prayer and/or in the sacraments and become “raised up with Him, and given a place with Him in heaven and in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:5-6).

D. Christ Our Peace (Ephesians 2:11-22, Galatians 3:28). The Gentiles, all the people except the Jews, had been excluded from the community of Israel, God’s People. They knew nothing of a God who had made a covenant, a solemn agreement, with the people of Israel. Paul writes to them: “You were strangers to the covenant and its promise; you were without hope and without God in the world.” By their natural recognition of a being or beings higher than they, all

manner of “gods” had been worshipped, both by the cultured, highly educated Greeks, whose works we still study, and by the Romans, the greatest organizers and gifted law-makers.

“But now, you are near through the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13). Not only near, but the Gentiles are now united with the People of God as one, for Christ has “bought” each people, each member of the human race, and made them all one before God, abolishing the Old Law of the Jews, and the Gentiles who “were without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Now they all have the Holy Spirit and worship the same Father, for Christ through His cross put that enmity and division to death (Zechariah 9:10b). We who had been two, writes Paul, are now one; we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

The various nations and the Jews are aliens no longer... they are fellow citizens. It occurs to me that our America is made, as is the Church, from many nations; all who become fellow citizens. We form one country. In Ephesians, Paul uses the unity symbol as “a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the capstone.”

“The whole structure fitted together” is the Church, a “holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:22). By a sad occasion in Christian history, the structure of the Church is no longer fitted together. The word “catholic” is a Greek word meaning “whole” “all” or better yet, “universal.” The universal church became greatly divided in the 1500’s, splitting at first into two (Luther’s followers) and the remainder of the Church, and thereafter, into many breakaways, “churches” of differing doctrines, “protestants” against the church of a thousand and five hundred years, and also against each other. The Catholic Church went on with its papacy in Rome, descending from the apostle Peter, the first “father” chosen by Christ (Matthew 16:13-19).

Since Vatican II, which produced an important document on the reunion of Christians, strong efforts from all separated churches are more and more working toward the unity that Christ brought to the nations outside Judaism; from His death on, the church was for all peoples, it was united under the successor of Peter, who was martyred in Rome, after establishing his office of head of the Church there. The bishop of Rome ever since has

been Peter's successor to a united church and head, as Peter was, of the whole Church. Prayer and love and understanding are strong today among most Christian churches, hoping to finally become one again, "a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, through the Lord Jesus" (Ephesians 2:22).

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 19
Ephesians 3 – 6

Day 1 Read the Notes. As you read, underline a sentence that strikes you to share with the class.

Day 2 Read Ephesians 3:7-13.

a. Underline the adjective-noun phrases. What is your reaction to their meaning?

b. Read Ephesians 4:1-16. What do verses 1-2 say to you?

c. Compare Paul's description of the "Mystical Body" to Christians today.

d. What is our duty in this regard?

e. Read Ephesians 4:17-24. In what ways does this description fit our country?

f. Suggest some remedies for this situation.

Day 3 Read Ephesians 4:25-32.

a. List the faults named here.

b. List the opposite attitudes or acts he recommends.

- c. Reflect on one of these that apply to yourself. After a brief prayer, decide on a way that would rid yourself of it (personal).

Day 4 Read Ephesians 5:1-20, John 12:36 and Luke 21:34.

- a. What helped you in these readings?

- b. Read Ephesians 5:21-33—counsels for wives and husbands. Be sure to consider this question: If these were done, would the marriage succeed or fail? Why?

- c. What two standards or motives does Paul assign to husbands?

- d. Should these be included in marriage preparations by the Church. Why, why not?

Day 5 Read Chapter 6:1-9.

- a. Paul adds again “in the Lord.” How would you explain that to a child?

- b. What direction does Paul add for the father?

Day 6 Read Ephesians 6:10-24.

- a. In Ephesians 6:10-17, what helps you?

- b. How important is prayer to Paul? to you? according to this?