



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 28 Commentary 1 Peter
Lesson 29 Questions 2 Peter

THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER 1 Peter

INTRODUCTION

This letter is thought to have been written shortly before the persecution of Nero in 64-67 A.D., when Peter was martyred in Rome, as tradition says, by crucifixion. Peter, in humility, asked to be placed upside down on the cross, as he felt unworthy to die just as Jesus did.

Today scholars note that the letter was written in cultivated Greek to Gentile Christians living among pagans, unusual coming from a Galilean fisherman. Also Old Testament citations are from the Greek translation of the Septuagint by educated Hebrews in Egypt. Further, it is very similar in thought and word usage to Paul's writings. The persecution intimated in the letter was in 81-96 A.D.

However, other scholars note that it could have been by Silvanus whom Peter mentioned as his helper (1 Peter 5:12). Still another difficulty about the author comes from the fact that it was written to an area that Paul had evangelized and was still involved with, so it seems unlike Peter to write thus to Paul's missions.

It is thought to be reasonable to believe that a disciple of Peter wrote it after his martyrdom about the same time as Paul's in Rome, around 67 A.D. Some of the sections in the first part are beautiful writings, making one wonder about the Galilean fisherman's unusual talent. Yet, it has come down through history with the name of Peter as the writer, which indicates strongly that this first head of the church had a main role in this valuable document.

I. THE GIFT AND CALL OF BAPTISM (1 Peter 1:3-21)

An Opening prayer of praise to God the Father centers on a "new birth," mentioning the term four times: a birth of hope coming from the glorious resurrection of Jesus after death; a birth to an inheritance that is imperishable, above any fading or defilement, for it is kept in heaven for us, guarded as we are with God's power flowing from our faith; a birth of wonders to be revealed "in the last days." Just to read this prayer, and thoughtfully realize its full meaning is truly "cause for rejoicing," as we read next. The distress of many trials only develops a reality in us (and here is one of

the choice descriptions) that “is more precious than the passing splendor of fire-trying gold, for its genuineness leads to praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ returns.”

Although you have never seen him,
you love him,
And without seeing, you now believe,
And rejoice with inexpressible joy,
touched with glory, because
You are achieving faith’s goal. (1 Peter 1:8-9)

Are we, are you, more interested in your gold (our money, though paper, has a gold value behind it) than we are of what a genuine faith will lead to? Is it what money can do for us that we plan and spend our lives, or is at least our main interest in life?

A. The Gifts of Baptism. These are all supernatural, far above our natural abilities and gifts; what the Church has come to understand about these gifts that God gives in addition to our created natures, is amazing as we read them:

1. Removal of all guilt of sin, original and personal.
2. Removal of all punishment due to sin, temporal and eternal.
3. Infusion of sanctifying grace along with the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity (love), and the gifts of the Holy Spirit—wisdom, understanding, knowledge, courage, counsel, piety, and fear of the Lord.
4. Incorporation into Christ.
5. Entrance into the Mystical Body, which is the Church founded at Pentecost; though the Reformation split it so terribly in doctrine and government, baptism still is the entry into the Church whose history is hundreds of years, in fact, one thousand and 517 earlier. The Church does not re-baptize a validly baptized new member.
6. Imprinting of the baptismal character (mark) which enables a person to receive the other sacraments, to participate in their priesthood of

Christ through the sacred liturgy, and to grow in the likeness of Christ through personal holiness.

There are two effects of original sin which baptism does not remove: strong desires and tendencies toward fleshly pleasures; and bodily death. But baptism gives a Christian the title to rise in a glorified body on the last day.

—The Modern Catholic Dictionary
by John Hardon, S.J.

B. Our Challenge (1 Peter 1:13-21, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3). “Become holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, after the likeness of the holy one who called you” (1 Peter 1:16). We were delivered by Christ’s blood “beyond all price” (John 1:29). “The Father judges each one justly on the basis of his actions” (1 Peter 1:17). High challenges, all of them.

At one time in Christian history, the gifts of Baptism listed as 1 and 2 above were so desirable that many put off Baptism until death seemed imminent. The teaching above also affected the Church’s decision on the baptism of infants and children: to remove original sin was necessary to everyone who was to be “in Christ.” It early became desirable to Baptize children born into families of faith, and to teach them from infancy about Christ and how to live avoiding sin. Reformation times brought about the idea of each one deciding for himself about becoming a baptized Christian. As we look upon the world, especially in America as we know it, many teenagers have no religious training or desires for it, and at that difficult time of adolescence, they have not been Baptized. Sin becomes desirable beyond their training or powers, while acceptance with their peers is all-important.

So the Church’s understanding of “removal of all punishment due to sin, temporal or eternal” and of all sin, led to the understanding that heaven, as a state of perfect holiness is not won immediately after death by most Christians. The

Church long ago faced this fact, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, teaches a period of purging of sinful habits and imperfect lives, that included sin but yet a state of sanctifying grace in which mortal sin was avoided or forgiven, a state that still needed purification before heaven, a state of being purged of habits and choices of sin that prevented immediate entrance into heaven. This purging has long been called Purgatory. Private revelations, along with lives and teaching of the saints and the doctors of the Church have helped to understand this doctrine, which is a merciful one.

II. GROWTH IN CHRIST (1 Peter 1:22 - 3:12)

A. Important Steps

1. Final Command of Jesus (John 15:12). Like a last will and testament, on the night before He died, Jesus gave final teaching and instructions to His apostles. He spoke of His love for them, just as His Father loved Him. Then He gave these important words:

“This is my commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.”

Peter, who heard these words, now tells them to his followers: “You have obeyed the truth and have purified yourselves for a genuine love for each other. Therefore, love one another constantly from the heart.” This is one of the most difficult imitations of Jesus that we have. Yet, it is this that will bring peace to homes and families, to parishes and cities. There is more, however, than being at peace. It is living by the “gospel which was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:25). Progress in this comes first by reading the “Good News” of Jesus, the Gospels, then pondering it for your life and actions.

2. Growth in Holiness (1 Peter 2:1-10, James :1-22). First, ill will, deceitful and vi-

cious words, pretensions, jealousy, and unkind, angry words, need to be starved out of our hearts. For Jesus and His followers are to form a spiritual building, a holy priesthood, that offers sacrifices of love and good in the world, a light that dispels darkness that comes from sin and evil, for “you are a holy people, a holy nation, a people he claims for his own to proclaim the glorious things God has done” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Those without God or religion may mock you, but if conversion comes to them one day, they will praise you for living a way that was so different than theirs (1 Peter 2:12).

3. Different Roles in Life (1 Peter 2:13 - 3:7)

a. Citizens (1 Peter 2:13-17). Followers of Christ must be known as and live as good citizens, respecting the government that punishes criminals and recognizes good citizens. While we are free people, we must not use this for hiding vice, but as servants of God, esteem every one, and respect the government. This may even entail resisting bad governments, but a true Christian knows when and when not to obey.

b. Slaves (1 Peter 2:18-25, Isaiah 53:3-8). Peter wisely did not take on the issue of slavery, instead he gives clear and careful teaching for a Christian slave. He holds up Christ, the innocent and holy one, the all-powerful and infinite Creator, suffering great injustices and injuries, although guilty of no offense. The lines describing Christ in this passage are eloquent and moving. He points out that a slave who bore punishment though not guilty, has an opportunity to be like Christ, and becomes even more pleasing to God under unjust punishment.

“When he was insulted, he returned no insult.” We, who suffer so much less than a slave, may have never learned to be insulted without retaliating. Take a prayer time and re-read slowly this passage from 1 Peter 2:22-24, honestly looking at

your own responses to these injustices or offenses; call on the Holy Spirit, on Jesus, to show you how to be as Christ was, for His example was free from the same faults that His attackers were so guilty of.

c. Wife and Husband (1 Peter 3:1-7, Ephesians 5:22-24). Peter gives longer attention to the Christian wife, and less to the Christian husband. Paul's instruction in Ephesians was less to the wife and more to the husband. Here, Peter's words include advising wives to avoid fancy clothes and jewelry, for "Your adornment is rather the hidden character of the heart, expressed in the unfading beauty of a calm and gentle disposition." Husbands, with less attention, yet are given encouragement to active love: "Show consideration for those who share your lives. Treat women with respect as weaker in body but heirs just as much as you to the gracious gift of life. If you do so, nothing will keep your prayers from being answered" (1 Peter 3:7). What a promise, gentlemen, to win a hearing from God when you pray! We remember, in Mark's gospel (Mark 1:29-31), that Peter was a married man and Jesus frequently visited there. Soon after He called Peter He visited the house and found the mother-in-law quite ill, "and the first thing they did was to tell him about her. He went over to her, grasped her hand and helped her up, and the fever left her. She immediately began to wait on them" (Mark 1:29-31). Both the disciples and the mother-in-law and Jesus were all examples for homes and visitors.

III. SUFFERING IN CHRISTIAN LIFE (1 Peter 3:13 - 4:19)

If we suffer "for justice sake" we will be happy, for venerating the "Lord Christ in your hearts" and speaking gently and respectfully with a clear conscience, will bring shame on your persecutors, but blessings eventually on you. "The reason," says Peter, "that Christ, the just man, died for the unjust, was that he might lead you to God." He died for every one of us! Our baptism was no re-

moval of bodily stain but the pledge of God of an irreproachable conscience through the resurrection of Jesus. This is a new way to consider our fitting response to our gifts at Baptism: we then pledge ourselves to preserve the irreproachable conscience through to heaven, where Jesus, at God's right hand, has rulers and powers among the mighty angels subjected to Him. If we can clearly get this understanding of the reward of unjust suffering, or of suffering that life brings us, we can, as some of the saints did, exult in the future and not be overcome by the suffering. Peter teaches another fact about Christian suffering: It brings power to conquer sin.

When we think of the extent of sin in our cities today, of crime, of violence, of fighting, of killing, of robbery, of failed marriages, of abortion, etc., we must remember that all of this is being also affected by suffering peacefully and by accepting this atonement, and by strengthening goodness in those very cities. The goodness of God and the suffering of His loving friends is also counterbalancing and converting others, even the worst sinners and those turned to evil in early youth.

There are blessings from persecution, that will be causes for exultant joy, for "Happy are you when you are insulted for the sake of Christ, for then God's Spirit in its glory has come to rest on you" (1 Peter 4:14).

We need to reread this letter of Peter occasionally; especially if we are suffering much, more than even occasionally. This is one of the marvels of the Word of God—that so many homes allow a Bible to sit in all its decorative beauty as a book, and never give the clearness and the joy of discovering it, of hearing its teaching and finding its strength in peoples lives.

IV. CONCLUSION (1 Peter 5:1-14)

Peter writes to the leaders of the church, who at first were called "elders" as in the earlier books of the Bible, and humbly calls himself a fellow elder.

He adds a telling identification as “a witness of Christ’s sufferings.” We have those whole sad days that we call “Holy Week,” when we set our own lives to witness Christ’s suffering because we love Him so.

Peter also remembers that all such suffering offered for love and unity with the sufferings of Christ will lead to glory, a shining beauty in our souls in eternity.

To these elders, Peter now instructs them as more than a fellow elder; he writes as a leader of the elders: “Give God’s flock a shepherd’s care, ...not for shameful profit but generously. Be examples to the flock, not acting as lords over them, so that when the Chief Shepherd appears you will win for yourselves the unfading crown of glory.” Often, priests and bishops must try to re-read these words, for their own lives are spent as servant of God’s people. They, like Peter, were

called to “Feed my lambs,” “Tend my sheep” and “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

The fisherman that Jesus called from his nets has now become chief shepherd, having caught the whole Church in his net.

Yet Peter as the chief shepherd does not end on this moving account of what all the shepherds must be, but advises young people, young men, to follow their elders, to resist the devil who goes about the world “like a roaring lion”; remembering that the believers in the faith and in the Lord Jesus are undergoing the same suffering all over the world.

“The God of all glory will himself restore and strengthen those who have suffered a little while” (1 Peter 5:10). A little while seems nothing to all eternity, so let us all take new heart and live and love our faith, together.

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 29
2 Peter

Day 1 Read the Notes.

- a. Share something that you learned or that spoke strongly to you.

Day 2 Read 2 Peter 1:1-7.

- a. What gifts does Peter tell us God has given that are “necessary for a life of genuine piety”?

- b. Of these gifts, notice the first and last ones. How important are they?

- c. Read 2 Peter 1:8-11. What important advice does Peter give us? What does it ensure us if we live it?

Day 3 Read 2 Peter 1:12-18 and John 21:17-18.

- a. What does Peter mean by “fold my tent”? (Verse 14)

- b. Read Matthew 17:1-8; can you name the feast of the Church that celebrates this magnificent vision?

- c. Read 2 Peter 1:18-21. How does Peter define “prophecy”?

- d. Read 2 Peter 2:1-2. What can also happen in God’s Church?

Day 4 Read 2 Peter 2:3-9.

- a. What do you learn of God in these verses?

- b. Read 2 Peter 2:10-22. How do these evildoers Peter is describing remind us of our modern sins?

- c. Quote some comparisons in nature that Peter makes to these sinners and sins.

Day 5 Read 2 Peter 3:1-2.

- a. Do you find a clue in these words to the belief of some scholars that this may not have been written by Peter?

- b. Read 2 Peter 3:1-7, Matthew 3:12. What do you learn about the last days here? How does this knowledge help us?

- c. Read 2 Peter 3:8-10. How does the Lord see “time”?

- d. What does Peter teach us about the Lord in verse 9?

Day 6 Read 2 Peter 3:11-13.

- a. What leads you to “changing our ways” in these three verses?

- b. Read 2 Peter 3:14-17, Mark 13:5, Hebrews 2:1. What encourages you to continue your fidelity to God and a holy life?

- c. In 2 Peter 3:15-16, what hint is there in Peter’s words that Paul’s letters were “Scripture”?

- d. What else could this indicate about the possible author of this letter?