



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 19 Commentary Ephesians 3 - 6
Lesson 20 Questions Philippians

TEACHING FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING Ephesians 3:1 - 6:23

INTRODUCTION

In our first study of this letter from Paul, we heard Paul's presentation of Jesus as Son of God and Savior to all mankind. Both Jews and Gentiles were chosen to know Jesus, to believe in Him, and to be sealed with the Holy Spirit as the full redemption. This is given by God to both Jews and Gentiles, who form the Church with Christ as the head. This wonderful unity is meant for all in the human race who will be, as Paul images, "a building rising on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the capstone—a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:20-21).

Paul wrote this letter in prison, possibly in Caesarea (Acts 24:27). He sees an analogy in this to Christ "capturing" him on that road to Damascus.

I. PAUL EXPLAINS HIS CALL (Ephesians 3:1-21).

A. To Preach God's Plan. The first sentence in this chapter gives a problem about Paul's

three years in Ephesus: his words, "I am sure you have heard of my ministry God gave me in your regard," imply that the Ephesians had not known Paul until this letter. Some scholars think that a writer close to Paul and his teaching wrote the letter as Paul presented it to many of his converts. "When you read what I have said, you will realize that I know what I am talking about" (Ephesians 3:4) sounds as though he expected them or had experienced them doubting him. His main message to all the Gentiles is stated: "...in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are now co-heirs with the Jews" (Ephesians 3:6a). The Church is a unity for all peoples.

Paul reveals here the inner effect of that vision of Christ on the road to Damascus. This was a "gift God bestowed on me by the exercise of his power." The gift was "the grace to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ and to enlighten all men on the mysterious design which for ages was hidden in God, the Creator of all" (Ephesians 3:8). We see the immense revelation that came to him at this grace—he was called to preach, and to "all men" not only "the riches" of Christ, but the unfathomable riches. What he un-

derstood of Christ must have been overwhelming, so much so that the once arrogant young Pharisee was filled with a new and splendid knowledge of Christ filled with an urge to spread it everywhere. This knowledge was for “all men” (all people) enlightenment on a “mysterious design hidden for all ages in God the Creator.” Not only to Paul and through him to us, but this mystery is “Now... made known to the principalities and powers of heaven” (Ephesians 3:10).

B. Paul’s Ministry. How much this Saint Paul must have received in his heart, his mind, and how much his body would suffer for this ministry! At one time, his concern for the Corinthians elicited from him a description of his sufferings as an Apostle: “...my labors, my imprisonments, beatings, and frequent brushes with death. Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes less one; three times I was beaten with rods; I was stoned once, shipwrecked three times; I passed a day and night on the sea. I traveled continually, endangered by floods, robbers, my own people, the Gentiles; imperiled in the city, in the desert, at sea, by false brothers; enduring labor, hardship, many sleepless nights in hunger and thirst and frequent fastings; in cold and nakedness” (2 Corinthians 11:23b-27). This man, on fire with zeal and love for his faith, says to the Ephesians and to us: “In Christ and through faith in him we can speak freely to God, drawing near him with confidence... the trials I endure for you... are your glory” (Ephesians 3:12-13).

As in Chapter 1, Paul adds a prayer for those who read this letter (even for us, 2000 years later) (Ephesians 3:14-21). Each sentence of this prayer is enlightening and moving. We could do well to take a sentence to pray as we go about our business... or to add to a letter. Besides, it has become God’s words, it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, so a most effective and beautiful prayer. The Ephesians, and all the Gentile Christians to whom Paul wrote, must have copied these letters and sent them to others. They must have preserved them until they were standard Christian readings and

were eventually added to the New Testament, when the Church collected the various writings that are now there. In a council of bishops and scholars of that day, chose the writings which we now call the New Testament. How much Christians owe to the churches of that day for our gospels and letters of the apostles!

II. THE CHURCH: ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT (Ephesians 4:1-24)

A. Unity from the Spirit

1. A Worthy Life in the Church (Ephesians 4:1-3). Paul writes from prison to newly “reborn” pagans how to live a Christian life “worthy of the calling.” Can we take up the challenge? We ourselves consider that our intention. Many of us Catholics consider our church attendance, our observing of the teaching and the laws of the church, a sign of our living a Christian life. Paul says to us: “There’s more!” To be worthy of the calling we have received he says, live it “with perfect humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another lovingly” (Ephesians 4:2). A very high standard, one which forces us to see ourselves as other than “a good Catholic,” “a good Christian.” Who of us can claim “perfect humility, meekness, and patience”? But we must realize that is the goal that the Scripture sets (Matthew 5:22-24, 22:24-40). Paul makes the words of Jesus tell us of definite attitudes that it takes to love the neighbor as yourself; “bearing with one another lovingly (Ephesians 4:2b). This willingness, this effort, is what keeps unity in the home, in the neighborhood, in our work, and in our church. So Paul adds: “Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force.”

2. Unity Within the Church (Ephesians 4:4-6). We must love all in the church, not only the Catholic Christians, but all who profess and love Christ. We must, all of us, love all who love and follow Christ. With this kind of unity “in the one Spirit” there will be blessings that will produce unity of belief. It is almost hard to read

the next: “There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5a). We know that our twentieth century still does not have that unity. Not only truth will win it; but real love for each other.

The Church is a Mystical Body (a spiritual reality), calling all its members to unity.

B. Diversity in Unity (Ephesians 4:7-16).

The diversity comes from God’s measure for us in Christ. Each of us has received gifts for our lives, for God loves variety also, and His favors are in each of us. Many of us have gifts which “build up the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11). Paul names some of these: “apostles, prophets (teachers), evangelists (we are all called to this: spread the good news of Jesus), pastors, and teachers of various activities. This list is of “roles of service for the faithful to build up the Body of Christ, till we become one in faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, and form a perfect man who is Christ come to full stature” (Ephesians 4:13). To bring Christ to full stature is a wonderful goal, as being one in faith and in knowledge of Jesus.

But God intends unity of all mankind, in one faith. That is why the Apostles, especially Paul, labored so greatly to bring the faith to others. We are all responsible and are called to “build up the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). In this respect, there are Christians who are eagerly doing that because they so earnestly read those words. Sad to say, they are even “evangelizing,” spreading good news, to baptized Catholics and truly causing them to come alive and in love of God.

Our situation in the United States is quite different than that in South America—this country is mostly Protestant in whole areas, particularly the South. We Catholics live our faith among ourselves, but we can hardly claim to be evangelists full of desire to bring others to Christ and to the unity of the Church, the “Catholic” (Greek for universal) Church. We sort of leave other Christians alone. There is some merit to that, but other Christians don’t leave us alone. Witness to what

has happened in South America, and finally, the bishops are roused about it. “Evangelical Churches” are converting Catholics in South America, in huge numbers. They simply teach the New Testament and how to read the Bible and it is such a help to those uneducated people, that they want it. This, by the way, is the reason for the Catholic Scripture Study: only by this are we truly learning Christ, and only by this can we attract people who know only the Bible. The greatest prayer on earth is the Mass; but many of our youngsters don’t know enough love for it. “Where did it come from?” they ask. “It isn’t in the Bible.” It certainly is; it is full of the Bible. If our young people knew and loved the Bible, they could understand so much of what is read, said, and done in the Holy Eucharist.

And I must add a plug for Catholic Scripture Study. It can spread most, by each one in it who has received graces from it, to not only invite but even bring others to study the Scriptures daily for themselves.

“Let us grow to the full maturity of Christ the head. Through him the whole body grows... and builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

C. Renewal in Christ (Ephesians 4:17-24)

1. Lives Without God (Ephesians 17:20). Paul describes the “pagans” of his time, with no gods or with false ones, as people who live as though they were their own gods, not responsible to any higher being. Such, he says, have “Their minds empty, their understanding darkened, estranged from God because of ignorance and their resistance, giving themselves to lust and every sort of lewd conduct” (Ephesians 4:8-20). Today, we read of the number of teenage pregnancies, of the many abortions among women. Boys and men are also responsible as instigators of lust. “It takes two to tango.” The morals of our young people are left untaught in many cases, especially of parents who have no religious training,

or in public education that does not teach morals, because it might be “religion.” To some, our great guarantee of religious freedom means freedom from religion, which, since it teaches of a higher power to whom we are responsible, is the protector of the nation’s morals.

2. Life in Christ (Ephesians 4:21-24).

Religious education is the first step in becoming Christian: “I am supposing that he has been preached and taught to you” (Ephesians 4:21). What should have been taught and expected in Christians, Paul explains: “You must lay aside your former way of life and the old self which deteriorates through illusion and desire” (Ephesians 4:23).

This is a most important process for us. “The old self” is what we naturally are, do, and say without Christian virtues, which come from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit who guides us, and to whom we learn to turn, to listen to an inner voice that gives us understanding of what Christ’s way is in this situation. This has been called an “examination of conscience”—when we recognize our thoughts or actions as either sinful or unworthy of a Christian (one called to live with Christ’s life active in us). But, as Paul says, without learning “the truth that is in Jesus”—knowing him from the Gospels—we can not know how to live in accord with that.

However, our age, through the Church’s long development, has two distinct and valuable advantages for us, in the business of learning Christ:

a. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, commonly called the Mass. Long ago, the most important gathering for Christians was “The Lord’s Supper” or the “Liturgy of the Lord” (Acts 13:2, 20:7, “the breaking of the bread). As time went on, instructions and prayers were added before the Eucharist, as development for their faith and knowledge: Old Testament and New Testament readings were added to preaching to apply these in life. For many centuries, few people could read,

the Greek and Latin of the original scriptures were unfamiliar to many ordinary folk, books were available only if copied by hand. So the readings and preaching at their gatherings were their main source of knowing God’s words, even to hearing it occasionally. In century after century, the monks who lived to know and love and serve God, memorized the psalms and a gospel and prayed them as they worked the long hours of daylight.

So, the opportunity of daily Mass today, with both Scriptural readings, always one from “the Good News of Jesus”—God’s Spel”—the gospel, and another from some other Scripture, comes from centuries of development. Every week, we hear a Sunday Eucharist when two readings from Scripture and the Gospel give instructions on the theme of the Mass. We have so many opportunities that the first Christians did not have.

b. Bibles That We Can Own. Circumstances since the breakup of the Church into so many differing believers, especially those who believed that “the Bible alone” was the only source of faith, and private interpretation of Scriptures, separated Christians into numerous groups believing different meanings for the Gospels. To safeguard Catholics, who still hold to the meanings that had come down from the early Church, the Church cautioned them on “private interpretation” of Scripture. Without intention, the church seemed to be restricting the Bible. But that is not the problem, for we have so many Bibles available, especially with copious and helpful notes, explaining the possible misunderstandings or bringing out the meaning, as the faith has had for centuries. However, most of the Scriptures are not under this danger; they are valuable and clear directions for our lives. You in the Bible Study are very pleasing to the Lord as you go through the days as you do. So, “Tell the Good News to others.”

At the close of this section C, “Renewal in Christ,” Paul directs all his converts to “lay aside

your former way of life and the old self which deteriorates through illusion and desire, and acquire a fresh, spiritual way of thinking. You must put on the new man created in God's image, whose justice and holiness are born of truth" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

3. A Life Worthy of Christ (Ephesians 4:25-32, 5:3-21). As loving children, imitate God Himself; follow His way of love, as shown in the love of Christ in dying for us, giving God the most pleasing fragrance of all sacrifices. With this positive and encouraging opening, Paul ends chapter 4 and continues in chapter 5, to warn against vices and conduct directly opposed to an indwelling God in a Christian. "Put off," "renew," "put on" refer to the baptismal liturgy with its white garments.

Paul cautions against lying (lack of respect and fidelity to members of the same body), anger, stealing (instead work hard to have something to give to the poor), evil talk, and gives reasons why they are so unfitting to a Christian. He wisely says, "If you are angry, let it be without sin." Anger is an emotion that we do not cause and is difficult to control, but "let it be without sin. Verse 31 lists "vices to be avoided," and follows them with attractive qualities won with self-control so that we want to achieve them. Wisely, again he says, "Be mutually forgiving" (Ephesians 4:32, 1 John 3:16). It takes two to experience forgiveness, and "turn about is fair play." Again, in Ephesians 5:3-6, as he lists bad conduct through certain sins, he gives a reason that we might not be inclined to see: Why is lewd conduct, etc., wrong for us? "Your holiness forbids this." Holiness we do not ascribe to ourselves! But, in fact, the Holy Spirit, Jesus in the Eucharist brings within you a holiness you do not know or discern. But your soul has it truly. Recognize this and live worthily. Why avoid suggestive talk? It is out of place in you. Why should young people, or any Christian people avoid fornication (sex out of wedlock) "in effect an idolater," says Paul, and so loses "any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ." And he

cautions about listening to worthless arguments in favor of such: They bring down God's wrath on the disobedient (Ephesians 5:1-6). A serious discussion and conversation on these Ephesians 4:25 - 5:21 texts would have a real effect on teenagers.

4. "Light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:18-21). "Light produces every kind of goodness and justice and truth" (Ephesians 5:9). Paul had not been present when the Apostles heard Jesus say, "You are the light of the world," but he knows it, for he says, "You are light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10). By condemning deeds done in darkness, in secret, we show them in the light of the day; we bear the light on them, just as a person with a lantern holds it up to darkness and reveals what is there. He speaks of getting drunk and says, "Be filled with the Spirit!" Remember that when you drink! Verse 19a, the Church and some homes do regularly; some Christians in the past 15 or 21 years, do this literally and often; they seem always to be filled with the desire to "sing praise to the Lord with all your hearts." Usually, this is a special gift (charism) of the Lord so they have been named by this beautiful word: charismatics. True, some went to excess; but we must recognize the genuine gift. In his eagerness to see his Christians alive to God, he says, "Give thanks to the Lord always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20). Quietly read these verses and on each one, check on ourselves to see if we ever do this... And lastly, Paul, after all these cautions for a holy life, adds a wise way to "get along" well with others: "Defer to one another out of reverence to the Lord!" (Ephesians 5:21).

D. Christian Homes (Ephesians 5:22 - 6:9; Colossians).

1. Wives and Husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33). "Defer to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21) is the last verse in the section. (Chapter divisions, made long ago by some thoughtful monk who was the first to number the verses, are not always the best.) But this

principle is a general one for all situations with each other. The translations: “Defer to one another” is much easier for modern “equal rights” wives and husbands, but in each of Paul’s teaching on the duties and treatment of wives, husbands, children, he adds “as if to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22). If Paul had written that phrase first, it would not shock modern women so; that is, not rouse their strong reaction: Try: “As if to the Lord, be submissive to your husband.” We should treat all Christians as if to the Lord.

Christ’s self-sacrificing love is a model for everyone in a family. Paul expresses this masterfully in “husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church, giving Himself up for her... to present to himself a glorious church, holy and immaculate” (Ephesians 5:25-27). Both wives and husbands, as Christians, can learn to love each other “as they do their own bodies (Ephesians 5:28, Mark 10:2-12, and Genesis 2:21-24), and “He who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever hates his own flesh! No, he nourishes it and takes care of it just as Christ does for the church, for all of us are members of his own body!” (Ephesians 5:28-30). Do you take care of each other?

2. Children in the Family (Ephesians 6:1-4). The first commandment with a promise added to it is: Honor your father and mother... so that you may have long life and prosper in the land” (Exodus 20:12). This continues for us in adult life, and especially at the end of the parents’ life, or better—when they can not help themselves, when old and failing in some way or another. This can be a trying time, especially when a couple has a family and many responsibilities. We can be sure that such a sacrifice, done with love and patience, will be rewarded abundantly by the Lord, with blessings you would not have gotten.

Paul writes, “Children, be obedient to your parents in the Lord” (Proverbs 6:20-22). And Paul adds a wise remark: “Parents, never drive your

children to resentment, but bring them up with correction and advice inspired by the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). The child can not handle resentment, as much as we adults in the Faith can.

3. Slaves, Worker, Employees (Ephesians 6:5-9). This would be read out in a Christian assembly, so slaves might hear it, as well as the people responsible for them.

Slaves are “slaves of Christ who wholeheartedly do the will of God” (Ephesians 6:5-6). Slavery, unhappily, existed for a long, long time, even to our “free” nation, and this free and “United” nation fought a sad and bloody war over it; brother killing brother. “Never forget that everyone, slave or free, will be rewarded by the Lord for whatever work he has done well” (Ephesians 6:8).

And lastly, employers, never “forget that your workers and you have the same “employer” in heaven and that there is no favoritism with Him.

E. The Spiritual War (Ephesians 6:10-20, 1 Peter 5:8-9, Isaiah 14:12-15). Paul gives strong advice and speaks of how we can become spiritually strong. Paul plainly warns us: “It is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the princes and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above” (Ephesians 6:12). “Stand firm against ‘the tactics of the devil’” (Ephesians 6:10, Romans 13:12, Matthew 4:1, 10-11). That done, we need the belt of truth, a breastplate of uprightness, our shoes the eagerness to spread the gospel, and the shield of faith “so that we can quench the burning arrows of the ‘Evil One’” (Ephesians 6:16). And finally, our helmet is salvation and our “sword of the Spirit is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). “Keep praying in the Spirit in every possible occasion” (Ephesians 6:18). Paul continues on prayer, telling us to pray for all in the “holy company” and that God will “put his word on my lips, and that I may speak fearlessly” (Ephesians 6:20).

If Paul were alive today among us, he would want us to learn to share with others in a wise and

helpful way what God is and does for us, what the Scriptures do for us, as we would share about other good things in our lives.

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 20
Philippians

Day 1 Read the Notes.

a. Quote a sentence or so that struck you.

b. What did you learn from the notes?

Day 2 Read Philippians 1:1-17, John 15:8.

a. In the Greeting, what tells us of how developed this community is?

b. In verse 3, what example does Paul give to parents?

c. In Philippians 1:5 and 1:14, what can we learn from the Philippians?

d. Read Philippians 1:18-30. Share a quote from these verses that is especially meaningful for you.

Day 3 Philippians 2:1-11, John 1:1-5, 10-12.

a. Read Philippians 2:1-4. Besides describing the virtues of dedicated Christians, what words describe the ideal parish or church?

b. Read Philippians 2:5-11. In the hymn to the attitude of Christ, what do we learn about God's response to those who are willing to see themselves humbly?

Day 4 Philippians 2:12-30.

- a. Read Philippians 2:12-18. What verse is an apt challenge to us today and why?

- b. What verse speaks for you of the value you receive through daily CSS activity?

- c. Read Philippians 2:19-24, 1 Corinthians 4:17. In these words of scripture, which would be a good examination of conscience of us, perhaps in confession?

- d. Read Philippians 2:25-30. What do you admire in this description of the early Christian?

Day 5 Philippians 3:1-21.

- a. Read Philippians 3:1-11. Quote words that Paul says about Christ that attract you to an ideal for yourself.

- b. Read Philippians 3:12-21. Are modern Christians easily attracted to the disasters Paul mentions in verse 19? Give an instance.

- c. To the contrary, what true glory does Paul describe?

Day 6 Philippians 4:1-23.

- a. Read Philippians 4:1-13. Choose a quote that you will share with your group and tell what it means to you.

- b. Read verse 14-23. What can this say to us about concern for priests and missionaries?