



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 I

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE AND ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Lesson 14 Commentary Luke 13 - 16

Lesson 15 Questions Luke 17 - 19:27

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP— GOD'S MERCIFUL LOVE Luke 13 - 16

I. INTRODUCTION

In these chapters Jesus calls the smug Pharisees (and us) to repentance, humility, and love. He teaches, urges, tells parables—some of the most beautiful and important in the gospels. He reveals the character of His Father and ours in the stories of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son. He reveals the hidden, gradual growth of His Church in those of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast. The parables of the Prodigal Son and the Unjust Steward (both misnomers) appear only in Luke.

II. MYSTERY OF THE CROSS

A. Call to Penance (Luke 13:1-5). The people were shocked at Pilate's cruelty and audacity in killing some Galileans as they sacrificed offerings in the Temple, and asked Jesus about it. Jesus acknowledged that sin and punishment are connected, told them of another accident—tragedy (the falling of a tower), and reminded His hearers that such cruelties and such accidents did not mean that the victims were necessarily the

sinners—all are; and such things, allowed by Providence, are meant to bring us to repentance for our sins. With a spirit of humble faith, such suffering saves, not crushes. Jesus Himself, we remember, suffered unjustly and so we may be called to this, united with Him in saving others (See Isaiah 53:1-5).

B. Bearing Fruit as a Christian (Luke 13:6-9). The fig tree, planted in a well-kept vineyard, should have borne fruit. Every year the owner looked in vain for some, then ordered it cut down. The caretaker pleaded for a chance to specially fertilize and cultivate it, before he had to cut it down. This can be a picture of us, in the vineyard of the Church, with rich helps, yet producing little or no fruit. Jesus might be the caretaker who asks His Father to leave us a little longer, and He digs and prunes and adds materials to our lives; things that disturb our status quo, our little ruts. If we can accept these treatments, we will show the results of spiritual fruit!

C. A Spontaneous Action of Jesus? (Luke 13:10-17). The next story, an event in a

synagogue on the Sabbath, seems particularly beautiful, and we owe it to Luke for showing us Jesus' pity: "When he saw her (a woman bent double), He called her to Him, laid both hands on her," and said, "you are delivered!" It sounds so spontaneous. We can imagine the profound amazement of this poor woman, so handicapped, "instantly made straight." How many times since has Jesus, by His grace, called misshapen lives and instantly made them straight. Such a loving action ought to forever get us praising and loving Him!

But this brought just as instant criticism from the ruler of the synagogue, and a rebuke from Jesus, defending the cure of "this daughter of Abraham" when even animals were cured on the Sabbath.

D. Being "Saved" (Luke 13:13-35). And here Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a tiny grain of mustard seed growing slowly into a large tree sheltering birds, or a bit of yeast, that leavened the whole of a mass of flour. Then He went on His journey, and at one point someone asked Him about only a few being saved. He does not say that, but only that many will not enter, for the "door is narrow" and warned that those who counted on just being in His presence, "eating and drinking in his presence" (being at the Eucharist) and hearing His teaching, will not make it. For some who are in the church will be lost, and others outside, will come in (Luke 13:28-30). It was a stern warning, and Catholics and Christians in name only need to hear these words ringing. Jesus then looks over Jerusalem and reveals His longing to have saved it, and all in it, and they would not. This is one reason for our suffering in peace and willingly bringing someone to Jesus who would have been lost.

III DINING OUT—MEAL STORIES (Luke 14:1-24)

A. Luke 14:1-6. When Jesus was invited by a "leading Pharisee" to a meal, he told two par-

ables about meals. St. Luke always uses meals as a symbol of the banquet in the kingdom of God.

At the Pharisee's house, Jesus also, unasked, healed a man there who had the dropsy, and occasioned His repeating His teaching that the healing on the Sabbath was in keeping with its true meaning—to free man to seek God, to be himself.

B. The Wisdom of Humility (Luke 14:7-11). Here Jesus speaks of a "wedding party" and an invited guest who tries to get for himself a place of honor. The reversal of values in the Kingdom of God occurs, says Jesus: "Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." Jesus repeats this same saying again in chapter 18, and He Himself had often read the thought in Proverbs 25:6f.

It is also true in human relations. If we learn to think of others instead of ourselves first, they will do this for us. It is a simple, homely wisdom, that pride finds it hard to practice. St. Therese understood it so well, that all of her seeking of the last place and the lowest and least (a little child) ended up with Popes calling her "the greatest saint of modern time—patroness of missionaries." The people of God have exalted and studied her enormously, ever since her death. But this attitude begins in the heart, with recognition of what we are before God. As St. John of the Cross says, "Nada", nothing—yet at the same time we are God's chosen ones, His own daughters and sons (Ephesians 1:4-6).

C. Learning a Universal Love (Luke 14:12-15). Jesus uses a Semitic (Jewish) habit of exaggeration in suggesting that we not invite friends and relatives to our parties, but the poor and the outcast. He means that we should empty ourselves for others, all others, as He did, without counting the cost. The kingdom is for everyone, especially for those overlooked by the better off.

D. And Now Comes a Most Interesting Parable: The Great Supper (Luke 14:16-

24). This story, included by both Luke and Matthew, is a fine example of the different purpose, audience, and situation the two evangelists were writing for. Luke had in mind the simple people in the Gentile communities of Asia Minor and Greece, years after Paul’s missionary journeys began among these non-Jews. Matthew, writing for Jews, for whom God was their King and who called themselves the Chosen People, and who had rejected Jesus, adapted it quite differently (Matthew 22).

This kind of attempt by those who study and try to explain the difference between the synoptic evangelists—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—is called redaction criticism. Evangelists took an original story and teaching of Jesus and interpreted it each in his own way, for his own Christian community, applying the lesson to their situation. Today, such a skill and need is called the science of hermeneutics, and the word “homily” is a talk explaining a scripture read to the people at worship and applying it to their lives. If this is actually what the synoptics did, we can see how quickly they taught what Jesus said in a way that their people could apply it best.

Here is a comparison of the two tales, with an explanation:

Luke:	Matthew:
1. a man	1. a king
2. a large dinner or supper	2. a wedding banquet for his Son
3. one servant sent, to invite	3. sent “servants” to the invited
4. excuses made	4. refused to come
5. angry master of the house sends servant to invite the unfortunate in the streets and lanes—the poor, crippled, blind	5. sent other servants
6. there is still room	6. some ignored, some made excuses, some preferred making money
7. servant sent “outside” the city to “make them come in”	7. others insulted the servants

	8. King grew furious, sent his army to destroy the murderers and to burn the city
	9. he then sent other servants to invite “anyone” bad as well as good
	10. one who failed to put on the wedding garment provided was thrown into “darkness” outside
It is easy to see the simple way of life pictured. For Luke, all men are invited. Each hears a servant of the Master invite them. Some refuse. The supper is then opened to the less fortunate, these unknown or outcast, then even to those “outside”—the whole of the World outside the Jews or the Empire of Rome, all people of all time	Matthew’s “servants” were Moses and his followers, then the “Prophets,” finally, the Apostles. The King, in the person of the Roman ruler, destroyed Jerusalem and burned the city. The apostles then took the message to the whole known world. The Jews were left until they accepted Jesus. The one who had no proper garment, failed to accept God’s grace, lost it, and was cast outside

From either Luke’s story or Matthew’s, we see how Jesus tried to awaken His hearers to the coming tragedy of rejecting Him, God’s chosen Messiah, and also His veiled prediction that the Gentiles would accept His invitation and come to the kingdom before the original ones invited. For us, we can realize that every time we turn to sin, to worldliness, to money, fame, pleasure, power, instead of seeking His “kingship over us” we are refusing a loving invitation of God to the fullness of His meal.

IV. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP (Luke 14:25-35)

Jesus said these words to a “great crowd,” to all who follow Him. A follower cannot be half-hearted. Even family, father or mother, must not be preferred to following Jesus. Luke uses here a rare word—an original Aramaic one, “hate” was the only one available for degrees of preference—there were no comparatives or superlatives in the language. It is a stern teaching. “Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me cannot

be my disciple.” “None of you can be my disciple if he does not renounce all his possessions.” Some have taken these words literally, like St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Anthony of the desert. For most, they call to a renouncement of family and possessions to the extent that they prevent or lessen our adherence to Jesus and His way of life. We can not prefer anything to God. God must be first in our life. Then, said Jesus in Matthew 6:33, “all these things will be given you besides.” We should, this week, ponder very seriously what comes before God in our lives.

V. GOD AND SINNERS—THE LOST AND FOUND (Luke 15:1-32)

Read Luke 15:1-10. God’s concern for the individual, His trusting love for the fidelity of those who stay within the fold, but His anxious concern for even one lost one, draws us immediately into a different world than ours—God’s outlook is so different from ours, always seeking our reward and what we deserve. God’s love is completely unselfish. At all costs He goes after the lost. Jesus adds an almost pathetic detail of a man actually inviting friends in to rejoice over one poor little sheep recovered, and a woman who does that for one poor coin. But, in doing this, Jesus gives us a picture of heaven, when angels of God have that kind of rejoicing “over one repentant sinner.” We can surely add, that the human saints join in, too. This is one of the joys of heaven, watching the salvation on earth, the changes in the hearts of lost souls, of those finally choosing heaven over eternal loss.

Read Luke 15:11-32. This long and beautiful parable could be better called the Prodigal Father, prodigal meaning lavish giving.

Among the Jews, the first-born received a double share of the property, so in this case, the younger son received a third of the property. He asked for it early, then disappeared with it and wasted it, thus leaving the farm and his family without it or him.

The story has so much in it, besides being a literary masterpiece, a classic of spiritual insight, that we cannot explore it all in one short time. But let us notice that there are two sons; one faithful, yet angry and bitter about the one who was a free-loader, a spendthrift, and yet was received so lavishly by the father. Don’t we see ourselves here, always faithful, yet angry with God about something that seems unjust to us? Who are we in this parable, the elder son, the younger, the Father? At times of our lives, we can be any of the three. The Father’s love for the older one is also shown; his patient explanation, his seeking the boy who refused to come and rejoice with him, his reminder “that you are always with me”; it was this love that finally brought the boy back to the feast. But the longing love of God for a lost soul is very clear; as is the utter inability of the things and the friends—all false—that the younger son thought to satisfy him. We can get many lessons for our lives, each blossoming out with new meanings at different times. What is the one for you now?

VI. RIGHT USE OF MONEY (Luke 16:1-15)

St. Luke here adds a teaching of Jesus, that the runaway boy could have used. The “Wily Manager” (the “Unjust Steward”—though actually, the steward did nothing strictly unjust!), the teachings of Jesus gathered here, and the Rich Man and Lazarus, all show us the poor carpenter of Nazareth who “had nowhere to lay his head” and remind us that through the Christian ages, this chapter of Luke has inspired some followers to seek desert simplicity, some to vow to live without property of their own, to share all they have, etc.

The Holy Spirit guides each Christian how to interpret it as God wills. The Wily Manager is a good example of the right use of money. One can have money, one can earn a fine living, but to do so through carelessness with another’s money and property, will finally be called to reckoning. Before that happens, the person hired to manage another’s goods or business had better use his

chance to do some good with it, to do good to his boss's customers, at least to use money and possessions in a wise way. He had not been dishonest with the money he managed, but had mismanaged it. We often mismanage our money, wasting it, and spend it recklessly. Money used wisely, and not just on ourselves, but in a sharing way, says Jesus, will not endanger our judgment. In this story, the steward probably over-charged the interest he was allowed to ask for his salary, often an exorbitant amount. He erased this extra charge, and might be seen as reforming his life and performing an act of justice

For us, our worldly goods are not really ours; we are stewards of them. They belong to God and to all on the earth. Justice demands that, if we are given earthly treasures to manage, we owe them to the poor who need them. They are not ours to waste and squander on ourselves. This is why Jesus then tells the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, another misuse of earthly wealth. If Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos of the Philippines, for instance, had noticed the horrible poverty their people lived in, the thousands of beggars, would they have amassed such excessive worldly comforts? The Rich Man in Jesus' story did not even look at the beggar at his gate he ignored him. This should cause us to look at our cities, at our local poor; should we depend on a far-away government bureau to notice them'?

Note the lesson of Acts 4:32-35... "nor was there anyone needy among them." This is a Christian community's responsibility, even if it is necessary to "sell property and houses and donate the

proceeds" (Acts 4:34). This is the high ideal we can try to at least reach for.

This parable is followed by Luke with "If you cannot be trusted with elusive wealth, who will trust you with lasting?..." You cannot give yourself to God and money... What man thinks important, God holds in contempt. Nationwide, as well as individuals, we must see to how our riches are spent. We are the richest nation on earth. Our standard of living is extremely wealthy, as seen in the eyes of the poor nations. There are few really as poor in America as in the Third World. We are exporting love of money, comfort, and pleasure, by our American excesses. It is by encouraging a better America that we can help the other poor of the world.

And tucked in here, in all the lessons on wealth and possessions, is another important statement of Jesus, one that our culture has more and more ignored: "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery (Luke 16:18). The man who marries a woman divorced from her husband, likewise commits adultery." The Church still upholds this law, while at the same time making every effort to see that people asking for the sacrament of Matrimony understand what a marriage bond really must have to be binding. So many who enter marriage do so with wrong and inadequate understandings of what it means. There are often, say our marriage tribunals, no true marriages in the first place, particularly among those with little religious upbringing. We can learn what the Church is saying today and help our children and our friends to understand this strong teaching of Jesus on family structures.

* * * * *

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 15
Luke 17 - 19:27

Day 1 Read the Notes. Find a point that helped you especially, or a portion that enlightened you, and comment on the way you see it.

Day 2 Explain the meaning of “hermeneutics” from the notes.

Day 3 Read Luke 17:1-10.

a. Do you recall or can you imagine any time when the apostles might have had to forgive one another or others? Do you think they had to struggle as we do to accomplish this?

b. Reflect on anyone whose way of being or of doing tends to anger or at least to irritate you. (Instead of writing a response, take a few minutes of prayer to ask help in forgiving even as you wish God to forgive you.)

c. Choose one of these statements of Jesus and comment on what it says to you.

Day 4 Read Luke 17:11-37. “The Kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 11:20-21).

- a. Can you speak of any concrete situations in which you are especially aware of the presence of the kingdom? (it might be a particularly loving person, an experience of forgiveness...)

- b. What do verse 22-35 teach you?

Day 5 Read Luke 18:1-43.

- a. In the parable of the two men at prayer in the temple, one man keeps all the laws and tells God he does. The other, probably an unfair “tax collector,” asked pardon. What do you learn from this parable? Think if your attitude might have been like either one.

- b. What qualities of a child do you think Jesus is referring to in Luke 18:15-17?

Day 6

- a. In Luke 19:1-10, how do you see Zachaeus in relation to the rich young man of the earlier story? (After writing your answer, reflect on your attitude towards whatever constitutes your own riches—personal gifts, etc.)

- b. What do you think is the point of the parable in Luke 19:11-27?