



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 18 Commentary Luke 22:66 – 23:56

Lesson 19 Questions Luke 24

JESUS' TRIAL, WAY OF THE CROSS AND DEATH Luke 22:66 - 23:56

THE TRIALS BEFORE JEWISH AND ROMAN RULERS

A. The Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66-71). At the earliest possible time on Friday, daybreak, the Jewish Sanhedrin (Aramaic for “council”) met to try Jesus for breaking Jewish Law. The Sanhedrin was developed around 200 B.C. under the High Priest. Past high priests and their family representatives, representatives of the principal lay families, the scribes, some of whom were Pharisees, composed this body.

They first asked Jesus if He was the Messiah. This term meant a promised leader of God’s people, a prophet, who would save them from their enemies. Knowing and having experienced their trickery, Jesus did not answer directly, but exposed their deliberate intentions to kill Him. He remarked that if He told them, they would not believe; if He questioned them, they would not answer. But He added an enigmatic comment from Daniel 7:13-14. “From now on, the Son of Man will have his seat at the right hand of the Power of God.” In chorus, they pounced on His answer. “So you are the Son of God?” Again, Jesus turned it back on them, “It is you who say it.” Luke only

adds, “We have heard it from his own mouth!” Matthew tells us that false witnesses had been testifying against Him, but with little success. They needed no more witnesses; they declared that He was guilty of blasphemy and was deserving of death. It was for this terrible sin that the Jewish leaders condemned Him: claiming to be the one who would be equal to God, at “his right hand.”

The term “Son of God” was not understood by the Jews usually as one with the divine nature. A son of God was one of their race, but Jesus clearly (Matthew 21:37 and 24:36, and John 20:17) claimed it in a new way. The use of the two terms, Son of Man and Messiah was a fusion which the disciples realized their faith in Jesus rested upon. Their resurrection faith realized its fulfillment. Peter in Acts 2:32-33 claimed it: “This is the Jesus God has raised up, and we are his witnesses. Exalted at God’s right hand, he first received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, then poured this Spirit on us.” Stephen also claimed it in Acts 7:56, “I saw the Son of Man standing at God’s right hand.” Blasphemy was to insult God in speech; without perceiving the real truth that Jesus was Divine, the Sanhedrin saw His claim as preposterous.

But they had lost the power to execute anyone: the hated Roman conquerors had that. So they had to take him to Pilate.

B. Before Pilate (Luke 23:1-6). Pilate must have been amazed at seeing the whole (70 of them) Sanhedrin calling on him so early in the morning, with the wonder-worker he had heard of, bound as though He were a dangerous criminal. The leaders showed their deceit by accusing Jesus of three political offenses. As the trial wore on, Pilate is shown by Luke as pronouncing Jesus innocent of these charges three different times, a fact important to Luke's Gentile Christians. Jesus did not incite the people to revolt, "opposing payment to Caesar" (in fact, he had cleverly admitted that right) or "claiming to be king."

Hearing the Jewish leaders mentioning Galilee, Pilate hoped to be rid of the case by sending Him to Herod, tetrarch of Galilee. This was the Herod married to Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and the one who had beheaded John the Baptist. He merely wanted to see Jesus perform a miracle. Jesus spoke not a word in his court; all there joined in a sport of dressing Jesus as a king and bending the knee before him; then sent him back to Pilate.

Luke is the only one who tells us of Herod's court. He omits, on the other hand, the Roman soldiers' mockery of Jesus. Where did he get this information about Herod? In Acts 13:1, he tells us that a follower of Jesus named Manean had grown up with Herod; he is probably giving us his source.

Back in Pilate's presence, Jesus this time sees Pilate sending for the entire Sanhedrin, and the people. These last were probably gathering anyway, because it was time for the release of a prisoner, usually a political one requested by the people. Pilate again tells them he finds Jesus innocent, and so did Herod; "Therefore, I mean to re-

lease him." Ironically, the Jewish leaders then insist on the release of one who had actually been guilty of the very thing they accused Jesus of.

The man they chose had the strange name of "Jesus, Son of the Father." No evangelist includes the full name, probably out of respect for Jesus Christ, but Barabbas, the thief, murderer, and insurrectionist, was hardly a son of the Father; yet they obtained his release to continue his crimes, while the innocent Son of the Father was sent to death. Before that, Pilate again said, "I have not discovered anything about him that calls for the death penalty." With the crowd and the leaders shouting for Barabbas, Pilate, fearing for his own reputation and career, delivered Jesus up, after deciding to "chastise" his innocent victim.

It was customary for the Romans to scourge a man before crucifying him; otherwise, some remained on the cross for days. It was necessary for the three condemned this day to die quickly, for the next day was a Sabbath and the Jewish did not allow a corpse to remain unburied on that day.

The gentle Luke can not bring himself to record details that the others did, of Jesus' torture in the hands of Jewish and Roman soldiers.

C. The Way of the Cross. The condemned usually had the crossbeam laid across their shoulders, their arms tied to it. The fact that the soldiers pressed a man in the crowd to do so indicates not pity for Jesus, but fear that he would die before he reached execution. Simon of Cyrene stands for every Christian, called to carry the cross after Jesus, to shoulder their cross for the salvation of their world. Luke strangely suppresses a fact in Mark, whom he had been so closely following (as remarked by Sr. St. John, much of this; section of Luke is more like John's Gospel). But this Simon in Mark was "the father of Alexander and Rufus" which leads scholars to think that these two were known to later Christians, possibly were Christians themselves. Some have wistfully believed that Simon was converted by this experience.

On Luke's way of the cross, he characteristically, as elsewhere in his Gospel, tells us of the women who befriended Jesus. These were "daughters of Jerusalem" and they lamented over Jesus as they saw him. Thinking not of Himself, but of their coming sorrows, He tells them to weep for themselves and for their children, again seeing in His prophetic mind the destruction they will not escape when Jerusalem falls.

Here, Jesus is shown going out of Jerusalem in disgrace, in contrast to the beginning of the week, when he entered in triumph. On both occasions, though, Luke continually emphasizes the kingship of Jesus. We remember the symbol of the donkey "no one had sat upon," the acclamations that recall the prophetic king of Israel. Here, Luke shows his Gentile followers that in each court, Jesus was dressed in royal robes, mocked as a king, and even crowned, but with cruel thorns. Even Pilate sent a marker for the cross, "The King of the Jews" which the leaders protested. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, leaders in the Sanhedrin, come forward later, and witnessed to His innocence before Pilate, even asking for an interview with him—to bury Jesus in a "new tomb" which was usual for a king. Pilate concurs with them in his own way that Jesus was a king, and allows it readily. This Joseph of Arimathea (added by Luke to help his Gentile readers know the location in Judea) risked becoming unclean in the Jewish law by touching a corpse on Preparation Day. Luke says of him that he "looked for the kingdom of God."

Mount Calvary, known as the Hill of the Skull, was a common execution spot. Calvary is Latin for "skull" while "Golgotha" is Aramaic. It was outside the city walls; those executed there were buried in a gully. Jesus, as we have seen, was buried as an innocent man, as a king, in a new tomb.

Luke gives few details of the nailing, the scene, but he does give details of the people who

saw it. First, the "people"—stood watching. The leaders "kept jeering," challenging Him to save Himself if He were the Messiah. The soldiers "also made fun of him" offering Him spoiled wine and saying "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself," and, of course, Pilate's sign over His head read "The King of the Jews." Though apparently defeated and overcome, the opposite was true, had these onlookers only known. Jesus, by this terrible and insulting death, came into a kingdom that would last forever; He saved not only Himself but millions of followers destined for the kingdom of heaven, who must have fidelity enough to the kingdom to endure martyrdom, if called to.

Others watched; the two thieves, both mention Jesus' kingdom also. Fr. Kodell, author of the Little Rock Bible Study, remarks that another was watching the scene, for it coincided with His eternal will: The Father. The mystery of the cross is not just an earthly injustice; it has also the Justice of God, a justice which, while recognizing the sin of humankind, is willing to repair it Himself, with the willing death of His Son for all.

As Jesus nears death, the triumph of darkness seems complete. Luke says that the sun's light failed in an eclipse for three hours, as Matthew does, also noting that the temple's great veil, a curtain between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, was torn in two. A new access has been given to God's presence; the old covenant is over; a new dispensation of grace has come.

Jesus commended His soul to the Father and expired. Immediately, a reaction among the crowd occurred. The pagan centurion gave glory to God, proclaiming Jesus an "innocent man" "a Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). The crowd began to beat their breasts in anguish; His friends and the women from Galilee, stand silently at a distance from the ones who crucified Him, "watching everything," and soon to come forward to reverence the body.

Today there is a 30' long piece of cloth known as the Shroud, believed to be that of Jesus, that was acquired by a king in France in the 1400's. A replica of it, produced by modern photography, and a most amazing sight with its clear images of the front and back of a crucified man, was recently shown in St. Joseph Hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. A cloth known in history as the one that a woman gave Jesus to wipe his face as he struggled by carrying His cross ("Veronica's Veil") and said to be the image of His face, is now called the Edessa Cloth. It resembles so much the face on the shroud that modern scholars and scientists see a possibility that the long shroud with the image of Jesus' body which was brought to light by modern photography, was once folded in such a way that the face image only showed, since it only had a likeness on it seen at that time.

D. Jesus' Last Words. The last words of one we love are treasures spoken by a dying person of his last wishes. Let us reflect on the words Jesus left to us as truly as to those standing beneath His cross, John, Jesus' mother, and the other holy women.

Matthew and Mark give the same one statement of Jesus, a line from Psalm 22:2: "My God, why have you forsaken me?" It expresses what is believed to be Jesus' last renunciation—the abiding experience of seeing the face of His Father. He renounced this briefly. All who feel abandoned by God are strengthened to know that Jesus voluntarily went through such a dreadful state, for love of them. Also, by beginning Psalm 22, which is a remarkable description of His crucifixion written hundreds of years before it, He called our attention to the entire Psalm. Try to read and ponder this Psalm now, to understand more of the witness the Old Testament is to the revelation of the New one, and to understand more of Jesus.

The other "words" (statements) of Jesus are powerful messages to all His followers, yet they were addressed to the few standing by Him. Luke gives three others, omitting Mark's and Mat-

thew's one. John gives three more, omitting Luke's three. This gives us the "Seven Last Words."

The first words Luke gives are a significant revelation of the heart of Jesus: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). The plural "them" and "they" include all who are responsible for His being on that cross, all sinners, including us. None of us realizes sin as sin when we do it; we think we are reaching for a good which we need or want; none of us can realize the horror and the evil of sin as Jesus did.

How can we apply this to ourselves? When we suffer from someone's actions, do we call on the Father to forgive them? Do we, like Jesus, try to find an excuse for their injury to us? We need compassionate hearts to overcome hate—a compassionate heart has the power to undo enmity and evil.

Hearing Jesus had this very effect immediately on two men present, two unlikely men, who did not honor the very Father that Jesus called to—the thief on his right, and the centurion in charge of His crucifixion. The thief had the honor of hearing Jesus' next address words to him. He recognized the sanctity of Jesus and His true kingship and turned to Jesus with utter confidence, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus gave him the very first fruit of salvation coming from His Passion: "This day you will be with me in Paradise. "To the Jews, Paradise represented a restoration of the Garden of Eden, a return to original innocence.

This is the mighty work of Jesus in His passion and death—mankind's first state is restored, and heaven becomes open to him again. Jesus allows us to participate in this achievement by our own suffering and obedience on earth. So this converted sinner was the first canonization! The first of the redeemed; the first to enter heaven—an unlikely saint, but all these are the ones Jesus

came to save, “not the righteous,” as He had said before.

It is important for us to recognize our sinfulness, never becoming “righteous” in our own eyes! When we are punished by life, or by decree, false or true, do we turn to Jesus with utter confidence? Do we, in turn, grant forgiveness quickly and totally, as Jesus did?

The first word John gives us from Jesus on the cross reveals John’s own place in Jesus’ heart, the one to whom Jesus entrusted His greatest earthly possession: Mary, His sinless mother, standing there in unity with His suffering, feeling the passion as no one else could, being a co-redeemer with Him of us all. “Behold your mother,” He said to John, who represented all the human race at the cross. “Behold your son,” He said to Mary, and she accepted there all of Jesus’ redeemed brothers and sisters as hers.

Of all Christians, we Catholics have preserved the tremendous reverence and love for the Virgin Mother Mary that has come down through history. What is our own love for her, our imitation of her? Do we offer our suffering in life to “fill up” as Paul said, the “suffering of Christ” as she did, and for the same reason? To bring lost children home to the Father?

Jesus’ next words in John, “I thirst,” are a cry for more than water for His parched throat; they cry down the centuries for the salvation of each child of the Father. They have inspired many a

saint in whom the love for Jesus burns, to go out and preach, teach, suffer, work, for the Kingdom of God to come to all whom they meet. What is our effort to share the good news of Jesus to others? These words of Jesus have inspired religious orders and their members by the thousands; have brought followers of Jesus to the desert for penance and prayer for the world; have inspired hundreds to take up a life in a community dedicated to evangelization, to bringing the Gospel to others. They have inspired holy parents to inculcate love and obedience to the Gospel and to the Church that Jesus gave us, in all their children.

Let us take up the challenge anew to relieve Jesus’ eternal thirst for the love and obedience of all on earth to His Father. Today is an age when the Laity are taking up service and witnessing roles in the Church. Too long has this been left to priests and religious, as part of their special call. We need to learn from other Christians to answer Jesus’ cry, “I thirst,” as well as they do!

Jesus’ last words, recorded in Luke, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,” and in John, “It is finished” we can say to God, at the end of each day spent in union with His will, at each night of our lives, and on our last day on earth. We can so live as to look back on our lives with a great sense of finishing a work for God, a life of always moving toward a goal of greater repentance, greater living of the teaching of Jesus, and following His “Way.”

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 19
Luke 24

Day 1 Read the Notes.

- a. From the following texts, list the physical and mental/emotional abuse Jesus received:
Matthew 26:47-50,67-68; 27:2

Luke 22:63-65; 23:10-11

John 19:3

- b. Recall any like physical and mental/emotional abuse you have suffered from others. (personal answer)
- c. Examine your past reactions to this abuse. Compare/contrast them to Jesus' reactions. Decide on your proper future behavior as a follower of Jesus. Turn and earnestly ask his help.

Day 2 Read Luke 23:55-56, and Chapter 24; Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; John 20:1-2.

- a. Who went out?

b. When did they go?

c. Why did they go?

d. What do you think they were feeling?

Day 3 From the scripture read for Day 2 what did the women see:

- a. In Mark's account?

b. In Matthew's account?

c. In Luke's account?

d. In John's account?

Day 4 In the above passages, how did the women respond, i.e., what did they do?

a. In Mark's account?

b. In Matthew's account?

c. In Luke's account?

d. In John's account?

Day 5 How did the apostles respond?

a. In Luke 24:12-24?

b. In John 20:1-10?

c. In Luke 24:10-11?

Day 6 Read Luke 24:13-53. Reflect upon all the scenes you read about during this week. Select one person (other than Jesus) with whom you feel a kind of affinity, either because of temperament or of experiences. Write a short message or prayer to that person.